

TABLETALK

MARCH 2025 | \$5



What Is Hope?

EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.” These are some of the sweetest words of comfort that any of us can hear. In times of suffering and sadness, our grandparents, parents, teachers, and friends will often try to give us hope by telling us that everything is going to be OK. I have found this to be the way that both believers and unbelievers strive to comfort each other and give hope amid the pain and sorrow that touches every one of us in this fallen world.

The unbelieving world desperately wants to give reassurance that everything will be OK in the end, that everything will eventually work out for good, and that whatever doesn't kill us will make us stronger. For the unbelieving world, however, being apart from Christ, such hope is vain. Not everything is going to be all right in the end for those who do not know Christ. But for those of us who have been rescued from God's wrath and redeemed by God's grace, everything is not just going to be OK; one day everything is going to be perfect. Nevertheless, we must never forget that in this world of sin, sadness, and suffering, not everything will work out the way that we want. This is why in hard times and in good times, we do well to study Scripture and the stories of God's people throughout history to remind us of God's unwavering faithfulness, sovereign providence, and abounding loving-kindness. Christian hope is not a hope that everything will work out in this life; rather, it is hope that God will make everything work out for our ultimate good and His glory. Hope is not wishful thinking; it is confident expectation. Hope is not the absence of sadness; it is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Hope is not a feeling; it is a mindset fixed on God that informs our feelings. Hope is trusting God because of who He is and what He has done as we await the fulfillment of all His promises now and throughout eternity.

People will continue to disappoint us, our loved ones will suffer and die, Satan will attack us, and we will struggle against our flesh. In those dark times when we are tempted to feel hopeless, we must preach to ourselves just as the psalmist did: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Ps. 42:5–6). We hope not because of our circumstances but because of Christ—His divine person, sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. Now, as we eagerly await His return, we wait with confident expectation before His face, *coram Deo*, remembering that one day when we see Him face-to-face, there will no longer be any need for hope. Then our hope will be completely fulfilled, and everything will be all right forever. ■

DR. BURK PARSONS is editor of *Tabletalk* magazine and senior pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla. He is cotranslator and coeditor of *A Little Book on the Christian Life* by John Calvin.

C O N T E N T S

MARCH 2025 | VOL. 49 | NO. 3



4

Laughing at the Times to Come

Tim Keesee

8

The Hope of Saints

Justin Estrada

16

Hope in the Ordinary

Margo Tripp

19

Hope in Our Trials

Michael S. Beates

23

Our Future Hope

Neil C. Stewart

STUDIES

27 Into the Word

28 The Rule of Worship
William Boekestein35 The Lion and the Lamb
Robert W. Carver43 Not to Be Served but to Serve
Sarah Ivill51 “He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought”
Derek W.H. Thomas60 Personal Knowledge
Kevin D. Gardner

COLUMNS

64 HEART AFLAME

The Grace That Will Be Brought to Us
Kenneth Mbugua

66 FOR THE CHURCH

Connecting People in the Church
Scotty Anderson

68 CITY ON A HILL

The Witness of Listening in Love
John C. Kwasny

72 LAST THINGS

Loci of Systematic Theology
The Editors

COVER AND FEATURES Jill De Haan



Tabletalk (USPS 009-013; ISSN 1064881X) is published monthly by Ligonier Ministries, Inc., 421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771. Annual subscription price (12 issues): \$30.00. Periodicals postage paid at Lake Mary, FL, and additional mailing offices. The daily Bible studies are copyright 2025, Ligonier Ministries, Inc. Unless noted, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Printed in Canada. **Postmaster: Send address changes to Ligonier Ministries, 421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771.**



AN OUTREACH OF LIGONIER MINISTRIES

EDITOR *Burk Parsons* SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR *Thomas Brewer* MANAGING EDITOR *Aaron L. Garriott*
ASSOCIATE EDITORS *Kevin D. Gardner, Karrie Hahn, and Robert Rothwell* WEB EDITOR *Meredith L. Myers*
CREATIVE DIRECTION & DESIGN *Metaleap Creative* MARKETING AND CIRCULATION *J.D. Bridges and Nathan W. Bingham*

Laughing at the Times to Come



In the wake of Hurricane Helene, I write amid the sound of blaring sirens, whining chainsaws, and humming generators. Yesterday in the raging dawn, live power lines burned in our yard, trees fell, our basement flooded, and my wife, Debbie, had a moment of despair. But after we finished bailing water out bucket by bucket, she took hold of the situation and embraced it. With a drop cord plugged into a neighbor's generator,

she made coffee (which made *me* more hopeful) and put soup on to heat in the slow cooker. Her contagious hopefulness didn't stop the storm, restore power, or raise fallen trees, but it did brighten a dark day. Her hopefulness became helpfulness as she extended coffee and soup to the neighbors on our storm-battered street.

Where did such hope come from? I've seen Debbie's hopefulness grow over the

years of my cancer journey. It's a daily hope that comes from knowing that God is with her and in control even when—especially when—we're not in control (which is actually all the time). Seeing Debbie take hold of hope and joy (although sometimes mixed with tears) reminded me of the passage in Proverbs 31. Speaking of the virtuous woman, it says, "She laughs at the times to come" (v. 25). What kind of person can laugh at the times to come? Someone who is filled with hope—a real, solid, God's-got-this, confident expectation for ultimate and lasting good.

The New Testament word for *hope* is a general one that can be used as we commonly use the term, too. For example, a few weeks ago during the summer's drought, I often said, "I hope it rains." But today, as dark clouds gather over the flooded ruins left by the hurricane, I'm saying, "I hope it doesn't rain!" This is the normal sense in which we use the word *hope*—a desire for some future good. But as with my rain example, our hopes are more like wishes, and they change like the weather.

That's not to say that such hope is useless—not at all. Having a desire for good that might or might not come is the way that God has wired all of us. It is healthy for us to be hopeful in our everyday lives, and such hope is a gift of common grace. It's this hope that helps us plant gardens, build houses, stock shelves, follow a recipe, read a book, and teach a child. Yet this hope is frequently bruised by disappointment—sometimes even despair. A canceled flight, a broken promise, or a doctor's saying "It's cancer" can crush our hopes and upend our plans for a day—or even a lifetime. Such are the vicissitudes of life. As O. Henry put it in his brilliant telling of "The Gift of the Magi," "Life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating."

But there is a hope that goes beyond wishes, beyond the horizons of our broken world. That hope is in Christ and from Christ and

for Christ. It is a certain and lasting hope that is bound up not in our circumstances but in a person whose name is Faithful and True (see Rev. 19:11). Because of Christ's sovereign, saving work, His people have a hope that is a sure and steadfast anchor for the soul (Heb. 6:19). A hope that is certain and steadying is not a hope of our own making—rather, it is a hope that Jesus made secure by His death, burial, and resurrection. As the old hymn says:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.*

And just as the cross and resurrection are at the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–4), they are also at the heart of the Christian's hope. See how Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 15:16–20:

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

"He is risen" are the three words that change everything. For if hope is an expectation for future good, then the hope of the resurrection is the ultimate future good. But it provides the ultimate present good as well because our hope is not only the hope of heaven, one that's good only after we are dead. Not only do we die in hope, but we live in hope, too. As the Apostle Peter wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to



We need to rehearse our hope through prayer and song, through the Word, and through the fellowship of the saints.

a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

If we are in Christ, we are always living in hope, and the complete fulfillment of that hope will be when our faith becomes sight, when we see Him who “loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph. 5:2).

Among the most precious promises that anchor a Christian’s hope in the present is Jesus’ parting promise before His ascension: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). That means that Jesus is with us in all kinds of days—both in weakness and in power, in happiness and in hurricanes—and He promises to be with us every day until the end of all days. It’s important to remember that Jesus made this promise after His resurrection, so the promise is good on both sides of the grave. Our hope in Christ is secure, for we are held by the Shepherd with scars in His hands. This certain hope cannot be taken away from us, but pain and tears can obscure our sight, and storms of fear and doubt often shake our world.

In Hebrews, the Christians who first read that letter had some shining days even in the midst of intense suffering:

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. (Heb. 10:32–34)

Their hope in Christ was so clear that despite the loss of their possessions and reputations, they found joy. They “laugh[ed] at the times to come” because they could see beyond to

the promises. But they had grown weary, as one hard day stumbled into the next, and so the preacher writing this letter reminded them to keep at it because Jesus is worth it. He urged them to renew their hope and build endurance by remembering God’s stunning record of keeping His promises—from the moment they were saved and throughout all generations (10:32–12:1)—and to refocus on Christ, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (12:2).

All of us have stood in the sandals of our first-century brothers and sisters. We, too, need endurance. We need to rehearse our hope through prayer and song, through the Word, and through the fellowship of the saints. John Piper recalled how he struggled with discouragement in his first year as pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. The young pastor was like the psalmist in Psalms 42 and 43 who asked the same question three times: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” Piper got hold of those dark moments by “preaching to himself” before he preached to others. Inspired by these psalms, he answered the question with the same answer that the psalmist did: “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Ps. 42:11). And so Piper had a large sign placed on the side of the church that he could see when he walked from his house to the church. It simply said: “Hope in God!” He said that folks in the neighborhood started calling it the “Hope-in-God Church.” That’s a good thing to be known as.

The hope that Christ brings is as real and near as He is. So our hope is as lasting and sure as our Savior and holds so much promise beyond this wasting-away world that we can laugh at the times to come. **T**

DR. TIM KEESEE is founder of Frontline Missions International. He is author of several books, including *Dispatches from the Front* and *A Day’s Journey*.

The Hope of Saints



Most of us know the traditional folk song “When the Saints Go Marching In.” Whether you have encountered it through Louis Armstrong’s famous jazz rendition or a marching band at your local parade or community event, the chances are good that you know the lyrics of at least a verse or two.

Yet I would venture to say that most people probably don’t know that this song is steeped in the eschatology (doctrine of last things) of the Bible, especially the book of

Revelation, anticipating the time when the procession of Christian saints throughout history will finally reach its end as God completes His works of redemption. It speaks of trumpets sounding, horsemen riding, and the heavenly bodies burning up—“Oh, when the stars fall from the sky, oh, when the stars fall from the sky, oh Lord, I want to be in that number . . .”—all with the sure hope that one day the saints of God will march into His presence in the train of their Savior

and dwell with Him for eternity because Jesus was slain, and by His blood He ransomed a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9).

This is the end of redemptive history, and it was the hope of the saints of the old covenant just as it is for saints of the new covenant. God creates all things with the promise of something more for His people; therefore, their lives, especially after the fall of Adam, are characterized by the expectation of a better country and kingdom, a heavenly one, even if during their mortal toil they greet the things promised only from afar (Heb. 11:13–16). Let’s examine this hope through the rolls of the saints as they lived and processed through the unfolding of God’s salvation.

THE MARCH BEGINS

The Westminster Confession of Faith states:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good. (4.1)

The confession goes on to state that our gracious God, in His voluntary condescension, His stooping down to make Himself known—which we call “covenant”—promised even more blessedness and reward: “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (7.2). What a gift. Adam, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, made in the very image of God, received a command that held a promise: eternal life in the presence of God. Placed in a paradise sufficient for all his needs, given dominion over the earth and a good purpose within it, and privileged to host his Lord in regular

visitation—what more could Adam have hoped for? But almighty God lavished on him even more: the sure promise of a permanent state of blessedness, perpetual access to and presence before Him. This was God’s goal for mankind. What could go wrong?

Of course, we know all too well the answer to this question. Adam and his posterity turned from life to death, seduced by Satan into breaking God’s command and eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. “By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body” (WCF 6.2). The Belgic Confession puts it this way: “[Adam] transgressed the commandment of life, which he had received, and by his sin he separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his entire nature” (art. 14). These two excellent summaries of Scripture capture the hopeless condition of mankind after those moments of rebellion in which we all shared through Adam, our representative. Yet only when we acknowledge the darkness of our despair can we appreciate fully the light of God’s salvation.

Amazingly, out of the darkness of that hopelessness came light (*post tenebras lux*). God the Promise-Giver issued another in the midst of His judgment against transgression: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). How could we overstate the magnitude of this declaration? God’s goal for humanity did not change, but He would secure His people’s beatitude, their blessed destiny in His presence, through another—the last Adam, the second man, His very own Son. In other words, when Adam and Eve plunged themselves into sin and death, making themselves completely forlorn and miserable, God comforted them with words of hope (BC 17). Their eternal,

powerful, wise, and good God would secure their hope at great cost to Himself, but the line of the woman, the line of His people, would strive and suffer long as they awaited the consummation of that hope, receiving only foretastes to satisfy their appetite for heaven, glimmers to catch and keep their eyes. Scripture exemplifies this weary tread in the lives of the patriarchs.

THE LONG MARCH OF THE PATRIARCHS

Very few saints in Scripture capture the concept of a long and solitary sojourn as clearly as Abraham. The entirety of God's work in and through him occurred during the twilight of his life—even his initial call to depart from Haran and take residence in Canaan as a foreigner came at the age of seventy-five. Nonetheless, God promised to Abraham that He would secure the ultimate blessing of His divine presence among His people through Abraham's seed (singular, as Paul argues in Gal. 3), the fullness of which He will foreshadow in the bountiful land and numerous descendants He will give to Abraham (see Gen. 12:1–3). This land and progeny Abraham would experience only briefly and marginally, tempered by sorrow.

The only land that Abraham owned during his sojourn in Canaan was a small field in Machpelah, east of Mamre, purchased for the cave that would serve as the tomb for his deceased wife, Sarah, and for himself (chs. 23; 25). Likewise, Abraham had his children late in life—when he was “as good as dead,” according to Hebrews 11:12—all of whom he would send away except Isaac, the son of promise whom Sarah birthed to him when Abraham was a hundred years old (Gen. 21:5). Yet these gifts were enough to keep Abraham looking toward “the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 12:10). In fact, God reveals to Abraham details of the great salvation through which He would bring His people into His holy and eternal presence.

In Genesis 15, Abraham received a command from God to prepare a covenant-ratification ceremony by digging a trench and filling it with the blood of cut-up animals. Likely expecting to proceed alone through this mire under the watchful eye of his sovereign Lord—an act of fealty acknowledging curses for disobedience—Abraham suddenly fell into a deep, trancelike sleep, in which he witnessed a manifestation of almighty God pass through the pieces, signaling God's sworn commitment to bless Abraham. God previewed this for Abraham again on the other side of the birth of Isaac, pulling back the curtain of heaven on Mount Moriah ever so slightly to draw Abraham's ailing eyes upward. When Abraham raised the knife over his bound son—surely wondering how Isaac's life could possibly soothe God's wrath against sin and enable divine access—God delayed the blow and provided a vicarious, innocent substitute, a ram caught in a nearby thicket (ch. 22). In this moment, God gave Abraham back his son, foreshadowing that another would be necessary for the altar.

Isaac, too, would sojourn in hope. Apart from his binding, Scripture records few other remarkable events in Isaac's life. Compared to the narratives of the other patriarchs, Isaac's sojourning appears rather prosaic. Rather than seeing this as a subtle chastisement for his shortcomings as some do, we should view this as God's gift of peace, a sign of the ultimate hope for those who seek and obey his will, as Isaac did on Moriah. Two episodes in particular reveal that Isaac clung to the promises to which his rescue pointed. First, Genesis 26:12–13 records that “Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.” Isaac reaped more than he sowed—a tangible gift as well as tantalizing herald for the future—but Isaac's sowing has further significance. An alien in the land,

Isaac performed the generational activity of sedentary settlers, envisioning a later time when his descendants would enjoy the produce of this small endeavor, savoring the produce of a land in which they did not sow (see Josh. 24:13). At the very least, Isaac had these promises in mind when he “invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau,” his sons (Gen. 27; Heb. 11:20). His eyes dim (speaking literally of his blindness and figuratively of his ignorance of Rebekah's and God's plans for the succession of his younger son) eventually the eyes of his heart saw truly into the patterns of redemption by which God works near and far—preferring that which seems weak and unimportant in this world, as Isaac himself was. He passed on the hope of humanity to his children, with Jacob, the younger son, carrying the promise of the seed.

If Isaac's narrative strikes us as relatively uneventful, Jacob's life and trials more than make up for the doldrums. His life seems the polar opposite of Isaac's: Jacob was a cunning and industrious fellow who moved from one struggle to the next, unsure of the promises of God even as they unfolded around him. Shortly after he fled from Esau's wrath, God visited him in a dream, in which Jacob witnessed

a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I

will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Gen. 28:12–15)

The vision and declaration confirm that God would bridge the gap between heaven and earth, visiting through a divine ladder issuing forth from Jacob to consummate promised blessedness (see John 1:51).

God bestowed on Jacob gift after gift to assure him of His presence and promise—great physical possessions, a large family, peace with Esau, return to the land—but rather than cultivating hope and worship in Jacob, these gifts brought Jacob sorrow, for he anchored his hope in the provision rather than the Provider. For instance, he virtually abandoned his role as patriarch for fear of the inhabitants of the land, leading to the resentment of his sons, which culminated in their cruel treatment of their brother Joseph, the deception of their father, and Jacob's lingering distrust of and disappointment in the lot of them (see Gen. 34–45). Only decades later and upon hearing the news that Joseph lived did Jacob's spirit revive (45:27). Scripture includes this detail to indicate not merely physical refreshment but also, most importantly, the revival of Jacob's hope in God's promises. The Lord broke His silence and spoke to Jacob again (46:1–4), assuring Jacob of the hope of His presence, whether in Egypt, the land of Canaan, or even in death—for that would overtake him.

