Foundations

An Overview of Systematic Theology

R.C. Sproul
Introduction

Does your knowledge of theology make you a better Christian? Or is it just an intellectual exercise?

The background of the word theology is rather simple and points out the importance of its study. The word comes from two Greek words, theos and logos, meaning “God” and “word” correspondingly. Thus, theology attempts to come to a coherent understanding of the knowledge of God. In the case of the Christian faith, B. B. Warfield said, “Theology is the science of God and His relationship to man and the world.”

However, many Christians are suspicious of one word in that definition: science. What many do not know is that for most of the last two thousand years, there was no animosity between science and theology. Theology was called “The Queen of the Sciences,” and all other disciplines saw her as their matron and themselves as her handmaidens. Theology informed the natural sciences with answers to the ultimate questions of being, while the natural sciences informed theologians of the glories of God revealed in the stars, the oceans, and the human body. But there came a time when man’s desire for autonomy confounded this mutually beneficial relationship. From the Enlightenment onward, theology, far from being simply demoted to a handmaiden, became an outcast, a crazy aunt hidden in the basement of academia.

This series is but an introduction to the field of systematic theology. And it is no substitute for knowing personally the God for whose glory these lectures and this study guide were created. But this field of study has been extraordinarily rewarding to me in my Christian journey. Not a day passes that I do not benefit from God’s revealing of Himself in a logical fashion. We serve a God who is rational, and systematic theology highlights that good news.

May this series better enable you to love God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Sincerely,

R.C. Sproul
What is Theology?

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. What is systematic theology?
   a. The word *theology* can be understood by dividing it into *theos* and *logos*. *Logos* means “word” or “reason” and *theos* means “God.” Theology concerns the application of logic to God.
   b. R.C. spoke at a college and lectured to the faculty on the topic, “What is a Christian college?” On his tour of the campus, he noticed a revealing inscription. The study of theology, not the study of religion, is at the heart of what makes a Christian education.

II. What are some aversions to systematic theology?
   a. The word *systematic* is often very negative to people. Most are not biased against mechanical systems, but the idea of a systematic way of understanding reality has been opposed by several ideologies.
   b. As people try to squeeze biblical ideas into preconceived, anti-biblical systems, it is no wonder the Bible does not appear coherent.
      i. Existentialism
      ii. Relativism

III. What is the nature of biblical revelation?
   a. Biblical revelation is the Word of God. It has diversity, but within it there is order.
      i. Unity
      ii. Coherence
      iii. Consistency
   b. The systematic theologian depends upon the biblical scholar, for theology is rooted in the details of Scripture.
   c. Every detail of theology has an impact on every other detail of it.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is systematic theology?

2. Why is theology distasteful to many people? Tell of any experiences you may have had with people who were opposed to “anything but the Bible.”

3. What is the nature of biblical revelation?

4. What questions do you hope this series will answer about systematic theology?

FURTHER READING

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, introduction
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, I: 1–33
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 1–54
Scope and Purpose of Theology

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. “Bringing the Light of the Reformation to Scripture”
   • The phrase on the cover of the New Geneva Study Bible is an example of what we don’t mean to communicate about theology—that we bring an external system to the Bible and intentionally interpret it through that grid.

II. Theology is a science that attempts to gain a consistent knowledge of God.
   a. A paradigm shift is a radical shift in the operating principles of a science.
   b. An anomaly is an exception to a paradigm, but when anomalies build up, a paradigm shift eventually will occur. A new model must be constructed to make sense of the new information and experiences.
   c. What would a paradigm shift in theology look like? Why would it come? We have had the same basic data for two thousand years. But shifts are driven by new philosophies and societal changes, as people desire to view the data differently.
      i. Progress in theology
      ii. Non-progress in theology

III. There are three spheres of theology.
   a. Biblical theology is concerned with going through the Bible and studying all the verbiage on a given topic. The biblical theologian looks at the data, not the history or systems of thought. Biblical theology has been corrupted by “atomism,” which leads to isolating biblical ideas, claiming that different writers of Scripture had radically different theologies and understandings of God.
   b. Historical theology is a study of the history of theological development. Much can be derived from this study, especially when we meet “new” doctrines that
have in fact been dealt with hundreds of years previously. Knowing historical theology is one key to remaining orthodox as you search the Scriptures.

c. Systematic theology is done when commentators teach how to interpret the whole scope of Scripture. The systematic theologian relies on the previously mentioned branches of theology.

IV. What is the value or purpose of Theology?
   a. Everyone is a theologian, even those who deny it with every breath.
   b. Second Timothy 3:16 is the biblical response to those who deny the importance of theology.
      i. Doctrine
      ii. Reproof
      iii. Instruction in righteousness

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the problem with the phrase “Bringing the Light of the Reformation to Scripture”?

2. What is an example of a paradigm shift in science? What is the cause of such a shift in theology? How does creativity play a part in theology?

3. What are the three spheres of theology? How do they interact?

4. What is the value or purpose of theology? Is it rooted in the Bible?

FURTHER READING

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, introduction
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, I: 1-33
General Revelation and Natural Theology

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Christianity is not based on speculation; it is a revealed faith.
   a. The truth we embrace has come from God. We call this revelation.
   b. General revelation and special revelation are the two sources of information we have about God. God is the source of all truth, whether “spiritual” or not.
      i. Illustration of a fountain head
      ii. St. Augustine’s illustration of vision
      iii. Objections from a modern scientist
   c. General revelation goes to all the world. Psalm 19:1 is the biblical proof for this. Interior knowledge of God is taught in Romans 1. General revelation is not in the Bible. It is God’s revelation of Himself through nature. It is also general because of its content. It is not specific, not strictly “law” or “Gospel.”
   d. Natural revelation is usually a synonym for general revelation. But there is another category that is often confused with general revelation.

II. Natural theology can be distinguished from general revelation.
   a. Between God and man is nature. Through the medium of nature, God communicates about Himself. This is something God does to reveal Himself to us.
   b. Does that revelation that God gives ever get into our minds? How much do we miss? Natural theology is the result of what God does, of what God reveals, of what gets into our minds.
   c. There have been opponents of natural theology in the church. But Romans 1 seems to indicate that we do have a limited, non-salvific knowledge of God. On the other hand, Paul says that in Corinthians natural man cannot know God. Which is right?
i. The verb “to know” is used in different ways.
ii. Example: Old Testament references to “knowing” people
iii. Romans 1:18–20—God is concerned about what people do with the
information He gives to them, so they must know something. Verse
21 says they know God but refuse to obey.
iv. We know God in one sense, but in another, natural man does not know
Him. Natural theology is distorted by our sin, but general revelation
is perfectly revealed.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How are special revelation and natural/general revelation different?
2. Natural theology is how man perceives general revelation. How is natural theology
distorted?
3. In what sense do we know and not know God through general revelation?
4. What is the problem with God judging people if general revelation is not perfect?

