

**DEBATABLE THEOLOGY**

A SYSTEMATIC-THEOLOGY OF SECONDARY DOCTRINES



Sunday School Curriculum  
For Fairfield Christian Reformed Church  
By Daniel J. Harrison

## INTRODUCTION – THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE



### What is “Debatable Theology”?

- Three types of doctrines
  - o Die For
  - o Divide For
  - o Debate and Decide for
- Why do a class like this?
  - o Romans 12:16 – we are to live in harmony with one another
  - o Rom. 14:1-2 – we are to welcome those who disagree with us
  - o Rom. 14:5 – each believer must be fully convinced of his/her position

### Ground Rules and Expectations

- We don't want to talk over one another
- We want to give everyone who wants to speak a chance to speak
- We want to stay on subject since we are only doing one view each week
- It is okay to admit if you are undecided
- It is okay to admit if you already have decided
- It is my intention to be as neutral as I can be

### CRC Statement on the Authority of Scripture

Scripture, the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ, addresses us with full divine authority in its total extent and in all its parts, and therefore the CRC speaks of the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God. The authority of Scripture is inseparable from the historical reality of the events recorded in it. Interpreted historical events are presented in Scripture not simply as isolated events but for their revelational meaning. Scripture is self-authenticating; it is not dependent on the findings of science, but these findings may lead to a better understanding of Scripture and must be developed within a Christian community faithful to the authority of Scripture.

Biblical studies must be done carefully, with emphasis on what Scripture itself says and without the use of interpretive methods that exclude or question the event character or

revelational intent of biblical history and thereby compromise the full authority of the Word of God. Freedom of interpretation within the bounds of Scripture and of the creeds is to be respected. The authority of Scripture is to be believed and confessed as an article of faith and is to be consistently applied and practiced in the life and ministry of the church.<sup>1</sup>

### The (Brief) History of “Inerrancy”

- RC Sproul
  - o Ligonier Statement on Inerrancy (early 1970s)
  - o Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)
- “Inerrant” still largely an American Evangelical *distinctive*

### What is the logic of inerrancy?

- God is perfect and thus cannot err
  - o Scripture is God-breathed
    - What God breathes retains His perfect character
      - Scripture cannot err

### Key Passages

- 2 Tim. 3:16-17
  - o All Scripture is God-breathed, and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness
- 2 Pet. 1:20-21
  - o The Scriptures were written by men, not of their own interpretation, but as they were moved by the Holy Spirit
- Num. 23:19, 1 Sam. 15:29, Titus 1:2, Heb. 6:18
  - o God does not lie
- Deut. 13:1-5, Deut. 18:20-22
  - o The sign of a true prophet from God demands 100% accuracy
- Gen. 13:16, Gal. 3:16
  - o Paul’s view of the accuracy of Scripture was specific even to the grammar
- Ps. 119:89, 160
  - o The entirety of God’s word is true

### Case Study

Rachel, a sophomore social work major at a state university, has been building a relationship with her roommate, Molly. As the relationship has developed, she has found opportunities to share her faith in Jesus. Molly, a history major, has been showing interest in spiritual things. One day, things take a challenging turn. After listening to a lecture on ancient historiography, in which the New Testament Gospels were used as an example, Molly returned to their room and posed a series of troubling questions to Rachel. Why is the fourth Gospel’s record of Jesus’ words and deeds so unlike that of the other three? Why do the various Gospel accounts of Jesus’ resurrection differ in some of their details? Is the Bible really historically reliable? Historic Christianity has always claimed that the Bible is the trustworthy written Word of God, but how can we be sure of this?<sup>2</sup>

How do we reconcile differences in detail, like Matt. 10:9-10, Mark 6:8-9, and Luke 9:3?

<sup>1</sup> CRC Position on the Infallibility of Scripture

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## CREATION – YOUNG EARTH



### All the Positions

- Young Earth → God created the world in six literal days
  - o John MacArthur, RC Sproul, Martin Luther
- Day Age → God created the world in six ages
  - o CS Lewis, Tim Keller, Sam Storms
- Framework → God's creation of the world is only explained to us in its structure
  - o Augustine, Bruce Waltke, Gordon Wenham
- Historical → God created Eden/Promised Land in six literal days
  - o John Sailhamer, John Piper, Matt Chandler

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

God was not created. God alone created everything out of nothing. From the moment of creation until now, God continues to be active in His creation.

### The CRC Position on Creation

“All of life, including scientific endeavor, must be lived in obedience to God and in subjection to his Word. Therefore we encourage Christian scholarship that integrates faith and learning. The church does not impose an authorized interpretation of specific passages in Scripture; nor does it canonize certain scientific hypotheses. Instead, it insists that all theological interpretations and all scientific theories be subject to Scripture and the confessions. Humanity is created in the image of God; all theorizing that minimizes this fact and all theories of evolution that deny the creative activity of God are rejected.”<sup>3</sup>

### Summary of View

The Young Earth interpretation of creation affirms that God created the earth in the recent past, in six literal 24-hour days, not in billions of years as science suggests.

This interpretation of Genesis 1 is consistent with other biblical uses of the Hebrew word *yom* “day.” Outside of Genesis 1, the use of *yom* follows a consistent pattern. When *yom* appears

<sup>3</sup> CRC Position on Creation and Science

with a number attached, it always refers to a literal 24-hour day. When *yom* appears without a number attached, it always refers to an unspecified period of time. This pattern is consistent with few exceptions. This interpretation of Genesis 1 is also consistent with other biblical uses of the Hebrew phrase *erev boker* “evening *and* morning.” Outside of Genesis 1, the use of *erev boker* is used to emphasize a daily activity, such as sacrificing at the altar every day, not every age. Here in Genesis 1, we see “evening *and* morning” repeated each day, clearly indicating a literal 24-hour day.

This interpretation of Genesis 1 also flows out of the natural interpretation of the fourth commandment. God’s people are to work six days and rest one day, just as God created everything in six days and rested one day.

### Key Passages

- Gen. 1:1-2:3
  - o Creation account
- Gen. 8:14, Num. 29:1, Hos. 6:2, 1 Sam. 17:16
  - o Some examples of “day + number”
- 1 Chron. 16:40, 2 Chron. 2:4, Ps. 55:17
  - o Some examples of “morning and evening”
- Ex. 20:8-11, 31:12-17
  - o Fourth commandment/Sabbath explanation

### Case Study

Justin was excited about his new direction in life. Over the summer he had recommitted his life to Christ, and he had a new passion for pursuing his dream of becoming a medical doctor. Now, instead of joining a practice in his hometown, Justin felt certain that he was being called to the mission field to assist in God’s work of healing people’s souls and bodies in the Two-Thirds World context. What he hadn’t expected was the challenge to his faith that came with his evolutionary biology course. According to his professor, evolution was an undisputed fact, and the age of the earth was over four billion years.

After class, Justin approached the professor. His question was simple and straightforward: How, as a Christian, can I reconcile the claims of modern science with the book of Genesis? His professor’s response was abrupt and blunt: These two perspectives cannot be squared, because science is based on fact while the first chapter of Genesis is simply religious myth. As Justin left class that day, he wondered if it were truly possible to be both a Bible-believing Christian and a contemporary-minded scientist.<sup>4</sup>

### Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- If we accept the Young Earth interpretation, how was it that the sun was not created until the fourth day?
- Heb. 4:1-11 suggests Sabbath rest is not restricted to a single day, but is more of a continual lifestyle for God’s people. Doesn’t this passage from Hebrews throw a wrench in the Young Earth reasoning?
- God created everything, including science, so science ought to back up the Bible. Isn’t the scientific rejection of this view enough for us to reject it as well?

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## CREATION – DAY AGE



### All the Positions

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- Framework → God's creation of the world is only explained to us in its structure
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God was not created. God alone created everything out of nothing. From the moment of creation until now, God continues to be active in His creation.

### The CRC Position on Creation

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### Summary of View

The Day Age interpretation of creation affirms that God created the earth in the ancient past, in six unspecified periods of time, which allows for the billions of years that current science suggests. This interpretation of Genesis 1 is the most natural synthesis of the natural world

<sup>5</sup> CRC Position on Creation and Science

around us with the 20+ other accounts of creation found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, let alone several others found in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup>

The account in Genesis 1 is not meant to be literal historical chronology. This is clear by the word *reshit* “beginning” in the first verse. There are two major Hebrew words for beginning. *Reshit* is consistently used elsewhere in Scripture as an undefined beginning, whereas *Techillah* is consistently used elsewhere in Scripture as a defined starting point in time. From the get-go, God makes it clear He is not trying to give us a specific age of the earth.

The Young Earth argument regarding the Hebrew word *Yom* “day” is slightly misleading. There are not two, but four ways *yom* is used: 1) a portion of the daylight hours; 2) the entirety of the daylight hours; 3) a full 24-hour period; and 4) a long, finite period of time. This range of meanings for *yom* is clearest in 1:5 where it is used in two of the above four different ways. The next example is in 2:4 concerning “*the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens*” describing the entirety of creation.

The Young Earth argument is correct that “evening *and* morning” designate a definite beginning and end to each of the “days.” Yet we do not see this bracketing on day seven; therefore, the seventh day is not yet complete. This is why Jesus can heal on the Sabbath because he does what he sees the Father doing (John 5). This is why the author of Hebrews tells us Sabbath is no longer restricted to a single day. Instead, it is a lifestyle Christians ought to strive to enter into (Heb. 4:4-11). This is why when the present age ends, we will enter into the eighth day when a new creation can take place.

### Discussion Question

- If we accept the Day Age interpretation, how do we account for the definitive beginning of sin through Adam (Rom. 5:12-13)?
- The Hebrews passage speaks of what Sabbath rest looks like for God’s people today. But does this passage change what the fourth commandment meant to God’s people when Moses initially gave it to them?

### Case Study

Justin was excited about his new direction in life. Over the summer he had recommitted his life to Christ, and he had a new passion for pursuing his dream of becoming a medical doctor. Now, instead of joining a practice in his hometown, Justin felt certain that he was being called to the mission field to assist in God’s work of healing people’s souls and bodies in the Two-Thirds World context. What he hadn’t expected was the challenge to his faith that came with his evolutionary biology course. According to his professor, evolution was an undisputed fact, and the age of the earth was over four billion years.

After class, Justin approached the professor. His question was simple and straightforward: How, as a Christian, can I reconcile the claims of modern science with the book of Genesis? His professor’s response was abrupt and blunt: These two perspectives cannot be squared, because science is based on fact while the first chapter of Genesis is simply religious myth. As Justin left class that day, he wondered if it were truly possible to be both a Bible-believing Christian and a contemporary-minded scientist.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 2, Ex. 20:8-11, Neh. 9:6, Job 26-28, Job 38, Ps. 8, Ps. 19, Ps. 24, Ps. 72:12-17, Ps. 89, Ps. 102:25, Ps. 104, Ps. 136, Prov. 8:22-31, Is. 11, Is. 40:12, Is. 45:11-13, Jer. 4, Jer. 10, Hos. 2

<sup>7</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## CREATION – LITERARY FRAMEWORK



### All the Positions

- Young Earth → God created the world in six literal days
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### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

God was not created. God alone created everything out of nothing. From the moment of creation until now, God continues to be active in His creation.

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### Summary of View

The Literary Framework interpretation of creation affirms that the purpose of Genesis 1 is to convey God as the Creator, not an historical chronology of creation.

To interpret the core message of Genesis 1 as a description of when God created is to misunderstand the passage. Genesis begins by assuming the preexistence of God. Verse one is a

<sup>8</sup> CRC Position on Creation and Science



headline/summary of the full account that follows. After the initial creation of the heavens and the earth, God identifies two problems: the earth was formless and empty. God provides solutions to these two problems by forming and filling. “Days” 1-3 describe God forming His previously formless creation, and “days” 4-6 describe God filling His previously empty creation.

There is also a correspondence between these two three-day sections. In “days” 1 and 4, God formed light and darkness in the heavens, and filled the heavens with the sun, stars, etc. to govern the light. In “days” 2 and 5, God formed the skies and waters, and filled the skies and waters with birds and fish. In “days” 3 and 6, God formed the land with vegetation, and filled the land with animals to eat the vegetation and with humans to work the land, eat the vegetation, and rule over the animals.

The use of “days” is simply to provide a framework for our human minds to understand the core message of God as Creator who brings chaos into order.

### **Read Genesis 1:1-2:3**

#### **Discussion Question**

- What is your reaction to this view?
- This establishes a false dichotomy between structure and chronology. Why can't creation take place as it is written *and* be magnified by its structural symbolism?
- How does this view factor into the command to keep the Sabbath day holy?

#### **Case Study**

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## CREATION – HISTORICAL EDEN



### All the Positions

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### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

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### Summary of View

The Historical interpretation of creation affirms that God created the heavens and the earth in the unspecified time of “in the beginning,” and formed and filled a specific land, the Garden of Eden, in six literal 24-hour days. This interpretation of Genesis 1 was the majority-held view in Church history up until the time of Darwin. This interpretation has slowly reemerged over the last half-century.

The use of *yom* “day” attached with a number throughout the remainder of the Old Testament is consistent; therefore, the “days” of creation in Genesis 1 are rightly understood to be literal 24-hour days. However, Genesis 1 does not attempt to convey the amount of time there was “in the beginning” or between the “beginning” and what follows. Days 2-7 all use ordinal

<sup>10</sup> CRC Position on Creation and Science

numbers, but day 1 uses the cardinal number, so verses 2-5 is inaccurately translated “the first day” and is rightly translated “one day.” Thus, Gen. 1 does not attempt to convey the earth’s age.

There is a range of meanings for the word *eretz* “earth,” used almost exclusively in Genesis 1-2. *Eretz* can refer to the globe, it can refer to a specific place, it can refer to the ground, and it can refer to the dirt. In verse 9, we see a different word used to describe the *dry land*, yet this *dry land* is immediately equated to *eretz* in verse 10. Additionally, in verse 25, we see a different word to describe the bugs of the *ground*, yet this *ground* is equated to *eretz* in verse 30. All this to demonstrate there is a range of meanings for *eretz*. The context is key, and in this case the specific context of Genesis 2 helps inform us what Genesis 1 is talking about. In Genesis 2, *eretz* is clearly Eden; therefore, the days in Genesis 1 refer also to Eden.

There are also links between the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1-2 and the Promised Land throughout the Old Testament. The Israelites’ wandering through the wilderness and their time in exile are both described in the Hebrew as “formless and empty” (Deut. 32:10, Jer. 4:23-26, Is. 51:3, Ezek. 36:35, etc.). Additionally, the boundaries of the Garden and Promised Land are marked by four rivers, most notably the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18-19, Deut. 1:7-8).

Finally, this interpretation is consistent with the whole of the Biblical narrative of God preparing a specific place for a specific people for a specific purpose. Just as disobedience in the Garden led to eastward exile, so also did disobedience in the Promised Land lead to eastward exile (Deut. 4:25-26, Deut. 30:16-20). God’s people began in paradise and were removed due to sin, but God led them back through the great redemption of the Exodus. God’s people were removed again due to sin, but God leads us back to paradise through the great act redemption of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, described by Isaiah as the Second Exodus.

### Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- Was the Church right to leave this view behind following the work of Darwin?
- Doesn’t this view overcomplicate the otherwise clear first chapter of Genesis?
- How does whatever view you hold play into apologetics and evangelism?

### Case Study

Justin was excited about his new direction in life. Over the summer he had recommitted his life to Christ, and he had a new passion for pursuing his dream of becoming a medical doctor. Now, instead of joining a practice in his hometown, Justin felt certain that he was being called to the mission field to assist in God’s work of healing people’s souls and bodies in the Two-Thirds World context. What he hadn’t expected was the challenge to his faith that came with his evolutionary biology course. According to his professor, evolution was an undisputed fact, and the age of the earth was over four billion years.

After class, Justin approached the professor. His question was simple and straightforward: How, as a Christian, can I reconcile the claims of modern science with the book of Genesis? His professor’s response was abrupt and blunt: These two perspectives cannot be squared, because science is based on fact while the first chapter of Genesis is simply religious myth. As Justin left that day, he wondered if it was possible to be both a Bible-believing Christian and a contemporary-minded scientist.<sup>11</sup>

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## IMAGE OF GOD – SUBSTANTIVAL



### All the Positions

- Substantial → The Image of God is the soul, wholly unique to people
  - Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, John Calvin
- Functional → The Image of God is our authority over all other created things
  - GC Berkhouwer, Dennis Okholm, NT Wright, Pete Enns
- Relational → The Image of God is our relationality to God and each other
  - Tim Keller, Martin Luther, Bruce Ware, Sam Storms

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Men and women are equally made in the image of God. Much like an idol mirrors an aspect of its corresponding god, all people mirror an aspect of God. The image of God did not disappear after the Fall, for following the flood, God says this to his people: *“Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.”* Therefore, the image of God is still present in all people still to this day. Even with sinful natures, there is value to all life because all life is made in the image of God.

### CRC Statement on the Image of God

“Made in God’s image to live in loving communion with our Maker, we are appointed earthkeepers and caretakers to tend the earth, enjoy it, and love our neighbors. God uses our skills for the unfolding and well-being of his world so that creation and all who live in it may flourish... Since God made us male and female in his image, we respect each other as equals, not flaunting or exploiting our sexuality. While our roles and capacities may differ, we are careful not to confine God’s gifts and calling to the shape of our cultural patterns or expectations. Sexuality is disordered in our fallen world—brokenness, abuse, pornography, and loneliness are the result—but Christ’s renewing work gives hope for order and healing and surrounds suffering persons with compassionate community.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Section 10 and 45 of “Our World Belongs to God,” approved at Synod 2008. “While not having confessional status, it is meant to give a hymn-like expression of our faith within the heritage of the Reformed confessions, especially addressing issues that confront the church today.”

## Summary of View

The image of God in humans is the unique substance humans possess. No other creation or creature of God is given the image of God. The aspect of humanity, unique to all the rest of creation, is humans have a soul. With a soul, humans have capacities for reason, moral goodness, divine awareness, and love. While our soul did not disappear after the Fall, it was damaged and needs to be restored. The central idea to our identity as humans is related to who we are, not what we do. While death is inevitable for our human bodies, our soul does not die; part of us remains: our soul. This is not true of animals that die and cease.

## Key Passages

- Gen. 1:26-28
  - o God creates men and women with the image of God
- Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:36-40; Luke 10:27; 1 Thess. 5:23
  - o Love God with your heart, mind, soul, and strength
- Rom. 1:19-20
  - o God's eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen by what He has made
- Rev. 6:9-11
  - o Martyrs will cry to the Lord prior to receiving their new body

## Case Study

What makes a human being human? When does a human being become a person? When does a human being cease to be a person? What is the significance of being human? Is there an inherent value with inherent rights that go along with being human?

How you answer the question of what makes a human being human will significantly influence whether you believe mentally handicapped people should be able to reproduce at will or have the same access to limited medical resources. How you answer the question concerning the significance of being human will determine your views about what inherent rights people have, how people should be governed, and what authority, if any, they have to treat animals differently than they treat people.

Indeed, how you answer these questions will greatly affect your views on whether it is legal to allow severely deformed babies to die, whether people have the right or responsibility to take others off life support, whether and when people have the right to choose abortion, and whether human cloning should be pursued.<sup>13</sup>

## Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- The main passage, Genesis 1:26-28, mentions nothing of the substance or essence of a human person. How can we reconcile this discrepancy?
- In Is. 65:17-25, we read prophecy of the coming new creation, and among the things present in the new creation are animals. *The wolf and the lamb will feed together...* Does this poke a major flaw in the substantialist position?
- As images, we mirror aspects about God. What part of God does our soul mirror?

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## IMAGE OF GOD – FUNCTIONAL



### All the Positions

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  - Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, John Calvin
- Functional → The Image of God is our authority over all other created things
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- Relational → The Image of God is our relationality to God and each other
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### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

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## Summary of View

The image of God in humans is the unique function humans play in the world. God has established a hierarchy of dominion with Himself above humans, and humans above all other creatures. The aspect of humanity, unique to all the rest of creation, is humans have dominion. With dominion, humans have capacity to exercise authority over the animals. While our dominion did not disappear after the Fall, much of it was taken from us by Satan. The central idea to our identity as humans is related to what we do, not who we are. More importantly, the key passage from Genesis suggests that humans will rule over the animals *because* they possess the image of God. And not just animals, for they are to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue the land, and again, have dominion over the animals. It would be a grave mistake to separate humanity's task of dominion from the image of God.

## Key Passages

- Gen. 1:26-28
  - o Task of dominion intrinsically connected with the image of God
- Ps. 8:4-6; 1 Cor. 15:25-27; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 2:6-8
  - o Hierarchy of created things
- Eph. 2:2
  - o When we live in sin, we subject ourselves to the authority of the world; tainted image.

## Case Study

What makes a human being human? When does a human being become a person? When does a human being cease to be a person? When is the significance of being human? Is there an inherent value with inherent rights that go along with being human?

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## Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- Philosopher Peter Singer argues that human rights are grounded in capacity. In *Practical Ethics*, he argues that killing infants, and certainly the unborn, is in no way equal to killing "normal human beings." How is the functional view of the image of God different from Singer's capacity view of humanity?

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<sup>15</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## IMAGE OF GOD – RELATIONAL



### All the Positions

- Substantial → The Image of God is the soul, wholly unique to people
  - o Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, John Calvin
- Functional → The Image of God is our authority over all other created things
  - o GC Berkhouwer, Dennis Okholm, NT Wright, Pete Enns
- Relational → The Image of God is our relationality to God and each other
  - o Tim Keller, Martin Luther, Bruce Ware, Sam Storms

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions and the CRC Position

Men and women are equally made in the image of God. Much like an idol mirrors an aspect of its corresponding god, all people mirror an aspect of God. The image of God did not disappear after the Fall, for following the flood, God says this to his people: *“Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.”* Therefore, the image of God is still present in all people still to this day. Even with sinful natures, there is value to all life because all life is made in the image of God.

### CRC Statement on the Image of God

“Made in God’s image to live in loving communion with our Maker, we are appointed earthkeepers and caretakers to tend the earth, enjoy it, and love our neighbors. God uses our skills for the unfolding and well-being of his world so that creation and all who live in it may flourish... Since God made us male and female in his image, we respect each other as equals, not flaunting or exploiting our sexuality. While our roles and capacities may differ, we are careful not to confine God’s gifts and calling to the shape of our cultural patterns or expectations. Sexuality is disordered in our fallen world—brokenness, abuse, pornography, and loneliness are the result—but Christ’s renewing work gives hope for order and healing and surrounds suffering persons with compassionate community.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Section 10 and 45 of “Our World Belongs to God,” approved at Synod 2008. “While not having confessional status, it is meant to give a hymn-like expression of our faith within the heritage of the Reformed confessions, especially addressing issues that confront the church today.”

## Summary of View

The image of God in humans is the unique ability to connect relationally to God and to one another. No other creature has the ability to enter into relationship with God and to one another. The aspect of humanity, unique to all the rest of creation, is humans are inherently relational. As relational beings, humans have capacities for compassion, empathy, friendship, and love. While humans' relationships with God and with one another did not disappear after the Fall, they were significantly damaged and need to be reconciled. The central idea to our identity as humans is we are not alone.

Additionally, the key passage from Genesis suggests the motivation for giving humans the image of God was so they may be "like us." This passage does not explain the doctrine of the trinity in and of itself, but in light of all the Biblical data, it is hard not to see the trinity in this passage. Just as the three persons of the Trinity relate to one another, so also are humans made in their likeness, with the ability to relate and interact with God and others, yet simultaneously be one with God and one with others.

## Key Passages

- Gen. 1:26-28
  - o Humanity is made in "our likeness"
- Gen. 2:23-24
  - o Men and women become one in marriage
- John 17:21-23
  - o Jesus desires believers to be one with God, as the Father and Son are one

## Case Study

What makes a human being human? When does a human being become a person? When does a human being cease to be a person? When is the significance of being human? Is there an inherent value with inherent rights that go along with being human?

How you answer the question of what makes a human being human will significantly influence whether you believe mentally handicapped people should be able to reproduce at will or have the same access to limited medical resources. How you answer the question concerning the significance of being human will determine your views about what inherent rights people have, how people should be governed, and what authority, if any, they have to treat animals differently than they treat people.

Indeed, how you answer these questions will greatly affect your views on whether it is legal to allow severely deformed babies to die, whether people have the right or responsibility to take others off life support, whether and when people have the right to choose abortion, and whether human cloning should be pursued.<sup>17</sup>

## Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- Does this view assume too much about the trinity? Isn't it more plausible that the "us" refers to God and the divine council (1 Ki. 22:19-23, Ps. 82:1, Ps. 89:5-7)?
- If this view is correct, how does the task of dominion play into it?

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<sup>17</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.



## CHRISTOLOGY – IMPECCABILITY



### All the Positions

- Impeccability → Jesus was not able to sin – *non posse peccare*
  - o Bruce Ware, John MacArthur, Herman Bavinck
- Peccability → Jesus was able not to sin – *posse non peccare*
  - o Millard Erickson, Charles Hodge, Sam Storms

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

As the writer of Hebrews states, Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because in every type of way he was tempted as we are, yet Jesus did not sin (Heb. 4:15). Jesus has eternally been fully God. Jesus became fully human at the singular point of conception in Mary by the Holy Spirit, and remains fully human in his current state. Through this hypostatic union, Jesus is rightly called the God-man.

### CRC Confessional Statement on the Nature of Christ

“We believe that by being thus conceived, the person of the Son has been inseparably united and joined together with human nature, in such a way that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in a single person, with each nature retaining its own distinct properties. Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth. Christ’s human nature has not lost its properties but continues to have those of a creature—it has a beginning of days; it is of a finite nature and retains all that belongs to a real body.

And even though he, by his resurrection, gave it immortality, that nonetheless did not change the reality of his human nature; for our salvation and resurrection depend also on the reality of his body. But these two natures are so united together in one person that they are not even separated by his death. So then, what he committed to his Father when he died was a real human spirit which left his body. But meanwhile his divine nature remained united with his human nature even when he was lying in the grave; and his deity never ceased to be in him, just as it was in him when he was a little child, though for a while it did not so reveal itself. These are the reasons why we confess him to be true God and truly human—true God in order to conquer death by his power, and truly human that he might die for us in the weakness of his flesh.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Article 19 of the Belgic Confession



## Summary of View

The Impeccability position affirms that Jesus did not sin because he was unable to sin. Because he is God, Jesus is unable to sin. The union of the two natures of Christ is unbreakable. Even if his human nature could have theoretically sinned, because the union is unbreakable, the divine will would supersede the human will, preventing the human will from succumbing to sin. Thus, through the union of the two, Jesus' divine nature made it impossible for his human nature to sin.

Jesus truly felt the full strength of Satan's temptations, which were stronger than any we face, because Satan only needed Jesus to succumb once, yet he did not. Even if Jesus' divine will prevented him from sinning, by suffering through temptation, Jesus is our example of endurance for when we face temptation.

## Case Study

"How can I follow the example of a guy who was God?" Shawn asked with an exasperated tone. Joel had been trying to help [Shawn] through a spiritual crisis by posing the question, "What would Jesus do?" [Joel's] encouragement was hitting a roadblock. "Come on, Shawn," Joel replied, "Jesus was a human being, just like we are. The Bible says we are to follow his example in all areas of our life." Shawn was not ready to accept something just because a Bible verse said he should. "I don't doubt he was a human being," [Shawn] said, "but you Christians believe he was God. I don't get how a man can be God in the first place, and even if he were, I don't see how he can serve as an example of how we are to live. Being God kind of gives him an advantage over us, doesn't it?"

For a moment, Joel was dumbfounded. Finally, several passages of Scripture came to mind, so he attempted a response. "No, it doesn't give him an advantage. The Bible says Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted." The response only intensified Shawn's questioning. "No advantage? Well, do you think Jesus could have sinned? And if so, since you say he was God, does that mean that God could have sinned?" Joel felt checkmated. On the one hand, [Joel] knew it wouldn't be correct to say that God can sin. On the other hand, he didn't see how Jesus' temptations could be real if he couldn't sin. Joel worried that the months he had spent trying to bring Shawn to the Christian faith were going down the tube.<sup>19</sup>

## Key Passages

- Jas. 1:13
  - o God is not tempted by evil and God does not tempt anyone
- 1 Cor. 10:13
  - o Our temptations are common to man, not more than we can handle

## Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- How could Jesus have been legitimately tempted if there was not also the legitimate possibility of him sinning?
- If by nature Jesus was not able to sin, and if by nature we are not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*), how can Jesus be an example for facing temptations?
- Does this view give you a practical model for how to face your own temptations?

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<sup>19</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## CHRISTOLOGY – PECCABILITY



### All the Positions

- Impeccability → Jesus was not able to sin – *non posse peccare*
  - o Bruce Ware, John MacArthur, Herman Bavinck
- Peccability → Jesus was able not to sin – *posse non peccare*
  - o Millard Erickson, Charles Hodge, Sam Storms

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

As the writer of Hebrews states, Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because in every type of way he was tempted as we are, yet Jesus did not sin (Heb. 4:15). Jesus has eternally been fully God. Jesus became fully human at the singular point of conception in Mary by the Holy Spirit, and remains fully human in his current state. Through this hypostatic union, Jesus is rightly called the God-man.

### CRC Confessional Statement on the Nature of Christ

“We believe that by being thus conceived, the person of the Son has been inseparably united and joined together with human nature, in such a way that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in a single person, with each nature retaining its own distinct properties. Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth. Christ’s human nature has not lost its properties but continues to have those of a creature—it has a beginning of days; it is of a finite nature and retains all that belongs to a real body.