Jacob's response—to bless Joseph's and Judah's line with expectation of a kingdom of peace and plenty for his descendants—demonstrates more clarity of foresight than his father, Isaac, demonstrated. Even Joseph, faithful and obedient, didn't fully understand why Jacob crossed his hands to bless Ephraim over Manasseh, Joseph's younger son over the older (48:8–22), and there must have been a few eyebrows raised at the tremendous blessing issued to his unruly fourth son, Judah, from whom a scep-



*Neither the temptation
of the luxuries of Egypt nor the
fierce visage of Pharaoh, adorned
with the uraeus—the serpent
crown—on his brow, captured
and enslaved Moses' vision,
for he had eyes only for "him
who is invisible."*

ter would emerge and not depart (49:8–12). Yet Jacob finally envisioned the promises of God developing, building, and growing; he saw the trajectory of a kingdom not established by the hands of men. Joseph, having ascended to the heights of Egyptian rule and hegemony, finally witnessed again something that the alleged god-king Pharaoh and all his mortuary temples could never offer: the promise of eternal life in the presence of almighty God. On his own deathbed, Joseph made his brothers swear to return his bones to the earthly land that God had promised would witness the bridge between heaven and earth (50:22–26; see Heb. 11:22).

THE LONG MARCH OF THE NATION

Egypt transformed from a refuge for the promises of God and His people into a potential wasteland that threatened to extinguish them, epitomized in the slaughter of the Hebrew infants cast into the Nile (Ex. 1:8–22). Yet when the waters of death appeared close to encompassing God's people, out of it Pharaoh's daughter drew Moses. Though being "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), Moses later

refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (Heb. 11:24–26)

Neither the temptation of the luxuries of Egypt nor the fierce visage of Pharaoh, adorned with the uraeus—the serpent crown—on his brow, captured and enslaved Moses' vision, for he had eyes only for "him who is invisible" (v. 27).

Moses longed for the establishment of his Hebrew brethren into a nation, the next development of the promise, because this would mean a greater knowledge of, in-

timacy with, and access to "the LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). In fact, Moses remained so sure of the ultimate blessing of God's presence that he admitted that inheriting and inhabiting the promised land would be futile unless God went with the Israelites (33:16). Only after God assured him that He would accompany them (v. 14), confirming it by the construction of the tabernacle, establishment of the sacrificial system, and ordination of the priests—all of which speak to how the people will dwell with and approach God—did Moses lead this nascent nation toward Canaan. With God's light leading His people toward the promised land—reflected in the pillar of fire and cloud, as well as in the face of Moses—the consummation of God's promise to bless all the nations through Israel seemed closer than ever. Yet the people's disobedience on the brink of bliss again halted progression, and even Moses failed to usher in the full fruition of God's promises. His disobedience barred him from entering the promised land (Num. 20:10–13), but God gave him a blessed glimpse of the land of hope from Mount Nebo before the waters of death closed around his mortal body (Deut. 34).

To Joshua was given the task to lead God's people through the Jordan River on dry ground—to enter as a renewed, sanctified people and to purify the land in which they would dwell with their holy God. God's program by which He would bless all the nations of the earth began with the tiny land of Canaan, described as a new garden of Eden, flowing with milk and honey. He desired that this sanctified land of peace would serve as a sign of the ultimate reality that He has planned for all creation. It began well under Joshua with the battle of Jericho. The mighty walls of Jericho tumbled down without a finger raised, the sound of

the people's worship the means by which the stronghold toppled (Josh. 6:1–27). This glimpse of power, executed by the Commander of the Army of the Lord who appeared to Joshua before the battle (5:13–15), previewed God's assault on darkness through the seed of the woman (see Eph. 2:1–6), but the full assault and its overwhelming victory did not materialize under the faithful leader Joshua, for this kingdom of priests faltered shortly after Jericho. From the deceit of Achan onward, the old covenant church failed to possess the land fully, forgetting the promises of God and conforming to the ways of the nations around them rather than striving for the heavenly kingdom ahead of them (Josh. 7; Judg. 1:1–3:6). The descendants of Abraham took up residence in the promised land, beleaguered under threat of corruption and destruction. Joshua renewed the covenant with Israel and was buried in his own inheritance (Josh. 24), a sure fulfillment of the promises of God and more than enough to fan the flames of hope for the succeeding generations. Yet tasting God's goodness would not come without hunger pangs.

Ruth and Hannah are two examples during who grew in hope through their struggles rather than in spite of them. The Moabitess Ruth came to these promises from outside the family of faith, introduced to them through the faith of her husband and through her mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 1:1–5). She came to desire a better land, a better family, a better promise under a better God, willing to exchange a comfortable, secure life within the confines of her native family for a life of want, beggary, and hope in a final, heavenly rest. God bestowed on her a taste of His riches by writing her a new lineage, secure in the land as well as in His own family, the direct line of promise (4:13–22).

Hannah, too, endured much hardship as she waited for the Lord's intervention in her barrenness. Amazingly, her prayers and vow to offer up her son to lifelong ministry re-

veal an undying hope that God could add her own descendants to the long roll of the saints and that their greatest joy would be in His presence (1 Sam. 1:11). Her song of exultation not only recalls her own salvation (speaking socially and redemptively) but also indicates that she saw in her own predicament a pattern of God's purposes and works toward all His people: "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor" (2:7–8). Hannah envisioned the time when God would consecrate and raise the old covenant church to be emissaries of His blessing throughout the whole world, not merely Canaan. The creator God's agenda had to advance well beyond these boundaries, and her son, Samuel, would anoint Israel's greatest hope of its fruition: David.

In David, a son of Jesse, Scripture reveals both the greatest paragon of hope and the fullest representation of how this hope will find its consummation. "A man after God's own heart" (see 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), David longed for the consummation of God's promises, actively working toward their fulfillment. He united God's people in one kingdom, brought peace and extension to the land of promise, and desired uninhibited enjoyment and worship in the presence of God. Thus, he brought the ark of the covenant—God's footstool and nexus between heaven and earth—into Jerusalem, intending to build his Lord a permanent house in the midst of His people (2 Sam. 6:1–19). God, however, prohibited David from building Him a temple on account of the blood he had shed (see 1 Chron. 22:6–10). Yet God blessed him with the most precious blossom from the seed of promise that had grown from its inception in the garden: David's dynasty would never falter, and the blameless substitute, the seed of the woman, would proceed from his line to secure this bless-

ing for him and for all the families of the earth (2 Sam. 7). David drew plans, organized peoples, and collected materials for the construction of the temple under his son Solomon, commissioning Israel and Solomon with the ultimate goal: seeking the presence of the Lord:

"Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever." (1 Chron. 28:9)

THE END OF THE MARCH


Unfortunately, the kingdom of David waned under his successors—with notable exceptions such as Josiah—dividing, shrinking, and ultimately being reduced to a remnant inhabiting the small territory of Judah, or even just Jerusalem (e.g., under the Assyrian incursion; see 2 Kings 18). The prophets would serve as God's primary emissaries of hope, calling His people to keep their eyes tilted heavenward to anticipate the arrival of the day of the Lord, even though they

suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated. (Heb. 11:36–37)

The prophet Isaiah serves as this paradigmatic figure. In a time of significant turmoil and apostasy, he prophesied that a true Ruler in the mold of David would surpass his predecessor. He would be called

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and
of peace*

*there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his
kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
(Isa. 9:6–7)*

As the offspring of Abraham committed apostasy and suffered exile; as foreign rulers occupied, carved up, and redistributed the land; and as God disciplined His people by withdrawing the blessing of His presence, Isaiah and the other prophets called God's people to look to His faithfulness in the past and the present—however faintly He might signal it—as a hope for His full condescension and rescue from sin and death, as a hope in the arrival of the seed. Having witnessed fully the state of despair in which God's people were languishing, Isaiah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called on God's saints to anticipate God's salvation through a better Isaac, who can make "an offering for guilt" (Isa. 53:10); a better Moses, who can make full intercession for the transgressors (v. 12); a better Joshua, anointed with the Spirit of the Lord "to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God" (61:2); and a better David, who will establish a new Jerusalem as the celestial capital of the new heavens and the new earth, in which there will be only gladness and rejoicing forever (65:18; see 2 Sam. 5:6–10; Rev. 21). Isaiah continues to call God's people to look to the Christ, Jesus, in whom God will consummate all His promises and through whom all the saints of the old and new covenants will march into the heavenly Jerusalem, through "gates made of a single pearl, . . . and his servants will worship him" (Rev. 21:21; 22:3). 

REV. JUSTIN ESTRADA is senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Kingsville, Md.

Hope in the Ordinary



A friend called and asked about my day. I sighed: “Same old, same old! Laundry, dishes, meals, and a doctor’s appointment later.” You could answer the same question with whatever fills your days—driving, your job, cleaning, meals, homework, childcare, car repairs, home maintenance, appointments, shopping, laundry, milking the cow, weeding, mowing—you fill in the blank. Ninety-nine percent of life is taken up with the ordinary. Our daily responsibilities can feel like my

reply: “Same old, same old.” Daily routines, along with the attending interruptions and inconveniences, can all seem unimportant. In fact, we often look for the moments when we can escape. A night out, a party, or an unexpected visit or phone call can seem like a breath of fresh air, more meaningful and important than our daily treadmill.

But there is spiritual danger that dogs the ordinary. We grow accustomed to daily routines. They can begin to feel insignifi-

cant. That’s how the world interprets the routines of daily life, as ho-hum—boring, meaningless, and without purpose. Here’s the danger. We can become complacent over how we think about daily life. And of course, how we think shapes the way that we respond. You hear that in my weary reply to my friend. What was missing in my response? I believe that it was the unseen world of spiritual reality. My eyes focused only on the mundane tasks at hand. I was like Peter walking on the water: “Oh, no! I’m going down!” My spiritual eyes were closed.

The unseen world, from which God dispenses His love and care through His Son, is the storehouse of hope for His people. Our hope for our daily lives, our hope for trials, our hope for the future and for eternity flow from that unseen world. We cannot accurately understand or interpret our experience of life without reference to the unseen world of spiritual reality. Our hope for living robust and meaningful lives is gutted of its power without reference to this unseen world. We fall into lackluster daily living. Sadly, biblical hope is often a casualty when we miss the role that our daily, ordinary lives play in God’s plan.

Biblical hope isn’t wishful thinking. Biblical hope has Christ’s incarnation, perfect life, atoning death, and resurrection stamped on it by God’s acceptance of His work (Heb. 6:19–20). It is present hope (1 Tim. 6:17), future hope (Jer. 29:11), and eternal hope (2 Thess. 2:16–17; Titus 1:1–3; 3:4–7). It is sure hope (Heb. 6:13–19) and living hope (1 Peter 1:3–5, 13; see 1 Tim. 4:10; 6:17). Biblical hope is essential for transforming the ordinary routines of life into extraordinary opportunities to practice our faith. Hope in Christ allows us to live ordinary lives in this seen world, the world that we can see and touch and feel, with one foot securely planted in the unseen world.

Scripture unfolds the unseen world of spiritual reality from Genesis to Revelation.

Consider David the shepherd boy. What could be more mundane than tending sheep in the wilderness? But it was in the context of his mundane work as a shepherd that David learned to focus on the unseen world. He ruminated on the history of Israel. He rehearsed the Hebrew Scriptures that he had been taught. He considered who the Lord is and what that meant for his life. Hope for the present, for the future, and for all eternity sprang to life as David applied his faith to daily life. His faith was strengthened and informed during those lonely days. His pursuit of God as a shepherd shaped all his daily responses in the wilderness and prepared him for the dramatic episodes to come. How David thought about his daily experience of life drove his use of and response to daily opportunities. In fact, David used his ordinary life as a shepherd to bring powerful spiritual truth to us in the Psalms. David would not have been equipped to face the bear, the lion, or Goliath if his routine days in the wilderness were not suffused with spiritual vitality. It wasn’t wasted or insignificant time. His ordinary experiences had a profound role in his life. They drew him near to God. They strengthened his faith. They hardened his resolve in the face of the jeers of Saul and his brothers. They laughed at his courage and taunted him to go back to his sheep in the wilderness. They scorned his common work. They didn’t understand the power of David’s spiritual fervor in his ordinary life. His heroism wasn’t a one-off. It was rehearsed day in and day out by his constant connection to the unseen world. Our daily lives are profound opportunities to practice our faith. That’s God’s plan. Our daily routines are the training ground for applying gospel hope, the unseen world, to life. Hope in God is the propellant that fuels our journey to the Celestial City.

There are scores of narratives in the Old and New Testaments whereby God’s people exhibited hope in the ordinary that made

them strong for their battles. What enabled the Hebrew children to face the fiery furnace (Dan. 3)? What emboldened Naaman's servant girl in captivity (2 Kings 5)? What gave Elisha confidence when surrounded by the enemy (ch. 6)? It was hope, hope not in circumstances but in God's promise and provision. Where did hope in those heroic moments come from? It didn't spring from nothing. They didn't ask themselves, "Now, what was it that the Lord promised my forefathers?" Their daily experience of life was marked by singing and rehearsing the unseen world. They practiced access to the unseen world in their ordinary tasks. This transformed their experience of daily life, preparing them to keep their joys and sorrows and their triumphs and defeats in spiritual perspective.

When our children were teens, we wanted to prepare them for temptations that they would face. We would ask, "What will you say when your friends suggest something that you know will not honor God or keep you spiritually safe?" They would suggest possible answers. Then we would say: "Let's rehearse. I'll be your friend. We want you to practice your answer out loud so that it is not a novel experience for you when you're in the heat of the moment." That's what daily connection with the unseen world is like. It not only prepares your heart and lips with the joy and satisfaction that truth brings in the moment but readies your soul and your sinews for the hills and valleys of life.


Hope matters. Biblical hope, gospel hope, drives us to live purposeful, productive, spiritually aware lives that transform the ordinary stuff of life into opportunities for thanksgiving, testimony, and self-counsel in the little skirmishes of daily life and for life-altering preparation for the big skirmishes of life.

Has this ever happened to you? It's time to leave for the dentist appointment that you made three months ago. As you get everyone off to work and school, you are searching for the car keys. Time is wasting.

"Where did you put them? You drove the car last!" you shout at your spouse. As tension grows, you blurt out: "That's it! I've had it! I'll just have to miss this appointment and wait another three months!" That's daily life. What's missing? The unseen world and the real, powerful hope of the gospel.

How would hope and the unseen world transform that ordinary moment? It might sound like this: "Family, we don't know where the keys are. But God does. If it's His purpose for me to get to the dentist, we will find them. If not, we will trust Him with the disappointment and inconvenience. Let's pray and ask God for help. And then" (with a reassuring smile), "we should probably settle on a permanent place to leave the keys." That's the unseen world and hope applied to ordinary life.

How can we maintain gospel hope in our ordinary days? Paul supplies the remedy in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18: "So we do not lose heart... as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." Remember that the unseen-world is God's storehouse of hope for His people. Daily life is the training ground. Populate your daily life with the unseen world. Here's how. Be proactive. Put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10–18). This is an unseen-world passage. Acknowledge your need for the unseen world early in your day. Have your playlist, entertainment, social media, friendships, and free time be top-heavy with gospel hope. Make the unseen world a primary ingredient in your "ordinary" day. That's what the Bible heroes did.

Hope in God's provision of our Savior enables us to have joy and a sense of purpose in our daily callings. Hope in God's provision is also God's preparation for the extraordinary moments of life. 

MARGY TRIPP is a biblical counselor, conference speaker, and author of *It's Not Too Late*.

Hope in Our Trials



Jewish tradition holds that the temple of Solomon was destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonians on *Tisha b'Av* (the ninth day of the Jewish month of *Av*). Interestingly, the tradition also holds that the temple of Herod was destroyed on the same day in AD 70 by the Romans. In Judaism, it is considered the saddest day possible. It brought to an end the temple as a central Jewish institution. Thus, the book of Lamentations is read each year during the fast on *Tisha b'Av*.

That book comprises five acrostic poems, with the twenty-two verses of each chapter beginning with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. The central third chapter triples this, with the same letter beginning every set of three verses. The content laments the fall of the temple.

Of course, these events were crushing blows to Judaism. But Christians find hope as a bookend on either side of the most famous verses in Lamentations. The writer,



*Western culture does all it can
to avoid pain and suffering.
Everything in recent years revolves
around maintaining safety and
maximum comfort.*

presumably Jeremiah the prophet, expresses hope in Lamentations 3:21–24 with verses 22–23 containing these familiar words:

*The steadfast love of the LORD never
ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

After two and a half chapters of heart-breaking lament, Jeremiah, seeming to pause, says: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope” (v. 21). In the face of blinding and profound loss and grief, the prophet can find hope in the promises of God’s never-ending steadfast love and mercy. He remembered, perhaps, that just as the Israelites saw daily reminders of God’s faithfulness in the wilderness through manna, we can find daily hope in God’s promises. In our undeserving sinfulness, God still says, “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isa. 43:1). So Jeremiah concludes, saying, “‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him’” (Lam. 3:24).