FURTHER READING

Berkouwer, G.C. General Revelation
Calvin, John. The Institutes of Christian Religion, I: iii–v
Elwell, Walter, ed. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, pp. 944–945
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, I: 35–57, 75–77
Westminster Confession of Faith, I: 1
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. General revelation has several aspects.
   a. General revelation has divisions we have already discussed, but there are other important ones.
      i. Mediate: Revelation given by God through a medium other than Himself (Rom. 1)
      ii. Immediate: Revelation planted inside us by God, not gleaned via a medium (Rom. 2)

II. Special revelation is received through Scripture, and only occasionally have men received special revelation any other way.
   a. Hebrews 1 is a good example of this kind of revelation.
   b. Philosophers have debated the role reason and the senses play in receiving data. But regardless of our resolution of this debate, special revelation is knowledge derived directly from God with the highest possible certitude.
   c. This revelation has not always been through Scripture.
      i. Dreams, visions, Urim and Thummim
      ii. Theophany: An outward manifestation of the invisible God; for instance, the burning bush (Ex. 3)
      iii. Inspiration
   d. Three tests for true and false prophets: commission from God, presence of miracles, fulfillment of announcements

III. Hebrews 1 tells us of the supreme revelation of God to us.
   a. Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God to us.
   b. In the Upper Room, Jesus says that “he who has seen Me has seen the Father.”
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between mediate and immediate general revelation?

2. Explain how special revelation is different from general, and discuss the different modes of special revelation.

3. Read Hebrews 1. What impact does this teaching have on our discussion of God’s revelation to man?

FURTHER READING

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, I: vi
Elwell, Walter, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 945–948
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, I: 151–188
Jensen, Peter. *The Revelation of God*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 55–61
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I: 1
Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The material cause of the Reformation was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. But lurking behind the scenes was the question of authority.
   a. The slogan *sola Scriptura* means that Scripture alone has the absolute right to bind our consciences.
   b. Counsels and creeds do not have this same authority.
      i. The authority and authorship of the Bible
      ii. “Thus saith the Lord” shows the tension between the divine and human authors of Scripture.
      iii. *Verbum Dei* and *Vox Dei*

II. This leads us to the nature of inspiration.
   a. Second Timothy 3:16 is the primary text that teaches this doctrine.
   b. The English translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 and the way we use the term inspiration in theological language must be distinguished. The key word is “theopneustos.” All of Scripture is breathed out by God—expiration.
   c. How does God superintend the writing of Scripture by human authors?
      i. We don’t know exactly how this happens from Scripture, but we know what it is not—mechanical inspiration.
      ii. The Council of Trent and “dictate”
      iii. The human writers’ personalities came through, but were carefully guarded by God from inflicting sin upon the texts.
      iv. Verbal inspiration and “jot and tittle” inspiration
      v. Liberal and neo-orthodox ideas
      vi. The Bible as a witness to revelation, but not as revelation itself
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were the two main causes of the Reformation?

2. What is the relationship between authority and authorship of the Bible?

3. How much do we know about the way God inspired Scripture? What are some examples of wrong ideas about it?

4. What is propositional revelation?

FURTHER READING

Warfield, B.B. *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Discussions of the nature of Scripture must deal with matters of infallibility and inerrancy. Both have come under attack in recent years.

II. Inerrancy is alleged to be a creation of the Protestant Scholastics of the seventeenth century, foreign to the biblical writers and the Reformers.
   a. Luther said the Scriptures never err. That seems clear.
   b. Arguments for inerrancy can be very simplistic and faulty. That does not mean inerrancy is false, though.

III. Infallibility is a higher claim than inerrancy. One can be inerrant as a human for a short period of time or in a very specific sense. But infallible means that a document or person never errs in any way.
   a. Conservatives say that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
   b. Others use a similar phrase with a much different meaning. They say, “Only infallible when it speaks to matters of faith and practice.”
      i. The first uses the word “only” to point to the uniqueness of the Bible.
      ii. The second uses the word “only” to restrict infallibility to certain sections of Scripture. This is “limited” infallibility.

IV. The question of the authority of the Bible rests upon the authority of Christ.
   a. God’s Inerrant Word was published in the early 1970s from a conference on inerrancy.
   b. Each scholar had a view of the Bible that was fueled by their view of Christ. Their question was, “What did Jesus think about the Bible?” Even liberal scholars agree that Jesus had an exalted view of Scripture.
   c. Jesus was limited in His knowledge, as touching His human nature. But could He have been wrong? Not and remain sinless. If He taught error, He was subject to judgment, having lied about God and His Word.
If the Bible is a basically reliable historical document, then accept it on that level. Then note the basic teachings about Christ, the claims He makes about Himself, and the claims He makes about Scripture. If these claims are basically reliable, then accept His declaration and look for discrepancies to disprove His claims. If you find them, then you have disproved the Bible. If you don’t, then you must accept them.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the definitions of infallibility and inerrancy?

2. What was Christ’s view of the Bible?

3. What are some objections people have to the perfections of the Bible?

4. Some believe they have found errors in the Bible. How do you explain apparent errors in the Bible? What are some helpful resources that focus on these difficult sections of Scripture?

FURTHER READING

Geisler, Norman, ed. *Inerrancy*
Montgomery, John Warwick, ed. *God’s Inerrant Word*
Young, Edward J. *Thy Word is Truth*
Canonicity

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. What is the Holy Bible?
   a. *Biblos* is the Greek word for Bible.
   b. How do we know that the right 66 books have been included? This is the question of canonicity.
   c. Canon is from the Greek word *kanon*, which means “measuring rod.”
   d. Scripture is the *norma normans et sine normativa*: it is the standard and has no peer.

II. What is the scope of the canon?
   a. Of the thousands of possible books, says the critic, only 66 were chosen. Isn’t it likely that mistakes were made? Not really. The overwhelming majority of the other candidates were obvious frauds.
   b. Only three books were given serious consideration for inclusion but did not make the canon: The Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Epistle of Clement. Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, John’s epistles, and Jude were not accepted by all immediately.
   c. Another misconception is that it took 500 years to decide on the canon. It was 398 A.D. when the process of canonization was completed. But from the beginning of the church, the New Testament books were used and had functional canonicity.
   d. The heretic Marcion created the first canon. He eliminated books that he did not like and kept those that fit his theology. This action, not any confusion in the church, made it necessary for the church to make the canon official.

