

Heresies & Errors Handouts

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Heresies & Errors Handouts – Week 1

What are *Infra-lapsarianism*, *Sub-lapsarianism*, and *Supra-lapsarianism*?

Answer: These three theological terms, discussed among Calvinist thinkers, deal with God's predestination of certain individuals to be saved. The term *lapsarian* is related to the English word *lapse*; mankind's fall into sin was a "lapse" in that it was a "slip" or a "falling" from their original state of innocence.

The distinction between them is *sequence*—the order in which God determined things to happen. In what order did God create humanity, allow the fall, elect some to salvation, and provide salvation for humanity?

Ultimately, these are issues that we are incapable of fully grasping. It does not truly matter what order God decreed what to occur. What truly matters is that God created humanity, humanity sinned, and God has provided salvation through Jesus Christ.

INFRA-LAPSARIANISM ("after the lapse") puts God's decrees in the following order:

- (1) God decreed the creation of mankind,
- (2) God decreed to allow mankind to fall into sin through self-determination,
- (3) God decreed to save some of the fallen,
- (4) God decreed to provide Jesus Christ as the Redeemer.

Infra-lapsarianism focuses on God allowing the fall and providing salvation. This is by far the majority Reformed (or Calvinistic) view.

SUB-LAPSARIANISM ("under the lapse") is very similar to infralapsarianism, putting God's decrees in the following order:

- (1) God decreed to create human beings,
- (2) God decreed to permit the fall,
- (3) God decreed to provide salvation sufficient to all,
- (4) God decreed to choose some to receive this salvation.

The only difference between infra-lapsarianism and sub-lapsarianism is whether God *first* decreed to provide salvation through Jesus Christ and *then* chose some to be saved, or vice-versa.

SUPRA-LAPSARIANISM / ANTE-LAPSARIANISM ("before the lapse") puts God's decrees in the following order:

- (1) God decreed the election of some and the eternal condemnation of others,
- (2) God decreed to create those elected and eternally condemned,
- (3) God decreed to permit the fall,
- (4) God decreed to provide salvation for the elect through Jesus Christ.

Supra-lapsarianism focuses on God ordaining the fall, creating certain people for the sole purpose of being condemned, and then providing salvation for only those whom He had elected.

GotQuestions finds infra-lapsarianism to be the most biblical position. We don't believe the Bible portrays God as decreeing the fall and creating people for the sole purpose of eternal condemnation. Ultimately, though, the answers to the lapsarian issue are best left up to God. **Instead of worrying or arguing over when God decreed what, our concern should be on proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to all who need to hear it.**

<https://www.gotquestions.org/lapsarianism.html>

Partial Gospels

The Gospel of Jesus Christ — the *good news* — is that salvation the result of God's grace, not man's works (Eph 2:8-9). All Christians agree to that premise, or they are not Christians. Grace is a Christian distinctive. But the source, means, and effect of that grace is hotly disputed between Wesleyan Arminians and Reformed Calvinists. What makes the dispute so confusing is that Wesleyan Arminians are not true Arminians, nor Pelagians. If they were, we'd call them heretics and banish them from our pulpits. Instead, they're hybrid Calvinists: 2, 3, or 4-point Calvinists. And so the question becomes how Calvinistic you have to be to gain saving faith — or how Arminian you can be and still have saving faith. Few are willing to put it in those terms; those who do are denounced or shunned.

One of the first in the Church to comprehensively challenge the idea that Jesus was an atoning sacrifice for believers was **PELAGIUS**. In the 5th century, an argument broke out between him and Augustine over the part we play in justification, and the benefit of Christ's death. The Pelagians held that human beings are born in a state of innocence, i.e., there is no such thing as a sinful nature or original sin. As a result, they held that a state of sinless perfection was achievable in this life. It followed that, since we are not true sinners, we do not need a true Savior — and so, Christ did not die as a perfect substitute in our place, but merely set a good moral example that we should follow. Pelagius and his teachings were declared heretical.

In the 6th century, the Church codified its objections to the teachings of Pelagius at the COUNCIL OF ORANGE in 529 AD. The council also dealt with the **SEMI-PELAGIAN** doctrine that the human race, though fallen and possessed of a sinful nature, is still "good" enough to be able to lay hold of the grace of God through an act of unredeemed human will.

ARMINIANS are semi-Pelagians. They teach election based on foreseen faith, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and the possibility of a lapse from grace. In 1618, the Synod of Dordt rejected these views and set forth the Reformed doctrine on these points, namely: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited (or particular) atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of saints — which comprise the acronym TULIP.

AMYRALDISM is a hybrid between Calvinism and Pelagianism. It's also known as hypothetical universalism, post-redemptionism, ante-applicationism, and 4-point Calvinism. Amyraldism is nearly identical to Calvinism, but with a modified view of the extent of Christ's atonement — i.e., who he died for. The system derives its name from Moise Amyraut (Latin: Amyraldus) (1596-1664), who taught UNIVERSAL GRACE and UNLIMITED ATONEMENT. Amyraut divided God's will into two basic categories: a *general* will and an *effectual* will. The extent of God's *general* will, with reference to Christ's atonement, is for every single individual to be saved (universal provision; prospective potential); but the extent of God's *effectual* will is for only the elect to actually be saved (particular application; retrospective reality). Amyraut, who desired greater unity among Protestants, believed his view was more faithful to Scripture and Calvin himself.

Amyraldism maintains that the extent of Christ's atonement is *both* universal and limited. Its provision or design is universal or infinite because it is sufficient for all the sins of the world (Isa 53:6; John 1:29; 6:51; 2 Cor 5:14, 19; 1 Tim 2:6; Heb 2:9; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 2:2; 4:14). Its application is limited or finite because, though it is available to all men (John 3:16; 7:37; Tit 2:11; Rev 22:17), it is only effectual for the elect (Rom 8:32-34; 2 Cor 5:14; 1 Tim 4:10; cf. John 6:37-39; 10:11, 15; 17:9, 20; Acts 20:28; Rom 5:8-10; Eph 5:25). God does not desire the death of the wicked; rather He desires the salvation of all men (Eze 18:23, 32; 33:11; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). Though Amyraut held to Infra-lapsarianism, the Sub-lapsarian view of God's decrees is most consistent with Amyraldism. Amyraldians acknowledge that their system is a logically inconsistent form of Calvinism, but they maintain it because they are convinced that the Bible teaches a universalistic design behind Christ's cross work.