“The LORD is my portion.” This means that in some real, meaningful sense, we have all that we need in Christ. And this sounds like foolishness to the unbelieving world. In my travels and experience, the most content people I have ever met seem, in the world’s eyes, to be the most desperately needy people you might imagine.

Years ago, I traveled to Ghana, West Africa, with Joni and Friends’ mission outreach, Wheels for the World. We regularly saw disabled people, victims of polio, who walked with sandals on their hands, dragging withered limbs behind them. One night, our group was taken to visit a group of these homeless disabled people, living in cardboard boxes down a small, dark side street. As we approached, we realized that they were singing hymns of praise to God. Their simple testimony was “When Jesus

is all you have, you know that Jesus is all you need.” The Lord was their portion, and they were expressing an exuberant, joyful, overflowing hope in Christ.

Christian faith has often been embraced by the poor and marginalized but rejected by the elite, powerful, and popular. Paul said:

Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor. 1:26–29)

Christian hope is for those who know that their condition is desperate. Those with everything (in the world’s eyes) sense incorrectly that they need nothing from God—or anyone else, for that matter. From these two poles of utter poverty and lavish luxury, we learn an important truism: We learn virtually nothing from comfort, plenty, security, and ease in this life—nothing of eternal or lasting value, at least. We understand this in certain realms, such as sport (“no pain, no gain”). Conversely, the most precious lessons in life seem to come through pain, suffering, deprivation, loss, and grief. Western culture does all it can to avoid pain and suffering. Everything in recent years revolves around maintaining safety and maximum comfort.

Now, I get it: I hate pain. I try to avoid pain; and no one says, “Please pick me for the suffering!” But we must admit that the storms of life create strength. The Vikings picked trees buffeted on the coastline for the masts of their ships. They had learned that trees taken from deep in the forest, regardless of how tall and straight, lacked

the strength gleaned from punishing winds and storms. At the crucial time, weaker trees from mid-forest would fail.

Let's consider the way that many have reasoned through the years when pain and suffering come crashing in. A classical dilemma was constructed that holds two options: either God is good but not sovereign (otherwise, He would intervene to rescue those who suffer), or God is sovereign but not good (since He could relieve suffering but does not seem to care). More than forty years ago, Rabbi Harold Kushner articulated this argument in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He suffered deeply, watching his son live and die with the incurable condition of progeria. Those with this genetic condition age rapidly and usually die from "old age" in their teenage years.

Kushner considered the two options and came down on the first, saying that God is indeed good, but not sovereign. He is cheering for us, hoping that we make it through, but ultimately, He cannot help us. This is a theology of despair. (As a side note, Dr. R.C. Sproul said that bad things don't happen to good people—except to Jesus. Explaining why good things happen to bad people? Now, that, Dr. Sproul said, requires a great, lengthy treatise.) Our faith affirms that there is a *tertium quid*, a third way: God is both sovereign and good; therefore, suffering has meaning for those who trust in Him.

This is why our worldview matters. Nihilistic existentialism sees no future and can have no lasting hope in this life. Such skeptics are annoyed by resurrection talk because it presents a seed of faith beyond this world. But our Christ-centered faith is that there is hope beyond this physical world. Tolkien said it well in *The Return of the King* when Samwise had an epiphany: "For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach."

Simeon and Anna in Luke 2 are examples of saints who held on to hope and saw, after many, many years, the fruit of such hope in the fulfillment of God's promises. Not all people see the meaning of their suffering and pain in this life, however. Job, for instance, never got an explanation from God for his suffering. Instead, he got dozens and dozens of rhetorical questions from God, all ultimately saying, "Trust Me, the One who makes all things."

In C.S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*, the character Psyche says, "The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing—to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from." Elsewhere, Lewis said, "If I find in myself a desire, which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Our longings and desires for release from trials and suffering point us to the hope of the gospel, an anchor for us in the storms that will inevitably will come crashing in.

Finally, Corrie ten Boom saw God as the Master Weaver of the tapestry of life:

*Of't times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.*

In your suffering, as unspeakable and enduring as it is, hope is the light beyond the shadows of this world. Hope is the anchor that holds. God will not let you go. He knows your name, He knows your pain, and He promises to bring you home. **T**

DR. MICHAEL S. BEATES is chaplain and Bible teacher at The Geneva School in Casselberry, Fla., and author of *Disability and the Gospel*.

Our Future Hope



"Hope springs eternal in the human breast," Alexander Pope said. We are hardwired to believe that our best days are yet to come. Hope is essential; it sustains us through our sorrows and guides us in the darkness. Hope is the oxygen for the soul, giving us the strength to take risks, face challenges, and persevere. Without it, the lightest burden feels unbearable, the smallest challenge insurmountable.

While all men need hope, only a Christian

can have genuine hope—a hope that will not haunt our greatest victories with disappointment, fail us when we need it most, and leave us naked in the end. Here's why.

A FAITHFUL WORD

For many, hope is little more than a wish or a whim—a roll of the dice, a leap of faith, doing their best, hoping to dodge fate and beat the odds. Christians are different. Our hope rests on the promises of a God who

*God will never give up on you.
His grace is so high that you
can't get over it, so deep that you
can't possibly get under it, and so
tenacious that you can't get
away from it.*

cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and whose Word never fails. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not one jot or tittle—not the smallest letter or the tiniest stroke of a scribe's pen—can pass away from the law until all is fulfilled (see Matt. 5:18).

The Belfast Bible teacher Derick Bingham once shared a story from his early days as a young pastor conducting a funeral for an elderly missionary. The missionary's wife of sixty years stood by the grave, listening as Bingham spoke: "When God makes a promise, He binds Himself by seven. So when He says, 'I will never leave you,' it really means, 'I will never, never, never, never, never, never, no, never leave you!'"

As the mourners departed, the widow approached Bingham, looked him in the face, and with a glint in her eye said: "Son, when you're starting out, God may need to promise seven times. But after He's walked with you many a year through thick and through thin, once is enough."

Unlike the world, Christian, you have a hope that rests on a covenant that is ordered in all things and sure. You have a Word from the almighty God that will never fail you. But perhaps you wonder, "What if I fail it?"

A GRACIOUS GOD

Theologians describe God's grace as His love for the undeserving, which is true—but grace is better than that because we are worse than that. We are not just undeserving; we are hell-deserving sinners. When God saves us, He reaches down far—down to the bottom of the bottomless pit. There, at the nadir, He embraces us.

In Ephesians 2, Paul says that we are not just weak or sick. We are dead in our sins, lifeless just like fish floating belly-up in dirty water. Satan's willing slaves, we lived in our sins, doing whatever felt good to our bodies and seemed good to our minds. By nature, we were children of wrath (v. 3). Then grace stepped into the fray, and hope sprang to life (vv. 4–6). Here is grace that is designed to dazzle the eyes of angels and taunt the eyes of demons for all eternity (v. 7). God will never give up on you. His grace is so high that you can't get over it, so deep that you can't possibly get under it, and so tenacious that you can't get away from it.

A FINISHED WORK

What must you do to receive this grace? Simply receive it by faith. Christ has done

it all. In Romans 4, Paul explains that Christ was delivered to death because we were sinners and was raised for our justification, for our being counted righteous in Him (vv. 23–25). We are justified by faith, have peace with God, enjoy access to His limitless grace, and can rejoice in the hope of His glory (5:1–11). This hope, Paul says, will never disappoint us, for God's love fills our hearts through the Holy Spirit (v. 5).

Can you sin your way out of this hope? No, Paul assures us: "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (v. 6). God showed His love by sending His Son to die for us while we were still sinners (see v. 8). The logic is clear: If God upheld His most costly promise when you were entirely lost in sin, weak, and ungodly, then could He now break His commitment, shatter your hope, and abandon your soul—now that you have taken refuge in His Son? Never! You didn't earn your way into this hope, and you can't sin your way out of it.

A SOVEREIGN FATHER

Christians live locked in the double-handed grip of tender omnipotence. Christ assures us of this in John 10:27–30. Jesus carries us in His bosom; none can snatch us out of His hand. The Father who gave us to Jesus holds us tight, and none can pull us from His grasp either.

This security is anchored in God's sovereign and eternal counsel. Before time began, before the world existed, God set His love on you, entrusting you to His Son, giving you into His hands forever. Though we speak of it as a "moment," this choice was made outside time. Set in eternity, His love for you has no beginning and will have no end. Let that glorious truth sink deep into your soul: God has never existed without loving you, without seeing you in Christ (Eph.

1:3). His love for you is as unchanging as His character—the same yesterday, today, and forever.

An optimist sees the world through rose-colored glasses. As a result, the colors look much warmer than they are in reality. Well, Christian, God views you through "Christ-colored" glasses. He sees His beauty, His glory, and His perfect righteousness. He does not view you as you are by yourself, in your sins. He views you in Christ; He never thinks of you without also thinking of His lovely Son, Jesus Christ.

A CERTAIN FUTURE

Think of a Christian lady who has battled breast cancer for many years. The chemotherapy has failed. Her fight is almost over. She is about to breathe her last. What hope does she have? As she dies, she will not be alone. Her faithful Savior is with her. Death may wait in her hospital room. But death is there as a servant whose only job is to open heaven's door and let her in.

And when it comes, her soul is immediately at rest. Her striving stops. Her spirit bursts forth with never-before-felt freedom. Her soul is carried to heaven as God prepares to bring another of His beloved, blood-bought children home. She enters into the presence of the King who is there in all His beauty.

Yet even here, her best days lie ahead. Soon, that glorious moment will come when Christ returns to make all things new and to create a new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells. Then, the now will swallow up the not yet, and our best of days will be forever. What a hope. And if it is yours today, Christian, the fullness of this hope will be yours soon, and it will be yours forever. ■

DR. NEIL C. STEWART is senior minister of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, S.C.



YOURS FOR A DONATION OF ANY AMOUNT

It's easy to feel disoriented and even frightened in a society that is quickly abandoning its Christian past. What should we do when leaders and organizations fail us? When you support the global outreach of Ligonier Ministries this month, we'll send you Stephen Nichols' book *A Time for Confidence: Trusting God in a Post-Christian Society*. Dr. Nichols points us to our all-powerful God as the source and ground of our confidence. Though the whole world may shake around us, His kingdom is unshakable. **Thank you for your generous support.**



Ligonier.org/offer | 800-435-4343

This special offer begins March 1 and expires March 31, 2025.



MARCH 2025 DAILY BIBLE STUDIES

INTO *the* WORD

THE NATURE OF GOD

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY has always recognized that the purpose of life is to know and love God. We were made for God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Him, as Augustine of Hippo famously wrote in his *Confessions*.

Because knowing and loving God is the ultimate end for which we were created, systematic theology rightly focuses much of its attention on what we call *theology proper*, wherein we focus on the being and attributes of God. Last month, we began our study of theology proper with a look at

God's Being as the Holy Trinity. This month, we begin a three-month study that will explore the character of our Creator by considering the names, attributes, and metaphors for God found in sacred Scripture.

This month, we will look at many of the attributes that emphasize the transcendence or otherness of God. We will consider what it means for God to be perfect, self-existent, simple, one, spiritual, holy, sovereign, invisible, and omnipresent. May this study enflame our hearts and enlighten our minds with awe and adoration for our great God. **T**

“WE SHOULD NEVER CONSIDER THE CHARACTER OF GOD TO BE TOO DEEP TO THINK ABOUT. THE MORE WE REFLECT ON HIS GREATNESS, THE MORE OUR SOULS ARE MOVED TO ADORE HIM AND WORSHIP HIM FOR HIS MAGNIFICENCE.”

—R.C. Sproul, from
Truths We Confess

ABIDING IN THE WORD

These verses parallel the themes of the studies each week. We encourage you to hide them in your heart so that you may not sin against the Lord:

| | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Week of March 2 | 2 SAMUEL 22:31 |
| Week of March 9 | EXODUS 20:5–6 |
| Week of March 16 | HEBREWS 12:29 |
| Week of March 23 | ISAIAH 64:8 |
| Week of March 30 | PSALM 9:9 |



WEEKEND DEVOTIONAL
MARCH 1–2

THE RULE OF WORSHIP

WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN


Many people, even many professing Christians, might shudder at hearing worship called a rule. That sounds rigid. We might think of worship as a free expression of hearts warmed by God's love. That it is—but it is also a rule. Understanding that can help us establish priorities that will enable us to freely and “diligently attend the assembly of God's people,” as Heidelberg Catechism 103 puts it.

Psalm 81 opens with three strong calls to worship: “Sing aloud to God . . . ; shout for joy to . . . God . . . ! Raise a song” (vv. 1–2). This doesn't refer to the important disciplines of personal devotions and family worship; it is a call to corporate worship initiated by a blown trumpet on a day of feasting (v. 3). Asaph establishes the necessity of worship by calling it a statute, a rule, and a decree (vv. 4–5). He gives two main reasons for this. First, God relieves His people from misery. He lovingly “brought [them] out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2–3) so that they would serve no other gods but Him (Ps. 81:6–7). Second, He proves Himself faithful. God and Israel tested each other “at the waters of Meribah” as the people traveled from Egypt to Canaan (Ps. 81:7; see Ex. 17:7). The test was this: Will God's people trust and worship Him even when He seems distant? God passed the test valiantly. He is holy, worthy of our trust and worship.

Many Israelites failed the test. They didn't care about God's kindness. Because they would not submit, God “gave them

over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels” (Ps. 81:12). That's tragic. God wanted something better for His people, to “subdue their enemies” and give them not just water but “honey from the rock” (vv. 14, 16).

Everything this psalm says to Israel, it says louder to us. At Meribah, the Israelites wondered, “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Ex. 17:7). He was. They drank from the Rock of Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Today it is even more clear: in Christ, by the gift of His Spirit, God is powerfully among us. So the communal worship of God must be a leading rule for us. Matthew Henry wrote, “No time is amiss for praising God . . . but some are times appointed for us . . . to meet one another, that we may join together in praising God.” To do so, you must believe that God is worthy of your regular, wholehearted, sacrificial praise. And you can't gain for yourself a better blessing than what God offers. Instead, disobeying God's call to worship may lead you to follow your own counsel away from His good path.

If you were bought with a price, you must glorify God in your body, through biblical, tangible, congregational worship (1 Cor. 6:20). God alone can satisfy your longings. For meeting God and receiving His blessings, there is no substitute for corporate worship. 

REV. WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN is pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, Mich. He is author of many books, including *Finding My Vocation: A Guide for Young People Seeking a Calling*.

GOD'S INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES


EXODUS 15:11 “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

Theology proper, otherwise known as the doctrine of God, sits at the heart of the systematic theology of Scripture. Indeed it must, for unless we know God truly, we cannot have eternal life (John 17:3). In our study of the doctrine of the Trinity, we focused on who God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Without setting aside entirely the question of *who* God is as the Holy Trinity, we are going to focus our study on *what* He is over the next several months as we consider the attributes and names of God.

Attributes are the defining qualities that make a particular entity what it is. For instance, a human body is made up of arms, legs, a head, and so on. So when we talk about divine attributes, we are talking about the qualities that make God what He is. We should note, however, that God is not a composition of attributes as other entities are. When we talk about God's attributes, we are making distinctions to help us understand His being, but these attributes are ultimately identical with His essence and not distinct from it. We will talk about this more fully in a few days when we consider divine simplicity.

Scripture reveals to us many divine attributes, and they can be categorized under two major headings: incommunicable attributes and communicable attributes. Incommunicable attributes are those qualities that are true only of God and are not true in any way of human beings. In other words, our Creator does not “communicate” or share these attributes with human nature in any way. Communicable attributes are those qualities of God that are also true of human nature, though not in exactly the same way, since He is the Creator and we are mere creatures.

Incommunicable attributes, therefore, particularly reveal the difference between God and what He has made. These incommunicable attributes include such things as self-existence or aseity (Ex. 3:13–14), infinity (Ps. 145:3), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7–10), immutability (Mal. 3:6), and impassibility (Acts 14:15). God is dependent on nothing else for His life, He has no external limitations, He is everywhere present in creation, He cannot change, and He is not subject to mood swings. None of that is true of human beings.

The incommunicable attributes of God in particular highlight the greatness of our Maker. They help us see that none is like Him among the false gods of the nations (Ex. 15:11). 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Our God is far greater than we can imagine, and in studying His attributes we get but a taste of His greatness. That taste, however, is enough to move us to awe and to worship and praise our Lord for His unsurpassed grandeur. As we reflect on the attributes of God, let us marvel at our Creator and worship Him.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 33:26
2 Samuel 7:22
1 Chronicles 17:20
Romans 11:33

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Numbers 30–31
Mark 9:30–50

GOD'S COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

EPHESIANS 5:1 "Be imitators of God, as beloved children."



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

What is our deepest desire? Do we want material prosperity above all else? Do we want earthly success more than anything? While it is not necessarily wrong inherently to desire prosperity and success, our aim above all else should be to become like God. We should be seeking to more and more reflect, by the help of the Spirit, all of God's communicable attributes.