And even though he, by his resurrection, gave it immortality, that nonetheless did not change the reality of his human nature; for our salvation and resurrection depend also on the reality of his body. But these two natures are so united together in one person that they are not even separated by his death. So then, what he committed to his Father when he died was a real human spirit which left his body. But meanwhile his divine nature remained united with his human nature even when he was lying in the grave; and his deity never ceased to be in him, just as it was in him when he was a little child, though for a while it did not so reveal itself. These are the reasons why we confess him to be true God and truly human—true God in order to conquer death by his power, and truly human that he might die for us in the weakness of his flesh.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Article 19 of the Belgic Confession

## Summary of View

The Peccability position affirms that Jesus did not sin because, although he was able to sin, he perfectly resisted every temptation that came his way. Although Jesus is fully God, at his incarnation he took on a fully human nature with the same freedom Adam had prior to the Fall. Even if his divine nature could not have sinned, Jesus set aside the benefits of his divinity to truly live as a human. This does not break the union of the God-man, because the divine nature is still there; but it is not utilized.

Jesus perfectly resisted every temptation of Satan by utilizing the resources given to him in his humanity, namely the meditation on the Word, prayer, and the Spirit's empowerment for him to remain obedient. Since these same resources are available to all believers, Jesus is our example of resource utilization for when we face temptation.

## Case Study

"How can I follow the example of a guy who was God?" Shawn asked with an exasperated tone. Joel had been trying to help [Shawn] through a spiritual crisis by posing the question, "What would Jesus do?" [Joel's] encouragement was hitting a roadblock. "Come on, Shawn," Joel replied, "Jesus was a human being, just like we are. The Bible says we are to follow his example in all areas of our life." Shawn was not ready to accept something just because a Bible verse said he should. "I don't doubt he was a human being," [Shawn] said, "but you Christians believe he was God. I don't get how a man can be God in the first place, and even if he were, I don't see how he can serve as an example of how we are to live. Being God kind of gives him an advantage over us, doesn't it?"

For a moment, Joel was dumbfounded. Finally, several passages of Scripture came to mind, so he attempted a response. "No, it doesn't give him an advantage. The Bible says Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted." The response only intensified Shawn's questioning. "No advantage? Well, do you think Jesus could have sinned? And if so, since you say he was God, does that mean that God could have sinned?" Joel felt checkmated. On the one hand, [Joel] knew it wouldn't be correct to say that God can sin. On the other hand, he didn't see how Jesus' temptations could be real if he couldn't sin. Joel worried that the months he had spent trying to bring Shawn to the Christian faith were going down the tube.<sup>21</sup>

## Key Passages

- Phil. 2:6-7
  - o Jesus set aside the benefits of his divinity to truly take the likeness of humanity
- 1 Cor. 10:13
  - o Our temptations are common to man, not more than we can handle

## Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- James 1:13 states God cannot be tempted. The Belgic Confession essentially affirms the union of the two natures of Jesus is unbreakable. Doesn't this force us to accept the Impeccability position?
- If by nature Jesus was able not to sin, how can he be an example for us if by nature we are not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*)?
- Does this view give you a practical model for how to face your own temptations?

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<sup>21</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## ATONEMENT – CHRISTUS VICTOR



### All the Positions

- Substitutionary Atonement → The death of Jesus primarily paid the penalty we deserve for our sins; therefore, Christ substituted himself for us on our behalf.
  - John Calvin, John Wesley, Ulrich Zwingli, RC Sproul, JI Packer, Alistair Begg, Tim Keller
- Christus Victor → The death of Jesus primarily rescued us from bondage to Satan, sin, and death; therefore, Christ was victorious over cosmic evil influence.
  - Athanasius, Augustine, Martin Luther, Gustaf Aulen, CS Lewis, Greg Boyd, NT Wright

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Jesus, who was wholly innocent, actually died in a painful, gruesome manner. The death of Jesus successfully accomplished the plan of God to redeem His people and reconcile them to Him. The death of Christ on the cross accomplished what is argued in both the Penal Substitution and Christus Victor theories. This debate instead is about what was the central purpose of the death of Christ. Although it does not affect the substance of the Gospel, it affects how we share the Gospel to unbelievers.

### Article 21 of The Belgic Confession

We believe that Jesus Christ...presented himself in our name before his Father to appease his Father's wrath with full satisfaction by offering himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out his precious blood for the cleansing of our sins...

For it is written that "the punishment that made us whole" was placed on the Son of God and that "by his bruises we are healed." He was "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter"; he was "numbered with the transgressors" and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though Pilate had declared that he was innocent. So he paid back what he had not stolen, and he suffered—"the righteous for the unrighteous," in both his body and his soul—in such a way that when he sensed the horrible punishment required by our sins "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."

He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore we rightly say with Paul that we know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified"; we "regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [our] Lord." We find all comforts in his wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God than this one and only sacrifice, once made, which renders believers perfect forever. This is also why the angel of God called him Jesus—that is, "Savior"—because he would save his people from their sins.

## Summary of View

At some point before the Fall, Satan led an angelic rebellion in the heavens, which cast them to the earth. When Adam and Eve sinned, they surrendered their God-given authority to Satan and his minions to wreck havoc on creation. The most important feature of Christ's death and his resurrection was the public, total defeat of Satan, and the disarming of Satan's minions. Christ decisively defeated all the evil that reigned on earth through the cross.

If Christ's death was primarily to forgive sins, then there was no need to exorcise demons from people, but in casting out demons from people, sinless Jesus publicly demonstrated that the authority he has trumps the authority sinful humans gave over to Satan. Although he demonstrated this in his life, he more clearly accomplished this through his death and resurrection. This is clearest in Col 2:15—*He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; He triumphed over them in the cross.*

Third, the Bible also describes the death and resurrection of Christ as a ransom paid to Satan for sinners. This is different from forgiving sins, because with sin-debt, Christ would have paid the ransom to God, but God did not hold people in bondage, Satan did. So a ransom had to be paid to redeem God's people. The death of Christ freed God's people from bondage to Satan, and the resurrection of Christ defeated Satan, but to separate the two events as stand-alone acts is incorrect. Therefore, the chief purpose of Christ's death and resurrection was to defeat Satan.

## Key Passages

- Luke 4:5-8; Eph. 2:2; Acts 10:38
  - o Satan exercises or seems to possess authority on earth
- John 12:31; Col. 2:14-15; Eph. 1:20-22; Rev. 12:9-11; 1 John 3:8-12
  - o Judgment on the world is when Satan is cast out
- Gal. 1:4; Acts 26:18
  - o Jesus rescued people from the evil one
- Heb. 2:14; Col. 1:13-20
  - o The devil was destroyed by the blood of Jesus
- Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 9:15
  - o Christ's death was a ransom

## Case Study

You befriend a Muslim at the grocery store, and in time the two of you begin to discuss religion. At some point you tell him that you believe Jesus died for your sins. He immediately gets a puzzled look on his face. "What do you mean, 'died for your sins'?" he asks. You tell him that Jesus died in your place. His puzzled look intensifies. "How could an innocent man—indeed, one of God's prophets—be punished for what you deserve? Is that not unjust?" You have never thought of that question, and now you're the one with a puzzled look.<sup>22</sup>

## Discussion Question

- Does this view place too much emphasis on what Christ did to Satan rather than what Christ did for us?
- Did Christ's death and resurrection accomplish the same thing or did these two events accomplish separate ends?

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<sup>22</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.



## ATONEMENT – PENAL SUBSTITUTION



### All the Positions

- Substitutionary Atonement → The death of Jesus primarily paid the penalty we deserve for our sins; therefore, Christ substituted himself for us on our behalf.
  - o John Calvin, John Wesley, Ulrich Zwingli, RC Sproul, JI Packer, Alistair Begg, Tim Keller
- Christus Victor → The death of Jesus primarily rescued us from bondage to Satan, sin, and death; therefore, Christ was victorious over cosmic evil influence.
  - o Athanasius, Augustine, Martin Luther, Gustaf Aulen, CS Lewis, Greg Boyd, NT Wright

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Jesus, who was wholly innocent, actually died in a painful, gruesome manner. The death of Jesus successfully accomplished the plan of God to redeem His people and reconcile them to Him. The death of Christ on the cross accomplished what is argued in both the Penal Substitution and Christus Victor theories. This debate instead is about what was the central purpose of the death of Christ. Although it does not affect the substance of the Gospel, it affects how we share the Gospel to unbelievers.

### Article 21 of The Belgic Confession

We believe that Jesus Christ...presented himself in our name before his Father to appease his Father's wrath with full satisfaction by offering himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out his precious blood for the cleansing of our sins...

For it is written that “the punishment that made us whole” was placed on the Son of God and that “by his bruises we are healed.” He was “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”; he was “numbered with the transgressors” and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though Pilate had declared that he was innocent. So he paid back what he had not stolen, and he suffered—“the righteous for the unrighteous,” in both his body and his soul—in such a way that when he sensed the horrible punishment required by our sins “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.”

He cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore we rightly say with Paul that we know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified”; we “regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [our] Lord.” We find all comforts in his wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God than this one and only sacrifice, once made, which renders believers perfect forever. This is also why the angel of God called him Jesus—that is, “Savior”—because he would save his people from their sins.

## Summary of View

At some point before the Fall, Satan led an angelic rebellion in the heavens, which cast them to the earth. When Adam and Eve sinned, they brought to humanity a sin nature, and since the Fall, all humanity continues to accumulate sin-debt to God. This individual and corporate sinfulness severed humanity's relationship with God. The most important features of Christ's death was paying our individual and corporate sin-debt on our behalf and reconciling us to the Father.

If Christ's death was primarily to defeat Satan and not to forgive sin, then that puts the blame for sin on Satan, not on us. Moreover, while the death and resurrection of Christ were no doubt connected, they accomplished two separate things. This is clearest in Rom. 5:10—*For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life!* Sin makes us hostile to God, and the just penalty for sin is the wrath of God demonstrated in death. Jesus' death appeases/satisfies the just wrath of God.

Lastly, the atonement for our sins had to be paid by another. This is the precedent set before us in the Old Testament. Most prominently, the blood of a lamb or a guilt offering satisfied a temporary atonement. Christ's death fulfilled both of these two most prominent Old Testament examples, by pouring out his soul to the point of death as a guilt offering for many (Is. 53). Because he died the death we deserve, appeased the full weight of the Father's wrath (which we deserve), and forgave the totality of our past, present, and future sins (which we do not deserve), we can rightly call the cross of Christ a substitutionary atonement received by grace alone.

## Key Passages

- Rom. 3:23-25
  - o God passed over sins previously committed through Christ's blood, bringing redemption
- Acts 20:28
  - o Jesus purchased the Church with his blood
- Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:12-14, 26; Col. 1:22-24, 2:14
  - o Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice for the removal of our sins and cleansing from unrighteousness
- Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; 1 John 4:10
  - o God reconciled us to himself by making Christ the propitiation/appeasement for our sin

## Case Study

You befriend a Muslim at the grocery store, and in time the two of you begin to discuss religion. At some point you tell him that you believe Jesus died for your sins. He immediately gets a puzzled look on his face. "What do you mean, 'died for your sins'?" he asks. You tell him that Jesus died in your place. His puzzled look intensifies. "How could an innocent man—indeed, one of God's prophets—be punished for what you deserve? Is that not unjust?" You have never thought of that question, and now you're the one with a puzzled look.<sup>23</sup>

## Discussion Question

- This seems to pit the Father and Son against each other—often called "divine child abuse." Since we affirm that Father and Son are one in essence and will, isn't that Trinitarian foundation enough to reject Penal Substitution Atonement?

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<sup>23</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## ATONEMENT – LIMITED



### All the Positions

- Limited Atonement → Christ’s atonement extends only to the People of God.
  - o John Calvin, John Owen, RC Sproul, John Piper, John MacArthur, Sam Storms
- Unlimited Atonement → Christ’s atonement extends to all people.
  - o Augustine, Jacob Arminius, John Wesley, Lewis Chafer, CS Lewis, Millard Erickson

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Eternal salvation is only given by God as an undeserved gift in response to our faith in Christ, not in response to anything we do—saved by grace through faith. Only through the atoning death of Christ on the cross and his glorious resurrection can anyone be made right with God or live in union with him for all eternity. The atonement of Christ was sufficient for all who believe. By his nature, God is both sovereign and loving. The belief that all people are saved is rejected.

### Canons of Dort, section 2, Article 3 and 8

“The death of God’s Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world...”

It was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son’s costly death should work itself out in all the elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God’s will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith... It was also God’s will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.”

## Case Study

From Nathan's perspective, the weekly Bible study had been going well for the several months of its existence. As the group made its way through Paul's Letter to the Romans, people seemed to be learning and growing together. The discussion time was always vigorous and challenging. It seemed that each evening ended with general agreement regarding what Paul had been trying to communicate and how his words could be applied, practically, in daily life.

Then came Romans 9. By the end of the evening, Nathan wasn't sure what to think. In fact, the only thing he was sure of was that the group discussion that night had produced far more "heat" than "light." Justin had argued strongly that this chapter clearly shows that God is sovereign over all things. More specifically, God has sovereignly chosen only some people—the elect—to receive salvation by grace. Alisha, on the other hand, strongly disagreed. She quoted 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that God desires all people to be saved. Nathan felt caught in between, because he believed both in God's sovereignty and his love. He left that evening with far more questions than he had arrived with.<sup>24</sup>

## Summary of View

The death of Christ effectively forgave the sins of all believers from all nations from and all time. Contrary to our friends who hold unlimited atonement, the forgiveness of sins is a result of faith in Christ's resurrection, not a pre-requisite for faith, for the forgiveness of sins is intrinsically connected to the gift of salvation. Only those foreknown by God will respond to the Gospel with faith. Those who die having rejected the grace of the Gospel were never among the sheep of Christ in the first place.

It is God's will that none should perish (2 Pet. 3:8-9); however, this requires a proper understanding of the word 'will.' There are three understandings of 'God's will' in Scripture: sovereign decree, preceptive, and dispositional. By the context of this passage, the third is the only natural option. The death and resurrection of Christ secured the salvation, including the forgiveness of sins, of only his people; therefore, the atonement of Christ is unlimited in scope and limited in applicability.

## Key Passages

- Matt. 26:28; Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:19; Heb. 9:28; 1 John 3:16
  - o The death of Christ was for the *many*
- John 10:11-16; Eph. 5:25; 1 Pet. 2:24-25
  - o Jesus lays down his life for his sheep to give his sheep eternal life
- John 10:26-29
  - o All who do not believe are not his sheep
- 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Cor. 7:23; Rev. 5:9
  - o Believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation were bought with a price
- Matt. 1:21; Rom. 4:25; Gal. 1:4, 3:13; Titus 2:14; 1 John 1:7; 1 John 4:9-10
  - o The death of Christ was for the sins of *his* people
- 2 Cor. 5:21
  - o The sinless Christ bore our sin so we could bear his righteousness

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<sup>24</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## ATONEMENT – UNLIMITED



### All the Positions

- Limited Atonement → Christ’s atonement extends only to the People of God.
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### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Eternal salvation is only given by God as an undeserved gift in response to our faith in Christ, not in response to anything we do—saved by grace through faith. Only through the atoning death of Christ on the cross and his glorious resurrection can anyone be made right with God or live in union with him for all eternity. The atonement of Christ was sufficient for all who believe. By his nature, God is both sovereign and loving. The belief that all people are saved is rejected.