Point and Counter-point

Five Points of Arminianism

(1) Free Will or Human Ability -

Although human nature was seriously affected by the Fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does so in such a manner as not to interfere with man's freedom. *Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it.* Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe. *Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.*

(2) Conditional Election -

God's choice of certain individuals to salvation before the foundation of the world was based on His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned on what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected to salvation. Thus the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

(3) Universal Redemption or General Atonement -

Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe in Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it. *He only made man potentially salvable, not finally saved;*

(4) The Holy Spirit can be effectually resisted -

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation. He does all He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But because man's will is free, he can resist the call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes. Thus man's free will limits the Spirit's application of Christ's saving work. The Spirit only draws those to Christ who let him. God's grace therefore can be resisted and thwarted by man.

(5) Falling from Grace -

Because man's will is free to accept salvation, it is equally free to reject it and therefore man may lose his salvation through sin, loss of faith, etc. *Not all Arminians are agreed on this point and many accept that once regenerated, a sinner is eternally secure in Christ.*

The Five Points of Calvinism

(1) Total Inability or Total Depravity -

Because of the Fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. *The sinner is dead, blind and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt.* His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore he will not -- indeed he cannot --- choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ --- it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation --- *it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God.*

(2) Unconditional Election -

God's choice of certain individuals to salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

(3) Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement -

Christ' redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation. *4-point Calvinists usually reject this point.*

(4) The Efficacious Call of the Spirit or Irresistible Grace -

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation. The external call can be resisted but the inward call is irresistible and inevitable. The internal call is made only to the elect. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace is therefore invincible; it never fails to save those to whom it is extended.

(5) Perseverance of the Saints -

All who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God. Because the Spirit comforts and guides them, intercedes for them in prayer, He is the seal and guarantor of their inheritance: they will persevere.

Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel

IX. Heresy

We affirm that heresy is a denial of or departure from a doctrine that is essential to the Christian faith. We further affirm that heresy often involves the replacement of key, essential truths with variant concepts, or the elevation of non-essentials to the status of essentials. To embrace heresy is to depart from the faith once delivered to the saints and thus to be on a path toward spiritual destruction. We affirm that the accusation of heresy should be reserved for those departures from Christian truth that destroy the weight-bearing doctrines of the redemptive core of Scripture. We affirm that accusations of heresy should be accompanied with clear evidence of such destructive beliefs.

We deny that the charge of heresy can be legitimately brought against every failure to achieve perfect conformity to all that is implied in sincere faith in the gospel.

Scriptures:

Joh 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Act 4:12: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Gal 1:6-9: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

1 Joh 4:1-3, 10, 14, 15: Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world...

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins... ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *as* Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

1 Joh 5:1: Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

1 Joh 5:6-12: ⁶ This is He who came by water and blood-- Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷ For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. ⁹ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. ¹⁰ He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Seven Major Categories of Error

False Doctrine

- 1. REJECTING GOD’S TRUTH** (a false *authority* – see 5 below)
 - 1) Ignoring it
 - 2) Adding to it
 - 3) Taking away from it
 - 4) Falsely or incorrectly interpreting it
- 2. DIVIDING Christ** (a false *identity*) – two separate natures instead of a dual nature
 - 1) He is only human
 - 2) He is only God
 - 3) He is alternately God and man
- 3. DIVIDING THE GODHEAD** (a false *trinity*)
 - 1) The Godhead is three separate gods
 - 2) The Godhead has three modes of being, not three persons
 - 3) The Godhead does not include the Son (the Son is only a man)
 - 4) The Godhead does not include the Spirit (the Spirit is a *force*, not a *person*)
- 4. DUALISM** (a false *belief*) –
 - 1) two equal & opposing *gods*: one of good & one of evil
 - 2) two alternative *existences*: one of spirit (good) & one of flesh (evil)

False Practice

- 5a. LEGALISM** (a false *restraint*) – bound by the law (resulting in guilt & shame)
- 5b. ANTINOMIANISM** (a false *liberty*) – abandoning the law (resulting in guilt & shame)
- 6. ESCAPISM** (a false *response*) –rejecting the struggle of living godly in a sinful world
 - 1) put off the *flesh* to escape into the isolation of the *spirit* (mysticism)
 - 2) put off the *world* to escape into the isolation of the *body* (monasticism)
- 7. SUBSERVIENCE** (a false *obedience*) – choosing to be led by men instead of God.
 - 1) The Bible means only what you’re told it means (men claim to be the authority)
 - 2) You are accountable to men, in place of God (you grant men the authority)

Witnessing Tips

*Confronting the Challenge of Ethical Relativism*¹ by Douglas Groothuis

An indispensable pillar of Christian truth is the proposition that God is the lawgiver and moral governor of the universe. God is a personal and moral being, unlike the impersonal and amoral Force of New Age imagination. What is good, right, and virtuous is grounded in the triune God of the Bible. Jesus said, "Be holy as the Father in heaven is holy" (Matt. 5:48).

Because the all-knowing and eternal God is the source and standard of ethics, the moral law is universal, absolute, and objective; it is based on His unchanging, holy character. Although the *application* of unchanging moral principles may change throughout history, the *principles themselves* are perpetually binding and irrevocable. God isn't morally moody.

Given this eternal anchorage for ethics, sin must be seen as the transgression of God's law. John says that "sin is lawlessness" (1John 3:4). David cries out to God and says, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Ps. 51:4). Sin is an offense against God, ourselves, and others. R. C. Sproul calls it "cosmic treason"; we rebel against our creator and "do our own thing."