III. What was the three-fold test for the canonicity of books?
   a. Apostolic origin was important. To meet this criteria, a book had to be written by an apostle or by the direct sanction of an apostle.
      • What about Luke and Mark, neither of whom were apostles? The authority of Paul stood behind Luke, and that of Peter stood behind
Mark. There was no debate about these gospels because of the oversight of the apostles.

b. The second test was that the book must have been received gladly by the early church.
c. The third test was whether the book in question was in agreement with the books already in the canon. The “core” books of the canon, the ones which were accepted without argument, stood in judgment of other books. For instance, Hebrews 6 was questioned as being out of sorts with apostolic teaching. This was resolved, however, when the early church concluded that Hebrews was written by Paul.

IV. Is the canon infallible?

a. Did the Jewish canon include the Apocrypha?
b. Did the Alexandrian canon (Greek-speaking Jews) have the Apocrypha?
c. The Protestant view of the canon says that each book in the Bible is infallible. But the historic process that the church took was fallible. It appeared to be guided by the Holy Spirit, but the church was not (and is not) infallible in its pronouncements. So we have a fallible collection of infallible books.
d. The Roman Catholic view is that we have an infallible collection of infallible books. The church could not (and does not) err in her official pronouncements.
e. The church did the right thing. We have no reason not to be fully assured that we have a perfect canon.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of the word canon?

2. What grounds do we have for confidence in our present canon?

3. What were the criteria of canonicity used by the early church?

4. What is the difference between the Protestant canon and the Roman Catholic canon? How did this difference arise?

5. Is the canon of Scripture infallible? Explain.

FURTHER READING

Bruce, F.F. The Canon of Scripture
Carson, D.A. and John Woodbridge, eds. Hermeneutics Authority and Canon
Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology, I: 95–106
Westminster Confession of Faith, I: 2–3
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. R.C.’s story of Charlie and the inspiration of Scripture.

II. What is the relationship between Scripture and tradition?
   a. The Council of Trent, fourth session, spoke directly to this question. It stated that the revelation of God comes through Scripture and holy tradition. This is called the “dual source” of revelation.
   b. The fourth session of Trent was dismissed abruptly because of war. We know now that the first draft of the session contained the words partim partim. That is, the revelation of God is found partially in Scripture and partially in tradition. This wording was protested by two priests, but we don’t know how the assembly responded to them. But in the place of partim partim in the final draft was simply the word et, or “and.” Did they repudiate the dual source theory? History says no.
   c. The Catholic response to the “I’ll only believe it if it’s in the Bible” argument is to say that the Bible gets its authority from the church. It was by the church’s decision that certain books were canonized. But this in no way makes the Bible subject to the church.
   d. Catholics go on to teach apostolic succession, further undergirding their view of the pope as the vicar of the church, with Christ as his head.
   e. The church used a term to describe the generation of the canon: recipio. The church did not arrogantly claim to have created the canon; it said it “received” the canon. This humble reception of the Scriptures reveals a subordination to them, not authority over them.

III. We have spoken in abstract terms about the nature of God’s revelation to us. But if we have no mastery of the content of His revelation, we are still ignorant of God’s will for us in faith or practice.
- While this series is important, *Dust to Glory* can help you learn fundamental principles for interpreting the Bible. *Knowing Scripture* is also helpful for understanding hermeneutics.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What is the relationship between Scripture and tradition in the Protestant church?

2. What is the relationship between Scripture and tradition in the Catholic church?

3. What other sources or institutions vie for the authority that belongs to Scripture alone?

**FURTHER READING**

King, David T. and William Webster. *Holy Scripture*, 3 Vols
Kistler, Don, ed. *Sola Scriptura*
Mathison, Keith A. *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I: iv–x
Whitaker, William *Disputations on Holy Scripture*
Knowledge of God

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Soon after it began, Ligonier Ministries hired a consultant to help it define its purpose by asking specific questions. R.C.’s answer to one of his questions was that Ligonier existed to help people find out who God is. As people understand the character of God, so they will understand every other doctrine of God.

II. What is the first thing you study in theology proper?
   a. The *incomprehensibility of God* is the first area of study. Is this some kind of grand disclaimer? No; *incomprehensible* in this context means that our knowledge of God is always partial. Even in heaven, we will not exhaustively comprehend God.
      i. *Finitum non capax infiniti*: The infinite cannot be contained
      ii. God lisps for our benefit.
      iii. Anthropomorphic language is applied to normal descriptions and academic ones.
   b. In what ways can we speak about God?
      i. *Via negativa*: He is not like us and His creation.
      ii. *Via eminentiae*: He is like us, only exalted.

III. We use three kinds of language to describe God.
   a. The term *univocal* means “having only one meaning.” In theology, it describes characteristics that we share with God.
   b. *Equivocal* means “having two meanings.” It describes a term that radically changes its definition depending upon the one to whom it is referring.
   c. *Analogical* means “likeness or similarity.” Analogical language is a representation based on proportion. The meaning changes in direct relationship to that which is described, i.e., the good dog, good God, good man.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do we normally mean by the word *incomprehensible*? What does it mean in theology?

2. When we say that God lisps when He talks to us, what do we mean?

3. When we speak of God, we generally use two broad methods: saying what He is and what He is not. What are some examples of this language in the Bible?

4. The last three terms R.C. used are universal, applying to our descriptions of any idea or object. Using an example of your own creation, make univocal, equivocal, and analogical descriptions of it.

FURTHER READING

*Westminster Confession of Faith*, II
I. Pagans of all types lack an understanding of the unity of God. In the midst of many polytheistic cultures, Judaism fiercely clung to monotheism.
   a. Some say the Jews were not monotheists, but that redactors have edited the Bible to make it appear so. But those critical theories do not handle the multiple evidences from multiple sources testifying of the religion of the Jews.
   b. The Jews put great stress on the singularity of God. The Shema, found in Deuteronomy 6:4, is at the core of Jewish spirituality.
   c. The Jews did not take the prescription in the Shema as hyperbole. They were so serious about their monotheism, they literally placed the message of it on their foreheads, doorposts, and arms. They regularly taught their children the command that they should “have no other God before Me.”

II. The Trinity is a difficult, mysterious doctrine, yet it is taught in Scripture.
   a. How can Christians be faithful to the religion of the Old Testament and hold an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity?
   b. This question is not answered by a simple investigation of the history of theology. The New Testament is the key to unlocking much of the confusion surrounding the Trinity.
   c. John 1:1 is a key text for understanding God’s unity and plurality.
   d. The Greek word logos is translated as “word.” In the beginning, the Logos was with the Father. One person was with another person.
   e. “With” is also a key word in this text. There are three ways this English word is brought through from the Greek. In this case, the Greek word translated as “with” in this passage is pros, which means “face to face intimacy.” Jesus was intimately associated with the Father.
f. The verse also says that Jesus not only was with God, but that He was God. The Word is differentiated from God, but is also identified with God. It was because of plain teaching like this in the New Testament that the church developed the doctrine of the Trinity.