FOR FURTHER STUDY


Genesis 1:26–27
2 Corinthians 3:18
Ephesians 4:17–24
2 Peter 1:3–11

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Numbers 32–33
Mark 10:1–31

God's incommunicable attributes, we have seen, are those qualities that our Creator does not share with us in any way. Our Lord's communicable attributes, the second category under which we may classify His divine qualities, are those attributes that He can share with or communicate to us in a manner appropriate to our creatureliness. For instance, eternity (1 Tim. 1:17) is an incommunicable attribute of God because human beings have not always existed but have a beginning in time. Love (1 John 4:8), on the other hand, is a communicable attribute of God because human beings have a capacity for love.

Now, when we say that God shares or communicates certain of His attributes, we do not mean that the attributes communicated to us are completely identical to the same attributes in God. The difference between Creator and creature still exists even in the matter of God's communicable attributes. In an absolute sense, there is none like God (1 Sam. 2:2). Consequently, when we are speaking of communicable attributes, we are speaking by way of analogy. A communicable attribute that we possess, such as love, holiness, or justice, is sufficiently similar to the love, holiness, or justice of God that there is an overlap when man loves, man is holy, or man is just and that God loves, God is holy, or God is just. We receive true information about the Lord when attributes possessed by man are ascribed to God even if there is not a full identity between those attributes in God and those attributes in man. The Reformed theologian Francis Turretin writes in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, "God produces in creatures (especially in rational creatures) effects analogous to his own properties, such as goodness, justice, wisdom, etc."

The reality of God's communicable attributes provides the foundation for teachings such as Ephesians 5:1, wherein Paul exhorts us to imitate God as beloved children. If there were no commonality between human beings, particularly redeemed human beings, and the Lord, then it would be impossible for us to imitate Him. Because the Lord endowed human nature with attributes like His own, however, we can be like Him truly without ever becoming deity. To be sure, human nature is fallen, and apart from grace we cannot imitate God as we ought. Thankfully, in redemption, the Lord is renewing us and enabling us to imitate Him as we are conformed to Christ, the truest image of God (Col. 1:15). 

DIVINE UNITY AND SIMPLICITY


DEUTERONOMY 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Having considered the distinction between the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God, we now consider in what manner these attributes exist in the Creator. Does God have attributes as constituent parts that come together to form His essence or nature, or is God identical to His attributes?

Answering this question requires us to consider the doctrines of God's unity and simplicity. Today's passage tells us that "the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). This affirmation of monotheism means more than that only one God exists. Divine unity entails also that His essence is one, that it is not composed of various components that can be added and subtracted while He remains God. His essence must be simple, not made up of parts. God does not *have* attributes, properly speaking. Instead, God *is* His attributes. Each attribute is identical to His essence, and thus are necessary to Him and unchangeable.

This is not how creatures exist. Human beings, for example, possess attributes and can gain or lose them without losing their essential humanity. Consider the attribute of wisdom. A person may be wise or a person may be foolish, but in either case, the person is still a human being. The same cannot be said of God. If God were not perfectly wise, He would not be God. He is "the only wise God" (Rom. 16:27).

Divine unity and simplicity also mean that God's existence is identical to His essence. We can conceive of different natures or essences, but not every nature that we conceive of actually exists. An individual created being is a nature that possesses existence and not that nature by itself. For instance, we can conceive of the nature of the mythical half-man, half-goat creature known as a faun; we can know what a faun is. Fauns, however, do not actually exist. *That* a faun is (its existence) is different from *what* it is (its essence). On the other hand, divine existence is identical to the divine essence. God simply is (Ex. 3:14). One ramification of this is that it is impossible for God not to exist. He is what we call the *necessary being*. If God did not exist, nothing would exist. On the other hand, creatures are not necessary beings. No creature could exist and yet God would still exist.

Finally, divine simplicity means that God cannot violate any of His attributes. In other words, the Lord will never show love in a way incompatible with His holiness. His love is not one that overlooks His righteousness but it is a holy and righteous love. God is His attributes and He is His existence. He is simple, not composed of parts. 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Second Timothy 2:13 says that "if we are faithless, [He] remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." The underlying reality for this is God's unity and simplicity. Since He is His attributes, He can never be loving at the expense of His holiness; His wrath can never be unrighteous or capricious; and He cannot break His promises. Because of this, we know that God will always be good and will always tell us the truth.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Exodus 3:13–14
Mark 12:29
John 8:58
Galatians 3:20

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Numbers 34–36
Mark 10:32–52

DIVINE PERFECTION

2 SAMUEL 22:31 "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him."



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

God lacks no good thing but is perfect and all-sufficient in Himself. The good news for us is that His perfection means that He is able to give us all that we need, according to His riches in glory and sovereign plan. We should therefore not hesitate to ask the Lord to give to us out of His perfect bounty.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 19:7
Habakkuk 3:17–19
Matthew 5:48
James 1:17


THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 1–2
Mark 11:1–19

Our God is simple, meaning not that He is easy to understand but that He is not composed of parts or attributes (Ex. 3:13–14; Deut. 6:4). In other words, our Creator does not actually have attributes but He is His attributes because He is His essence. Thus, God cannot gain or lose an attribute like creatures can and He can never act against His own character.

Although God does not actually have attributes, at least not in the way that creatures do, it remains proper for us to distinguish between them. Scripture, after all, makes such distinctions as an accommodation to us. Because we are finite and God is infinite, we could never know God in His simple essence, but we can understand—to at least some degree—His attributes and therefore come to a true knowledge of Him that is proper for rational creatures. We should therefore study His attributes as given in Scripture, and we begin today with His attribute of perfection.

In today's passage, we read about the perfection of God (2 Sam. 22:31), and indeed the perfection of God shines through on every page of the Bible. To say that God is perfect is to say that He is complete and sufficient. To put it another way, our Lord lacks nothing. He is not deficient in any way and is not looking for something other than Himself to complete Him or to fill up what He lacks. Because He is perfect, His attributes are also perfect and not subject to change. For example, His wisdom is perfect, and so His wisdom cannot grow or change. This is most unlike human beings, who must grow in wisdom through education, trial and error, and so forth. The seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Petrus van Mastricht, in his *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, describes God's perfection as "a universal perfection and sufficiency which includes every good, in every kind, and is sufficient for all creatures in all things, all the way to infinite blessedness, and which accordingly also excludes negative imperfection."

Van Mastricht goes on to write that God "has enough for himself, since he does not desire and cannot receive more than he has, because he is infinite . . . enough for all things different from himself, inasmuch as he gives to all life, and breath, and all things. . . . But especially he is sufficient for his covenanted people." This is because He gives His people all the protection, salvation, and blessedness that they will ever need (2 Cor. 12:9). 

Imagine Yourself as an RBC Student

There's no better way to learn about Reformation Bible College than by spending time on our campus. You're invited to our Spring Preview Day on April 9, 2025. Experience student life as you sit in on a class, meet our president, tour RBC's beautiful grounds, and learn how our academic programs can help you build a theological foundation for all of life. **Register online today.**



REFORMATION
BIBLE COLLEGE
THEOLOGY FOR LIFE

REFORMATIONBIBCOLLEGE.ORG/PREVIEWDAY



EXODUS 3:13-14 "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to you"' (v. 14).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

If God were in some way dependent on us, we would be in big trouble. Imagine the pressure that would come with having to make up for something that a being far greater than us might lack. Remembering God's self-existence and independence guards us from fear and anxiety that comes with thinking that we need to help God or all will be lost.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

John 5:26
Romans 11:36

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 3-4
Mark 11:20-33

THE WEEKEND

Deuteronomy 5-10
Mark 12

Meditating on the perfection of God (2 Sam. 22:31), the fact that He lacks nothing and needs nothing outside Himself to be complete, will lead us to realize that our Creator is fully independent of creation. That is, God is not dependent on anything external to Himself for anything, not even for His existence. Thus we confess the scriptural truth that God is *a se*. He is of Himself; He is self-existent. This is the divine attribute of *aseity*.

Everything in creation depends on something outside itself for its existence. We exist because our parents conceived us and because we were nourished in our mothers' wombs, and we continue to exist because we continue to have our need for food met by farmers and our need for shelter met by homebuilders. Plants produce food because sunlight, water, and more enable photosynthesis. Water depends on the union of hydrogen and oxygen, and hydrogen and oxygen depend for their existence on subatomic particles. We can keep tracing a chain of dependence back to something that exists of itself, to the First Cause of all things, to God Himself.

God, on the other hand, is not an effect of any prior cause, and He does not depend on anything outside Himself for His own existence. His creation, including us, does not and cannot give Him anything that He does not already have. We receive our being, our existence, ultimately from Him through various secondary causes. He does not receive being, or existence, but is the Giver of existence. As Dr. R.C. Sproul used to say, "God has the power of being in Himself."

The truth about God's self-existence is at least part of what our Lord reveals when He discloses His covenant name, *Yahweh*, or "I AM" (Ex. 3:13-14). God, simply put, is. He exists of Himself and is the uncreated Being upon which all created being finally depends. In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

Consider how frightening it would be if God were not self-existent and independent, if He actually needed something from us. We can hardly supply our own needs at times, much less the "needs" of One who is far greater than we are. What an awful predicament we would be in if we had to make up for something that God lacks. In fact, if God were not self-existent and independent, then He would not actually be God; rather, that on which He depends would be more basic to reality and thus would be the real God. God's aseity, His self-existence and consequent independence, is good news for us. **T**

THE LION AND THE LAMB

ROBERT W. CARVER

There is an oft-quoted adage that says, "March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb." In rather picturesque language, this saying describes the (usual) contrast between the blustery, chilly weather at the beginning of the month and its calmer, gentler end.

Revelation 5 opens with a search to find one who was worthy to open the scroll in the hand of the One seated on the throne in heaven. It contained a record of God's purposes in history until its consummation. This was no ordinary scroll. It was written on both the inside and the outside and was sealed with seven seals.

Initially, no one worthy to open the scroll and look into it was found, causing John to weep loudly. Not even the most righteous humans named in the Bible, including Noah, Daniel, and Job (see Ezek. 14:14, 20), or all the most righteous and holy humans of all history taken together were worthy. Not even the glorious angelic servants of God were worthy.

John's weeping did not last long, for someone was found—the only One who was worthy for the task. This One is possessed with the same worthiness as the One seated on the throne, for They are equal in Their divine nature. This worthy One is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures are replete with pictures of His manifold character and glorious person. In this passage, two descriptive images are used. First, He is described as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of

David" (Rev. 5:5; recall Gen. 49:8-12). He is majestic and powerful and dangerous. He is great David's greater Son, who will rule with a rod of iron and vanquish all His enemies.

Second, as John turned to catch a glimpse of the Lion, he saw "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). The Lion and the Lamb are the same individual. Jesus, the altogether Righteous One, is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He died that He might abolish death and bring life and immortality to the elect (see 2 Tim. 1:10).

The contrasting pictures of the Lion and Lamb illustrate the unique beauty of our Savior. The perfectly harmonious combination of His powerful majesty and His lowly humility, of His conquest of death and His submission to death, of His regal lineage and His lowly birth all shine light on His worthiness to open the scroll.

In Revelation 4, we hear the melodious words of praise that the four living creatures unceasingly give to the One who is seated on the throne. Likewise, the twenty-four elders declare that He is worthy of all glory and honor and power.

In similar fashion, in chapter 5, we hear a new song being sung in praise of the Lamb. May we also continually sing praise to our great God for what He has done and what He will do. **T**

ROBERT W. CARVER served as associate professor of Greek and Bible at Clearwater Christian College in Clearwater, Fla., for more than thirty-five years.

DIVINE JEALOUSY

EXODUS 20:5–6 “You shall not bow down to [idols] or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

The Lord is a jealous God because there is nothing worthy of worship other than Him and because He is God for us. That is, He has taken us for His special, prized possession and does not want anything to harm our relationship with Him. His commands to worship Him alone are good for us because they help to safeguard our relationship with the only One who can grant us ultimate satisfaction.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 4:24
Song 8:6–7
Nahum 1:2
2 Corinthians 11:2

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 11–13
Mark 13:1–13

Unity and simplicity, absolute perfection, and self-existence set God apart from all creation (Ex. 3:13–14; Deut. 6:4; 2 Sam. 22:31). Such attributes, as well as several others, make Him unique and far greater than anything in creation. Recognizing such things helps us understand that He alone is Lord and that there is no other God. In turn, this truth lays the foundation for understanding another aspect of His character: divine jealousy.

Today’s passage describes God as a “jealous God” (Ex. 20:5–6). In context, the Lord’s declaration of His jealousy occurs just as God has forbidden graven images or idols. But why is making a visible representation of the divine nature unacceptable? Part of the answer has to be that any image of the divine nature crafted by human beings falls far short in depicting God as He is in Himself. He is unique, and His deity cannot be pictured. Because of this uniqueness, we can worship no other and cannot worship Him in ways contrary to His Word. Matthew Henry notes that the Lord’s being a jealous God reveals “the care he has of his own institutions, his hatred of idolatry and all false worship, his displeasure against idolaters, and that he resents every thing in his worship that looks like, or leads to, idolatry.”

Because of these truths, God is jealous to maintain that His people worship only Him in ways agreeable to His revelation. Here we note that the jealousy of God is not envy. Jealousy can be a positive quality when it means being “fiercely protective or vigilant of one’s rights or possessions,” as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it. All creatures belong to God but especially His covenant people, so He will tolerate no rivals to Him in our affections. This is for our own good because God’s absolute perfection means that we can be fully satisfied only in Him. By jealously guarding His worship and place in our hearts, the Lord keeps us from going after gods that will disappoint us.

Jealousy to protect an exclusive relationship is good and holy. We rightly expect a husband not to share his wife with another man and a wife not to share her husband with another woman. How much more is this true on the divine level with respect to God’s relationship with His bride, the church? Henry writes: “Idolatry being spiritual adultery, as it is very often represented in scripture, the displeasure of God against it is fitly called jealousy. If God is jealous herein, we should be so, afraid of offering any worship to God otherwise than as he has appointed in his word.” **T**

THE GREAT PROVIDER

GENESIS 22:14 “Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’”

Scripture reveals God to us using metaphors, abstract concepts, and more. Particularly important, as theologians have recognized, are the names of God given to us in the Bible. In naming Himself or allowing others to name Him, the Lord gives us vital information about His character. A few days ago, for example, we considered God’s covenant name “I AM” (Ex. 3:13–14), which highlights His aseity or self-existence and independence.

The Hebrew consonantal text behind “I AM”—YHWH—is known as the *tetragrammaton*, and modern scholars believe that with vowels it is pronounced *Yahweh*. (Hebrew was originally written without vowels, and they were added later.) Older English translations render the tetragrammaton as *Jehovah*. Either way, in the original Hebrew, many of God’s names are formed by combining the tetragrammaton with another Hebrew term. One of the most well known of these names appears in today’s passage: “The LORD will provide” (Gen. 22:14). Many Christians recognize this name in the Hebrew (using the conventions of older English) as the name *Jehovah-jireh*.

Abraham called God by this name just after He spared Isaac. We remember that the Lord ordered Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a test of Abraham’s faith. Just as Abraham was about to kill his son, the one at the center of God’s promises, the Lord stayed Abraham’s hand and substituted a ram for Isaac (vv. 1–14). The patriarch called the name of the place *Jehovah-jireh*, “The LORD will provide,” to remember how the Lord had indeed rescued Isaac. God vindicated Abraham’s trust that He would grant Isaac to survive the episode (vv. 7–8; see Heb. 11:17–19). John Calvin writes: “[Abraham] had fled for refuge to the providence of God; and he testifies that he had not done so in vain. He also acknowledges that not even the ram had wandered thither accidentally, but had been placed there by God.”