### Canons of Dort, section 2, Article 3 and 8

“The death of God’s Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world...”

It was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son’s costly death should work itself out in all the elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God’s will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith... It was also God’s will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.”



## Case Study

From Nathan's perspective, the weekly Bible study had been going well for the several months of its existence. As the group made its way through Paul's Letter to the Romans, people seemed to be learning and growing together. The discussion time was always vigorous and challenging. It seemed that each evening ended with general agreement regarding what Paul had been trying to communicate and how his words could be applied, practically, in daily life.

Then came Romans 9. By the end of the evening, Nathan wasn't sure what to think. In fact, the only thing he was sure of was that the group discussion that night had produced far more "heat" than "light." Justin had argued strongly that this chapter clearly shows that God is sovereign over all things. More specifically, God has sovereignly chosen only some people—the elect—to receive salvation by grace. Alisha, on the other hand, strongly disagreed. She quoted 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that God desires all people to be saved. Nathan felt caught in between, because he believed both in God's sovereignty and his love. He left that evening with far more questions than he had arrived with.<sup>25</sup>

## Summary of View

The death of Christ effectively forgave the sins of all people from all nations and from all time. Contrary to what is suggested by Universalists, having a sin-debt of zero does not mean you are deserving of eternal salvation, for salvation is granted by faith in Christ's resurrection, not faith in his death. However, having a sin-debt of zero does mean a person has the ability to freely choose to follow Christ. Those who reject the free offer of the Gospel are then all-the-more condemned by their denial.

To demonstrate how the atonement covered more than just the elect, Christ's death apparently even bought hell-bound false teachers who denied his Lordship (2 Pet. 2:1). Therefore, it is true that even though many inevitably do, it is God's will that none should perish (2 Pet. 3:8-9). The resurrection secured salvation for believers. The death of Christ did not secure the salvation of anyone and it forgave the sins of everyone; therefore, the atonement of Christ is limited in scope and unlimited in applicability.

## Key Passages

- 1 Tim. 4:9-10
  - o The living God is the savior of all people, *especially* those who believe
- 1 John 2:1-2
  - o Jesus, our advocate, is the propitiation for not just our sins, *but also* the whole world
- John 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:14-19
  - o Christ died for all that all might live for Christ; Christ reconciled and saved the world
- Rom. 3:23-25, 5:18; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9
  - o Christ gave himself as a ransom, tasting death to redeem *all* people
- 2 Pet. 2:1
  - o Even the false teachers who denied Christ were bought by Christ
- 2 Pet. 3:8-9
  - o It is God's will that none should perish

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<sup>25</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## SANCTIFICATION – LUTHERAN



### All the Positions

- Lutheran → Holiness is achieved by God’s declaration
  - Martin Luther, John MacArthur, John Murray
- Calvinist → Holiness is achieved by altering your personal moral behavior
  - John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Anthony Hoekema
- Hedonism → Holiness is achieved by finding satisfaction/higher value in Christ
  - John Piper, Sam Storms, Matt Chandler
- Wesleyan → Holiness is achieved by perfectly fleeing from sin in all areas of life
  - John Wesley, Charles Finney, Nazarene denomination

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Since all people are sinners, all people are unable on their own to live up to God’s holy standard. When people are saved, God sets them apart; they are distinct from people who are not saved. All set-apart people are justified by grace plus faith plus nothing else. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can these set-apart people live a set-apart, holy lifestyle that honors and glorifies our holy God.

### Case Study

Ernie struggles with a habitual problem of lustful thoughts. He has prayed frequently that God would deliver him, but no release has come. Ernie believes that because God cannot look upon sin, God can no longer accept him in the same way he did before the sin occurred. Ernie sincerely desires to live a life pleasing to God but up to now has failed to realize his goal.

What should Ernie do? Should he (1) reaffirm the belief that persons stand before God by faith alone, rest in this biblical fact, and simply seek professional help for his personal problem; (2) recall that he is united with Christ and simply trust that Christ’s life will be increasingly manifested in him; (3) recall that the Holy Spirit has already given him the power to say no to sin and develop this power through obedient discipleship; or (4) seek to reprioritize your values and cherish Christ more than all else, therefore allowing you to refrain from engaging in sinful behaviors? How you advise Ernie reflects your understanding of sanctification.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. Option four was replaced.

### Summary of View

The Lutheran view of sanctification is the easiest view to explain and the hardest view to accept. If you are a follower of Christ, God declared you holy; therefore, you are.

Your holiness is entirely God's act. We are not becoming holy, we are holy on the simple basis that God declares us holy. That does not mean believers have no responsibility to live into that holiness. Jesus said, *I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me* (John 15:5). This means that because we are in Christ, we will act, but it is entirely at the cause of the LORD. Believers are a new creation, created in Christ for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do (Eph. 2:1-10). Peter's command for us to be holy as God is holy is not commanding us to become holy, but instead is a command to walk in the holiness already prepared for us.

Sanctification is not about improving ourselves but about dying to the old sinful nature, and living into the new resurrected nature. The Lutheran view rejects the Wesleyan view wholeheartedly for even suggesting that holiness equates to perfection. Paul assumes sin is present but losing in the Christian life (Rom. 6:12-14). The new self is winning. Yet, Paul still clearly describes Christians as holy simply because the Spirit lives within them (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

The Lutheran view of sanctification affirms immediate justification and immediate actual sanctification, even if it is not immediately realized in the Christian life.

### Key Passages

- 1 Cor. 3:16-17
  - o Believers are temples for the Spirit; God's temple is holy, and that is what you are
- Rom. 4:4-5
  - o Our righteousness is not owed to us, but is given by faith
- 2 Cor. 5:21
  - o Only by exchanging our sinfulness for Christ's righteousness can we be holy
- Heb. 10:10-14
  - o We have been sanctified through the offering of Jesus once for all
- 1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:1
  - o Believers, saints, and sanctified-ones all used interchangeably

### Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- Are you set-apart simply by being in Christ, or is there more to being set-apart?
- What motivation is there for a Lutheran to *grow in the grace and knowledge* of Christ (1 Pet. 3:18) if they are already saved and holy enough for God?

## SANCTIFICATION – CALVINIST



### All the Positions

- Lutheran → Holiness is achieved by God’s declaration
  - o Martin Luther, John MacArthur, John Murray
- Calvinist → Holiness is achieved by altering your personal moral behavior
  - o John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Anthony Hoekema
- Hedonism → Holiness is achieved by finding satisfaction/higher value in Christ
  - o John Piper, Sam Storms, Matt Chandler
- Wesleyan → Holiness is achieved by perfectly fleeing from sin in all areas of life
  - o John Wesley, Charles Finney, Nazarene denomination

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Since all people are sinners, all people are unable on their own to live up to God’s holy standard. When people are saved, God sets them apart; they are distinct from people who are not saved. All set-apart people are justified by grace plus faith plus nothing else. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can these set-apart people live a set-apart, holy lifestyle that honors and glorifies our holy God.

### Case Study

Ernie struggles with a habitual problem of lustful thoughts. He has prayed frequently that God would deliver him, but no release has come. Ernie believes that because God cannot look upon sin, God can no longer accept him in the same way he did before the sin occurred. Ernie sincerely desires to live a life pleasing to God but up to now has failed to realize his goal.

What should Ernie do? Should he (1) reaffirm the belief that persons stand before God by faith alone, rest in this biblical fact, and simply seek professional help for his personal problem; (2) recall that he is united with Christ and simply trust that Christ’s life will be increasingly manifested in him; (3) recall that the Holy Spirit has already given him the power to say no to sin and develop this power through obedient discipleship; or (4) seek to reprioritize your values and cherish Christ more than all else, therefore allowing you to refrain from engaging in sinful behaviors? How you advise Ernie reflects your understanding of sanctification.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. Option four was replaced.

### Summary of View: Belgic Confession Article 24

We believe that this true faith, produced in us by the hearing of God’s Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates us and makes us new creatures, causing us to live a new life and freeing us from the slavery of sin. Therefore, far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them that apart from it they will never do a thing out of love for God but only out of love for themselves and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls “faith working through love,” which moves people to do by themselves the works that God has commanded in the Word. These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by God’s grace. Yet they do not count toward our justification—for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works. Otherwise they could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place.

So then, we do good works, but not for merit—for what would we merit? Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not God to us, since God “is at work in [us], enabling [us] both to will and to work for his good pleasure”— thus keeping in mind what is written: “When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done.’” Yet we do not wish to deny that God rewards good works—but it is by grace that God crowns these gifts. Moreover, although we do good works we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment. And even if we could point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work. So we would always be in doubt, tossed back and forth without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly if they did not rest on the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior.<sup>28</sup>

The Calvinist view affirms immediate justification and progressive sanctification through altering personal behavior to be like Christ.

### Key Passages

- Heb. 12:1-3
  - o Keeping our eyes on Jesus until the race is complete
- Rom. 6:2-4
  - o Christ was raised, so we may walk in a new way of life, not walking in sin.
- 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2
  - o Being transformed demonstrates an ongoing process
- 2 Pet. 2:2-3, 3:18; Heb. 6:1; Luke 8:14-15; Col. 1:9-10; Eph. 4:13-16
  - o We are to grow in maturity in Christ

### Discussion Question

- This view does not encourage pride but it certainly makes it easier to fall into pride. How could someone holding this position resist that temptation?
- Didn’t Christ free us from following a rulebook so we could live according to grace? Isn’t there more to holiness than following restrictive moral imperatives?

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<sup>28</sup> Article 24 of the Belgic Confession, regarding sanctification



## SANCTIFICATION – WESLEYAN



### All the Positions

- Lutheran → Holiness is achieved by God’s declaration
  - Martin Luther, John MacArthur, John Murray
- Calvinist → Holiness is achieved by altering your personal moral behavior
  - John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Anthony Hoekema
- Hedonism → Holiness is achieved by finding satisfaction/higher value in Christ
  - John Piper, Sam Storms, Matt Chandler
- Wesleyan → Holiness is achieved by perfectly fleeing from sin in all areas of life
  - John Wesley, Charles Finney, Nazarene denomination

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Since all people are sinners, all people are unable on their own to live up to God’s holy standard. When people are saved, God sets them apart; they are distinct from people who are not saved. All set-apart people are justified by grace plus faith plus nothing else. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can these set-apart people live a set-apart, holy lifestyle that honors and glorifies our holy God.

### Case Study

Ernie struggles with a habitual problem of lustful thoughts. He has prayed frequently that God would deliver him, but no release has come. Ernie believes that because God cannot look upon sin, God can no longer accept him in the same way he did before the sin occurred. Ernie sincerely desires to live a life pleasing to God but up to now has failed to realize his goal.

What should Ernie do? Should he (1) reaffirm the belief that persons stand before God by faith alone, rest in this biblical fact, and simply seek professional help for his personal problem; (2) recall that he is united with Christ and simply trust that Christ’s life will be increasingly manifested in him; (3) recall that the Holy Spirit has already given him the power to say no to sin and develop this power through obedient discipleship; or (4) seek to reprioritize your values and cherish Christ more than all else, therefore allowing you to refrain from engaging in sinful behaviors? How you advise Ernie reflects your understanding of sanctification.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. Option four was replaced.

## Summary of View

“[Christian perfection] is the complying with that kind command, ‘My son, give me thy heart.’ It is the ‘loving the Lord, his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind.’ This is the sum of Christian perfection: it is all comprised in that one word, love. The first branch of it is the love of God: and as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparable connected with the second...” –John Wesley<sup>30</sup>

“We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.” –Nazarene denomination<sup>31</sup>

Often when people think of holiness, they immediately jump to what holiness is not, or they compare themselves relative to others. This is not the most helpful way to narrow down what holiness is. The Bible tells us what holiness is. Holiness is love for God and love for others without failure. Holiness is not about what we do, but about what we have. The Christian who lives a holy lifestyle loves precisely as the Scriptures command. Christians can enter into perfection in this life by entirely surrendering to this command to love God and others. It is at the point of reaching Christian perfection in this life that a person is truly baptized of the Holy Spirit.

The Wesleyan view of sanctification affirms immediate sanctification and progressive justification.

## Key Passages

- 1 Thess. 3:12-13
  - o Paul equates “abound in love for one another” with “blameless and holy”
- 1 Thess. 5:23
  - o Paul prays that they would be sanctified “completely”
- 1 John 3:7-10
  - o All who have been born again do not sin; he is not able to sin
- 1 John 4:7-12
  - o Since God is love, if we love one another, God remains in us and love is perfected in us
- 1 John 4:19
  - o We love because God first loved us
- Acts 19:1-7
  - o Indwelling of the Holy Spirit immediately following true baptism

## Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- This view relies heavily on 1 John, but 1 John 1:8-10 says if we claim perfection, we deceive ourselves and make Christ a liar. How can both claims be true?
- If we become perfect, then why do we need Jesus?

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<sup>30</sup> John Wesley, Sermon #76

<sup>31</sup> Nazarene Denomination Article of Faith #10

## SANCTIFICATION – CHRISTIAN HEDONISM



### All the Positions

- Lutheran → Holiness is achieved by God’s declaration
  - o Martin Luther, John MacArthur, John Murray
- Calvinist → Holiness is achieved by altering your personal moral behavior
  - o John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Anthony Hoekema
- Hedonism → Holiness is achieved by finding satisfaction/higher value in Christ
  - o John Piper, Sam Storms, Matt Chandler
- Wesleyan → Holiness is achieved by perfectly fleeing from sin in all areas of life
  - o John Wesley, Charles Finney, Nazarene denomination

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Since all people are sinners, all people are unable on their own to live up to God’s holy standard. When people are saved, God sets them apart; they are distinct from people who are not saved. All set-apart people are justified by grace plus faith plus nothing else. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can these set-apart people live a set-apart, holy lifestyle that honors and glorifies our holy God.

### Case Study

Ernie struggles with a habitual problem of lustful thoughts. He has prayed frequently that God would deliver him, but no release has come. Ernie believes that because God cannot look upon sin, God can no longer accept him in the same way he did before the sin occurred. Ernie sincerely desires to live a life pleasing to God but up to now has failed to realize his goal.

What should Ernie do? Should he (1) reaffirm the belief that persons stand before God by faith alone, rest in this biblical fact, and simply seek professional help for his personal problem; (2) recall that he is united with Christ and simply trust that Christ’s life will be increasingly manifested in him; (3) recall that the Holy Spirit has already given him the power to say no to sin and develop this power through obedient discipleship; or (4) seek to reprioritize your values and cherish Christ more than all else, therefore allowing you to refrain from engaging in sinful behaviors? How you advise Ernie reflects your understanding of sanctification.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. Option four was replaced.

## Summary of View

Christian Hedonism is the most recent model developed by John Piper. Much like perfectionism defines Wesleyan theology, Christian Hedonism defines John Piper's theology. Piper's simple way to describe this position is that God is most glorified or magnified in us when we are most satisfied in him, especially through our suffering and death. Piper would slightly alter answer one of the Westminster Shorter Catechism and affirm that the chief end of man is to glorify God *through* enjoying Him forever.