III. There are other references to the Trinity in the New Testament.
   a. The testimony of Thomas, who cried out “My Lord and my God!” as he witnessed his resurrected Lord, plainly shows that Jesus is God.
   b. Jesus stated several times that He was God, for instance when He said He was Lord of the sabbath or when He said He was given all authority. Also, for Jesus to say that He was the way, the truth, and the life was a clear testimony from Jesus’ lips that He believed He was God.
   c. The distinctions of each person of the Godhead do not destroy Their deity. Neither does emphasizing the deity of each person do away with Their distinctions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does the term “polytheism” mean? What does “monotheism” mean?

2. How does the Shema illustrate the importance of monotheism to the Jews?

3. How does John 1 teach a doctrine of the Trinity? What other New Testament passages teach this doctrine, affirming the unity of God yet also affirming the distinctions in His persons?

4. Can someone be a Christian without believing in the Trinity? Why or why not?

FURTHER READING

Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, pp. 82–90
Letham, Robert. The Holy Trinity
Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology, I: 181–183
Three in Person

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Is the Trinity a contradiction?
   a. Many people say yes, but it is surprising that some educated people say so based on logic. The formula for the Trinity is paradoxical, but not contradictory.
   b. “One in essence, three in person” is the classical statement of the Trinity. This formula does not violate the law of non-contradiction, because it is not referring to the same thing at the same time and in the same relationship. God is not both one and three at the same time and in the same relationship.

II. What is a paradox?
   a. The word paradox is made up of two Greek roots: para (alongside) and dox (seem, appear).
   b. A paradox occurs when two things, placed alongside each other, appear to be contradictory. But when you look closely, you can see that there is no contradiction.
      i. Essence: being, substance, stuff
      ii. Person: “masks” that actors wore to appear as different characters

III. What is subsistence?
   • It is not someone who is basically surviving on meager food; in theology, it means a person who functions under another one.
     i. God cannot exist in the technical sense of the word.
     ii. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit subsist, not exist.
     iii. One being, three persons
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the law of non-contradiction? Does the Trinity break it? What if it did?

2. What is a paradox? How is the Trinity a paradox? Are there any other doctrines that appear to be contradictions at first glance?

3. In the definition of the Trinity, essence and person are important words. Explain what R.C. said they mean in this context.

4. What does subsistence mean in a theological context? Why is it a superior description of God compared to existence?

FURTHER READING

Augustine. *On the Trinity*
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, pp.442–482
Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 253–282
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. A form of identification usually is required for purchases on credit. When we identify someone we are looking for traits, and combined, these traits are the person’s attributes. God is identified by His attributes, but they are broken into two groups.
   a. Communicable attributes are those which also are found in humans, but to a lesser degree.
   b. Incommunicable attributes are those which are found in God alone.

II. What are the incommunicable attributes?
   a. Is it possible for God to create another “god”?
      i. No, because the new god would not be independent, uncreated; there are certain attributes that God cannot transfer from Himself.
      ii. Simplicity of God
   b. What are some of the differences between God and man?
      i. We are human beings, but God is supreme. The real difference between God and man is that His being is very different from ours. He is independent, but we are entirely dependent on Him. What He creates, He sustains.
      iii. Aseity: self-existence of God
   c. The one who is supreme deserves our worship and our awe.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of communicable attributes? Incommunicable?

2. In what sense is God “simple”?
3. In what areas are God and man fundamentally different?

4. What does “aseity” mean and why is it such an important theological idea?

FURTHER READING

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 113–172
Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, I: x–xii
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, pp. 191–206
Communicable Attributes

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. There are communicable and incommunicable attributes.
   a. Ephesians 5:1: “Therefore be *imitators* of God as dear children.”
   b. We can imitate God only if there are certain things we share with Him, cer-
      tain attributes that are communicable.
   c. One attribute is debatable: holiness.
   d. Why is the word *holy* attached to the third person of the Trinity?
   e. Does redemption include deification, as stated by the Eastern Orthodox?

II. What are the communicable attributes?
   a. Paul confirms that love is shared by God and humans.
   b. The goodness of God can be imitated.
   c. God is just, and we are called to be workers of justice as well. Both internally
      and externally, God is just.
   d. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.
   e. God is wise, and we are instructed by books such as Proverbs, James, and
      Song of Solomon to be wise also.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the main difference between communicable and incom- 
   municable attributes?

2. Why is it debatable as to whether holiness is shared by humans?

3. Name five communicable attributes. How do humans obtain these attributes?

4. Notice the diagram. How does this help us understand how it is righteous for God 
   to have mercy on some but not others?
FURTHER READING

Bavinck, Herman. The Doctrine of God, pp. 175–251
Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, pp. 64–81
Charnock, Stephen. The Existence and Attributes of God, pp. 181–182
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, pp. 393–441
The Will of God

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The Primary “Ask R.C.” Question: How can I know the will of God for my life?
   b. Where is this quotation found? It is in the second book of the Law, during recapitulation of the Law given through Moses.

II. Hidden and Revealed Will of God
   b. Deus revelatus: (Latin) The Revealed God.
   c. These two concepts are found in Deuteronomy 29:29.

III. Uses of the Term “Will of God”
   a. The Directive Will: What God sovereignly, absolutely, efficaciously, brings to pass. It is what He has determined will occur.
   b. The Preceptive Will: What God has spoken as right and true. It can be and quite frequently is resisted.
   c. “How can I know God’s will?” is a question that demands a follow-up: “What kind of will are you talking about?”
   d. “Where God closes His holy mouth, I will desist from inquiry” (John Calvin) or, “The hidden will of God is none of your business.”
   e. This explains the practical reasons behind God’s restrictions concerning divination.

IV. What do the Scriptures say?
   a. “This is the will of God for you, even your sanctification” 1 Thess. 4:3.
   b. How do you know which job? Which mate? Study the preceptive will of God and learn how to live day to day. Study God’s law, and find a way to live that most fulfills His holy commands.
c. Tomorrow is the surest revelation of the hidden will of God.
d. “But the things revealed belong to us...” Note to whom the revealed things belong. They belong to our children and us.
e. Even though we have the New Testament revelation of Christ, we may still use the law as it reveals the character of God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the #1 question you have concerning Christianity?

2. How has God revealed Himself in creation and in the Bible? In what way has He hidden Himself?

3. What are the differences between the preceptive will and the decretive will of God?

4. What are some examples of topics in the Bible that God has whispered about rather than shouted about? How should God's relative silence on a particular topic guide us as we take a stand on that topic?