In the modern Western world, ethical relativism poses a challenge to the biblical basis for ethics. Relativism affirms that moral right and wrong are only socially and individually determined. Ethics is split off from any objective moral order. Cultural norms of morality are relative to particular societies, individuals, and historical periods. What is "right for you" may not be "right for me." What is wrong today may not be wrong tomorrow. When the idea of moral law is held in disrespect, the notion of sin softens and then dissolves. If all is relative, absolute evil is impossible. If sin is nonsense, then the notion of a Savior from sin is absurd. There is nothing from which to be saved.

Because of its denial of abiding ethical standards and of sin against a holy God, relativism is a roadblock to effective evangelism — besides undercutting values essential for a healthy society. But the key arguments for relativism are fatally flawed.

1. Relativists often argue that a society that honors free speech and freedom of religion must relinquish any notion of absolute truth or morality because this stifles the free exchange of ideas. Dogmatism and moralism are unwelcome in the pluralistic public square. Relativism is seen as required for a democracy of ideas and norms.

But this is flatly false. One may believe there are moral absolutes and also believe that the best way to reach ethical conclusions is through open discussion, dialogue, and debate. Freedom of religion and speech does not necessitate that there can be no objectively true religion or morality. A free society guarantees your right to be right — and your right to be wrong! I can try to persuade you of the truth of my convictions without using coercion. In fact, I may take it as a *moral absolute* that I should not coerce those I believe to be absolutely wrong.

¹ This article was revised and expanded as a chapter in the book, *Christianity That Counts* by Douglas Groothuis (Baker Books, 1995). Philosophical concepts like NOMINALISM and REALISM have led to a rejection of universal truth, morality, and ethics. Reality, language, and meaning are thus subjective and relativistic (they vary with circumstance, culture, gender, race, etc.). This is POSTMODERNISM.

The relativist has abandoned the very concept of objective moral truth. It is all a matter of opinion because everything is relative. There is, therefore, nothing objective to argue about and no good reason to believe one thing over another. This is hardly what the American founders envisioned for a free society. It more resembles anarchism and nihilism (i.e., rejection of all values) than a "marketplace of ideas."

2. The sheer diversity of moral and religious ideas within and between societies is invoked as evidence for relativism. With so many options before us, who is to say what is true or false, right or wrong? We are left with relativism.

Here again, the facts do not deliver the conclusion. A diversity of ethical and religious beliefs hardly insures that they are all somehow true. A tribal culture may be *scientifically* wrong in thinking that the sun revolves around a flat earth. Why can't the same culture be *ethically* wrong for practicing head-hunting? If you say that abortion is right and I say it is wrong, how can we both be correct when we contradict each other? Ethical relativism eliminates the notion of a moral mistake. But this is just as fallacious as saying that every answer on a multiple-choice test is correct because there is a diversity of answers.

There may also be less diversity between cultures than is often thought. Every culture has taboos against stealing. Yet a desert culture may penalize the theft of water much more highly than would a tropical culture. The diversity of moral *codes* does not rule out a basic agreement on deeper ethical *principles*. In an appendix to his excellent book against relativism, *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis listed common moral principles spanning thousands of years from diverse religions and civilizations. As Paul tells us in Romans 1-2, God has endowed with a conscience all those created in His own image, however much we efface or neglect it.

Relativism also leads to absurd conclusions which undermine its credibility. If there is no true moral law that applies transculturally, then there is no basis for one culture to condemn actions in another. Surely any morally sane person must ethically condemn Nazi atrocities as evil and praise the heroes who resisted the Reich by saving Jews from extermination. But relativism cannot permit such judgments. The morality of everything is relative — even genocide.

If we can reveal flaws in the case for relativism, we can further argue that the moral law is best understood as flowing from the moral lawgiver of the universe. God, as our Creator, knows what is best for us and calls us to obey Him for our own good and for His glory. Yet, as Paul said, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 6:23). The universal fact of guilt and shame testifies to that, whatever the cultural setting might be.

But the good news is that the Lawgiver is also the Redeemer of those who lament over their lawlessness and trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Those who cry out, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13), can find mercy and eternal life. But the unrepentant relativist must face the absolute justice of a holy God who admits no interpretation other than His own. In the end everything is relative — but it is relative to God's absolute standards, not ours.

Why Do We Need Creeds?

by **Andrew J. Webb**

Creeds and confessions are summaries of the doctrine that Christians believe to be taught in the Bible. For instance, if we were to both read the New Testament, and you were to ask me to write down what I believe that it teaches about Christ, I might draw up the following 7 points list:

1. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God
2. He was miraculously conceived of God, the Holy Spirit
3. He was born of the Virgin Mary
4. He was crucified, He died, and He was buried
5. On the third day after His crucifixion, He arose bodily from the dead
6. He then ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father
7. He will come again to judge the living and the dead

If I wanted to be really pedantic, I might write down all the places in Scripture I believe these points are being taught, thus creating “proof texts” for my list. The above list is essentially the same as the points taught in the Apostle’s Creed, or one of the earliest “standards” used by the Church to summarize its beliefs.

The word “creed” comes to us from the Latin “Credo” or “I believe”. Both creeds and confessions are essentially recapitulations or summaries of the teachings of scripture, but creeds tend to be shorter and far less comprehensive and were usually developed to address particular heresies. The 4th century Nicean Creed, for instance, was formulated expressly to combat a Christological heresy called Arianism, which denied the deity of Christ and taught that He was a created being (sadly this belief has been revived by modern day cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses). Some creeds such as the Apostle’s Creed (the version we have today dates from the 8th century) were originally intended to be used as statements of faith to be assented to by the new believers at their baptism. The church has always had and used creeds as statements of faith – for instance, the Hebrew *shema*, “Hear O Israel...” can be considered to be a creed of the OT church. Indeed, only in this age has it become common to assume that handing someone a Bible is a good answer to the question “what do you believe?”