Christian Hedonism is based on Phil. 1:20-23. It is Paul's eager hope that Christ will be honored in his body in his life and in his death. Christ will be honored in Paul's death because for Paul to die is gain, meaning Christ is more valuable than all else.

We grow into holiness when we find our satisfaction wholly in Christ. Jesus describes the Kingdom of God like a buried treasure that a man finds and reburies. *In his joy*, he gives up as much wealth as was necessary to claim that better treasure (Matt. 13:44). Peter describes the journey from new birth in Christ to the growth of sanctification as that of a newborn infant who *desires for the pure spiritual milk...since you have tasted that the Lord is good* (1 Pet. 2:2-3; cf. Ps. 34:8). Jeremiah prophesies against Judah, *they have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves* (Jer. 2:13). Yet, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that *everyone who drinks from this well will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the living water I give will never thirst again—ever! In fact, the water I give will be a water welling up within him for eternal life* (John 4:13-14). The woman left behind her water jar to proclaim that Messiah had arrived (John 4:28). Her satisfaction in Christ outweighed all other worldly pleasures, and in this exchange of treasures, God was glorified. Finally, Jesus again affirms that those who come and believe in him will be entirely satisfied (John 6:35).

This mind-set motivates the spiritual discipline of self-denial (Mark 8:34). We are not becoming holy by adding Godly behaviors, but instead by subtracting sinful behaviors. Christian Hedonism states self-denial cannot occur without a corresponding higher valuing of Christ over the behaviors being denied and subsequent happiness in belonging to him in life and in death.

The Christian Hedonist view affirms immediate justification and progressive sanctification through cherishing Christ more than anyone or anything else.

## Key Passages

- Phil. 1:20-23
  - o God is honored when in life and death I am wholly satisfied in Christ
- Matt. 13:44
  - o Kingdom of God is like a hidden treasure more valuable than all else combined
- Mark 8:34
  - o Valuing Christ requires devaluing all other possessions and relationships

## Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- One could suggest this view teaches that if we are in a state of desiring God, and we do what makes us happen, then we will usually do the right thing. Is this what it means to be holy?
- If we accept this view, are we running the race after pleasure or after God?
- How is this view similar and different from the other views?

## CHRISMATIC GIFTS – CONTINUATIONIST



### All the Positions

- Cessationist → The Holy Spirit stopped distributing the supernatural gifts to believers following the death of the first generation of believers
  - John MacArthur, Anthony Hoekema, Tom Schreiner, RC Sproul, J.I Packer, Doug Wilson
- Continuationist → The Holy Spirit continues to distribute the supernatural gifts to believers to this very day
  - Wayne Grudem, John Wesley, John Piper, Sam Storms, Gordon Fee, Pentecostals

### Summary of Agreement between the Two Positions

At the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit gives the believer specific spiritual gift(s). Every believer is given at least one spiritual gift. The purpose of all spiritual gifts is to strengthen the faith of other believers in the Body of Christ. No believer is given every spiritual gift, so that through the diversity of giftedness, all believers may serve and be served by the Church (1 Cor. 14:12). It is imperative upon all Christians to identify their spiritual gifts and be good stewards of those gifts by exercising them and sharing them with other believers in the local church.

### CRC Statement on the Charismatic Gifts

The whole church and every member must live in close fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ so that believers' lives, individually and communally, may always show the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Christ, through his Spirit, sovereignly distributes his gifts to the body of believers when and where he wills, and he empowers the members of the church in every age with whatever gifts he judges necessary for the building up of his body. Individual congregations should provide within their communal fellowship for the free exercise of all genuine gifts of the Spirit so long as all things are done for edification and in good order, and churches should provide full opportunity for kingdom service in ministries appropriate to the gifts received by their members.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> CRC Statement on Charismatic Gifts



## The Argument

The Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20); however, that has nothing to do with the distribution of spiritual gifts. The Cessationist argument is flawed by equating words from those with the “revelatory” gifts with the words of Scripture, therefore arguing that all prophecies articulated ought to be preserved for the full Church. Paul commands the Thessalonians to test every prophecy (1 Thess. 5:20-21) yet the Bereans were lauded as better than the Thessalonians for evaluating Paul’s words according to the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). The New Testament gift of prophecy is different from the Old Testament office of prophet. Those gifted with prophecy in the New Testament speak authoritatively, yet are still subject to the Scriptures. There are also several examples of believers with the gift of prophecy whose words are never preserved (Acts 11:27, 19:26, 21:9). The point is there is no Biblical basis for a written record of every word articulated by a believer gifted with prophecy. Their words are instead to be discerned by those receiving them.

With exception of more extreme Pentecostal churches, we agree that apostleship has functionally ceased due to the qualifications set forth in Acts 1:21-26, among others. In fact, the cessation of certain spiritual gifts is a Biblical truth; however, we affirm that these “revelatory” gifts have not *yet* ceased. 1 Cor. 13:8-13 is clear: the “revelatory” gifts will cease but not until the perfect comes, referring to the time when Jesus (quoting Is. 54:13) says *the children of God will be taught directly by God* (John 6:45). Clearly, the “perfect” consummation of God’s redemptive plan has not yet arrived; therefore, these gifts are still legitimate. A similar point can be gleaned from Eph. 4:11-13.

The apostles and prophets were certainly authenticated by signs and wonders; however, that was not their exclusive purpose. Stephen (not an apostle) performed signs and wonders (Acts 6:8). Deacon Philip (not an apostle) performed signs and wonders (Acts 8:6). Not just were these two men able to perform signs and wonders through their gifting by the Spirit, but ordinary, unnamed believers were also apparently eligible as a matter of principle to receive “revelatory” and “signs” gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10).

Lastly, the Cessationist argument is flawed when they say of tongues that since we have access to the Scriptures in our language that tongues have altogether ceased. If anything, that argument would be limited to the English-speaking world. What about people throughout the world who do not have access to Scripture or the Gospel? It seems like a great opportunity, if the Spirit chose to do so, for the Spirit to give the gift of tongues to a missionary to communicate the Gospel to that unreached people.

## Key Passages

- 1 Cor. 12:1
  - o All of Paul’s talk on the spiritual gifts is so they would not be unaware
- 1 Cor. 14:1
  - o Desire the spiritual gifts, above all seek prophecy
- 1 Cor. 14:39
  - o Be eager to prophesy and do not forbid the speaking in tongues
- 1 Thess. 5:19-22
  - o Do not quench the Spirit or despise prophecies

## Discussion Question

- Doesn’t this view open the Church up to “new” revelations and words from God?

## CHARISMATIC GIFTS – CESSATIONIST



### All the Positions

- Cessationist → The Holy Spirit has ceased from distributing the supernatural gifts to believers following the death of the first generation of believers
  - o John MacArthur, Anthony Hoekema, Tom Schreiner, RC Sproul, J.I Packer, Doug Wilson
- Continuationist → The Holy Spirit continues to distribute the supernatural gifts to believers even to this very day
  - o Wayne Grudem, John Wesley, John Piper, Sam Storms, Gordon Fee, Pentecostals

### Summary of Agreement between the Two Positions

At the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit gives the believer specific spiritual gift(s). Every believer is given at least one spiritual gift. The purpose of all spiritual gifts is to strengthen the faith of other believers in the Body of Christ. No believer is given every spiritual gift, so that through the diversity of giftedness, all believers may serve and be served by the Church (1 Cor. 14:12). It is imperative upon all Christians to identify their spiritual gifts and be good stewards of those gifts by exercising them and sharing them with other believers in the local church.

### CRC Statement on the Charismatic Gifts

The whole church and every member must live in close fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ so that believers' lives, individually and communally, may always show the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Christ, through his Spirit, sovereignly distributes his gifts to the body of believers when and where he wills, and he empowers the members of the church in every age with whatever gifts he judges necessary for the building up of his body. Individual congregations should provide within their communal fellowship for the free exercise of all genuine gifts of the Spirit so long as all things are done for edification and in good order, and churches should provide full opportunity for kingdom service in ministries appropriate to the gifts received by their members.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> CRC Statement on Charismatic Gifts

## The Argument

The Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). God has spoken to us in these “last days” through Christ (Heb. 1:2). The fullness of God was pleased to dwell within Christ and only through Christ can you be filled with the fullness of God (Col. 1:19; Eph. 3:19). Therefore, the writings of the apostles and prophets about Christ are all we need. Moreover, Jude (3) insists upon contending for the sufficiency of Scripture and the rejection of “new” revelations. The “revelation” gifts that have ceased are apostleship, prophecy, tongues, and healing.

Apostleship has ceased because there were clear qualifications for apostleship: men followers who witnessed the ministry of Jesus before his crucifixion and witnessed his physically raised body to establish the Church (Acts 1:21-26). These qualifications were stated following Judas’ vacancy, yet after James died, his apostolic office was never filled (Acts 12:2). Moreover, Paul seems to claim to be the last apostle (1 Cor. 15:8). Therefore, nobody alive today would meet the basic qualifications of apostle. Therefore, the office of apostle has functionally ceased.

Much like apostles, the prophets play an important, *temporary* role to lay the foundation for the Church through establishing essential doctrine and practice (Eph. 2:20, 1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 3:5, Eph. 4:11). We know the gift of prophecy is temporary because Paul tells us precisely that, *prophecies will come to an end* (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

A basic study of the gift of tongues is also clear these are real languages, not a “free vocalization,” “psychological relaxation” experience.<sup>35</sup> True tongues were used to convey authoritative truth to people who did not have it. Since authoritative truth has been given to us fully in Scripture, and since we have entire access to the Scriptures in our language, the gift of tongues is no longer necessary for us.

Finally, the gift of healing has ceased because healing (and signs and wonders) were specifically performed through the apostles to authenticate their apostleship (Acts 2:43, 5:12, 14:3, 15:12; 1 Cor. 12:12). Therefore, since apostleship has ceased, so also has the need to authenticate apostleship through healing, signs, and wonders ceased.

## Key Passages

- Acts 1:21-22, 9:1-8
  - o Qualifications for apostleship functionally limited to first century
- Acts 2:22, 43, 5:12, 14:3; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:2-4;
  - o God granted miracles to be performed through apostles to authenticate them
- Eph. 2:19-21
  - o The apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the Church
- 1 Cor. 13:8-13
  - o Prophecies and tongues will come to an end

## Discussion Questions

- Doesn't 1 Cor. 13:8-13 teach the gifts will cease at the second coming?
- Does this unnecessarily place naturalistic restrictions on a supernatural God?
- Paul says in 1 Thess. 5:20 not to despise prophecy while waiting for the day of the Lord, testing everything. Shouldn't we welcome and spot-check prophecy?

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Schreiner and J.I. Packer respectively. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/cessationist/>

## WHAT ARE THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?



*Charisma* = gift from God to people  
*Charis* = grace

*Doran* = gift from people to God

### Principles about the Gifts

- The Holy Spirit gives each believer specific spiritual gifts after their conversion (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Cor. 12:7-11)
- Each believer is given at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:6-7; Eph. 4:7)
- Not all believers get the same gift and no believer is given all gifts (1 Cor. 7:7-9; the “body of Christ” metaphor in 1 Cor. 12-14)
- Despite being one Body of Christ, there is a variety of very different gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-6)
- The fruits of the Spirit are *not* spiritual gifts, but are instead demonstrated through the legitimate use of our spiritual gifts (Gal. 5:22-25)
- All spiritual gifts are to be used in peace and good order (1 Cor. 14:26-40)

### Principles about God’s Role in Spiritual Gifts

- The Holy Spirit is a required prerequisite for a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:3)
- The Holy Spirit decides what gifts we receive (1 Cor. 12:11, 18; Eph. 3:6-8)
- God is glorified by the proper use of our spiritual gifts (1 Pet. 4:9-11)

### Principles about the Emphasis on “Others” in the Gifts

- Spiritual gifts strengthen the faith of others (Rom. 1:10-12)
- Spiritual gifts are meant to serve others (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:9-11)
- Spiritual gifts are for edifying other believers (1 Cor. 14:2-5, 12; Eph. 4:9-12)
- The proper use of spiritual gifts leads to worship (1 Cor. 14:24-25; Ex. 35:30-33; Dan. 2:46-47)
- Spiritual gifts help equip other believers for ministry; promote unity (Eph. 4:9-12)
- The proper use of spiritual gifts will not prompt others to sin (1 Cor. 7:7-9)
- Each gift *needs* the others functioning alongside them (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:14-17, 21-26)

### Principles about the Gift-Holder

- It is right for believers to desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1)
- Believers should not neglect their spiritual gifts (1 Tim. 4:14)
- Believers ought to stir up their hearts toward their spiritual gifts (2 Tim. 1:6)
- Believers use their spiritual gifts in proportion to their faith (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 13)
- Using our spiritual gifts help us wait eagerly for Christ’s return (1 Cor. 1:7)

List of Spiritual Gifts<sup>36</sup>

1. **^Administration:** Organizers or logistical planners for the church to advance the church
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 12:28; Tit. 1:5; Acts 6:1-7; Luke 14:28-30
  - b. Works well with celibacy, evangelism, leadership, service, and teaching
2. **^Apostleship:** Witnesses of the Risen Christ who plant churches and establish doctrine
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 9:1; 12:29; Eph. 4:11-12; Acts 1:21-26; 15:22-35; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 2:7-10
  - b. Works well with evangelism, healing, martyrdom, and prophecy
3. **\*Celibacy:** Illustrators of Christ's devotion to the Father, freed from spousal distractions
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 7:7, 32-35; Matt. 19:9-12
  - b. Works well with evangelism, hospitality, mercy, shepherding, and teaching
4. **+Craftsmanship:** Those whose expressions of creativity help others worship God
  - a. Passages: Ex. 35:30-33
  - b. Works well with knowledge, music, and service
5. **^Discernment:** Judges of if another is acting by the Holy Spirit or by demonic spirits
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 12:10; Acts 16:16-18; 1 John 4:1-6; Heb. 5:14
  - b. Works well with interpretation, miracle-working, prophecy, teaching, and wisdom
6. **\*Dreams/Visions:** Those who see the coming Day of the Lord via dream or vision
  - a. Passages: Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17
  - b. Works well with evangelism, interpretation, knowledge, and prophecy
7. **^Evangelism:** Preachers or sharers of the Gospel to grow the Kingdom here or abroad
  - a. Passages: Eph. 3:6-8; 4:11-12; 2 Tim. 4:5; Acts 8:12, 26-40; 14:21-22
  - b. Works well with exhortation, healing, martyrdom, prophecy, and service
8. **^Exhortation:** Encouragers whose words empower others to endure through suffering
  - a. Passages: Rom. 12:8; Acts 11:23-24; 14:21-22; 15:32; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:9; 2:11-15
  - b. Works well with evangelism, healing, intercession, mercy, and music
9. **^Faith:** Those with a deeply-held, unshakable confidence in the stated promises of God
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 12:9; 13:2; Acts 3:1-10; 11:22-24; Rom. 4:18-21; Matt. 17:20; 21:21
  - b. Works well with healing, intercession, martyrdom, and miracle-working
10. **^Giving from Abundance:** Enablers of & sharers in ministry by filling needs of ministers
  - a. Passages: Rom. 12:8, 13; Acts 4:32-37; 2 Cor. 9:5-15; Phil. 4:10-18
  - b. Works well with administration, hospitality, mercy, service, and teaching