5. Explain how God is not unjust by not electing everyone to salvation.

FURTHER READING

Elwell, Walter. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, pp. 1172-73
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, pp. 402-405
Sproul, R.C. Knowing God's Will
Westminster Confession of Faith, III
Westminster Shorter Chatechism, Q. 7-8
Westminster Larger Chatechism, Q. 12-14
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Paul says in Romans 8:28 that God causes all things to work for the good of those who love Him. This is stated with extraordinary strength.
   a. How do our lives relate to the sovereign government of God? Our thoughts on this matter have changed radically since the founding of our country, even since the Civil War.
   b. Romans 8:28–30: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”
   c. “What then shall we say to these things?” What is our response? “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Deus pro nobis means “God for us.”

II. What is providence?
   a. The root of this word means “to see.” The prefix means “beforehand.” But this word, theologically, does not simply mean foreknowledge. It is more akin to “provision.”
   b. We are first introduced to the idea of providence in Genesis 22.
   c. Providence covers several areas.
      i. Sustaining or preserving
      ii. Provision
   d. What is the doctrine of concurrence?
      i. Is God the author of sin?
      ii. What you meant for evil, God meant for good.
      iii. Judas and concurrence
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is Paul so sure about what he says in Romans 8:28? What other evidence for this is found in Scripture?

2. What does the word *providence* mean?

3. Where is providence first mentioned in the Bible?

4. What are some areas that providence covers?

5. What is the doctrine of concurrence? Read Deuteronomy 29:29—do we ever know for sure exactly how God’s will and sin interface?

FURTHER READING

Sproul, R.C. *The Invisible Hand*
Calvin, John. *The Secret Providence of God*
Flavel, John. *The Mystery of Providence*
Helm, Paul. *The Providence of God*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 489–538
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, V
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. What is the doctrine of creation?
   a. The central issue that separates secularism and supernatural religion is the doctrine of creation.
   b. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
      i. Beginning
      ii. God
      iii. Creation

II. What was the beginning of the universe like?
   a. Even most secularists acknowledge the universe had a beginning. But the nature of that beginning is disputed.
   b. Some might even debate whether there is a universe at all, i.e., a solipsist.
   c. There are three basic options for answering the questions of creation.
      i. Eternal (self-existent)
      ii. Created by someone who is self-existent (includes Christian worldview)
      iii. Self-created (irrational)
   d. Spontaneous generation is the conceptual grandfather of the self-creation hypothesis.
   e. Chance is a legitimate scientific concept to be used when trying to discover mathematical possibilities. But chance is not a being or power. It cannot influence anything. It is a mathematical entity, not a thing.
   f. The idea of a self-existent material world is a popular idea. It is thought that there is a stable, self-existent part of the universe somewhere. That portion is like a power core, or battery. So there is no need for a transcendent being to create or sustain the visible universe.
   g. *Ex nihilo nihil fit* means “out of nothing, nothing comes.”
h. *Creatio ex nihilo* teaches that God called the universe into existence. He did not shape or form it from pre-existing material.

i. God gave the word, the divine fiat, and the universe began.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Three terms in Genesis 1:1 define the creation debate. What are they?
2. What is chance?
3. There are three basic options for explaining the nature of the creation of the universe. What are those options?

**FURTHER READING**

Copan, Paul and William Lane Craig. *Creation Out of Nothing*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 431–462
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, IV
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. “There can be no biblical theology without demonology,” G. C. Berkhover said.
   a. Rudolf Bultmann attacked the veracity of the New Testament by attacking the supernatural worldview of the first century.
   b. The world the New Testament describes is filled with angels and demons. Therefore, that world is deemed to be faulty.
   c. What is it about Satan that is so unbelievable? The current image of Satan was developed during the Middle Ages. The people of the time mocked him and joked about him so as to attack his pride.

II. In the teachings of Christ angels are discussed more than love or sin. Does this validate the current New Age interest in angels? No.
   a. An early heresy in the church was that Jesus was actually an angel. The author of Hebrews challenges that assumption. See Hebrews 1.
   b. Angels are created beings who have various functions.
      i. Mysterious: invisible, visible, various shapes and forms
      ii. Ministering spirits: seraphim, cherubim; help to Jesus
      iii. Messengers: announce John’s and Jesus’ births, make Old Testament visits
   c. How do fallen angels differ? They are lesser angels who fell with Satan and are under his command. Satan is not God. Particularly, he is not all-knowing and all-present. Do not attribute too much power to Satan.
      i. Tempter
      ii. Deceiver
      iii. Accuser (Rev. 12:10)
   d. A warning: Satan, like other angels, is metamorphic. He can change images as easily as we change our clothes. He can appear as pure as light.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is it about Satan that makes him unbelievable?

2. Angels are created beings. What are the popular ideas about angels that are contradicted by Scripture?

3. What are the various functions of good angels? What are the various evil functions of Satan?

4. What other questions do you have about angels and demons? Does Scripture answer those questions clearly? What do we do with our unanswered questions?

FURTHER READING

Leahy, Frederick. *Satan Cast Out*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 539–567
The Creation of Man

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The creation of man is closely connected to the overall doctrine of creation. With the assault on creation, the dignity of man is also assaulted.
   a. One philosopher has said, “We are at best grown-up germs, sitting on one cog on one wheel of a vast cosmic machine that is destined for annihilation.”
   b. Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most pessimistic of philosophers. He showed the effects of ignoring the dignity that flows from the divine creation of man.
   c. Non-Christians have no reason to give man any dignity. They live on borrowed capital from the Christian worldview.

II. Starting in Genesis 1:26, man’s creation is described as initiated by God, just like that of the rest of creation. But we are different in our function and form from the rest of creation.
   a. We are made in the image of God, the imago Dei. What is the nature of the discussion?
      i. Image and likeness in Catholicism
      ii. Hendiadys
      iii. Medieval theologians vs. Barth: the analogy of being vs. wholly other
   b. What precisely is the imago Dei?
      i. Rational and instinctive
      ii. Volitional
      iii. Affect
      iv. Male and female: analogy of relationship a la Barth
      v. Responsibility and ability
      vi. Reasoning back from the Second Adam: a unique ability to mirror the character of God
   c. Since the Fall, do we still have the image of God? Yes, though it has been marred.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In non-Christian worldviews, how does man obtain dignity?

2. How are we similar to and different from the rest of creation?

3. What are some opinions on the image of God in man? What is the true nature of the image of God in man?

4. Since the Fall, do we still bear the image of God? In what way do sub-cognitive people (the mentally handicapped or infants) bear the image of God?