Most confessions on the other hand, date from the time of the Reformation and are more comprehensive statements intended to survey and reflect all of the important doctrines (particularly those regarding salvation) taught in Scripture. Confessions tend to divide the teachings of the Bible topically rather than mirroring the Bible’s own internal order, and as such, they are “systematic” in their presentation of theology. The presentation of this theology is also from a “whole Bible” perspective, so a teaching on the nature and attributes of God, for instance, will reflect the completed revelation of the entire canon of Scripture. Because of this, the process of “proof texting” every doctrine is sometimes difficult if not impossible, because no proof text can sufficiently encompass the whole testimony of the redemptive historical message contained in the Bible. In fact, most heresies tend to be tied to one or more proof texts isolated from their larger Biblical context.

Confessions are frequently regarded as less important or significant than creeds, because creeds are often viewed as ecumenical reflections of the belief structure of the entire Christian church rather than individual portions of it – but as the New Dictionary of Theology points out, this argument is less substantial than it may appear:

“In this debate, confessions are often compared to their disadvantage with the creeds, but the contrast is frequently overdrawn. Most confessions were certainly productions of dividing or divided churches, but so to was the Chalcedonian Definition. Both confessions and creeds were formed to exclude erroneous beliefs; both were historically conditioned by the heresies they refuted. The creeds’ limitations (e.g. none mention the Lord’s Supper; they together contribute little on the atonement) and obscurities (cf.

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“descended into hell” in the Apostle’s Creed, to say nothing of the technical terms of the Nicean and Chalcedon) are far more obvious than those of the confessions, which are normally more balanced and thorough. If confessions are more controversial, creeds are more minimal and have in practice lost more completely than the confessions their originally basic functions as touchstones of orthodoxy. This is however not true of the Apostle’s Creed.” — “Confessions of Faith” from *New Dictionary of Theology*, Ferguson, Wright & Packer, eds., IVP, 1988)

Catechisms, which are often included as part of the standards of a church, were developed to systematically teach biblical doctrine. By memorizing the questions and answers in a catechism, children and adults learn the system of theology the church believes to be the witness of scripture. Catechisms go into greater detail on specific points than confessions are able to, as is the case with say the extended analysis that the Westminster Larger Catechism devotes to the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments.

While Scripture is inerrant and normative because its ultimate author – God – is infallible, confessions are the products of fallible men and thus it is entirely possible that they contain error. It should not be assumed that because these men were capable of erring that they necessarily did, however. It is possible, for instance, that the Westminster Confession is an entirely accurate (if not exhaustive) reflection of the doctrine contained in Scripture. But regardless of whether confessions do or not contain error, only the Holy Scriptures are normative and inspired, and as such confessions must never be viewed as having anything other than a subordinate or secondary role.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of standards is in their value as a means of preserving the unity of the Church. In theory, by concisely setting forth that which the Church as a body believes is taught in Scripture, confessions provide a standard that ensures that the teachings of individual ministers will be in harmony with the witnesses of scripture and the teachings of their fellow elders. The prospect of schisms and heresy is thus minimized, and individual believers may grow in knowledge without being tossed to and fro by every contrary wave of doctrine. Teaching will also thus be uniform regardless of which individual church in a communion they happen to be worshipping at. Standards also ensure that worship is uniform and Biblical, thus making worship intelligible to individual members regardless of where they happen to be worshipping and preventing the embarrassing possibility that individuals will be prevented by conscience from worshipping in a church within their own denomination.

In modern times the practice of subscription to standards has become increasingly lax in most confessional denominations; as a result, what an individual church member hears in a worship service usually has more to do with individual beliefs of a pastor regarding the teachings of the Bible, than the standards he has subscribed to. In a world that places a premium on “newness” this tends to mean that there is a trend away from “old fashioned” or “dogmatic doctrine” and towards new interpretations. It also means that the uniformity of worship in individual churches moves in different directions in accordance with the tastes of the ministers and congregation.

Finally, looking at Standards, it is important to keep in mind the intention of the authors. When we consider the Westminster Confession, for example, it is good to remember that the individual divines who drafted this great document were not primarily concerned with matters of taste, but rather that they produce a document that was as accurate a reflection of the doctrine they believed the Bible taught as was humanly possible. To this great end they vowed:

“I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of the Almighty God, that in this Assembly whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in the point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God’s glory and the peace and good of His Church.”

May our own teaching be ever likewise constrained!

Open Theism

OPEN THEISM is a revisionist movement. Ligon Duncun describes it as “Arminianism with a vengeance.” Others say it is Pelagianism dressed in new garb. It asserts a radical view of human autonomy and free will. It claims that God has chosen to limit His sovereignty, so that man too may have limited sovereignty. This unbiblical view has been advanced by such figures as Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Greg Boyd, Richard Rice, William Hasker, David Basinger and Terence Fretheim. They see Calvinism as “a resurgence of militant Augustinianism.”

Greg Boyd points to Scriptures which he thinks prove this “open view of God.” In some, God “regrets” how things turned out, proving He didn’t know. In others, God didn’t know what would happen in the future. God is surprised by some events, and frustrated that things didn’t work out as He planned or expected. God tests people to learn their character, as if He didn’t know. God says if you repent, *then* He will forgive. If you rebel, *then* He will judge. Boyd writes,

“Calvinists have totally misunderstood Paul’s use of the potter and clay illustration (Rom 9:21; Jer 18). When Paul says that God is the potter and we’re the clay, he doesn’t mean that God is determining, and we’re putty in the hands of a sovereign God. He means that God is... a very *flexible* potter... Look, that passage clearly says that God’s blessing or cursing is contingent upon our choice; and therefore, our future receiving of God’s blessing and cursing is not a product of his sovereign mercy alone, but the response of his sovereign mercy to our prior choice, whether it’s a choice to obey or a choice to disobey. If we choose to obey, his sovereign mercy responds to us with blessing. If we choose to disobey, his sovereign mercy responds to our choosing with a curse.”