<sup>36</sup>

^ Explicit spiritual gifts  
 \* Implicit spiritual gifts  
 + Qualifying spiritual gifts



11. **\*Giving from Poverty:** Illustrators of sacrificial giving, sharers in the ministry of others
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 13:3; 2 Cor. 6:10; 8:1-7
  - b. Works well with evangelism, faith, hospitality, mercy, and shepherding
12. **^Healing:** Restorers of the physical and/or spiritual health of others
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 12:9, 30; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Jas. 5:13-16; Acts 3:1-10; 9:32-34; 28:7-10; Ps. 103:3
  - b. Works well with evangelism, faith, intercession, mercy, and shepherding
13. **^Hospitality:** Servers who make space to wait upon the church and build community
  - a. Passages: 1 Pet. 4:9-11; Rom. 12:13; 16:23; Acts 16:14-15; 28:7-10; Heb. 13:1-2
  - b. Works well with evangelism, giving, mercy, shepherding, and teaching
14. **\*Intercession:** Effective prayers who seek for others to remain rooted in their faith
  - a. Passages: Heb. 7:25; Col. 1:9-12; Col. 4:12-13; Jas. 5:14-16; 2 Cor. 1:11
  - b. Works well with exhortation, faith, healing, shepherding, and wisdom
15. **+Interpretation of Dreams/Visions:** Interpreters of others' eschatological dreams/visions
  - a. Passages: Gen. 40:7-8; 41:25-26; Dan. 2:36-49
  - b. Works well with discerning spirits, dreams/visions, and miracle-working
16. **^Interpretation of Tongues:** Interpreters of tongue speaking who also share the message
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 12:10, 30; 14:1-28
  - b. Works well with discerning spirits, exhortation, prophecy, and tongues
17. **^Knowledge:** Those who understand and communicate the *heart* of God revealed in Christ
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 2:6-13; 12:8; Col. 2:2-3; Ex. 35:30-33
  - b. Works well with evangelism, music, prophecy, teaching, and wisdom
18. **^Leadership:** Willing overseers of the lives of those within the context of the church
  - a. Passages: Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17; Heb. 13:17
  - b. Works well with administration, apostleship, and shepherding
19. **\*Martyrdom:** Martyrs whose one act strengthens the faith of all who witness or hear
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 13:3; Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4-6
  - b. Works well with celibacy, evangelism, faith, prophecy, and wisdom
20. **^Mercy:** Nurturers whose compassion and empathy elevate others in the midst of pain
  - a. Passages: Rom. 12:8, 15; Matt. 5:7; 18:33; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 3:17; Jude 22-23; 1 Thess. 5:14
  - b. Works well with exhortation, hospitality, intercession, and shepherding
21. **^Miracles:** Performers of signs/wonders who set the stage for Gospel proclamations
  - a. Passages: 1 Cor. 12:10, 29; Acts 2:43; 3:1-20; 4:29-31; 5:10-16; 9:36-43; 13:4-12; 19:11-12; 20:7-12; Gal. 3:5; Rom. 15:18-19
  - b. Works well with evangelism, faith, and prophecy

22. **\*Music:** Musicians who effectively help stir the hearts of believers to offer praise to God
- Passages: 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16
  - Works well with administration, craftsmanship, exhortation, and knowledge
23. **^Prophecy:** Communicators led by the Spirit to share a word to a specific person or group
- Passages: Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29; 14:29-40; Eph. 2:20; 4:11-12; Acts 2:17-18; 13:1-3; 19:1-7; 21:4, 10-14; 1 Tim. 1:18; 1 Thess. 5:20-21; 2 John 7-11; 1 Pet. 4:9-11; Rev. 19:10
  - Works well with evangelism, healing, interpretation, teaching, and tongues
24. **^Service:** Unnoticed servers who fill tangible needs that help the speaking gifts succeed
- Passages: Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:4, 28; 16:15-18; 1 Pet. 4:11; Acts 6:1-7; 20:35; Matt. 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; 2 Tim. 4:11; Rev. 2:19
  - Works well with administration, celibacy, craftsmanship, evangelism, exhortation, hospitality, leadership, prophecy, shepherding, and teaching
25. **^Shepherding:** Illustrators of sacrifice and humble-leadership through special oversight
- Passages: Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9; Acts 20:28; John 10:11-18; Jer. 3:15; 1 Pet. 5:13
  - Works well with administration, celibacy, evangelism, hospitality, intercession, leadership, mercy, prophecy, service, teaching, and wisdom
26. **^Teaching:** Teachers who clearly and accurately explain the Scriptures to other believers
- Passages: Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Jas. 3:1; 2 Tim. 3:15; Acts 17:11; 18:24-28
  - Works well with administration, hospitality, prophecy, service, and wisdom
27. **^Tongues:** Speakers of real, known, or unknown languages interpreted in good order
- Passages: 1 Cor. 12:10, 30; 14:2, 27-40; Acts 2:4; 19:6
  - Works well with discerning spirits, exhortation, faith, and interpretation
28. **^Wisdom:** Sages who speak into situations from a God-fearing, righteous perspective
- Passages: 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 12:8; Ps. 111:10; Col. 1:9; 2:1-3; Jas. 3:13-18; Ex. 35:30-33; Acts 6:10
  - Works well with discerning spirits, intercession knowledge, and mercy

#### How to identify your gifts?

- Take an online test, but expect the results to be limited.
- Identify what gifts are largely missing from your church. Is that a need you could fill?
- Ask other believers for input.
- Try one. If after a while it is clear you do not have that gift, set it aside and try another.

#### Discussion Questions

- Of those who already know what your spiritual gifts are, can you please share how you identified your gift and how you use it?
- Do any of these gifts seem to violate the guiding principles for spiritual gifts?

## WOMEN IN MINISTRY – EGALITARIAN



### All the Positions

- Complementarian → While equal in value, women have a different God-ordained role; the role of ecclesiastical leadership belongs exclusively to men.
  - Billy Graham, John Piper, John MacArthur, Wayne Grudem, RC Sproul, Sam Storms
- Egalitarian → Since the Spirit distributes *all* gifts to *all* people, Spirit-empowered women must use their gifts, which may include the ecclesiastical leadership role.
  - John Wesley, George Fox, Gordon Fee, Greg Boyd, Craig Keener, Ben Witherington III

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Men and women were both created in the image of God, and were created on purpose. Men and women both have equal value, equal worth, and equal dignity. The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to both men and women to be used in ministry within a local church context. Men are capable of being effective and ineffective husbands and fathers. Women are capable of being effective and ineffective wives and mothers.

### Brief CRC Statement

All congregations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America may allow women to serve in the office of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor. The CRC recognizes that there are two different perspectives and convictions on this issue, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God.<sup>37</sup>

### Summary of View

If the Complementarian position is the creational-ideal, then why do we find examples in Scripture of women functioning in positions of spiritual authority over men? If the Complementarian position is the creational-ideal, then we should expect each of these examples to be spoken of in negative terms. The contrary is true. Women function in the role of prophet in both Testaments (2 Ki. 22:14, Luke 2:36-38, Acts 21:8-9, 1 Cor. 11:4-5). Apollos, a gifted male preacher, was taught the Scriptures by Priscilla, a woman, far beyond his own knowledge of the

<sup>37</sup> From the CRC Statement on Women in Ecclesiastical Office

Scriptures (Acts 18:24-26). If the Complementarian position is the creational-idea, why did a woman have spiritual authority over Apollos without a rebuke? We reject the Complementarian position that the creational-ideal is for the roles of spiritual leadership to be filled by only men.

Paul's writings regarding the Holy Spirit's distribution of the spiritual gifts are even more explicit. In Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:4-6, Paul writes that the Spirit distributes all the gifts to all believers. This includes women, and it includes the pastoral, teaching, and leadership gifts.

1 Tim. 2:12 is for many the linchpin. However, the fact is that every single word in this verse is debated, and the rendering in our English translations is a relatively new rendering that has its roots only in the last century. The more accurate, historically-supported rendering would be "I do not permit a wife to teach or usurp authority from her husband." This supports the specific headship of a husband in his marriage, not the broad headship of males in church.

### Case Study

Recently graduated from a Christian liberal arts college and home for summer, Christina had asked her pastor to stop by that evening. Tonight was the night she would tell her parents and her pastor just what God had been doing in her heart with regard to future ministry. Tonight was the night she would tell them that she had a strong sense of calling to the pastoral ministry and that she planned to start seminary in the fall. Her dream was to fulfill the role of senior pastor in a church one day.

They all listened intently as she shared her pilgrimage with them. When she finally asked for their feedback, the responses were far from unanimous. Her pastor began: "Christina, I have watched you grow as a Christian from the time you were a little girl. Your heart for God and your passion for his kingdom have always been evident in your life. I am so excited that you want to minister within the church in a full-time capacity. However, the Bible teaches that the particular role you are aspiring to—that of senior pastor—is to be reserved for male ministers. In passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12-15, the apostle Paul is very clear about this matter."

At this point, Christina's mother could not contain herself any longer. "But as I read through the Bible, I find women fulfilling leadership roles in both Testaments. In the Old Testament, there are women leaders such as Miriam and Deborah. In the New Testament, Paul mentions women leaders such as Priscilla and Phoebe. How can you tell my daughter that God isn't calling her to pastoral ministry when we have these clear examples of women leaders in the Bible?" As Christina turned to her father, the confused look on his face was evidence enough that he had no idea where he stood on the issue. "Now what?" she thought to herself.<sup>38</sup>

### Discussion Question

- Could this view be functional in societies around the world? Does that matter?
- If we accept that Paul's instruction to Timothy was specific to Timothy, is that true of his whole letter? This would mean that requirements of elders and deacons would only apply to the church Timothy was planting, not to every church. Aren't we picking and choosing based on what we want the text to say?
- This view seems to suggest that if women are unable to teach men, then their teaching gift is wasted. Doesn't Ti. 2:3-5 remedy this perception of fruitlessness?
- If you hold the Complementarian position, do you see plausibility with this view or do you think this is a non-debatable point of doctrine?

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<sup>38</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## WOMEN IN MINISTRY – COMPLEMENTARIAN



### All the Positions

- Complementarian → While equal in value, women have a different God-ordained role; the role of ecclesiastical leadership belongs exclusively to men.
  - Billy Graham, John Piper, John MacArthur, Wayne Grudem, RC Sproul, Sam Storms
- Egalitarian → Since the Spirit distributes *all* gifts to *all* people, Spirit-empowered women must use their gifts, which may include the ecclesiastical leadership role.
  - John Wesley, George Fox, Gordon Fee, Greg Boyd, Craig Keener, Ben Witherington III

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

Men and women were both created in the image of God, and were created on purpose. Men and women both have equal value, equal worth, and equal dignity. The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to both men and women to be used in ministry within a local church context. Men are capable of being effective and ineffective husbands and fathers. Women are capable of being effective and ineffective wives and mothers.

### Brief CRC Statement

All congregations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America may allow women to serve in the office of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor. The CRC recognizes that there are two different perspectives and convictions on this issue, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God.<sup>39</sup>

### Summary of View

There is not a hierarchy in value between men and women, but there is a hierarchy in roles. The Father is head of Christ, and Christ is head of men. No one would suggest Christ is less than the Father in value, but there is a willful subordination. Likewise, men are head of women; women are to subject to their husbands and men are to love their wives. This hierarchy was pre-Fall, therefore, it is the creational-ideal.

The first thing God said was not good was man's aloneness, so He made man a helper. Because of the Fall, God said a woman's desire will be for her husband (Gen. 3:16). What is the

<sup>39</sup> From the CRC Statement on Women in Ecclesiastical Office



desire? The same word is used in the next chapter referring to authority (Gen. 4:7). The woman's sinful desire for her husband is to claim his authority established in creation.

Despite breaking other societal barriers elevating women and outcasts, Jesus still intentionally chose all male disciples. Even more explicit though, are Paul's instructions in two separate letters regarding church leadership. To the Corinthians he instructed that women should remain silent in churches and ask questions to their husbands at home (1 Cor. 14:34). To Timothy, he instructed that elders and deacons should be the husband of one wife, not the wife of one husband (1 Tim. 3:2-12). And again to Timothy, he instructed that women should learn in silence, and should not teach or have authority over men (1 Tim. 2:11-14). These passages are not merely about isolated cultural contexts, but are clear endorsements of the creational-ideal.

### Case Study

Christina knew the evening's conversation would be interesting, to say the least. Recently graduated from a Christian liberal arts college and home for summer, Christina had asked her pastor to stop by that evening. Tonight was the night she would tell her parents and her pastor just what God had been doing in her heart with regard to future ministry. Tonight was the night she would tell them that she had a strong sense of calling to the pastoral ministry and that she planned to start seminary in the fall. Her dream was to fulfill the role of senior pastor in a church one day.

They all listened intently as she shared her pilgrimage with them. When she finally asked for their feedback, the responses were far from unanimous. Her pastor began: "Christina, I have watched you grow as a Christian from the time you were a little girl. Your heart for God and your passion for his kingdom have always been evident in your life. I am so excited that you want to minister within the church in a full-time capacity. However, the Bible teaches that the particular role you are aspiring to—that of senior pastor—is to be reserved for male ministers. In passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12-15, the apostle Paul is very clear about this matter."

At this point, Christina's mother could not contain herself any longer. "But as I read through the Bible, I find women fulfilling leadership roles in both Testaments. In the Old Testament, there are women leaders such as Miriam and Deborah. In the New Testament, Paul mentions women leaders such as Priscilla and Phoebe. How can you tell my daughter that God isn't calling her to pastoral ministry when we have these clear examples of women leaders in the Bible?" As Christina turned to her father, the confused look on his face was evidence enough that he had no idea where he stood on the issue. "Now what?" she thought to herself.<sup>40</sup>

### Discussion Question

- Could this view be functional in societies around the world? Does that matter?
- Why should we enforce Paul's prohibition against women in spiritual authority over men and not also the requirement of women to be silent during church, both stated in the same passage? Aren't we picking and choosing?
- Paul also writes in two separate letters that all the spiritual gifts are given to all. This would include gifts of preaching, pastoral, leadership, etc. to women (Eph. 4:11, and 1 Cor. 12:4-6). How do you reconcile this with Paul's words against women in church leadership stated within the same letter to the Corinthians?