FURTHER READING

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, II: 3–41
Hoekema, Anthony. *Created in God’s Image*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 462–488
The Nature of Sin

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Something is very wrong with the world in which we live.
   a. God created the universe in its perfect state, but the fall of mankind brought tragedy and curse upon the entire universe.
   b. There are cosmic ramifications of sin. Because humans were in charge of the entire earth, the earth was cursed along with Adam and humanity.

II. What are the effects of sin upon man and the universe?
   • People are alienated or estranged.
     i. Estranged from nature
     ii. Estranged from God
     iii. Estranged from each other
     iv. Estranged from self

III. What is the nature of sin?
   a. Sin can be defined as “missing the mark,” as when an archer misses his bull’s-eye. It is the standard or norm of God’s law that is the target.
   b. Sin is, according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God.”

IV. What is the origin of sin?
   a. Did God cause sin?
     i. Privatio
     ii. Negatio
   b. Sin is primarily defined in negative terms, over against the positive norm of God’s character or law. But do not think that just because we define sin negatively that it is not actual. It is real. It is something in which we are personally involved.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How much of the world is harmed by sin? Why?

2. What are the four ways man is affected by sin?

3. What is the nature of sin?

4. Did God cause sin?

FURTHER READING

Berkouwer, G.C. *Sin*
Burroughs, Jeremiah. *The Evil of Evils*
Campbell, Iain. *The Doctrine of Sin*
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, II: 130–192
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 591–629
Westminster Confession of Faith, VI
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. A popular misunderstanding is that the doctrine of original sin refers to the first sin. But it is a description of the results of that sin, not that sin itself.
   a. We are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners.
   b. Original sin describes the fallen condition of the human race.
   c. Jonathan Edwards said, “If the Bible did not tell us that there is a problem with our moral disposition by nature, we would have to affirm it on the basis of rational observation because of the pervasive presence of evil in the world of human beings.”
   d. Even pagans acknowledge that “Nobody’s perfect.” But if perfection is possible, wouldn’t you expect more people to attain and maintain it?
   e. Original sin is a judgment of God upon rational creatures.

II. The classic study of this doctrine was done by St. Augustine and was the center of the Pelagian controversy of the fourth century.
   a. God made man posse peccare, or able to sin. Humans had the power to sin. We know that because they sinned.
   b. They also were created posse non peccare, or able to not sin. They had the moral ability to obey God.
   c. In the Fall, mankind lost posse non peccare and received non posse, non peccare. They lost the ability to not sin and received the inability to not sin. This does not mean man cannot do anything to obey the commandments in an outward manner. But he cannot keep them rightly.

III. As an aside, even Christians are subject to this rule. All people are unable to obey God rightly and completely. Amoral things that we refer to as “mistakes” are often rooted in moral matters. If we loved God with our minds, we would not make nearly as many “errors.”
a. Jesus says in John 6:44 that people cannot do the good work of coming to God without the enabling of God. The doctrine of original sin makes the effectual calling of God absolutely necessary.

b. Many do not agree, and claim that there is an “island of righteousness” in every man. This view is not biblical (Rom. 3:10–11).

c. We were made in the image of God. We lost the image of God in the narrow sense in the Fall, but we retain it in the broad sense. The perfections granted to us were lost, but the many other similarities God granted us remain.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Are we sinners because we sin, or do we sin because we are sinners? Explain.

2. What does original sin describe?

3. What early controversy brought the issue of original sin to center stage?

4. How did Augustine describe the state of man before and after the Fall?

5. What does John 6:44 teach about man’s ability to come to God?

FURTHER READING

Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, pp. 244–254
Boston, Thomas. Human Nature in its Fourfold State
Calvin, John. The Institutes of Christian Religion, II: i–iii
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, II: 227–277
Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology, I: 629–640
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The doctrine of original sin raises the question, “How can God hold us accountable for sin when we cannot do anything but sin?”
   a. How is the sin nature (and therefore guilt) transferred from Adam to us?
   b. Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”
   c. Do we duplicate in our own life the fall of Adam, and therefore make the transfer of guilt unnecessary? No.
   d. How do we know differently? Infants die. They are not active sinners, and the Scriptures tell us why they bear the curse in Romans 5.

II. There are three positions on exactly how Adam’s guilt is transferred.
   a. Realism, crass version—It would be just for God to visit us with fallen natures only if we actually sinned. So we were really there in the garden with Adam. Our souls were pre-existent, present in the garden, participating in some way in the Fall. The ministry of Melchizedek is mentioned as “proof” of this, as recorded in Hebrews 7:10.
   b. Realism, sophisticated version—In the mind of God, you pre-existed. He had a perfect idea of you, and this idea was real. If you were there in God’s mind, you were really there. But this depends on a platonic view of ideas. Jonathan Edwards held this view.
   c. Federalism—Adam represents us, just as Jesus represents us. Adam does not act alone, but acts on our behalf. His probation is our probation since he is our representative.
      i. “No damnation without representation!”
      ii. We were accurately represented and flawlessly represented. God perfectly chose our representative.
      iii. God selects our representative, just as God selected Jesus to represent His elect.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How is God just in passing the consequences of Adam’s sin to us?

2. What are some situations that demonstrate the effects of Adam’s sin?

3. What are the two kinds of realism?

4. Describe the federal view of the transmission of original sin. How did Adam perfectly represent us?

FURTHER READING

Murray, John. *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, pp. 640–658
The Covenants

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. In Hebrews 8:3–6, the author says Jesus was mediator of a better covenant that was established on better promises.
   a. The author goes on to explain exactly why the new covenant is a better covenant.
   b. This passage reveals the nature of covenants, demonstrating that the structure of covenant provides a framework for all God's relationships with man.

II. The covenants God has made with man progressed from the covenant made with Adam to one with Noah, then Abraham, then Moses, then David, and then with all believers through Christ.
   a. Covenants are based on the promises of God toward man. They include stipulations—conditions to be fulfilled. Ceremonies follow that dramatize the words of the agreement.
   b. God has given us His word, in Christ, that He will fulfill all He has said.
   c. Jesus’ life and ministry were part of the dramatic revelation of the vast expanse of God's promises toward us.