Had Isaac died without any offspring, God’s promise to bless the world through Abraham’s seed would have failed and there would be no salvation (Gen. 12:1–3; 17:15–21). Humanly speaking, it seemed impossible that Isaac would live and the Lord’s promise be fulfilled, but Abraham knew that God always keeps His covenant oaths and trusted Him to provide. That God provided for Abraham in that moment when it would have been easy for the patriarch to think God was abandoning His promise through Isaac gives us confidence that the Lord can provide for His people in any circumstance. **T**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

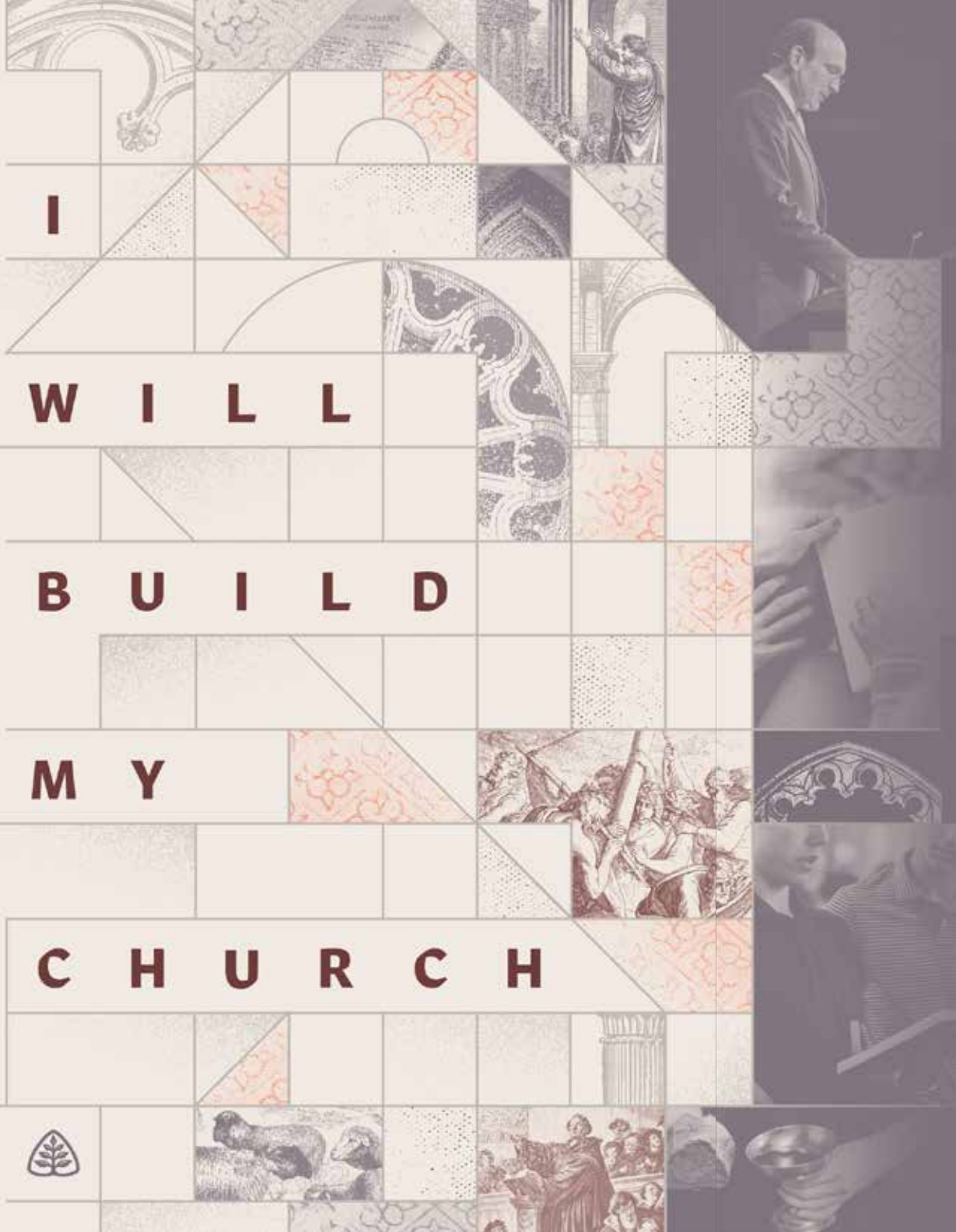
Paul tells us that God will supply every need of His people “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). No need of ours is too big for the Lord to meet, and He provides for us always in line with His sovereign providence, working for our good and His everlasting glory. We can come before Him with the biggest problems we face, confident that He is able to provide what we need to deal with them.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

2 Chronicles 32:22
Psalm 111:5
1 Corinthians 10:13
1 Timothy 6:17

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 14–16
Mark 13:14–37



I

W I L L

B U I L D

M Y

C H U R C H



2025 Ligonier National Conference

April 10–12 | Orlando, FL

Register today and save at
Ligonier.org/2025

LIKE AN EAGLE

DEUTERONOMY 32:10–12 “[God] found [Israel] in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

From our perspective, there may be times when it seems as if the Lord is moving slowly—or not at all—to help us. Yet we cannot evaluate God according to our notions of time, for He is outside time. Thus, what seems to us to be a slow response is not slow but appropriately quick, for God always knows when it is the best time for Him to act.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Exodus 19:4
Psalm 103:1–5
Ephesians 6:10
Revelation 8:13

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 17–19
Mark 14:1–25

Divine perfection and self-existence, two of God's incommunicable attributes, tell us that the Lord is complete, lacking nothing. Indeed, these attributes tell us that God is the very source of existence itself, having the power of being in Himself and granting existence to creation. Because the Lord is the source of all things, He can provide all things that His people need. Little wonder, then, that Abraham called Him “The LORD will provide” (Gen. 22:14). He is jealous for His own glory, commanding His people to worship Him alone and according to His Word, for only in Him will they be provided full satisfaction (Ex. 20:5–6).

As we continue our look at the Lord's character and in particular the attributes, names, and images that Scripture uses to talk about God as our Provider, we come today to the metaphor of the eagle. In Deuteronomy 32:10–12, Moses likens the Lord to an eagle, comparing Him to that majestic bird of prey as it “stirs up its nest, . . . flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions.” When an eagle is teaching its young to fly, it will push the eaglet out of its nest but does not forsake it. If the eaglet runs into trouble from a predator or other problems, the mother eagle will swoop down quickly and rescue her young. In a similar manner, God pushed Israel out of its “nest” in Egypt, as it were, but did not abandon His people in the wilderness. He saved them on many occasions, redeeming them from foes such as the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8–16). By likening God to an eagle, Moses was reminding the Israelites of the Lord's protection of His people and that He would always have His eye on them in order to meet their needs.

Additionally, the eagle in Scripture sometimes appears as an image of God's speed and strength, since eagles are swift and powerful. For example, Isaiah 40:31 features the promise of the Lord to those who wait on Him. Such people will find their strength renewed and will “mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” The idea is that God will supply all the power that His people need and He will do so speedily. When we are in need of strength to press on in serving the Lord and to persevere in faith, God does not fail to grant it. He does not delay but gives it quickly. Any slowness that we perceive on His part is just that: a mere perception. At the proper time, He always acts.

DIVINE INFINITY

PSALM 145:3 “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.”

Continuing our look at the divine names and attributes and the metaphors used for God in Scripture, we now turn to another incommunicable attribute of our Creator—namely, His infinity. When we refer to the infinity of God, we mean that He is not limited in any of His attributes. Our Maker is infinite goodness, infinite holiness, infinite presence, infinite wisdom, infinite righteousness, and so on. Although we will look in more detail at these attributes and many others, we need to understand that in His attributes, God possesses no limitations.

Scripture frequently expresses divine infinity by stressing the greatness of God. Psalm 145:3, for instance, reveals that the greatness of the Lord “is unsearchable.” Something unsearchable lacks boundaries. It is unsearchable precisely because we can never reach the end of it, we can never enclose it in our minds as we might be able to do with other entities or facts. The Dutch Reformed theologian Petrus van Mastricht comments on today's passage as he discusses God's infinity: “There is no end to [the greatness of God]. For whatever is finite is fully searchable, and in turn, whatever simply cannot be searched is also infinite.”

Divine infinity is taught in passages such as Psalm 145:3, but it is also the necessary consequence of other truths about God, such as His self-existence and absolute independence. The Lord is before all because He has always existed, having the power of being in Himself, and because He depends on nothing, whereas all creation depends on Him. Van Mastricht also writes that God is infinite because “he is (1) the absolutely first being, who for this reason does not admit a prior being which would bound and limit him. He is, accordingly, (2) independent, bounding and limiting all things, and thus, he is limited by no one.” God's infinity also means that He is incomprehensible, not in the sense that we cannot know God truly but in the sense that we cannot know God fully or know Him as He knows Himself. As many theologians have stated, the finite cannot contain the infinite.

Our Creator's infinity is good news for His people and bad news for the impenitent. Because the Lord's love and goodness have no limits, we can trust that God will never harm His children. Because His righteousness has no limits, we can trust that the impenitent will not finally escape their just punishment.



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Because God is infinite, His goodness is far greater than we can fathom. Indeed, His goodness has no limits. Thus, we never need think that He will one day exhaust His goodness toward us. If we trust in Christ Jesus, we can be confident that He will be good to us forever and that He will be good to us in ways that we cannot yet imagine.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 Chronicles 16:25
Psalm 77:13
Isaiah 40:13
Ephesians 1:19

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 20–22
Mark 14:26–50



JOHN 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”



CORAM DEO

*Living before the
face of God*

Our communion with God is often called “spiritual” because it involves the fellowship of our spirits with the One who is by nature spirit. This means that we continue in fellowship with Him after the death of our physical bodies because we do not require physical senses to commune with our Creator. We will, of course, have resurrected physical bodies one day, but between our deaths and the resurrection, our souls commune with God in heaven.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 31:3
2 Corinthians 3:18

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 23–25
Mark 14:51–72

THE WEEKEND

Deuteronomy 26–28
Mark 15

Physicalism, sometimes also called materialism, denotes the belief that only physical or material entities exist and that everything can be explained by reference to physical or material causes. Such a philosophy is widely accepted by many modern scientists, but it is directly contrary to Scripture, which teaches that not everything that exists is material or physical. In truth, the Bible teaches that angels are immaterial spirits (Heb. 1:14) and that humans are composite beings, each man, woman, and child possessing both a physical body and an immaterial soul or spirit (1 Cor. 5:5). Moreover, Scripture itself teaches that God is spirit, as we see in today’s passage (John 4:24).

Jesus’ statement to the Samaritan woman in John 4:24 reflects the truth of the spirituality of God. Spirituality is an attribute of our Creator—that is, the divine nature is immaterial. Like many of God’s other attributes, the spirituality of God is explicitly taught in Scripture, but it is also a necessary consequence of our Lord’s other attributes. For instance, divine infinity means that God has no limits or boundaries, but physical entities by definition have such limits. Physical bodies, for instance, extend only so far before reaching a limit. A physical or material substance, therefore, cannot be infinite. That property can belong only to an immaterial entity; therefore, since God is infinite, His nature must be spiritual.

When we consider God’s spirituality, we note that there is a type of commonality between created spirits and His uncreated spirit in that both are immaterial. We must also note, however, that because of the distinction between Creator and creature, God’s spirituality is different from the spirituality of angels and human beings. For instance, created spirits lack infinity and they can change, but God is infinite and unchangeable (Ps. 145:3; Mal. 3:6).

As noted above, spirituality applies to the divine nature, which means that when we say that God is spirit, we are not referring exclusively to the Holy Spirit. All three persons of the Trinity are spirit, though the Son of God since the incarnation also has a human nature and thus a material body according to His humanity. As infinite spirit, the Holy Trinity is incomprehensible; we can know Father, Son, and Holy Spirit truly but not completely. This should drive us to humility and to seek to understand Him only according to how He has revealed Himself and not according to our vain imaginations.

NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE

SARAH IVILL

If we’re honest, when we approach God in prayer, we want Him to do for us whatever we ask of Him. For example, if we pray for advancement in our career or a desired ministry opportunity, we don’t want Him to answer by giving us more grace to continue waiting. We want Him to deliver our desires immediately.

We’re not the only ones who have talked to God this way. Jesus’ disciples James and John said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you” (Mark 10:35). Jesus’ response displays His long-suffering and patience: “What do you want me to do for you?” (v. 36). Their request reveals how self-oriented their thoughts were. In a moment when they should have been focused on Jesus’ revelation of His suffering, they instead craved honor: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (v. 37). They failed to understand that in God’s kingdom, God alone receives the glory. They also failed to understand their severe limitations. When Jesus asked if they could drink His cup, or be baptized in the way that He would be, they responded, “We are able” (vv. 38–39). Such proud confidence reinforces their sheer misunderstanding of Jesus’ teaching on being the suffering Messiah. Since the other ten disciples were “indignant at James and John,” we can conclude that even they thought the brothers’ request was wrong (v. 41).

Not surprisingly, Jesus turned this occasion into an opportunity to reveal that the values and victory in God’s kingdom

come in a far different way than they do in this world. The great ones are servants. The winners are slaves of all. The leaders are to serve, even if it costs them their very lives. Jesus is the preeminent example of this: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The One who “was given . . . everlasting dominion” and an eternal kingdom (Dan. 7:13–14) came to serve and to die for God’s people.

It is encouraging that the Apostle John did not continue to crave glory. God sanctifies His own, and that was certainly true in the case of John. Not only did he write one of the Gospels, but he also wrote 1–3 John and the book of Revelation. Through his writings, we see how much he grew in understanding the gospel. He came to model his Savior’s words and actions: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16).

As we look toward the week ahead, we’re likely hoping that God will do for us whatever we ask of Him. Instead, let us follow the example of our Savior. Let us go and serve, giving up our desires for advancement, comfort, and convenience so that we can share the gospel and glorify God alone.

SARAH IVILL is a Bible teacher, conference speaker, and graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. She is author of several books, including *The God Who Hears: How the Story of the Bible Shapes Our Prayers* and *The Covenantal Life: Appreciating the Beauty of Theology*.

COLOSSIANS 1:15 "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments: "God in himself, that is, in his naked majesty, is invisible, and that not to the eyes of the body merely, but also to the understandings of men, and that he is revealed to us in Christ alone. . . . For in Christ he shows us his righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, his entire self." Although God is in His essence invisible, we do see Him truly in Christ. We must therefore go to Him in order to know the only true God.

FOR FURTHER STUDY


Exodus 33:18–20
Matthew 5:8
Romans 1:20
1 Timothy 1:17

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 29–30
Mark 16

As we make our way through our study of the attributes of God, the divine names, and metaphors used for our Creator, we come today to another attribute that is both expressly taught in Scripture and a consequence of other attributes. We are talking about the invisibility of God, which belongs necessarily to His divine essence in light of His infinity and spirituality (Ps. 145:3; John 4:24). After all, we cannot view an infinite substance, at least not all of it, since it has no boundaries, and spirits are ordinarily not visible to us either.

God's invisibility is not a reality necessarily only as a consequence of other divine attributes but also because the Lord reveals it explicitly in His Word. For example, we read in today's passage that Christ "is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). The divine essence, in other words, cannot be seen, and this does not surprise us because His essence is spiritual, not material; thus, it is inaccessible to our five senses. This means that in the theophanies (manifestations of God) described in Scripture, people never really saw the divine nature in itself but rather a created effect that God used to represent Himself to our physical senses. For example, in seeing the fire of the burning bush, Moses did not actually see God in Himself but rather saw a vision that the Lord gave to demonstrate His presence (Ex. 3:1–2). With Jesus, it is more appropriate to say that those who viewed Him in the flesh actually saw God because the Son of God assumed a human nature, including a physical body, into personal union, and thus the human nature is truly His. To see the humanity of Jesus is to see the Son of God because it is the Son's humanity. Nevertheless, even in the incarnation, the divine essence itself is not made visible to us.

Of course, the Bible does say that one day we will see the face of God, a reality that theologians commonly call the *beatific vision* (Rev. 22:4). We do not know exactly what that means, although we know that it will satisfy us completely. Perhaps, as theologians such as Jonathan Edwards have suggested, God will make His deity immediately perceptible not to our physical eyes but to our minds. In any case, as we wait for the day when we will see God, we should allow the invisibility of God to move us to humility and to not say more about Him than He has revealed. We cannot find the invisible Lord on His own, but He must speak to us, and we do well not to try to make God more visible than He has made Himself. 


ISAIAH'S VISION OF DIVINE HOLINESS

ISAIAH 6:1–7 "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' " (vv. 1–3).

Which divine attribute sets the true God of the Bible apart from all the false gods that humans have concocted? The question is vital because in some ways, the gods of other religions bear some similarities to the God of Scripture. For example, other monotheistic religions such as Islam and Judaism agree with biblical Christianity that God is all-powerful and eternal. Does this mean that all these religions serve the same God?

No, these religions do not all serve the same God, and one reason that we say so is that the God of the Bible is unlike false gods in terms of His divine attributes. When we look at which attributes set the God of the Bible apart from other so-called deities, the holiness of God stands out. Scripture stresses divine holiness to such an extent that this attribute distinguishes the true God from all others.

Today's passage gives us one of the clearest revelations of the holiness of God. During Isaiah's vision of Yahweh, the covenant Lord of Israel and the one true God, the prophet saw the seraphim praising God and exclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). The angels' threefold repetition of "holy" is significant. As Dr. R.C. Sproul frequently reminded us, *holy* is the only divine attribute used in such a way in all Scripture. That threefold repetition takes the attribute of holiness to the superlative degree, drawing our focus to its importance. Clearly, God wants us to understand that His attribute of holiness makes Him unique among all other "gods."