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<sup>40</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## DESTINY OF UNEVANGELIZED – RESTRICTIVIST



### All the Positions

- Restrictivist → A person is saved by expressing explicit faith in Jesus following the explicit proclamation of the Gospel
  - Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, RC Sproul, David Platt
- Universal Opportunity → Flowing from His foreknowledge, God will do everything necessary to bring the Gospel to all people who will respond affirmatively.
  - Jacob Arminius, John Newman, Norman Geisler, Robert Lightner, William Lane Craig
- Postmortem Evangelism → The Gospel is proclaimed to the dead, giving each unbeliever one final chance to accept Christ
  - Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, Ambrose, Athanasius, Wolfhart Pannenberg, P.T. Forsyth
- Inclusivist → Jesus provides the way of salvation for all who respond with faith in God based on the extent of revelation given, even if they are unaware of Jesus.
  - Justin Martyr, Ulrich Zwingli, John Wesley, Billy Graham, CS Lewis, N.T. Wright

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

God has a genuine, deeply rooted love for humanity, His premier creation, and He desires all would be saved. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way for anyone to be saved. Jesus was crucified for you. He died and was buried. The good news is this innocent Jesus who died for you was resurrected the third day! This resurrection confirmed His identity as Son of God and Messiah. If you believe the Father raised Jesus from the dead, repent of your sins, and call on the name of Jesus as Lord, you are saved, your sins are forgiven, your heart is transformed, and the Spirit indwells you.

### Case Study

Imagine that you are called by God to bring the gospel to an unreached people group on the far side of the globe. After months of language instruction, preparation, and prayer, you head to the mission field... Eventually, a small church is born where once there was no sign of the gospel.

One day, Jamil, one of the first converts, asks to talk to you in private... He asks a question that has been plaguing him for some time... Six months before you came to his land, his father died. His father was a good man, respected and loved by everyone in the village. However, he died without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ... “Is there any chance I might see my father again in heaven? ...Is there a chance my father will somehow come to know the God that has

finally been revealed to the village? Or will he be eternally condemned simply because he was born at the wrong time and place?” What would you say to Jamil?<sup>41</sup>

### Summary of View

There is only one way of salvation available for all people in the world today and that is through Christ. When Jesus spoke of himself as the door of the sheep, he clearly stated that only through him can anyone be saved (John 10:9). He reiterates this again several chapters later, saying “I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also” (John 14:6-7a). Jesus is clear in these passages: there is only one way of salvation and it requires an explicit knowledge of him.

Salvation is unfair. It is not unfair because some are condemned to Hell, for all have sinned against a Holy God and are deserving of eternal condemnation. Instead, salvation is unfair because some are undeservingly granted eternal life. The New Testament writers are clear that the plan of salvation was narrowed and specified following the resurrection of Christ. Jesus said as much after his resurrection, prior to his ascension, that his resurrection and the call to repent must both be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

There is an explicit need to know the Gospel of Christ before you come to saving faith in Christ. Paul writes to the Ephesians that prior to their saved status, Gentiles were separated from Christ, alienated from the covenant, without hope, and without God (Eph. 2:12). And Paul tells the Romans that anyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and believes in his resurrection will be saved, and people cannot make this confession unless someone who is sent proclaims Christ to them—faith comes from hearing (Rom. 10:9-17). A phrase from Church history is *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*, “Outside the Church, there is no salvation.” As much as we may want God’s grace to extend to as many as possible, that benevolent-impulse ought to prompt us to go to the nations instead of creating speculative models that justify our unwillingness to go.

### Key Passages

- 1 John 5:11-12
  - o The one who has the Son has life; the one who doesn’t hasn’t
- Rom. 10:9-17
  - o Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and they need people sent to proclaim because faith comes from hearing
- Matt. 7:13-14
  - o Narrow is the gate that leads to life
- Luke 24:46-47
  - o Christ’s death and resurrection, and the call to repent, must be proclaimed to all nations
- Eph. 2:12
  - o Prior, you were separated from God, alienated, with no hope, without God

### Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- This view would suggest aborted babies or mentally disabled persons who die before they can comprehend the Gospel are condemned to Hell. Does that mesh with your understanding of the character of God?
- How would this view approach missions.

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<sup>41</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## DESTINY OF UNEVANGELIZED – UNIVERSAL OPPORTUNITY



### All the Positions

- Restrictivist → A person is saved by expressing explicit faith in Jesus following the explicit proclamation of the Gospel
  - Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, RC Sproul, David Platt
- Universal Opportunity → Flowing from His foreknowledge, God will do everything necessary to bring the Gospel to all people who will respond affirmatively.
  - Jacob Arminius, John Newman, Norman Geisler, Robert Lightner, William Lane Craig
- Postmortem Evangelism → The Gospel is proclaimed to the dead, giving each unbeliever one final chance to accept Christ
  - Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, Ambrose, Athanasius, Wolfhart Pannenberg, P.T. Forsyth
- Inclusivist → Jesus provides the way of salvation for all who respond with faith in God based on the extent of revelation given, even if they are unaware of Jesus.
  - Justin Martyr, Ulrich Zwingli, John Wesley, Billy Graham, CS Lewis, N.T. Wright

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

God has a genuine, deeply rooted love for humanity, His premier creation, and He desires all would be saved. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way for anyone to be saved. Jesus was crucified for you. He died and was buried. The good news is this innocent Jesus who died for you was resurrected the third day! This resurrection confirmed His identity as Son of God and Messiah. If you believe the Father raised Jesus from the dead, repent of your sins, and call on the name of Jesus as Lord, you are saved, your sins are forgiven, your heart is transformed, and the Spirit indwells you.

### Case Study

Imagine that you are called by God to bring the gospel to an unreached people group on the far side of the globe. After months of language instruction, preparation, and prayer, you head to the mission field... Eventually, a small church is born where once there was no sign of the gospel.

One day, Jamil, one of the first converts, asks to talk to you in private... He asks a question that has been plaguing him for some time... Six months before you came to his land, his father died. His father was a good man, respected and loved by everyone in the village. However, he died without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ... “Is there any chance I might see my father again in heaven? ...Is there a chance my father will somehow come to know the God that has finally been

revealed to the village? Or will he be eternally condemned simply because he was born at the wrong time and place?” What would you say to Jamil?<sup>42</sup>

### Summary of View

There is only one way of salvation available for all people in the world today and that is through Christ. When Jesus spoke of himself as the door of the sheep, he clearly stated that only through him can anyone be saved (John 10:9). He reiterates this again several chapters later, saying “I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also” (John 14:6-7a). Jesus is clear in these passages: there is only one way of salvation and it requires an explicit knowledge of him. New Testament writers are clear that the plan of salvation was narrowed following the resurrection of Christ. After his resurrection but prior to his ascension, Jesus said his resurrection and the call to repent must both be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47), but he does not suggest this proclamation to be a required prerequisite to faith.

The Universal Opportunity position affirms nearly all of the Restrictivist position’s argument. The primary disagreement is the Restrictivist’s claim that faith in Christ must always follow an explicit proclamation by a human messenger. But God is never without a witness and we reject the idea that there are people who would otherwise respond affirmatively to the Gospel who are left unreached.

When human messengers are unable or unwilling to go preach to a person who would respond affirmatively, God will send angelic messengers, visions, dreams, etc. to proclaim enough of the Gospel to them. Rather than a disciple being sent to him, Cornelius received a message from an angel commanding him to send for a disciple to come to himself (Acts 10:1-8). Moreover, it seems to go against God’s character, as revealed in Scripture, for him to condemn anyone to eternal punishment for rejecting the Gospel if they had never heard it. Since God desires all people to be saved, and since he promises that those who seek will find—not might, but will—he is bound by his character and promises to do all he can do to save those who want to be saved, regardless of the ability or willingness of other human messengers.

### Key Passages

- Rom. 10:17
  - o Faith comes from hearing
- Matt. 7:7-8
  - o Keep searching and you will find
- Heb. 11:6
  - o To please God, one must keep seeking
- Acts 8:26-40
  - o Ethiopian Eunuch

### Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- People who don’t hear the Gospel are still sinners just as we are. Does not hearing the Gospel free someone from the guilt of their sins?
- Is there too much speculation in this view to embrace it over the others?
- How would this view approach missions?

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<sup>42</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.



## DESTINY OF UNEVANGELIZED – POSTMORTEM EVANGELISM



### All the Positions

- Restrictivist → A person is saved by expressing explicit faith in Jesus following the explicit proclamation of the Gospel
  - o Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, RC Sproul, David Platt
- Universal Opportunity → Flowing from His foreknowledge, God will do everything necessary to bring the Gospel to all people who will respond affirmatively.
  - o Jacob Arminius, John Newman, Norman Geisler, Robert Lightner, William Lane Craig
- Postmortem Evangelism → The Gospel is proclaimed to the dead, giving each unbeliever one final chance to accept Christ
  - o Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, Ambrose, Athanasius, Wolfhart Pannenberg, P.T. Forsyth
- Inclusivist → Jesus provides the way of salvation for all who respond with faith in God based on the extent of revelation given, even if they are unaware of Jesus.
  - o Justin Martyr, Ulrich Zwingli, John Wesley, Billy Graham, CS Lewis, N.T. Wright

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

God has a genuine, deeply rooted love for humanity, His premier creation, and He desires all would be saved. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way for anyone to be saved. Jesus was crucified for you. He died and was buried. The good news is this innocent Jesus who died for you was resurrected the third day! This resurrection confirmed His identity as Son of God and Messiah. If you believe the Father raised Jesus from the dead, repent of your sins, and call on the name of Jesus as Lord, you are saved, your sins are forgiven, your heart is transformed, and the Spirit indwells you.

### Case Study

Imagine that you are called by God to bring the gospel to an unreached people group on the far side of the globe. After months of language instruction, preparation, and prayer, you head to the mission field... Eventually, a small church is born where once there was no sign of the gospel.

One day, Jamil, one of the first converts, asks to talk to you in private... He asks a question that has been plaguing him for some time... Six months before you came to his land, his father died. His father was a good man, respected and loved by everyone in the village. However, he died without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ... “Is there any chance I might see my father again in heaven? ...Is there a chance my father will somehow come to know the God that has

finally been revealed to the village? Or will he be eternally condemned simply because he was born at the wrong time and place?” What would you say to Jamil?<sup>43</sup>

### Summary of View

There is only one way of salvation available for all people in the world today and that is through Christ. When Jesus spoke of himself as the door of the sheep, he clearly stated that only through him can anyone be saved (John 10:9). He reiterates this again several chapters later, saying “I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also” (John 14:6-7a). Jesus is clear in these passages: there is only one way of salvation and it requires an explicit knowledge of him.

There are elements of both the Restrictivist and Universal Opportunity arguments that we affirm, namely that faith in Christ specifically requires an explicit confession, and that God would be unjust to condemn anyone to eternal punishment for rejecting the Gospel if they had never heard it and that human messengers are not always needed. The primary point of contention with both prior views (as well as the next one) is the belief that the response of faith must be made prior to the point of death, which is never explicitly stated in Scripture. Instead, the final decision must be made prior to the eschatological Day of Judgment, something that also is never explicitly stated in Scripture but is implied.

The evidence for this comes from the descriptions of what Christ did after his death but before his resurrection, namely he descended to Hell to preach the Gospel to those who were dead so they too would be raised to life. As a result of this preaching, there is not just confession of Christ on the earth, but also under the earth (Phil. 2:9-11). And in speaking of the unforgivable sin, Jesus says speaking blasphemy against the Holy Spirit dooms a person in this age and in the next (Matt. 12:32). This would seem to imply that aside from that sin, those in the next age are not all decidedly doomed. All who were unreached on earth are given the opportunity to confess explicit faith in Christ, and all who were reached and rejected or missed their chance will be given one final chance after death prior to the Day of Judgment to confess explicit faith in Christ.

### Key Passages

- John 5:25-28; 1 Pet. 3:18-20
  - o Jesus’ one death brings the dead to spiritual life after physical death in the spiritual realm
- 1 Pet. 4:6
  - o For this reason, the Gospel was also preached to those who are dead so they could live
- Eph. 4:8-9; Phil. 2:9-11
  - o He descended to the lower parts of the earth where Christ is confessed

### Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- Jesus’ words about Lazarus and the rich man suggests that at death your opportunity to repent has gone. Doesn’t this view void Jesus’ point in Luke 16?
- This was popular among the early Church fathers, and is implied by the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. Shouldn’t we return to the early Church’s understanding?
- Heb. 9:27 says all are destined to die once then face judgment. Doesn’t this affirm that death is the final chance for all people to express faith in Christ?
- How would this view approach missions?

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<sup>43</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## DESTINY OF UNEVANGELIZED – INCLUSIVIST



### All the Positions

- Restrictivist → A person is saved by expressing explicit faith in Jesus following the explicit proclamation of the Gospel
  - Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, RC Sproul, David Platt
- Universal Opportunity → Flowing from His foreknowledge, God will do everything necessary to bring the Gospel to all people who will respond affirmatively.
  - Jacob Arminius, John Newman, Norman Geisler, Robert Lightner, William Lane Craig
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### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

God has a genuine, deeply rooted love for humanity, His premier creation, and He desires all would be saved. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way for anyone to be saved. Jesus was crucified for you. He died and was buried. The good news is this innocent Jesus who died for you was resurrected the third day! This resurrection confirmed His identity as Son of God and Messiah. If you believe the Father raised Jesus from the dead, repent of your sins, and call on the name of Jesus as Lord, you are saved, your sins are forgiven, your heart is transformed, and the Spirit indwells you.

### Case Study

Imagine that you are called by God to bring the gospel to an unreached people group on the far side of the globe. After months of language instruction, preparation, and prayer, you head to the mission field... Eventually, a small church is born where once there was no sign of the gospel.

One day, Jamil, one of the first converts, asks to talk to you in private... He asks a question that has been plaguing him for some time... Six months before you came to his land, his father died. His father was a good man, respected and loved by everyone in the village. However, he died without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ... “Is there any chance I might see my father again in heaven? ...Is there a chance my father will somehow come to know the God that has finally been

revealed to the village? Or will he be eternally condemned simply because he was born at the wrong time and place?” What would you say to Jamil?<sup>44</sup>

### Summary of View

The Restrictivist position is far too extreme. The Restrictivist position would be forced to say that aborted babies would be condemned to Hell forever for failing to explicitly confess faith in Christ. This does not mesh with the gracious and compassionate character of God. There is only one way of salvation available for all people in the world today and that is through Christ; however, an explicit knowledge of Christ is not necessary to be saved by the work of Christ. The writer of Hebrews defines faith as the confidence of what is hoped for without a need to see the promises of God finished (Heb. 11:1-2). Abel, Enoch, Rahab, etc. were saved by their faith based on revelation that was incomplete, for they did not see the fullness of God’s revelation found in Christ (Heb. 11:39-40; Col. 1:19).

Those who have heard the revelation of Christ are held to the highest standard; however, those who have never heard the revelation of Christ but have responded affirmatively to the incomplete revelation given through nature or other means are saved by the promise of Christ. Just as judgment for disobedience is limited based on ignorance (Luke 12:47-48), so also is blessing for obedience limited to the extent of knowledge. Paul tells the Romans that God’s invisible attributes are known through creation, thus leaving nobody without excuse (Rom. 1:20) and even those without the written law have the law instinctively accusing and excusing themselves (Rom. 2:14-16). God is not without a witness (Acts 14:17). Thus, not explicitly knowing Christ does not preclude a person from the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection.