III. There are three major covenants in Scripture.
   a. The covenants of redemption, works, and grace are the three main covenants God has made.
   b. The first is the covenantal agreement that was made in eternity between the persons of the Godhead. As a result, the creation of the world came to be. And in redemption, the Trinity worked together to bring about the plan of salvation. The Father makes the plan, the Son carries it out, and the Spirit seals our salvation.
   c. The second is the covenant God made with Adam. In the probationary scenario of the garden, Adam and Eve covenanted with God to obey him
and live. The destiny of the human race was to be decided on the basis of
the work of Adam and Eve. They disobeyed, failed the probation, and con-
demned the world.
d. The covenant of grace promotes us to the state that Adam and Eve would
have achieved if they had obeyed God.
e. There was grace in the covenant of works; it was not empty of God's blessing.
f. Confusion sometimes occurs when we read that we are saved by grace (Eph.
2:8–10). Jesus is the new Adam, the one who comes into the world and
places Himself under the obligations of the covenant of works. He succeeds
where Adam failed. The life and works of Christ save us, so in this sense we
are saved by works. Not our works, though, but the works of Christ.
g. So the covenant of grace does not nullify the covenant of works. It fulfills it.
h. These two covenants fit together and fulfill the promises and requirements
of God from all eternity.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does Hebrews 8:3–6 teach about the new covenant?

2. What is a covenant?

3. What is the covenant of redemption?

4. What is the covenant of works?

5. What is the covenant of grace?

FURTHER READING

Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, pp. 211–218; 262–301
Robertson, O. Palmer. The Christ of the Covenants
Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology, I: 574–578; II: 169–240
Westminster Confession of Faith, VII
The Christ of the Bible

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. One of the most intimidating sections of theology is Christology.
   a. We must be most careful at this point because Jesus is at the very center of our faith.
   b. It is difficult to summarize God. This problem is compounded with Jesus, as He is richly presented to us in all His splendor throughout Scripture.

II. Some of the most significant passages revealing the glory of Christ are found in Revelation 5.
   a. “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” No one was found who could do it—until Jesus stepped forward.
   b. This section is skillfully written to produce a sense of expectation. But in the end, John sees a bloody lamb. This profound contrast reveals great humiliation and great exaltation of Christ’s life.

III. What has God revealed to us in the gospels concerning Jesus?
   a. God gave us four gospels to give us different perspectives on Jesus’ person and ministry.
      i. Matthew
      ii. Mark
      iii. Luke
      iv. John
   b. We also see the various responses of people to the person of Christ through these multiple witnesses. The contemporaries of Christ testified to the vastness of His character.
   c. Jesus also attested to His own person and origin in the gospels. The “I am” statements of Christ (Ego emi) are particularly revealing of His nature.
   d. Jesus was more than a perfect man. He was “Immanuel,” or “God with us.”
e. The Council of Chalcedon said Jesus was, “Deum verum et hominem verum”—truly God and truly man. This was so carefully defined because both His natures are so boldly presented.

IV. How do the apostles preach Christ to us?
   a. Paul shows how Jesus is our mediator, accomplishing our redemption.
   b. The book of Hebrews gives us one of the highest, most beautiful teachings on the person of Christ.

V. How does the Old Testament teach us about Jesus Christ?
   a. His person and work are typologically represented in the tabernacle.
   b. The prophets are filled with references to the coming Messiah.
   c. Christ is preached on virtually every page of the Old Testament.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is Christology so difficult or intimidating to teach?

2. In the Bible passages concerning Jesus, which ones present images of Him that you have difficulty accepting?

3. Summarize what we know about Jesus just from the Old Testament.

4. Does the presupposition that the Bible is all about Jesus change the way you read the Bible?

FURTHER READING

Sproul, R.C. Mighty Christ
Berkouwer, G.C. The Person of Christ
MacLeod, Donald. The Person of Christ
Wells, David. The Person of Christ
Westminster Confession of Faith, VIII
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The greatest concern for the early church was to establish a clear, biblical portrait of Jesus that revealed the unity and diversity of the Godhead.
   a. The various councils during the fourth and fifth centuries are a result of that struggle.
   b. The person of Christ is greatly assaulted during our time.
   c. Throughout its history, the church has had to defend against attacks on the person of Christ similar to those of the Jesus Seminar today.

II. Was the Council of Chalcedon a terminal council?
   a. G.C. Berkouwer, a teacher of R.C.’s at the Free University of Amsterdam, believed it was the last council of church history to define the person of Christ. It was unimaginable that any council could go beyond those statements.
   b. Chalcedon, the fourth ecumenical council (A.D. 451), was brought about because of errors concerning the two natures of Christ.
   c. On the one hand was the error of Eutyches, the promoter of Monophysitism. He taught that the incarnate Christ had only one nature, called a theanthropic nature. It was a hybrid, neither human nor divine.
   d. On the other was the heresy of Nestorius, which was named after him. Nestorius did not deny that Christ had two natures, but he said Jesus also had two distinct personalities. Jesus was actually two persons in his view.
   e. Chalcedon said, *Deum verum et hominem verum.* Jesus was truly God and truly man.
   f. Four negatives also were established concerning the two natures of Christ.
      i. Without mixture
      ii. Without confusion
      iii. Without separation
      iv. Without division
g. Distinguishing the two natures is not the same as separating them.

h. The mystery of how Christ can be truly God and truly man cannot be penetrated by creeds or reason. It is beyond our full understanding.

i. We can only say so much positively concerning the person of Christ. If you try to think and write beyond Chalcedon, you might as well pick your heresy.

j. Each nature retains its own attributes—a teaching that must not be ignored.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was the main theological goal of the first five centuries?

2. What were the two main heresies confronting the orthodox position on Christ’s person?

3. Noting the text of Chalcedon printed below, what questions about Jesus’ deity does it answer? What questions remain unanswered?

4. How can the church fight Christological heresy today?

FURTHER READING

Berkouwer, G.C. *The Person of Christ*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 299–332

THE CREED OF CHALCEDON

We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; coessential with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *without confusion, without change, without division, without separation*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.
The Names of Christ

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The titles of God are revealing of His character.
   a. At a seminary, a scholar gave an uncharacteristic lecture by reciting the names of Jesus as found in Scripture.
   b. Notice every time the Scripture assigns a title to Jesus.

II. The major titles of Jesus are revealing of His nature.
   a. His most frequent title is “Christ.” Notice that “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name. Christ means “Messiah” or “the Anointed One.”
   b. For Jesus to be the Messiah, He must be the Lamb of God, the Great High Priest, and many other things. Many titles of Jesus interconnect with Messiah.
   c. The title “Lord” got Jesus’ followers into a great deal of trouble. This meant that Caesar was not Lord, nor was anyone else. Jesus alone was the Christians’ true king, and this claim was at the heart of the persecution of the early church. However, the title also meant “sir.”
   d. “Son of Man” is used far less frequently than the other titles. It is Jesus’ favorite title for himself, though. All but three of 80 usages are Jesus referring to Himself. But why? It is a designation of a royal deity and judge, as noted in Daniel 7:13.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How are the names of Christ theologically significant?

2. What is the most frequently used title of Jesus in Scripture? What does this title mean?

3. What are some of the meanings of the title “Lord”?
4. What title does Jesus use most frequently to refer to Himself? What is the significance of this title?