When we consider the holiness of God, we understand that this attribute is both incommunicable and communicable. Fundamentally, holiness has to do with "set-apartness," and God's holiness consists in His being set apart from creation. That God is holy means that He is absolutely transcendent—that is, different from the created order and Lord over it. This is the Creator-creature distinction that cannot be shared with us. On the other hand, while created things cannot be absolutely set apart from creation as God is, while they never lose their creatureliness, they can be set apart from other created things for God's special use. Thus, objects for use in the temple worship were "holy utensils" (1 Chron. 9:29), and God's people are distinguished as a holy nation from those who are not His people (Ex. 19:5–6). That type of set-apartness can be communicated to creatures, as can another aspect of divine holiness that we will consider in the days ahead: moral purity. 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

First Peter 2:9 tells us that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a holy nation. In saving us, God sets us apart as His special people, and that has consequences for how we should live. Because we have been set apart by God, we must live as He commands us to live. When we do not do so, we are not living up to the reality that we are the Lord's holy people.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Leviticus 11:45
Deuteronomy 7:6
Psalm 99
Revelation 4

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 31–32
Luke 1:1–23



NEVER MISS AN ISSUE OF *TABLETALK* MAGAZINE

Every issue of *Tabletalk* explores unique themes that are relevant to the Christian life. When you renew your subscription, you'll continue receiving daily Bible studies, thoughtful articles, and edifying columns from gifted pastors and teachers each month. **Renew your subscription today by scanning the QR code.**



Did you know that Ministry Partners receive *Tabletalk* and other benefits for a monthly gift of \$30 or more? **Learn more at Ligonier.org/partner.**



RenewTabletalk.com

THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL

2 KINGS 19:22 “Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy One of Israel!”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

The Holy One of old covenant Israel remains the Holy One of new covenant Israel. The same mighty God who kept His promises and showed His mighty power to the Israelites of old today keeps His promises and shows His mighty power to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have nothing to fear if we are on the side of the Holy One of Israel.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalms 71:22
Isaiah 54:5
Jeremiah 50:29
John 6:66–69

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Deuteronomy 33–34
Luke 1:24–38

Other “gods” such as Islam’s Allah may bear a superficial resemblance to the God of the Bible, but the totality of Scripture shows us that our God is far different from any would-be deity. Unlike false gods, the God of Israel, who became incarnate as the Lord Jesus Christ, is “holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3). Divine holiness sets the only true God apart from all others.

That Scripture emphasizes the holiness of God is evident not only in how often it describes Him as holy but also in that the concept of holiness is taken up into one of the divine names. One of the most common names or titles given to God in the Bible is “the Holy One of Israel,” which appears more than thirty times in the Old Testament and is particularly prominent in the book of Isaiah. The title itself helps us see how important holiness is as a divine attribute. In one sense, there is no real need of the name “God” or “LORD” when we refer to the one true God and covenant Lord of Israel. Holiness is so definitional of the one true God that we can say “Holy One of Israel” and immediately know whom we are talking about.

Scripture’s use of “the Holy One of Israel” is often coupled with specific acts that show God’s set-apartness, which is the fundamental meaning of holiness. For example, Psalm 78:41–43 calls God “the Holy One of Israel” in referring to the miracles performed during the exodus. God is set apart in power from creation, which is why He can do things contrary to ordinary natural patterns, such as turning the water of the Nile into blood (see Ex. 7:14–24). Isaiah 41:14 assures us that our “Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.” God, as our Redeemer, is set apart from creation in several ways. For instance, He is set apart in that His promise to save His people is sure (Ps. 85:9); He cannot fail to keep His pledge of redemption, unlike creatures, who can break their promises and often do so. He is also set apart as Redeemer in the sense that unlike creaturely saviors, who might be able to provide a temporary rescue from some difficulties in the present, God can save us to the uttermost, freeing us from sin, Satan, and death (Heb. 7:25). Therefore, “the Holy One of Israel” in His set-apartness is also able to show us immeasurable grace. In his book *The Holiness of God*, Dr. R.C. Sproul writes about God’s restoration of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1–7: “The holy God is also a God of grace. He refused to allow His servant to continue on his belly without comfort. He took immediate steps to cleanse the man and restore his soul.”

THE LORD WHO SANCTIFIES

EXODUS 31:13 “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.’”

Holiness is such a distinguishing attribute of God that He is truly “the Holy One of Israel” (2 Kings 19:22). The Lord is known in His holiness, and if we do not understand that God is holy, we do not understand Him at all.

Thus far in our look at the holiness of God, we have been focusing on holiness in the sense of being set apart. God, the Creator, is distinct from His creation, independent of it, transcending all its limitations. As transcendent Lord, He is holiness itself and the source of holiness in creatures. In these ways, holiness is an incommunicable attribute of God. In another sense, however, holiness is a communicable attribute of God. Here we will focus especially on the concept of holiness as moral purity.

We see that divine holiness includes moral purity in texts such as Leviticus 19, where we are commanded to be holy as the Lord is holy (vv. 1–2). The chapter then goes on to list many moral imperatives for God’s people, forbidding theft, oppression, injustice, sexual immorality, and so on (vv. 3–37). Clearly, part of what it means for human beings to be holy is to obey these commandments, and in so doing they are holy as God is holy. In other words, human holiness involves doing what is good and right because God does only what is good and right.

Because of the impact of the fall on the human race, such moral purity is elusive apart from the grace of God working in us. As Paul tells us in Romans 3:12, “no one does good” (except Jesus, of course). We must be made holy by another because we cannot make ourselves holy. Consequently, rightly comprehending the holiness of God requires us to acknowledge, as today’s passage does, that it is the Lord who sanctifies us (Ex. 31:13).

We will look at sanctification, the process by which we are made holy, in more detail in a few months when we study the doctrine of salvation. Today we will note that while we do not sanctify ourselves, we are not passive in being made holy either. It requires some effort on our part, including observing the Sabbath, or the Lord’s Day as it is known under the new covenant (Ex. 31:13). As we worship and rest on the Lord’s Day, we are reminded of the great works of God in creation and salvation, that He has made us a new creation and is conforming us to Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:17). In turn, that leads us to seek all the more to obey Him and love Him.



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

The Reformed theologian Petrus van Mastricht writes that “we should strive that God, who is thrice holy, holiness itself, and the source of all holiness, would sanctify us entirely.” We cannot make ourselves holy, but we can place ourselves in contexts that will be conducive to God’s work in making us holy, such as corporate worship and Christian fellowship.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Leviticus 20:8
John 17:17
1 Thessalonians 5:23
Hebrews 13:12

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Joshua 1–3
Luke 1:39–80



“HE LEADETH ME: O BLESSED THOUGHT”

DEREK W.H. THOMAS

HEBREWS 12:29 “Our God is a consuming fire.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God


The reality of God as a consuming fire should encourage us to approach the things of the Lord with reverence. Our Creator is holy, and His holiness will either heal and refine or burn and destroy. God, a consuming fire, does not look kindly on trifling with His name or compromising the holiness of His people.

Since the holiness of God is such an important emphasis of Scripture, we have been considering the divine attribute of holiness from a number of different angles. Today we will finish our look at divine holiness by considering the metaphor used in Scripture of God as a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29).

Fire appears throughout Scripture and is frequently associated with the presence of God and His worship. For instance, God confirmed His covenant with Abraham when He appeared as “a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch” passing through animal pieces (Gen. 15:17–21). The Lord spoke to Moses from a bush that was burning with fire but that was not consumed by the flames (Ex. 3:1–2). In Ezekiel 1, the prophet sees a vision of the Lord, and fire is a prominent motif (see v. 27). Of course, fire was used in the old covenant worship of God every time a sacrifice was offered to the Lord.

One author notes the aptness of fire as an image for God. The flickering flames of a fire are always changing shape and moving this way and that; in a similar way, God’s ways are inscrutable and we can never fully hold on to Him in the sense of fully understanding Him. In the sky sits a fire that is the sun (see Rev. 16:8) and on which life depends; in an even greater sense, all things depend on God. When it comes to the association of fire with divine holiness, however, God is a consuming fire because our holy Creator both purifies His people of sin and destroys impenitent evildoers.

God’s use of fire to purify His people appears in texts such as Zechariah 13:9, where we read that He will purify a third of His people so that they will call on Him and take Him alone as their God. Just as fire refines metal and removes impurities, so God purges idolatrous affections from His children. First Corinthians 3:10–15 says that the Lord will test the works of His redeemed people, with the works approved by Him passing through the fire unscathed but those He does not approve of being burned up.

As disappointing as it is that some of our good works will not pass through the fire of testing, even worse will be those who face God, our consuming fire, as impenitent sinners. All those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, who have not trusted in Christ alone, will be cast into the lake of fire and endure unending punishment forever. Satan and even death itself will be cast there as well (Rev. 20:7–15). 

John 10 introduces us to an extended use of the shepherd metaphor. Jesus is the “good shepherd” who leads His sheep to pasture and protects them from wolves (vv. 11–12). One statement requires some explanation: “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (v. 4). I grew up on a sheep farm where dogs drove sheep from one location to another, but that is not how ancient Near Eastern farmers moved sheep around. Instead of driving sheep, they led them. A farmer walked before his sheep, who followed him because they trusted him. They listened to his voice (v. 3).

Did Jesus have Psalm 23 in mind? Maybe. But the metaphor of the Lord as a Shepherd occurs frequently in the Old Testament. Jacob blesses his son Joseph and refers to God as having been “my shepherd all my life long to this day” (Gen. 48:15). The prophet Isaiah speaks of God as caring for His people as a shepherd cares for his little lambs (Isa. 40:11). Micah similarly calls on the Lord to shepherd His people “with your staff” (Mic. 7:14). Psalm 78 describes the exodus from Egypt with these words: “Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock” (v. 52).


But perhaps the most familiar reference to God as a Shepherd is the opening line of Psalm 23: “The LORD is my shepherd.” This Shepherd leads His people to “green pastures” and “still waters” and “paths of righteousness” (vv. 2–3). Even in “the valley of the shadow of death,” He promises to comfort them with the use of His rod

and staff (v. 4). There is a promise of a table spread with good things, even in the presence of enemies, and in the end the assurance that His sheep will dwell with Him “in the house of the LORD forever” (v. 6).

Older generations will recall the record company EMI’s familiar logo of a dog (“Nipper”) with its head tilted to the side, listening to a gramophone. The label was known as His Master’s Voice and was taken from a painting made in the 1890s by an English artist named Francis Barraud. Christians also do the same. They listen to their Master’s voice. They recognize it even in the midst of calamity and pain. It is a voice that speaks in the words of Scripture, for every word of Scripture is ultimately Jesus speaking. The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.

During the American Civil War, shortly after his ordination at First Baptist Church in Philadelphia in 1862, Joseph Gilmore penned these lines of a hymn:

*He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
O words with heav’nly comfort
fraught!
Whate’er I do, where’er I be,
Still ’tis God’s hand that leadeth me.*

It is indeed a blessed thought that the Good Shepherd leads us every step of the way with His reassuring voice. 

DR. DEREK W.H. THOMAS is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic and Pastoral Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary. He is author of many books, including *Let Us Worship God* and *The Life of Peter*.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Exodus 24:17
2 Thess. 1:5–12

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Joshua 4–6
Luke 2:1–21

THE WEEKEND

Joshua 7–11
Luke 2:22–3:38

Encounter the God Who Is *Holy, Holy, Holy*

There is no one like our God. Encountering His holy grandeur leaves us forever changed, bringing new awareness of our sin and our need for His grace.

At a time when the church is often influenced by superficial thinking about the Christian faith, *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul compels readers to tremble at the majesty of the Lord and His wondrous gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Receive the fortieth-anniversary edition of this celebrated book with your donation to Ligonier Ministries.

Your support will help spread the timeless message of God's holiness, that more people may grow in their knowledge of His character and live for His glory alone.



Visit Ligonier.org/holiness to learn more.



GOD THE SOVEREIGN KING

PSALM 47 "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy! For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth" (vv. 1–2).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

If we do not understand the sovereign kingship of God, we will get many other things about God wrong. His sovereignty tells us that He will give grace and love as He desires. His sovereignty tells us that He does not owe creation anything. His sovereignty means that He can overcome any would-be obstacle to His plan for the welfare of His people. Let us praise God for His sovereign kingship.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 33:22
Malachi 1:14
1 Timothy 6:15
Revelation 15:2–4

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Joshua 12–13
Luke 4:1–30

At the beginning of our study of the divine attributes, we noted the distinction that theologians make between God's incommunicable attributes and His communicable attributes. His incommunicable attributes are those that find no corresponding attributes in creatures, whereas God's communicable attributes do have something in common with certain attributes in creatures. The incommunicable attributes of God have to do with His transcendence—His being separate from creation, different from creation, and Lord of creation. Among the divine attributes, perhaps none is more closely associated with divine transcendence than the sovereign kingship of God.

The concept of divine sovereignty and lordship is found more often in Scripture than any other attribute of God, indicating its importance to having a right view of the Creator. Put simply, as Psalm 47:1–2 tells us, to say that God is sovereign is to say that the Lord is "a great king over all the earth." Everything falls under His rule and authority. Not every creature recognizes or submits to that authority, but that authority exists nonetheless. God is the sovereign King not only over the earth, however, but over all creation, over all things seen and unseen. His "kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). Matthew Henry comments that the Lord "is a God of sovereign and universal dominion. He is a King that reigns alone, and with an absolute power, a King over all the earth; all the creatures, being made by him, are subject to him, and therefore he is a great King, the King of kings."

Our God's sovereignty is comprehensive. In other words, He is in control of all things, governing whatsoever comes to pass according to His sovereign decrees. These decrees of the Lord, according to Westminster Shorter Catechism 7, are "his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." We find God's decrees, sometimes referred to in the singular simply as His "decree," spoken of in texts such as Ephesians 1:11, which says that our Maker works out all things according to the counsel of His will. Nothing operates outside God's sovereign control. From the tiniest detail to the most significant world event, God is controlling and directing all things according to His good and inscrutable purposes. **■**

GOD OUR SHEPHERD-KING

PSALM 23 "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures" (vv. 1–2).

Christians from all theological traditions confess that God is sovereign, but not all believers affirm that the Lord, in the words of the Westminster Standards, has "foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." We will consider that truth more deeply in the coming days as we continue looking at the divine attribute of authority, but today we will consider a metaphor for God's authority—namely, that of a shepherd.

Psalm 23:1 is perhaps the best-known statement in Scripture that the Lord is a Shepherd, and it is worth noting that in the ancient Near Eastern context, "shepherd" was a widely used metaphor among the nations for their kings and even for their gods. So God's use of the metaphor certainly communicated to the ancient Israelites the idea of authority. In keeping with that, other texts such as Ezekiel 34:23 refer to the messianic King, who would have lordship over God's people, as a shepherd. Clearly, then, to speak of God as a Shepherd is to recognize His sovereignty.

The rest of Psalm 23 explains more fully what the Lord's work of shepherding looks like. Verses 1–3, for instance, stress that God the Shepherd-King makes His people lie down in green pastures and leads them beside still waters. Here we have the Lord providing physical rest, food, and drink to His people. Yet God also satisfies spiritual needs, leading us in paths of righteousness, directing us by His Word and Spirit into what is good and upright.

Verses 4–6 emphasize how the Lord protects His people. Shepherds used rods to drive away wild animals that attacked the sheep and staffs to keep them on safe paths. Similarly, the Lord defeats our enemies and guides us safely to where He wants us to go—ultimately, the new heavens and earth. He provides such security for His people that we can even dine at His table in the presence of our enemies. Even when our foes seem to have the upper hand, we are sheltered by Him. God never takes His goodness and mercy from His children, and He will establish them in His blessed presence forever.

These are wonderful benefits for only those who dwell in the sheepfold of the Lord, to those who rest in Him alone for salvation. John Calvin writes, "God is a shepherd only to those who, touched with a sense of their own weakness and poverty, feel their need of his protection, and who willingly abide in his sheepfold, and surrender themselves to be governed by him." **■**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Do we rest in the fact that God is our Shepherd? So often we trust ourselves to provide for our needs or to protect ourselves and our families. Yet while we have a responsibility to act wisely and to seek to feed ourselves through honest labor and to take practical measures to guard our loved ones, we ultimately rely on the Lord to meet our needs. Let us never forget that.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Jeremiah 31:10
Ezekiel 34
John 10:11–15
Revelation 7:17

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Joshua 14–15
Luke 4:31–44

GOD THE POTTER

ISAIAH 64:8 "Now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

We need God to be sovereign over regeneration because Scripture makes it clear that if regeneration were up to us, it would never happen. We do not and cannot of our own accord seek after that which is good, including the Lord and His promises (Rom. 3:11). Thanks be to God, He has chosen to renew the hearts of those of us who believe. We should thank the Lord daily for enabling us to believe in Christ.

FOR FURTHER STUDY


Job 10:9
Isaiah 29:15–16
Jeremiah 18:1–10
Romans 9:19–24

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Joshua 16–18
Luke 5:1–16

In using the metaphor of a shepherd for the Lord, David in Psalm 23 communicated that the Lord exercises His sovereign control for the good of His people. For example, by His rule and reign over all things, He satisfies our physical needs for rest, for food, and for drink (Ps. 23:1–2). As we noted in our last study, however, God as our Shepherd-King also meets our spiritual needs, guiding us in paths of righteousness (v. 3). Today's study will further consider how the Lord sovereignly provides for our spiritual good.

Scripture often refers to God as a "potter" and to human beings as "clay," and we find those metaphors used in Isaiah 64:8. Now, in some places the Word of God uses the "potter" and "clay" metaphors to stress God's absolute sovereignty over all aspects of a human being's eternal destiny (Rom. 9:21). Moreover, the metaphors themselves serve to highlight God's activity as Creator and our status as created things, for potters create vessels out of clay. The context of Isaiah 64:8, while not denying the aforementioned truths, seems to use the metaphors of potter and clay to stress the Lord's sovereignty in salvation. Only a few verses earlier, Isaiah describes the reality of Israel's sin through the imagery of a polluted garment and laments how the Lord had hidden His face of blessing from His people (vv. 5–7). Then, after speaking of God as the potter and His people as the clay, Isaiah goes on to unfold the blessings of salvation (see especially 65:1–66:14). This suggests that we should take Isaiah 64:8 as communicating God's full control of our salvation. John Calvin applies it in particular to regeneration, God's giving us a new heart to believe His promises and ultimately to believe in the Savior whom He has sent, the Lord Jesus Christ. Calvin writes: "Isaiah speaks not of the ordinary creation of men, but of regeneration, on account of which believers are especially called 'the work of God.' . . . Here they acknowledge a remarkable act of God's kindness, in having elected them to be his people, and adorned them with benefits so numerous and so great."