“Consider briefly the following small sampling. Exo 32:14. ‘Because of Moses’ intercessory prayer, the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.’ David later recounts this episode when he notes that the Lord said he would destroy them had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to turn away his wrath from destroying them. That’s in Psa 106:23. Did God really plan on destroying Israel and did he really change his mind? And the implicit answer is, yes, God was going to destroy Israel. You’ve got to take the text seriously. It says that he was going to destroy them, and Moses’ intercession saved them. Exo 32:14. Exo 33. 1-3, and verse 14. In the light of Moses’ pleading, the Lord reversed His plan not to go with the Israelites. Was God simply toying with Moses when he told them he was planning on not going? And the implicit answer is, no, he wasn’t merely toying; he really wasn’t planning on going. And Moses, thank goodness, talked him into it.”

That’s Arminianism with a vengeance. It’s a matter of sound biblical interpretation. We must not come to Scripture with biases about what we *want* to be true, and then cherry-pick Scriptures to prove them. If these were proper conclusions about man’s autonomy and free will, they wouldn’t conflict with or outright contradict other clear Scriptures about God’s absolute sovereignty – but they do. Either God is completely sovereign, or He isn’t sovereign at all. Claiming that God somehow sovereignly chooses not to be sovereign is a nice play on words, but it’s a fiction. God says, “For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me.” (Isa 46:9 ^{NKJ}) God is *exclusively* God; we’re not mini-gods. We’re called to reflect some of the attributes of God, not to exercise them as if they were our own, separately and autonomously.

This view rejects prophecy as well as God’s promises. How could God know that Judas would betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, when the payment and acceptance of that sum depended on unforeseeable decisions of the chief priests and of Judas? This view makes prayer to God for the conversion of sinners misguided. God can do nothing more than He has already done, and the matter rests entirely with sinners. How could God envision the death of Christ before the foundation of the world if He didn’t know whether Adam would fall? (1Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8)

The Reformed faith does not deny but admits the reality of the responsible decisions of rational agents. The fact that we don’t fully comprehend how sovereignty and responsible agency relate to one another, doesn’t mean we must deny the one, in order to allow the other. They’re both true at the same time. *God is absolutely sovereign, and man is absolutely responsible.*

Heresies & Errors Handouts – Week 6

The late Dr. Roger Nicole contrasted the *Reformed View*, with the *Openness View*, as follows:

Biblical / Reformed View	Openness View
God is sovereign and controls everything in the created world, including the actions of responsible agents.	God's sovereignty has been self-limited by virtue of the creation of free agents.
God's power embraces the whole universe, yet not so as to do "violence to the will of the creatures."	God's power stops where human will begins and God Himself has established this self-limitation.
God's knowledge embraces all things possible, and specifically all that comes to pass. It includes eternal knowledge of the future actions and decisions of free agents.	God's knowledge is self-limited, because foreknowledge of the actions of free agents would evidence that they are not free.
God has an eternal plan which will surely come to pass. For Him there is no surprise and no disappointment.	God's plan has a multitude of blanks due to the unforeseen actions or decisions of free agents, God's greatness is manifest in that He is able to cope with anything that turns up.
Predictive prophecy is based on God's exhaustive knowledge and will certainly be realized.	Prophecy is based on God's educated guesses as to what will happen, and it is often conditional upon some activities or decisions of free agents. This conditionality is not always expressed in connection with prophecy, promise or warning. Hence, the appearance of non-fulfillment. Cf. the history of Jonah and Nineveh.
God's plan is immutable even as God's nature. Therefore expressions that speak of God repenting must be seen as metaphorical.	Prayer is an effectual activity whereby angels and humans can function as God's counselors and change His mind.
God is impassable in the sense that He is not, as human beings, susceptible to the upheaval of emotions. He is not impassive, for the scripture represents Him as compassionate.	God's love is the supreme perfection of God and all other characterizations must be envisioned, and if necessary reinterpreted, in terms of our understanding of that love.
God's predestination is that gracious provision whereby, out of His goodness and mercy, he has chosen a multitude out of a sinful and rebellious race, and has appointed them to receive and accept the full benefits of His salvation, provided for them in the work of Christ and applied to them in due time by the Holy Spirit.	God's predestination does not relate to individuals: it is God's blessing upon those, whoever they might be, who repent and believe on their own initiative. It is also at times God's appointment for service.
Those non-elected are inevitably to suffer the consequences of Adam's and their own sinful rebellion and will be forever separated from God.	God is too merciful to keep any one in eternal torment. Those not saved will simply cease to exist.

Open theism rejects salvation by grace alone, as a sovereign act of God. If they follow the logic of their position, open theists will abandon original sin too, because it's incompatible with free will – Pelagius did that. Open theism proudly exalts *man* and his free will, by limiting *God's* sovereignty and free will. They would make us like God, as Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan (Gen 3.5). It makes God fit into the experiences of man, and what man thinks God should be.

“You thought that I was altogether like you – but I *rebuke* you...” (Psa 50.21)

N.T. Wright is Wrong

A revisionist movement called “New Perspectives on Paul” (NPP), asserts that the Reformed understanding of justification is wrong. Its best-known exponents are James Dunn and N.T. Wright. Wright is a renowned and highly admired Anglican bishop from Durham, who has influenced many evangelical seminaries and churches around the world.

The NPP rejects *present* justification by grace alone, through faith alone. It substitutes *future* justification, *through faithfulness* (works). In many ways, this is a rehash of Arminianism. It founds justification (salvation) on *our* actions, not God’s.

The NPP claims the reformers misunderstood Paul, thinking he was opposed to Judaism as a system of works. But, the NPP says, Paul was only trying to teach the Jews that circumcision, the Sabbath, and dietary laws were “a badge of covenant membership” – not to be done for their own sake, but as a sign. Consequently, the three major confessions of the Protestant faith are in error (the Heidelberg, Belgic, and Westminster). He apparently misunderstands Reformed doctrine.