If ignorance limits judgment and if God’s invisible attributes in nature are enough to leave someone without excuse, then God’s revelation in nature trumps ignorance. For someone in a far off place, with no access to the Bible and no access to the Gospel, it is enough to respond with faith in God based on the limited extent of revelation given him in nature. That person’s salvation would be secured by the work of Christ on the cross without any knowledge of it.

### Key Passages

- Acts 17:26-27
  - o God made Christ the way so all who seek would reach God, though he is not far off
- Heb. 11
  - o Examples of people who were saved by faith absent of knowledge of Christ
- Rom. 1:20
  - o His invisible attributes are made known through creation, leaving none without excuse
- 1 Tim. 2:5-6
  - o Jesus is our one mediator given at the proper time

### Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- This view seems to get awful close to religious pluralism by creating the possibility of someone to be saved through a false, tribal religion?
- Does this view create more ways to salvation than through Christ?
- How would this view approach missions?

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<sup>44</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

## ESCHATOLOGY – THIS AGE VS THE AGE TO COME



John Piper  
Debate Moderator<sup>45</sup>

Jim Hamilton  
Premillennial

Doug Wilson  
Postmillennial

Sam Storms  
Amillennial

### The Three Historically held Positions

- Premillennial → Christ returns prior to his thousand-year reign on earth
  - o Hippolytus, Lewis Chafer, John Walvoord, D. Moody, John MacArthur, Thomas Schreiner
- Postmillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs through Christ's kingdom expansion on earth
  - o Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Hodge, B Warfield, NT Wright
- Amillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs in heaven, not on earth
  - o Augustine, John Calvin, Anthony Hoekema, Louis Berkhof, GC Berkhouwer

### What is the definition of eschatology?

- Study of last things, including where we are right now
- Jesus' resurrection was an "eruption of the last things" in the middle of history

### What is the Gospel?

- "Proclamation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the sins of his people and his exaltation to the right hand of God the Father... In Christ, God is remaking humanity, restoring the image of God, and Christ is that image of God that we are being restored into." –Doug Wilson
- "Christ died as a substitutionary sacrifice... in our place, enduring the wrath of God that we deserve, absorbed it into himself; exhausted it; satisfied the holiness and the wrath of the Father. At the same time... as our guilt was imputed to him and the wrath of God fell on him, for that reason his righteousness is imputed to us that we receive by faith so we stand declared righteous in the sight of the Father. That's the good news of what he accomplished that we receive through faith alone." –Sam Storms

<sup>45</sup> "An Evening in Eschatology." Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis, MN, Sept. 27, 2009. Available on YouTube.



### **Why is it Important to Talk about Eschatology?**

- Ephesians 4-5 – we must grow up into unity, which requires talking about it
- “The millennium is a thousand years of peace that Christians like to fight about.”
- Those on the road to Emmaus lacked wisdom

### **This Age and the Age to Come**

- Doug Wilson
  - o Illustration of a baton toss between the Judaic and Christian ages
  - o We are currently in the “age to come”
  - o The age to come is not the same as the eternal state
  - o When Christ comes again and the dead are raised, that is the eternal state
- Jim Hamilton
  - o Age to come is after Christ’s return, the messianic reign
  - o This age is the entirety of the Church between the two advents of Jesus
- Sam Storms
  - o This age is the present Church age in which we live
  - o Age to come is the new heavens and earth

### **Discussion Questions**

- What other topics that we have discussed did you hear come through in their explanation of the Gospel?
- In the Gospel discussion, Doug Wilson said “Christ did not die so that we might live; Christ died so that we might die. He lives so that we might live... If they die in Christ, they are raised in Christ. If they die outside of Christ, they die outside of Christ and perish forever.” What is your reaction to this statement?
- Read Matt. 12:32, Mark 10:30, Luke 18:30, Luke 20:34-36, 1 Cor. 10:11, Gal. 1:4, Eph. 1:20-21, and Titus 2:11-13. What do these verses say about the “age to come”? What is your reaction to the three views on the “age to come”?

## ESCHATOLOGY – PREMILLENNIALISM



John Piper  
Debate Moderator<sup>46</sup>

Jim Hamilton  
Premillennial

Doug Wilson  
Postmillennial

Sam Storms  
Amillennial

### The Three Historically held Positions

- Premillennial → Christ returns prior to his thousand-year reign on earth
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### Case Study<sup>47</sup>

The book had all the makings of a bestseller. Adventure, drama, action, mystery, even a touch of horror; it was all there. Paul finished reading the final few pages, put the book down, and reflected on the author's dramatized account of the events recorded in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. The author had a gift for bringing the biblical ideas to life.

Kelly, a friend from church, had recommended the book to Paul. She had told him the book was not only an excellent read—it had changed her life. With a new understanding of the way in which the end-times would unravel, Kelly again felt excited to be a Christian. She had explained to him how the book had enabled her to figure out the mysterious symbolism of Revelation. With this understanding, she was now able to see that the end-times scenario was unfolding right before her eyes.

Paul had to admit the book had held his attention from cover to cover. And he too felt a new urgency regarding the end-times. He was especially intrigued by the author's view that Christ would soon come and take Christians out of the world, wage war against his enemies, and then embark on a thousand-year period, which he called the millennium—the period when Christ and his church would rule the world.

Just then, the phone rang. It was Bob, a close friend of Paul's and a member of his Bible study group. The timing was perfect. Bob had majored in biblical studies in college and loved to

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discuss theological subjects. Paul explained the basic story line of the book and then asked Bob what he thought.

Bob hesitated before finally saying, “Actually Paul, I’ve looked through that book. I’ll agree that it seems to be an exciting book. But to be honest, I think the author’s interpretation of the book of Revelation is way off base, and I’m worried about its impact on people. The author treats the book of Revelation as though it is a snapshot of the future when in fact it is intended to be symbolic. The apostle John wasn’t writing about events that were going to take place in the lives of the people he was writing to. He tells us this at the very beginning of the book. I’m afraid Christians will read this book and waste time trying to interpret current events though this book the same way some people use horoscopes.”

After their conversation, Paul was left with many questions. How should Christians interpret the book of Revelation? Literally or symbolically? Does it speak about events in the first century or about events in the twenty-first century? And what about this idea of the millennium? Will Christ return soon and set up a thousand-year reign on the earth?

### **Discussion Questions, part one**

- What is your reaction to their statements on heaven as the intermediate state?
- Absent from the body is to be present with Christ. (2 Cor. 5:8-9)

### **Summary of the Premillennial View**

Jim Hamilton: “Christ comes, all believers rise, the unbelievers do not rise in this first resurrection, and then the believers all reign with Christ for a thousand years literally on the earth. [Satan is bound.] Jesus is here, in his resurrection body... There are unbelievers who survive his first coming and enter into the millennium and then they have offspring and that not necessarily everyone is regenerated in that period... After this thousand year reign there will be a releasing of Satan; he has been bound for these thousand years; there will be a final rebellion; they will be put down, and then the great white throne judgment will be setup...and then comes the new heavens and new earth.”

### **Read Revelation 20:1-10**

#### **Discussion Question, part two**

- What is your reaction to this view?
- Jesus tells us two back-to-back parables describing the kingdom of God starting small and growing into something big (Matt. 13:31-33). Does this view undermine that kingdom strategy?
- Is it appropriate to rest the entirety of a position on only one passage of apocalyptic literature rather than harmonize it with the rest of the Bible?
- Since the earliest post-apostolic figures in Church history that we have a record of held the premillennial position. Isn’t it safe to assume the apostles did as well?

## ESCHATOLOGY – POSTMILLENNIALISM AND AMILLENNIALISM



John Piper  
Debate Moderator<sup>48</sup>

Jim Hamilton  
Premillennial

Doug Wilson  
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Sam Storms  
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Paul had to admit the book had held his attention from cover to cover. And he too felt a new urgency regarding the end-times. He was especially intrigued by the author's view that Christ would soon come and take Christians out of the world, wage war against his enemies, and then embark on a thousand-year period, which he called the millennium—the period when Christ and his church would rule the world.

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### **Summary of the Postmillennial Position**

Doug Wilson: “Postmillennialism is the idea that the Gospel is going to grow and flourish and take over the whole earth; basically the great commission will be successful; all the nations disciplined, baptized, taught obedience... on earth in history; the world will be Christianized. Then Jesus will come. All enemies will be subdued, brought under his feet... Christ’s enemies are made a footstool progressively throughout all history, and then he will come and judge the last enemy personally, death. At the conclusion of the Christian eon... Christ will come again and destroy death; the dead will be raised and we are ushered into the eternal state... Satan is bound now with regards to deceiving the nations.”

### **Discussion Questions, part one**

- How does this explain the growing pervasive wickedness of our present world?
- Does this view try to make Rev. 20 fit into everything outside of Rev. 20 rather than harmonize it with the rest?
- Doug Wilson said a couple of times that we must interpret the unclear passages in light of the clear passages. But isn’t Rev. 20 a straight-forward passage?

### **Summary of the Amillennial Position**

Sam Storms: “The millennium is literal, real, vibrant, tangible, but it’s in heaven” where those who died in Christ are now. “Those are the saints described in Rev. 20:4-6 who are reigning with Christ in the intermediate state spanning the duration of the Church age between the two comings of Jesus—that constitutes the millennial reign.”

All amillennialists are postmillennialists with the primary distinction being the reign is in heaven, not on earth. This means the people of God on earth will continue to suffer; however, both the suffering of God’s people and the expansion of the Gospel will reach its culmination in the second coming of Christ, when death dies (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

### **Discussion Question, part two**

- One of this position’s most prominent arguments is rooted in its refutation of the other two positions. Is that enough?
- What danger is there to over-spiritualizing Scripture?



## ESCHATOLOGY – REVELATION 20



John Piper  
Debate Moderator<sup>50</sup>

Jim Hamilton  
Premillennial

Doug Wilson  
Postmillennial

Sam Storms  
Amillennial

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<sup>51</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

discuss theological subjects. Paul explained the basic story line of the book and then asked Bob what he thought.

Bob hesitated before finally saying, “Actually Paul, I’ve looked through that book. I’ll agree that it seems to be an exciting book. But to be honest, I think the author’s interpretation of the book of Revelation is way off base, and I’m worried about its impact on people. The author treats the book of Revelation as though it is a snapshot of the future when in fact it is intended to be symbolic. The apostle John wasn’t writing about events that were going to take place in the lives of the people he was writing to. He tells us this at the very beginning of the book. I’m afraid Christians will read this book and waste time trying to interpret current events though this book the same way some people use horoscopes.”

After their conversation, Paul was left with many questions. How should Christians interpret the book of Revelation? Literally or symbolically? Does it speak about events in the first century or about events in the twenty-first century? And what about this idea of the millennium? Will Christ return soon and set up a thousand-year reign on the earth?

### **Revelation 20:1-10 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. <sup>2</sup>And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, <sup>3</sup>and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. <sup>4</sup>Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup>The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. <sup>7</sup>And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup>and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup>And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, <sup>10</sup>and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Returning to our case study from a couple of weeks ago, should Christians interpret the book of Revelation literally or symbolically?
- Do you see “Satan’s activity totally shut down” in vs.1-3 like Hamilton sees it or do you see the shutting of Satan’s activity specifically in regards to deceiving the nations like Storms sees it?
- The Greek word *anastasis* “resurrection” always refers to a physical resurrection. Why should we interpret Rev. 20:6 differently from this consistent usage?
- Storms suggests Rev. 19 and 20 are separate parallel accounts of the same span of time (the church age aka the millennial kingdom). Read Revelation 19. Do you see these two chapters as parallel accounts or as sequential accounts?

## ESCHATOLOGY – SUMMARY OF THREE POSITIONS



John Piper  
Debate Moderator<sup>52</sup>

Jim Hamilton  
Premillennial

Doug Wilson  
Postmillennial

Sam Storms  
Amillennial

### The Three Historically held Positions

- Premillennial → Christ returns prior to his thousand-year reign on earth
  - o Hippolytus, Lewis Chafer, John Walvoord, D. Moody, John MacArthur, Thomas Schreiner
- Postmillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs through Christ's kingdom expansion on earth
  - o Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Hodge, B Warfield, NT Wright
- Amillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs in heaven, not on earth
  - o Augustine, John Calvin, Anthony Hoekema, Louis Berkhof, GC Berkhouwer

### Biggest Problems with Each view

- Premillennial – how to get natural bodies and unbelievers in the millennium
- Postmillennial – how to harmonize 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 2 Thess. 2:3-10
- Amillennial – how to reconstruct the clear meaning of *anastasis* “resurrection”

### The Affect Missions and Carrying out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)<sup>53 54</sup>

- Premillennial
  - o According to Matt. 24:1-14, despite increasing persecution of the Church, the Gospel must go out to all the world before Christ comes to usher in the thousand years of peace from persecution.
  - o What is the motivation for those who hold the premillennial view to send and support missionaries around the world, or to go themselves?

<sup>52</sup> “An Evening in Eschatology.” Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis, MN, Sept. 27, 2009. Available on YouTube.

<sup>53</sup> Fanning, Don, “Eschatology and Missions” (2009). *Themes of Theology that Impacts Missions*.

<sup>54</sup> “Eschatology and Missions,” The Gospel Coalition.

- Postmillennial
  - According to Matt. 13:31-33, the kingdom of God starts small, and grows and expands to his fullest form. At its fullest form is the culmination, therefore Christ comes following the completion of the Gospel's success. The world will be evangelized accompanied by a transformation of society.
  - What is the motivation for those who hold the postmillennial view to send and support missionaries around the world, or to go themselves?
  
- Amillennial
  - Similar to postmillennialism in regards to Gospel expansion, amillennialists also seek to bring about Christianized social-change, most prevalently through theocracy, to bring about the radical peace of God described by the Old Testament prophets.
  - What is the motivation for those who hold the amillennial view to send and support missionaries around the world, or to go themselves?

### **The CRC Position**

Although the Christian Reformed Church is generally amillennialist in its eschatology and especially in its interpretation of the book of Revelation, its assemblies have never made a specific pronouncement to that effect. In response to a theological challenge to its underlying eschatology, the synod of the CRC adopted the following succinct statements in 1920, which implicitly reject dispensationalism and some facets of premillennialism:

. . . according to our creeds there is not the least bit of doubt in regard to

1. The unity of the church of all ages, [ancient] Israel not excluded. The church of all ages is one in essence.
  
2. The kingship of Christ. Christ is not only head of the church as an organic unity but also king of his church in the juridical sense of the word.<sup>55</sup>

### **Discussion Questions**

- What is your reaction to the CRC position?
- Has watching this debate been helpful in providing clarity to you on the three positions? Or are you more confused than before watching the debate?
- Without revealing which view you hold, how many of you feel comfortable enough with the three views to be aware of where you stand or lean toward?
- If you are comfortable sharing which view you hold, what is the biggest point in favor of your view that convinced you?

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<sup>55</sup> CRC Statement on the Millennium