The Lord exercises sovereign control not only over some things but over all things. This includes personal salvation. Many Christians think that God directs only the big events or maybe even many smaller events as well, but that He certainly does not grant new spiritual life to individuals according to His will alone. The totality of Scripture tells us otherwise. God grants faith only to those whom He has chosen for salvation. 


GOD MOST HIGH

PSALM 57:2 "I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me."

Throughout church history, theologians have recognized that one of the most significant ways that God reveals Himself to us is by naming Himself. We have seen this in the revelation of His covenant name, *Yahweh*—"I AM"—which communicates to us His complete self-sufficiency, including His self-existence (Ex. 3:14). In today's passage, we find another name, *El elyon*, or "God Most High." This divine name is particularly important for conveying God's sovereignty.

"God Most High" first appears in Genesis 14:17–24, where we read about Melchizedek, who served Him as priest. Melchizedek's service to God Most High stands out in the pagan context of ancient Canaan, for the peoples there worshiped many different and lesser gods. Unlike most Canaanites, Melchizedek knew and served the one true God. Furthermore, the appearance of the name "God Most High" in contradistinction to the other gods of Canaan indicated to the Israelites that their God, the only true God, has an authority greater than any of His rivals, and thus only He is to be served. Of course, it is not that other gods have a true existence as deities, for we know that they are really demons (see 1 Cor. 10:20). Nevertheless, the name God Most High communicates that He is above all other so-called gods, who are only pretenders to the throne.

In Psalm 57:2, the name God Most High is mentioned in a context where the psalmist expresses his confidence that the Lord will fulfill His purposes for the author. Ultimately, this confidence has a sure ground only if God has sovereign authority over all things, only if everything is under His control. As Dr. R.C. Sproul often remarked, even one "maverick molecule" would call His entire plan into question. If one thing, no matter how small, is outside the scope of the Lord's governing hand, then that thing, even if seemingly insignificant, has the potential to unravel all of God's grand designs.

The name God Most High, therefore, means that God is seated apart from and above all creation such that He directs all things, by His providence, to the goals that He intends for them. This is good news indeed for the Lord's people, since God Most High will allow nothing to thwart His good plans for us. John Calvin comments, "God will never forsake the workmanship of his own hands,—that he will perfect the salvation of his people, and continue his divine guidance until he have brought them to the termination of their course." 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

If even one "maverick molecule" exists outside of God's control, that molecule could very well prevent the completion of His work of salvation in us. Because He controls all, the Lord can assuredly keep us in salvation and bring it to all its fullness in its glorification. Without His absolute sovereignty, we could not trust Him to keep us in His hand.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 32:8
Psalms 46:4; 95:3
Luke 1:35
Acts 16:17

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Joshua 19–20
Luke 5:17–39



TRUSTED TEACHING, EVERY DAY

Whether you're picking up the kids from school, commuting to work, or cleaning the house, why not redeem the time by listening to RefNet? Each day, our 24/7 internet radio app features a fresh playlist of trustworthy Bible teaching, Scripture readings, audiobooks, music, and much more. Tune out the noise and tune in to RefNet—anytime, every day.

Download the popular app on your Apple or Android devices today.



REF
NET

RefNet.fm/app

DIVINE OMNIPRESENCE

FRIDAY
28

PSALM 139:7–12 “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” (vv. 7–8).

Because God is simple, not made up of parts, all His attributes are ultimately one. His holiness is His love is His power and so on. Consequently, when we are making distinctions between the divine attributes, we can sometimes think of one attribute as an application of another attribute to a particular concept or reality. For example, that God is infinite means that He has no limitations. Thus, His sovereignty is really His infinity applied to authority—His sovereign control and right to rule have no external limits; His sovereignty is infinite, extending in its fullness over all that He has created.

Today we are thinking about divine omnipresence, which is God's infinity applied to location. Our Creator's omnipresence means that there is no place where He is not present. Today's passage describes the Lord's omnipresence in poetic terms. There is no place where the psalmist can flee from God; wherever he goes, the Lord is there. From the highest heaven to the depths of the earth (Sheol), God is present. Our Creator inhabits both east (“the wings of the morning”) and west (“the uttermost parts of the sea”). The darkness cannot hide the psalmist from the Lord, for our Maker is present even there (Ps. 139:7–12).

Importantly, when we say that the Lord is omnipresent, we do not mean that a portion of His essence is in France, a portion is in Nigeria, a portion is in the Andromeda Galaxy, and so on. Instead, wherever the Lord is present, He is present in His fullness. He cannot be divided up into parts, after all. The seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Francis Turretin writes in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, “Wherever [God] is, he is wholly; wholly in all things, yet wholly beyond all; included in no place and excluded from none; and not so much in a place (because finite cannot comprehend infinite) as in himself.”

God's omnipresence has significant consequences. First, it means that we cannot hide from God, so we should not even try. When we sin, the Lord has seen it, so we should be quick to repent. His omnipresence means that wherever we are, we can reach out to the Lord in prayer, confident that He will hear us because He is present. Because the Lord is everywhere, we can also be confident that He sees every good that we do and every harm inflicted on us, and He will not fail to bring His just recompense in His own time, whether now or on the day of final judgment. **TT**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Even after we have been converted, we sometimes act as if the Lord cannot see our sin, that somehow we can transgress His law and He will not see it. Remembering that the Lord really is everywhere and thus can see everything that we do can help us resist sin and say no to temptation.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Jeremiah 23:24
Hebrews 4:13

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Joshua 21–22
Luke 6:1–26

THE WEEKEND

Joshua 23–Judges 3
Luke 6:27–7:35



WEEKEND DEVOTIONAL
MARCH 29–30

PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

KEVIN D. GARDNER

A few decades ago, a particular genre of biblical literature was somewhat popular for a while. This genre posited that there are hidden meanings contained within the text of Scripture—usually the Hebrew text—that can be unlocked through selecting a starting point and noting the letters that appear at some particular interval, such as every five letters. Proponents of this method asserted that it reveals names and events that came centuries after the text was written.

I actually read a book in this genre once. The authors recounted their search for messages and claimed to have found some alarming things. They didn't know exactly what the messages meant, but they decided that the knowledge was so explosive and important that they had to publish their findings even before coming to any conclusions.

Yet the Bible doesn't work this way. It's not a code to be cracked or a collection of hidden messages. It's actually quite plain; anyone can understand the basic message of Scripture. But true, deep understanding, in the sense of accepting and loving that message, is personal, not impersonal like a code. It is personal in that it comes through the person of the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 1:15–22, Paul tells his readers of his prayer for them. He prays

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what

are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might. (vv. 17–19)

Paul prays that the Ephesians would have knowledge, and that God would grant them that knowledge. The knowledge that Paul prays for comes from God and is granted by God. God has already revealed saving knowledge of Himself to the Ephesians, and now Paul prays that He would see fit to continue to give them knowledge and wisdom to sustain them in the Christian life.

It is “the Spirit of wisdom” who comes and grants us wisdom and knowledge. The Spirit is the One who works faith in us and applies the salvation accomplished by Christ, and He also is the One who gives us understanding of the revelation of who God is and what He has done for us.

God does not reveal everything about Himself. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.” God doesn't reveal everything, but He has given His people saving knowledge of Himself, and by His Spirit, He continues to teach His people. So let us pray for ourselves and each other that the Spirit will lead us ever deeper into the knowledge of who He is. **T**

REV. KEVIN D. GARDNER is associate editor of *Tabletalk* magazine, resident adjunct professor at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla., and a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America.

THE LORD IS THERE

EZEKIEL 48:35 “The name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There.”

When we consider the attribute of divine infinity in light of place or location, we are thinking of God's attribute of omnipresence. Our Creator is present everywhere in creation in all His fullness even if we do not notice it or remember it. After all, there is no place that we can flee from the Spirit and escape God's presence (Ps. 139:7–12).

As we consider the divine attribute of omnipresence, we also need to think about passages that speak of His presence in a special or unique way. For example, Exodus 29:45 features God's pledge that the Lord will “dwell among the people of Israel” in the promised land. If our Creator is present everywhere, what can it mean that He would dwell with them in the land He was giving them? Also, in today's passage, Ezekiel says that the name of the city of Jerusalem in the new creation will be “The LORD Is There” (Ezek. 48:35). If the Lord is omnipresent, how can a specific place bear such a name?

To answer these questions, we need to remember the reality of divine immanence and in particular the idea of God's special, blessed presence. The truth of divine immanence means that although God is transcendent, distinct from creation and ruling over all, He is also close at hand in every place. This is a necessary consequence of divine omnipresence, of course, and Jeremiah 23:23–24 connects the two ideas of immanence and omnipresence. God always remains distinct from creation, but He is also closer to every aspect of creation than we can possibly imagine.

God's special, blessed presence is an aspect of His omnipresence and immanence. Our Lord is not more present in one place than in another if the fullness of His essence is everywhere present, but He can make His presence known more clearly in one place than in another. He can be present everywhere and yet not bring blessing or the fullness of blessing in every place or in the same way. Thus, Scripture explains that during the old covenant, God was present in a special way in the tabernacle and then in the temple (Ex. 40:34–38). In the incarnation, the Lord came among us in the most direct way possible by taking on our very flesh (John 1:1–14). Now, by His Holy Spirit, God dwells in His church and in individual believers (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16). Matthew Henry comments, “It is true of every good Christian; he dwells in God, and God in him; whatever soul has in it a living principle of grace, it may be truly said, The Lord is There.” **T**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

We can be grateful for the special presence of God to bless His creation and particularly His people. If the Lord were to reveal to us the fullness of Himself at once, we could not bear it, but in filling us with His Holy Spirit, He grants us His presence and works in us to make us more like Jesus Christ. Without the presence of His Spirit, we could not fulfill God's blessed purposes for us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 Kings 6:11–13
Haggai 2:1–9
Galatians 2:20
1 John 2:27

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Judges 4–5
Luke 7:36–50

THOUSANDS OF FREE VIDEOS TO STREAM AND SHARE



Ligonier's YouTube channel lets you stream trusted teaching from Dr. R.C. Sproul and other gifted theologians. With new videos added each week, you can watch edifying teaching on a wide variety of topics related to the Bible, the Christian life, church history, and more. **Subscribe for free and start streaming today.**



[YouTube.com/LigonierMinistries](https://www.youtube.com/LigonierMinistries)



The Grace That Will Be Brought to Us

KENNETH MBUGUA

WHAT HAS KEPT YOU GOING lately when you feel like you are running on empty? What hope have you been walking in when things seem dark or futile? What have you been most looking forward to? Has it been hope in a long weekend? Hope in some hours of silence at the end of the day, some entertainment, a long vacation, a job promotion, a presidential candidate, a spouse, a child, a grandchild? Perhaps it has been the day of retirement or a different day on the calendar.

None of these things are bad in and of themselves, but all of them are insufficient sources for the grace we need to live faithfully in a world plagued with temptations to sin and suffering. The Apostle Peter wants our hearts and eyes resolutely fixed on the appearance of Christ: “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). He wants us to stake our lives on the return of Jesus. At the most essential level, that is the mindset with which Peter wants us stepping into each day. Namely, “If Jesus does not return, my actions today

will be pointless, my suffering will be meaningless, my holiness nonsense; but thanks be to God, as sure as Jesus did rise from the grave, He will return and I will enter into His glory.”

Let us take a look at Peter’s exhortation piece by piece for our own instruction, so that we, too, might set our eyes on that grace that will soon be brought to us.

First, he says, “Set your hope . . .” This phrase suggests that we have an active role to play. We are to *set* our hope in that grace that is to come. We are the ones doing the setting. The responsibility belongs to us. We will not accidentally attain this. This is an invitation to obedient deliberateness.

Remember that the subordinate instructions—“preparing [our] minds for action” and “being sober-minded”—are aimed at getting us to “set [our] hope” on the grace here spoken of. Christianity is not a mindless faith. Thinking does not expose fewer reasons to trust; it reveals more reasons to obediently trust.

Peter adds the adverb “fully” or in other translations, “completely,” modifying how we are to set our hope in the grace that is to be brought to us. Peter is warning against the danger of hedging, plac-

ing some of our eggs in a separate basket, just in case plan A falls through. Entrust it all to God; let Him have sway over all that concerns you. Choose to make eternal grace your treasure, your boast, your reward, your security, your life. We must choose to say with the psalmist:

*Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me
to glory.*

*Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing
on earth
that I desire
besides you.*

*My flesh and my
heart may fail,
but God is the
strength of my
heart and my
portion forever. (Ps. 73:23–
26)*

It greatly encourages me that the future glory is here called “the grace that will be brought to you” (1 Peter 1:13). Our failures here on earth can cause us to doubt that we have reason to hope, let alone cause to deliberately set our hope on the glory that is to come.

But here we are encouraged that the rest that God is bringing to us is ours on the basis of grace. If we were to earn it, we would only with great uncertainty, if at all, set our hope on glory. But because that rest is all of grace, weak sinners can confidently set all their hope on it.

Finally, see here that everything will come to fruition on the day that Jesus returns. The posture of all saints is a posture of waiting. That day is the believer’s hope. As Paul tells the Colossians, “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4), and the Philippians:

*But our citizenship is in heaven, and
from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus
Christ, who will transform our lowly
body to be like his glorious body, by the
power that enables him even to subject
all things to himself.
(Phil. 3:20–21)*

Later in this letter, the Apostle Peter wraps up with these encouraging words:

*And after you have
suffered a little while,
the God of all grace,
who has called you
to his eternal glory
in Christ, will himself
restore, confirm,
strengthen, and establish
you. To him be the
dominion forever and
ever. Amen. (1 Peter
5:10–11)*

Let us examine our hope to see whether it is properly placed in the God of all grace. May we set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. ■

REV. KENNETH MBUGUA is senior pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Nairobi, Kenya, and is the managing director of Ekklesia Africa, which promotes biblical resources for building healthy churches.



FOR THE CHURCH

Connecting People in the Church

SCOTTY ANDERSON

PROTESTANTS RIGHTLY ORIENT themselves toward the church pulpit. That's not only an architectural feature (the central, raised pulpit) but a personal disposition as well. "Good" Protestants understand the need to embrace the pulpit. "How are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom. 10:14). The pulpit is the mainstay of the spiritual diet of believers. Visitors do well in attempting to discern a pastor's character and competence before committing to a church. As essential as preaching is, however, the individual's relationship to the pastor is ultimately not going to be the most telling factor of that member's eventual spiritual health. That deserves some explanation.

In my two decades of ministry at the same medium-sized church, it's been hard to miss certain patterns in how people connect within the body. There are those who have an other-member orientation and, conversely, those who maintain a pastor orientation. On the whole, one seems to be less healthy than the other. Yes, a pastor should consider another vocation if he thinks associating with him produces spiritual decline. But it took only a few years of my pride being chastened before I realized that those members with whom

the pastors spent the most time tended to be the least spiritually healthy and happy among church members.

Again, to clarify, members should have high expectations for their pastor. They should expect competence in explaining the Word, adeptness in making applications, and a degree of relatability. Members should likewise experience the pastor's shepherding efforts and have confidence that he's available for occasional personal counsel. But individual members don't do well to seek the pastor's audience after every sermon. They shouldn't expect him to engage in personal correspondence on a regular basis. They are unwise to want to be frequently found in his study. That kind of relational narrowness is disproportional to the church body and speaks to an unhealthy focus. Remember, the pastor is not the True Vine but a mere branch (John 15:1). He is not the Head but a member of the body with a particular function (1 Cor. 11:3; 12:27–30). It's one thing to expect the pastor to be a model of godliness (1 Cor. 11:1); it's quite another to see him either as a conduit to God (2 Cor. 5:18) or as an associate to elevate your personal status (1 Cor. 11:2).

Those more orientated to other church members generally function more fruitfully. First, it's apparent that they rightfully see

the church as a family (Mark 3:31–35; John 19:26–27). Family is an enduring relationship. Fellow members get prioritized and members also learn to be comfortable with receiving a reasonable amount of attention. Second, those who connect more "laterally" are also those taking an interest in others (1 Cor. 10:24). Regular member relationships are more reciprocal. The more natural mutuality of ministering and receiving tends toward selflessness, whereas pastor-oriented people often over-emphasize their own personal needs or importance. Third, being more member-oriented makes much more sense of the Apostles' unavoidable emphasis on "one

another." By my count, the New Testament presents almost sixty different "one another" commands, three-quarters of which are obligations to act positively so as to live with or carry out a duty toward others in the church. That refrain presumes life lived closely together. Fourth, of those positive "one another" commands, a full one-third are commands to "love one another" (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Peter 4:8–10; 1 John 4:7, 11–12). Any reasonable student of the New Testament can see that the Christian life demands living closely with others and serving sacrificially. Lord's Day corporate worship requires a kind of others-orientation (1 Corinthians 14 makes clear what happens when self is elevated), but that's a mere fraction of the expected community life for believers. The level of engagement indicated by the New Testament simply can't be satisfied by slipping in during the prelude and racing to the parking lot after the benediction, never mind worshipping at home. Fifth, in addition to the "one another" statements, there are those hospitality commands that play so vital a role in the advance of the gospel:

Matthew responded to his calling by inviting his friends to come feast and meet Jesus (Matt. 9:9–13). Christ sent the Twelve and the seventy to minister in homes (Matt. 10:5–15; Luke 10:1–12). In the intimacy of a house, Jesus explained His parable to the disciples (Matt. 13:36). The disciples of the early church were known for breaking bread in one another's homes (Acts 2:46), and the Apostles "did not cease" to preach and teach "from house to house" (5:42; see also 12:12; 16:15, 32; 28:30–31). Closeness to others in the church and welcoming strangers are merely keeping in step with Scripture.