Let’s be clear. Reformed doctrine teaches that there are only two covenants. There is a Covenant of **Works**, under which Adam labored and fell. And there is a Covenant of **Grace** (variously dispensed in both the Old and New testaments), under which the progeny of Adam may be saved through faith in Christ. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF), chap. 7, puts it this way:

2. The first covenant made with man was a **Covenant of Works**, in which life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, on condition of perfect and personal obedience.
3. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the **Covenant of Grace**; in which he freely offers to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give to all those who are ordained to eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.
5. This covenant [of Grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel. Under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing the Christ to come; they were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament.

The Reformed faith teaches that all those *before* Christ, were saved by faith in the *coming* Christ (Hebrews chap. 11). They “looked forward” to Christ. The NPP claims the reformers taught that the Old Testament was a covenant of works, and that’s why we need a new perspective on Paul, and why the Doctrines of Grace (TULIP) are in error. *That’s not true*, as the WCF makes clear.

Kim Riddlebarger writes,

Luther's oft-quoted dictum that the doctrine of justification is the article on which the church stands or falls, has fallen on hard times yet again. Though severely challenged by the Roman church at the Council of Trent, the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone, not only managed to withstand the opposition of Popes and Cardinals, but the doctrine became the center of orthodox Protestant theology, as affirmed by virtually all of the historic Protestant confessions, creeds and catechisms... They were setting forth nothing more and nothing less than the very gospel as taught by the Apostle Paul himself – that God justifies the wicked by means of the imputed righteousness of Christ received through faith alone.

But another serious challenge has arisen to the orthodox Protestant doctrine of justification; and this time the opponents of Luther's doctrine are not mitred cardinals with flowing purple robes gathering for yet another definitive ecclesiastical response to a renewed Protestant menace. This time, those challenging Luther's interpretation of the *kerygma* of the Apostle Paul are themselves self-consciously Protestants, and ironically, in many cases, ministers and theologians in churches that bear Luther's name.

Like a long line of carefully positioned dominos falling one upon another, if Calvin's view of justification is erroneous, the entire confessional Reformed tradition which developed in his shadow, ...will be forced to undertake a drastic revision of its understanding of the nature of the gospel and the central article of its faith... It is hard to imagine a more radical undertaking this side of 1517.

Wright rejects the traditional meaning of justification based on the IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ (as do the Roman Catholics). He's aware that he has turned from the understanding of the reformers. He describes their view as one "a later age has dreamed up." That is a rejection of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster standards. *He thinks justification isn't part of the gospel; it's a **result** of the gospel.* Is that biblically accurate? No.

When 2 Cor. 5:21 says that in Christ we have become the righteousness of God, it is a clear case of imputation. Righteousness in that text has no reference to *our* conduct, but to *His*. In Romans 4, Paul points to the Old Testament to prove the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, *his faith is accounted for righteousness*,⁶ just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:⁷ "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered;⁸ Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." (Rom 4:5-8 NKJ)

Since the sinner has no righteousness of his own, righteousness *must* be imputed to him. By rejecting imputation, Wright denies justification itself. Paul counts all things loss, that he may,

be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; (Phi 3:9 NKJ)

This means we have no righteousness of our own for justification, but only the righteousness from God that comes by faith in Christ. The righteousness here is from, or literally, "out of" God.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; (Rom 3:21-22 NKJ)

There is a righteousness from God *apart* from our law-keeping; thus, it is *different* from our own righteousness. Wright denies all this.

The Reformed faith teaches that God saves those who come to Christ *in their sin*. Wright says the righteousness of God "operates through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for the benefit of all those who in turn **are faithful**." He has corrupted the gospel into a religion of works. The real gospel is that God brings His salvation to the **unfaithful** when He justifies the **ungodly** who believe in Jesus — who trust in what *He* has done; and thereby *His* righteousness is accounted *theirs*.

Wright thinks the righteousness of God in every NT text *is never the righteousness given to us*. We must therefore acquire God's righteousness by our own faithfulness. It changes the needed *faith* of sinners (who come to Christ empty of all virtue) into some kind of *faithfulness* that's supposed to come from sinners — but which no sinner has, according to Romans 3:9-20. *By turning faith into faithfulness*, Wright does great damage to the gospel, and opens the door to justification by works.

We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Gal 2:15,16)

Here is a major part of Wright's system: he thinks Paul meant only that we are not justified by circumcision, Sabbath keeping, or kosher food laws, rather than meaning *none* of our works can justify us. If that's all Paul meant, then the door is opened for all those who think their faithfulness contributes to their justification. It does not, and *cannot*. The reformers were right about that.

The Lure of Dominionism

Dominionism (or THEONOMY) in its extreme form seeks to establish a Christian theocracy in each nation of the world, beginning with America. Such dominionists misperceive America as a Christian nation, and they believe it is God's ordained instrument to obtain worldly peace and justice. If that sounds hauntingly familiar, it is the battle-cry of the Christian Right. But it is not the battle-cry of the Church. It is heresy. It brings Islamic beliefs about worldly rule into the Church. It also feeds a fleshly lust for power and control.

One of the troublesome things about heresies is that, from a simple error, they branch off and then multiply in both scope and severity. Misappropriating the Church for worldly ends is made plausible by a simple misunderstanding of eschatology: by believing a physical reign of Christ precedes his return in Judgment.² This misunderstanding is called *Chiliasm* or *Millennialism*. It's the core of Dispensationalism, pre-millennialism, and some forms of postmillennialism.

To put it in perspective, let's look at some basic teachings. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" Joh 18:36. If we assume that the Church's role in the world is to cleanse it (but it is *not* – Luk 4:18³), and we also believe that the theocracy of the OT is our model for government (but it is *not*⁴), then DOMINIONISM is the result. It negates Christ's unambiguous statement that the kingdom is not physical with regard to the world. Many adherents of dominionism seek worldly means (politics, law, or government) to attain a spiritual end (Christ's physical reign on earth). That violates a clear commandment not to love the world or anything in the world (1Jn 2:15), including its style of governance (Mt 20:25-28).