Simply put, fellowship and intimate connections are vital means of grace. Our Reformed forefathers knew this and codified it by saying, "Being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces" (Westminster Confession of Faith 26.1; see also Belgic Confession 28, Heidelberg Catechism 55, and Second London Baptist Confession 27.1). So ask yourself: Am I a devotee of a preacher, or am I a member in the body? Is my connection to the church for personal therapy, or do I belong to a covenant community? Finally, consider whether you are hearing the exhortation (perhaps through your preacher) to

grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:15–16) **T**

REV. SCOTTY ANDERSON is associate pastor for family ministry at Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church in Simpsonville, S.C.



The Witness of Listening in Love

JOHN C. KWASNY

I HEAR IT FROM WIVES as well as husbands. I hear it from teens and children. I even hear it in church committee meetings. “I don’t feel heard” is a regular refrain not only in more intimate settings but also in the culture at large. What’s going on here? The cynic inside me wants to write off every “you’re not listening to me” proclamation by saying, “You are being heard; you’re just frustrated that the listener is not agreeing with you or doing things your way.” While that may be true in some cases, the frequent assertions of not being heard may actually reveal an epidemic of defective listening.

As a longtime biblical counselor, it’s my job to listen. I was trained in the skill of listening to the stories, to the problems, to the hearts of those before me. But in my own strength and personality, I am not a very good listener. I would rather talk than listen. As somewhat of an introvert, I often muse in my own brain instead of listening. Listening to people every day wears me out. And sadly, that even applies when I’m listening to those closest to me.

The truth is that good listening is not a natural skill. As self-centered creatures, we don’t come out of the womb eager to listen to what others have to say. We most often

want to talk more than to listen (the implication of James 1:19–20). Even when we are quiet and act like we are listening, we can get stuck on our own thoughts. This has probably always been the human condition, but it is certainly getting worse. Research studies demonstrate that attention spans are getting shorter with each passing generation. Distractions are becoming greater, not fewer. And the world of social media hasn’t done us any favors when it comes to listening to one another either.

Yet we worship and serve a God who loves to listen to His people. “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him” (John 9:31). He always listens perfectly in love, exactly when we need to be heard. “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear” (Isa. 65:24). This gracious reality must be the foundation for our listening to other people. God loves, so we must love. God in Christ forgives, so we must forgive. God listens to us, so we must listen to others. The work of God in our hearts is always the ground for the good work that He has called us to do. And listening to others, especially non-Christians, is a very good and necessary work in our world today. So

how does listening in love to unbelievers provide a witness of Christ to the world?

First, listening in love says, “You are known.” How can you get to know another person without listening—and listening extensively? Listening to people’s stories gives us a three-dimensional view of them, providing us with knowledge and understanding that we can’t get any other way. When we seek to know unbelievers, we are pointing them to a God who already knew them before they came out of their mothers’ wombs. Even better, when they come to faith in Christ, they will enter the fullness of being known as adopted children of God. As they continue to be known by God each day of their lives, they will always enjoy His listening ear. Christians who

listen are sending the message that God wants to know them as their heavenly Father. Listening to another person points to a God who is there, a God who knows His sheep and hears the cries of their souls.

Second, listening in love says, “You are welcome.” People increasingly feel alone, isolated, and on the outside. The world tends to divide rather than unify, exclude instead of include. Technology that promises to keep people connected continues to fail us. Listening to people in real time and real space demonstrates a desire to welcome them into the community of Christ, into a real, growing relationship with other believers. This is a witness to our gloriously personal God, who condescends to know and welcome us. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, always present by His Spirit. When Christians fail to listen, we portray an unwelcoming church and an inaccessible Savior. Listening in love displays a

heart that is open wide to all whom Christ sends us out to receive.

Third, listening in love says, “You are redeemable.” Listening that is driven by the compassion of Christ is wedded to a desire to see people change. The world communicates that you can’t change, that you are a helpless victim of (fill in the blank). It gives no hope for true redemption, offering only weak substitutes. Christians

listen to others in order to help, to show that there is a way out of habitual sin, anxiety, depression, disordered relationships, and a host of other life struggles. As we compassionately listen, we give witness to a God who hears our prayers and sends His Spirit as our great Counselor (John 14:15–26). The God who lis-

tens gives wisdom to all who ask of Him (James 1:5–6). We point to a Savior who personally lived with and listened to sinful, weak, and hurting people, bringing healing, change, and redemption. To refuse to listen to others in their struggles is to miss opportunities to offer hope in Christ, the Savior of our souls.

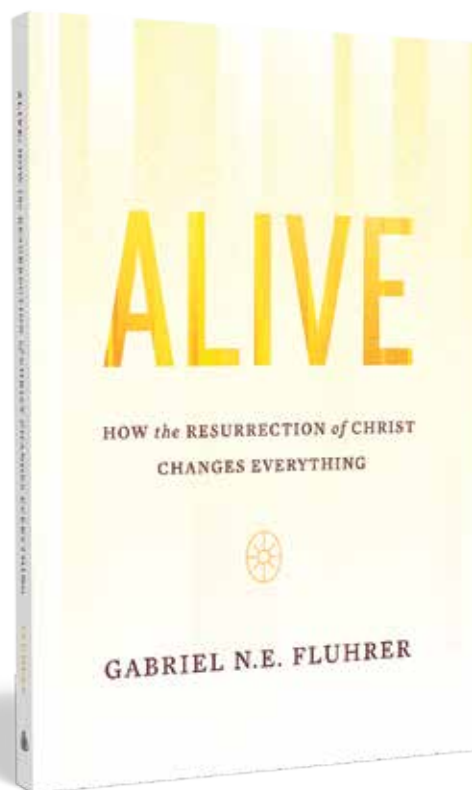
If you don’t regularly remember how much God listens to your daily heart cries, then you will be tempted to tune out the people He brings into your orbit. Christians are called to be different from our nonlistening world. We are to reflect to one another and our world the listening ear of a loving God. ■

LISTENING THAT IS DRIVEN BY THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST IS WEDDED TO A DESIRE TO SEE PEOPLE CHANGE.

DR. JOHN C. KWASNY is the executive ministry director at Pear Orchard Presbyterian Church in Ridgeland, Miss., director of One Story Ministries, and a visiting professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss. He is author of several books, including *Suffering in 3-D*.

SPRING GIFT COLLECTION

SAVE ON SELECT RESOURCES



ALIVE: HOW THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST CHANGES EVERYTHING by Gabe Fluhrer

Is the resurrection of Jesus simply an ancient hoax invented by the church? Many people hold that view today. Yet, those who reject the empty tomb fail to make sense of the unavoidable evidence from both Scripture and history. In this book, Dr. Gabe Fluhrer makes a compelling case for Christ's victory over the grave.



THE GREAT RESCUE

Are you saved? That's the ultimate question. In this new booklet introducing the gospel, Dr. R.C. Sproul explains how God has provided the rescue we need through the atoning sacrifice of His Son.

ALIVE

In this teaching series, Dr. Fluhrer explains that Jesus' resurrection is not only a historical fact, but it presents the answer to our deepest questions and provides every Christian with undying hope.



THE DONKEY WHO CARRIED A KING

In this beloved children's book, Dr. Sproul vividly brings to life the biblical teaching that Jesus was the Suffering Servant who carried the sins of His people to the cross.

GOOD NEWS: THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

In this book, Dr. John MacArthur helps us deepen our love and awe for the Savior by examining the Bible's revelation of Christ, encouraging Christians with the vast implications of all that Jesus has done for them.

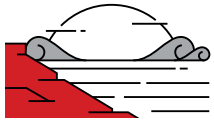


THE TRUTH OF THE CROSS

Until we understand what Jesus accomplished on the cross, we will not understand the Christian faith. In this book, Dr. Sproul surveys the Bible's teaching about the cross of Christ and the grace of God in redeeming His people.



Ligonier.org/store



Loci of Systematic Theology

THE EDITORS

DR. R.C. SPROUL WELL SAID that “everyone is a theologian.” He meant that every person has some thoughts about what is ultimate, about God. This is true even if a person’s thought is only that God does not exist. Not everyone is a professional theologian, of course, but since the theologian’s task is to think about God, once we start thinking about Him, we are engaging in the work of theology.

In church history, there have been several approaches to theology. For instance, practical theology focuses on the theology of ministry, at its best considering how we can preach, pray, and run the church in a God-centered way. Biblical theology traces the progress of divine revelation, looking at how the Lord gives various themes, institutions, and so on and then builds and expands on these things over time until they reach their fulfillment. An example here is the temple, which is given as the garden of Eden and is then lost but restored via the temple in Jerusalem, which is then fulfilled in Christ and His church.

When we hear the word *theology*, however, we are apt to think of systematic theology. Famously known as the “queen of the sciences,” systematic theology endeavors

to present the comprehensive teaching of Scripture in an orderly, systematic way. It asks questions such as: What does the entire Bible tell us about the character of God? According to Scripture, what is the order in which the Lord applies salvation to His people? What does God’s Word say about what happens in the sacraments?

The term *theology* comes from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (word). In essence, then, theology is a word about God, and since God is infinite, there are actually many words to say about God and what He has done. Because of that, systematic theology is typically divided into a number of *loci*, or topics, that address specific facets of the person and work of the Lord as well as the nature and destiny of human beings made in His image. Not every systematic theologian or systematic theology textbook organizes the presentation of doctrine in exactly the same way, and sometimes different *loci* are grouped together under a larger category. Nevertheless, because these various *loci* of theology are frequently mentioned by Christian pastors and teachers, as well as in publications such as *Tabletalk*, it is helpful to have a guide to these *loci* and what each is concerned with.

THEOLOGICAL PROLEGOMENA

The term *prolegomena* means “introduction” or “prefatory words,” so it should be no surprise that theological prolegomena deals with the introductory matters of theology. Under this heading, systematic theologians talk about things such as the

book of nature and the book of Scripture. While bibliology does consider the book of nature, or how God has revealed Himself in creation, its special focus is on the book of Scripture. It addresses issues such as the inspiration, authority, inerrancy, sufficiency, infallibility, and canon of Scripture.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IS TYPICALLY

DIVIDED INTO A NUMBER OF *LOCI*, OR

TOPICS, THAT ADDRESS SPECIFIC FACETS

OF THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE LORD

AS WELL AS THE NATURE AND DESTINY

OF HUMAN BEINGS MADE IN HIS IMAGE.

nature and method of systematic theology, the sources of systematic theology and the weight that we should give each of them, and sometimes even the history of theology. Often, theological prolegomena also includes the topic of bibliology.

BIBLIOLOGY

The word *bibliology* comes from the Greek terms *biblion*, which means “book,” and *logos*. Thus, bibliology looks at the book that God has given us—namely, His revelation. In fact, God has given us two books, the

THEOLOGY PROPER

As noted, theology at its core is about God, and so theology proper considers God Himself. Under theology proper, we study the nature of God, the names of God, the attributes of God, the works of God in creation and providence, and more. A special focus under theology proper is the doctrine of the Trinity, explaining that God is one in essence and three in person: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Sometimes theologians will consider the *loci* of angelology and demonology under theology proper as well.

**ANGELOLOGY AND DEMONOLOGY**

You will probably not be surprised to learn that angelology and demonology deal with the nature and works of angels and demons. These *loci* get their names from the Greek words for “angel” (*angelos*) and “demon” (*daimonion*).

ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthrōpos is the Greek word for “man” or “human being,” so anthropology concerns the doctrine of man. Theology is focused on God, but it also takes an interest in humanity because we are made in the image of God. When theologians discuss anthropology, they look at biblical teachings such as what it means to bear God’s image, human nature as a body-soul duality, the vocations of men and women, true masculinity and femininity, and other topics. Frequently, hamartiology is considered under anthropology.

HAMARTIOLOGY

In hamartiology, we deal with the doctrine of sin. The name for this topic comes from the Greek word for “sin,” *hamartia*, and hamartiology looks at man as a sinner and the impact of sin on human nature. Therefore, hamartiology considers the fall of humanity, the nature and extent of sin, the impact of sin on human beings and the rest of creation, what sin and sinners deserve at the hands of our perfectly righteous God, and so on.

CHRISTOLOGY

The concern of Christology—the person and work of Christ—is also easy to identify even if one has never learned any Greek. The title of this heading comes from the Greek word for “Christ”—that is, *christos*. There is much to study under Christology, including the identity of

Christ, who is the one divine person of the Son of God in whom are perfectly united the divine nature and a human nature without confusion, division, change, or separation. In dealing with the person of Christ, Christology also usually answers various heresies related to the person of the Savior.

In addition to the personhood of Jesus, Christology studies the work of Christ. Here we examine the threefold office of Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King. In considering this threefold office, we also look at the incarnation of Christ; the active and passive obedience of Christ; the nature of the atonement and what it accomplished; and the exaltation of Christ in His resurrection, ascension, session (being seated at God’s right hand), and return to judge the living and the dead.

PNEUMATOLOGY

The Greek word for “spirit,” “air,” and “breath” is *pneuma*; therefore, pneumatology examines what the Bible says about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Here we study the deity of the Spirit, the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, the gifts of the Spirit, the presence and work of the Spirit before and after the coming of Christ, and other important subjects. Pneumatology can be studied on its own, but sometimes theologians combine it with the study of soteriology.

SOTERIOLOGY

In soteriology, we seek to understand what God has done for us in the great work of redemption. The name of this *locus* comes from the Greek word for “salvation,” *soteria*, and the study of our salvation extends from eternity past and God’s covenant of redemption and election of His people to the completion of their salvation in their

glorification. So soteriology also examines regeneration, the outer and inner calls of the gospel, repentance, the nature of saving faith, justification, adoption, and sanctification. A study of the various covenants that God has made with human beings can also be studied here, but covenant theology can also be considered under another *locus* such as anthropology.

marks of the church: the sound preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the proper exercise of church discipline.

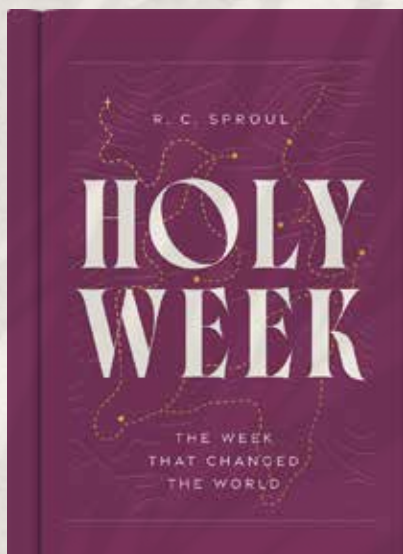
ESCHATOLOGY

Finally and fittingly so, since this *locus* deals with the last things, we have eschatology. The name of this category comes from the

SOTERIOLOGY, THE STUDY OF OUR**SALVATION, EXTENDS FROM ETERNITY****PAST AND GOD’S COVENANT OF****REDEMPTION AND ELECTION OF HIS****PEOPLE TO THE COMPLETION OF THEIR****SALVATION IN THEIR GLORIFICATION.****ECCLESIOLOGY**

Many Christians know that the Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which means that ecclesiology is the heading under which we study the doctrine of the church. Ecclesiology focuses on the church’s unity, holiness, Apostolicity, and catholicity. It also considers how Jesus has organized His church, looking at the church’s offices and structures. While dealing with the nature of the church, ecclesiology also looks at the

Greek word for “last” or “ultimate,” which is *eschatos*. Eschatology considers personal eschatology—what happens to individuals at the end, such as the nature of life after death, the intermediate state (the dwelling place and condition of people who die before Christ returns), and the resurrection of the body. Eschatology also considers topics such as the millennial reign of Christ, the antichrist, the sequence of events in the end times, and more. **T**



NEW

THE GREATEST WEEK IN HISTORY

We've all experienced life-changing moments. Our calendars are marked with anniversaries of enduring significance. But Holy Week is a celebration of the most important week in history, the week that changed the world. It recalls Jesus' final days in Jerusalem when the Son of God accomplished His mission to bring forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who trust in Him. Collecting several of Dr. R.C. Sproul's reflections on the climactic week in Jesus' redemptive ministry, *Holy Week* is a book for anyone seeking to understand the events at the heart of Christianity. **Order your copy today and cultivate deeper faith in and devotion to the Savior.**



Ligonier.org/books