Such dominionism naively ignores the fact that man's corruption will pervert whatever temporal government is instituted (Rom 7:18). It places an undue burden on those who do not belong to Christ (1Co 5:12). Non-believers don't have the Spirit to combat the flesh (Rom 8:6-7), and so they remain in bondage (Rom 7:14). They are not under the headship of Christ (Col 1:18), even though Christ is Head over all (Eph 1:20-22). Yet radical dominionists want to hold unbelievers accountable, as if they were believers. That's unrealistic, and it is also cruel and unmerciful. The Church, like any believer, is in the world, but not of it (Jn 17:11, 16) It does not wage war as the world does (2Cor 10:3). The function of the Church is *not* to transform the world, but to equip believers (Eph 4:11-13). Why? So that *believers* may be transformed (Rom 12:2). And when *they* are transformed, they will uplift the world, just as leaven causes the loaf to rise (Lk 13:20-21); just as salt preserves (Mt 5:12-13); and just as light guides (Mt 5:13-16). The Church, unlike an individual believer, is to be inwardly directed, not outwardly directed. The Church must *never* pick up the sword lest it die by the sword (Mt 26:52). *Whatever influence we have on the world is achieved by exemplary persuasion, not by physical coercion* (Mt 5:16; 1Pe 2:12; Rom 13:4).

Many of the beliefs of dominionists are biblical. The objection to the teachings of dominionism is not a determination of anyone's salvation. Despite wild accusations made by some atheists and pantheists, not all dominionists are rabid advocates for world domination. Yet every believer is to be wise and discerning concerning teachings in the Church (Mat 15:9; Gal 3:1, 6:1; 2Th 2:15; 1Tim 4:1; 2Tim 4:3; Heb 13:9). Unfortunately, it is both possible and common to hold saving faith in

² Christ's reign extends to the whole earth, but only the elect of the kingdom submit to it; the non-elect of the world cannot. Coercion is not the biblical way to bridge the gap between the two (Mt 20:25-28). The *Gospel* is God's designated means for doing that (Jn 8:31-32; Rom 8:1-4).

³ The Church's role is to proclaim the Gospel in the name of Christ, drawing the elect into the Kingdom of the Son, so that *they* may be cleansed (Mat 28:18-20; Joh 15:3).

⁴ **1 Cor 10:6** Now these things occurred as examples [types] to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. *In other words, the Old Testament demonstrates our inescapable need for Christ, not for the Law. Col 2:16* So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,¹⁷ which are a *shadow* of things to come, but the *substance* is of Christ.

Jesus Christ, while also holding to unsound (unhealthy) doctrine. Scripture must be our only authority. “May God be true and every man a liar.” (Rom 3.4)

What about Politics and the Courts?

This is not to say that we should ignore politics, that the men and women we elect or appoint to office are not important, that the laws of men are irrelevant, or that our sole focus is to be the church and the Gospel – as if we were isolationists and ghetto-dwellers. That would let evil wreak havoc in the world, unopposed. We are obliged by Scripture to *pursue* righteousness and justice in the world, to be peace-makers among all men, and not just in the church. “Blessed *are* those who keep justice, *And* he who does righteousness at all times!” Psa 106:3

How we do that, and *when* we do that, and *where* we do that, will make all the difference. Here’s the principle governing the role and accountability of government:

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. (Rom 13:3-4 NKJ)

So what happens when “the authority” – civil or military government – abuses or ignores its responsibilities as appointed to it by God? Do we overthrow that government? The Americans did that in 1776, justifying it in their Declaration of Independence this way:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers *from the consent of the governed*. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.

We pursue justice, kindness, goodness, and gentleness through the laws of men, whenever the laws of men reflect the laws of God. We uphold those laws (Rom 3.31). We are not “lawless ones,” and neither do we enable lawlessness. When the government and its laws favor and promote evil, and oppose the good – even if it costs us our life – we obey God rather than men (Act 5.29). “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev 2:10)

But where we can work within the law, and implement righteous and just laws through men, we are to do so. Even then, our faith is not in *men*; our faith is in *God*. We may live under the rule of men peaceably; but when that rule is actively opposed to God and the things of God, we stand our ground and let the laws have their consequences.

This is not *liberation theology*. That’s another heresy that bears all the markings of dominionism. What we advocate is the pursuit of justice through the law if available, and despite the law if it is not available.

One last thing: Radical dominionism is a heresy because it contradicts the testimony of the Church (*i.e.* our orthodoxy) – it leads to abuses in Scriptural interpretation and practice. And so it is error, even if it is not damnable error. It’s a form of ***legalism***, in its most literal sense; and yet its proponents well understand that salvation is by grace alone. Therefore they don’t confuse justification with sanctification; rather, they demand the sanctification of unbelievers *without* them having justification by faith. As mentioned at the beginning, that suggests there is a penchant to exercise *dominion* over others, to control others under the rule of Law; and thus a fleshly desire to *lord it over others*. “**Yet it shall not be so among you.**” (Mat 20:26) You may disagree, but please beware of the potential dangers in such teaching.

Eight Symptoms of False Doctrine

From *Warnings to the Churches* (1858)

by **J. C. Ryle**

1. There is an undeniable zeal in some teachers of error—their “earnestness” makes many people think they must be right.
2. There is a great appearance of learning and theological knowledge—many think that such clever and intellectual men must surely be safe to listen to.
3. There is a general tendency to completely free and independent thinking today—many like to prove their independence of judgment by believing the newest ideas, which are nothing but novelties.
4. There is a wide-spread desire to appear kind, loving, and open-minded—many seem half-ashamed to say that anybody can be wrong or is a false teacher.
5. There is always a portion of half-truth taught by modern false teachers—they are always using scriptural words and phrases, but with unscriptural meaning.
6. There is a public craving for a more sensational and entertaining worship—people are impatient with the more inward and invisible work of God within the hearts of men.
7. There is a superficial readiness all around to believe anyone who talks cleverly, lovingly and earnestly, forgetting that Satan often masquerades himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).
8. There is a wide-spread ignorance among professing Christians—every heretic who speaks well is surely believed, and anyone who doubts him is called narrow-minded and unloving.

All these are especially symptoms of our times. I challenge any honest and observant person to deny them. These tend to make the assaults of false doctrine today especially dangerous, and make it even more important to say loudly, “Do not be carried away with strange doctrine!”

<https://www.monergism.com/blog/warnings-churches-ebook>

J. C. Ryle On Worldliness

By David Meager

“from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord, deliver us.”

Ryle teaches us what **separation from the world** consists of:

1. The Christian must refuse to be guided by the world’s standard of right and wrong, but instead be guided by the Bible. Ryle encourages us to stand apart from the general standards and ways of society if they are in conflict with the Bible. This has particular relevance for us since we are surrounded by multi-media 24 hours a day, and are therefore in constant danger of imbibing worldly values.

2. The Christian must be very careful how he spends his leisure time. In particular, he encourages us not to waste our evenings (e.g., in vain conversation, or habitually staying out late), but ‘to resolve always to make time for quiet, calm thought — for Bible-reading and prayer... Tell me how a man spends his evenings, and I can generally tell what his character is.’

3. The Christian must determine not to be swallowed up and absorbed in the business of the world. Ryle encourages us to fulfil our duty in our particular callings. However, these should not interfere with our spiritual welfare: ‘If he finds his business beginning to eat up his Sundays, Bible-reading, and private prayer... he will say, “Stand back!” ...He will rather choose to be less rich and prosperous in this world, than not prosper in his soul.’

4. The Christian must abstain from all amusements and recreations which are inseparably connected with sin. Ryle warns his readers to avoid ‘amusements which are invariably connected with gambling, betting, drunkenness, and fornication... If we love our souls, we must have nothing to do with amusements which are bound up with sin.’ In his day, this meant warning about the evils of horse racing, bawdy theatre shows, card-playing (for money), and late-night balls, etc. For us today, this might be sports associated with gambling, certain types of films, music, computer games, blogs, etc.

5. The Christian must be moderate in the use of *lawful* and *innocent* recreations. Here Ryle affirms that recreation is good and needful, especially for the young; and he finds no fault with a moderate use of sport and other pastimes. However, Ryle warns against *excess* lawful recreation: ‘He must not devote his whole heart, soul, mind, strength, and time to them, as many do, if he wishes to serve Christ. There are hundreds of lawful things which are good in moderation, but bad when taken in excess.’ For us, Ryle’s warning is even more applicable due to the increase in leisure time and diversions, many of which did not exist in his day.

6. The Christian must be careful how he engages in friendships and close relationships with non-Christians. Ryle warns against intimate friendship with unconverted people (Prov 13.20). This point may be the most difficult to apply today. Friendship with people seems to be one of the most effective ways to communicate the gospel in today’s increasingly biblically illiterate culture (unlike Ryle’s church-going culture). However, the Christian still needs to be careful here. According to Ryle, ‘Human nature is so constituted that we cannot associate with other people without it having an effect on our own character... If friends will not walk in the narrow way with *us*, we must not walk in the broad way to please *them*.’

http://archive.churchsociety.org/crossway/documents/Cway_120_RyleWorldliness.pdf

Based on Ryle’s chapter 12, “The World,” in *Practical Religion* (1883)

We are to overcome the world, not be overcome by it.

(1Joh 5.4; 2Cor 5.19; Rom 12.2)

"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if able, even the elect. (Mat 24:24)

Speaking in Tongues

The biblical gift of tongues is distinguished by four marks:

First, the biblical gift of tongues is always a known language. They may be unknown to the people hearing them, as in the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians, but they are known and spoken by a culture somewhere on earth. They are not "unknown tongues"; the word "unknown" does not occur in First Corinthians 14 in the Greek language. They are known languages, spoken somewhere. Certainly the conclusion we draw from Acts 2:6, 8, 11 is that these tongues were spoken in a known language,

"...we hear them speaking in our own tongues ..." Acts 2:11.

Second, tongues are always addressed to God as praise and worship. They are not messages intended for men. Tongues are not a means of preaching the gospel. The early Christians did not preach the gospel in tongues in the New Testament; they praised God in tongues, they worshipped God in these strange languages. Paul confirms this in his discussion on tongues in First Corinthians 14. He says there,

"For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God;" 1Cor. 14:2a

"We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." Act 2:10 ^{NKJ}

This clearly brings into question those occasions during which a message is conveyed in tongues to those who are present, or some prediction is made, or some attempt is made to proclaim a truth for the benefit of the people present. According to the New Testament these practices are unbiblical because he that speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but in worship and praise to God.

Third, the gift of tongues is intended to be manifested publicly and never privately. Again Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 12:7:

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." 1Cor 12:7

The gifts are not for private blessing; they are for the common good. In chapter fourteen of First Corinthians Paul insists that if the gift of tongues is exercised publicly in the church, then it must be interpreted; otherwise it is of no value whatsoever. Others would think that those speaking in foreign tongues were barbarous or crazy. (1Cor. 14:11, 23).

Thus it is not designed for individual benefit; it is for the edification of others – things to which they can say "Amen" (1Cor 14:16). This was clearly evident on the day of Pentecost. The miracle occurred for the benefit of the thousands of Jews who had gathered together from the four corners of the earth. There is no account in the New Testament of the private use of tongues.

Fourth, the biblical gift of tongues is a sign to unbelievers, and not to believers. First Corinthians, 14:21-22 refers to the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied to the people of Israel that there would come a day when God would send to them men speaking strange tongues (Isa. 28:11). And, says Isaiah, when you hear these you will know that the hour has come when God turns from his limited ministry to Israel and begins to send the message out to all peoples everywhere. That is the reason why the tongues were given. It was a sign to unbelieving Jews that the gospel was now going out to the whole Gentile world – those of foreign tongues. And so, speaking the gospel to them in any foreign tongue was a sign meant for them, as *unbelievers*, and was not intended for believers.