FURTHER READING

Sproul, R.C. *Mighty Christ*
The States of Christ

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The names of Christ, the states of Christ, and the offices of Christ are three ways the Bible discusses the person and work of Jesus.

II. The states of Christ begin not with His birth, but with His pre-incarnate state.
   a. In John 1, John says that Jesus existed prior to His birth. His divine nature is eternally co-existent with the Father.
   b. The Old Testament records several encounters with a being thought to be the pre-incarnate Christ (Josh. 5:13; Ex. 3:2). Such an encounter is called a Christophany.
   c. The Apostles’ Creed refers to the birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and final return of Jesus. These are generally known as the states of Christ.

III. The nature of Jesus’ states generally flows from humiliation to exaltation.
   a. Jesus is humiliated in His incarnation and daily life, culminating in the Crucifixion, but from that point He experiences greater and greater glory, which will culminate in His return.
   b. This is agreeable up to a point, but has its limits.
   c. In The Glory of Christ, R.C. looked at the manifestations of glory throughout Christ’s life. This book shows that Scripture testifies that Christ was always glorious, even in the midst of His pre-resurrection humiliation.
   d. A carry-over from His state of humiliation was His physical body. The same body that died came out of the tomb. This reveals that the Incarnation was not completely filled with humiliation, just as the time of humiliation was not devoid of glory.
   e. The greatest moment of Christ’s glory so far has been the Ascension. (Acts 1). The importance of this event is highly underestimated.
   f. Jesus ascended to sit, rule, and intercede on behalf of all believers.
   g. It is from this place of majesty that He will return to judge.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are three ways the Bible discusses the person and work of Christ?

2. What biblical passages shed light on the pre-incarnate state of Christ?

3. What are the states of Christ as enumerated in the Apostles' Creed?

4. What do we mean when we speak of the humiliation of Christ?

FURTHER READING

Sproul, R.C. *The Glory of Christ*
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, II: 610–638
MacLeod, Donald. *The Person of Christ*
Thomas, Derek. *Taken up to Heaven*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 332–373
The Offices of Christ

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Scholars have chosen to parse the person of Christ in several ways. The richness of His being is not easily summarized in a single formula. One excellent way to understand the person of Christ is to view Him through His offices.
   a. Christ is called our Mediator. He is a go-between, someone who stands between two parties. In this case, God and man are in dispute and Jesus is the agent.
   b. There are three kinds of mediators in the Old Testament. They are prophets, priests, and kings.
   c. Christ fulfills all three of the Old Testament offices at once.

II. What is the nature of Jesus’ role as prophet?
   a. The prophet was a spokesperson for God, an agent of revelation to mankind. God gave His word to the prophet, then he or she delivered it to the people. The prophet’s words were prefaced by the idea, often the words themselves, “Thus saith the Lord.”
   b. False prophets often prove attractive to many. God said to Jeremiah that he should not be concerned about false prophets, but should focus on rightly proclaiming God’s word.
   c. Jesus was the perfect prophet. Most who met Him immediately knew they were in the presence of a great prophet (John 4). But He did not simply proclaim the word; He was the Word. In this sense, He was the fulfillment of the prophetic ministry.
   d. Jesus was also the object of the prophetic teachings of the Old Testament.

III. How does Jesus fulfill the role of the priest?
   a. What Old Testament passage is quoted most frequently in the New Testament?
b. Answer: Psalm 110. This incredible prophecy begins, “The Lord said to my Lord...” The book of Hebrews gives much attention to this tremendous passage.
c. The Old Testament priest came to make intercession for the people, ministering in the most holy of places as he did his work.
d. In Psalm 110, both ultimate kingship and priesthood are promised to the Messiah.
e. The writer of Hebrews affirms that Jesus is a greater priest than any other.
f. Christ’s work as priest continues until now as He intercedes for His people at the right hand of the Father.
g. Just as with Old Testament prophecy, Jesus is the subject and object of the sacrificial system.

IV. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the role of the king.
a. Jesus manifested the justice and rule of God in a better way than the Old Testament kings. Even though they had been given authority by God, they failed.
b. We never find a separation of state from God. Church from state, yes. But rulers are accountable to God as to how they exercise their reign. Only God can make a man a ruler.
c. David is the closest we have to a perfect king. But even his rule makes us long for a perfected version of David. The promise to us is that Jesus is the newly born King of Israel, and His claims to Kingship were what put Him on the cross.
d. Jesus perfectly fulfills the role of king by wrapping the other offices up into this one. He was a priestly king, a prophetic king, and a kingly king.
e. Right now, Jesus is the King. He holds the highest office in the universe by being seated at the right hand of God today. There is no other office higher. And He shall reign forever.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the three kinds of mediators in the Old Testament?

2. How does Jesus fulfill the roles of prophet, priest, and king?

3. How does seeing Him in these roles help explain His work in the economy of God's kingdom?

FURTHER READING

Calvin, John. The Institutes of Christian Religion, II: xv
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, II: 455–468; 596–609
Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology, II: 391–417; 486–494
Why Did Christ Die?

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The atonement of Christ is one of the most magnificent parts of theology. Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* or *Why the God/Man?* is one of the most famous works that dealt with Christ’s death.

II. The New Testament uses several metaphors to describe the Atonement. It is like a tapestry, with several strands woven through it.
   a. Redemption or purchase
   b. Ransom theories
   c. Bride price
   d. *Christus Victor*
   e. Governmental theories
   f. Satisfaction theory

III. The satisfaction theory gets at the heart of the cause and need of the Atonement.
   a. This theory is based on the justice of God. God’s justice is closely related to His righteousness and goodness.
      i. God’s justice is perfect.
      ii. Will not the judge of all the world do what is right?
   b. We have both pecuniary and moral debt toward God, as illustrated by the boy in the ice cream shop.
   c. God is both just and the justifier of the ungodly.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. List and describe the different theories of the atonement.

2. Why is the satisfaction theory more accurate than the others?
3. Using the Bible’s logic, how can God be just and yet be the justifier of sinners who do not deserve mercy?

FURTHER READING

Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*
Hodge, A.A. *The Atonement*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 417–426
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. In R.C.’s homiletics class, the teacher would critique the presentation of the student’s sermon. But when the substitutionary atonement was preached, he commented on the content.

II. Is the substitutionary atonement a vital part of Christianity? All orthodox (and even some unorthodox) have agreed it is.
   a. Karl Barth said that the most important word in the New Testament was *huper*, or “in behalf of.”
   b. Through the First Adam, we all fell. But through the Second Adam, we are redemptively represented. Anselm highlighted this relationship in the previously mentioned *Cur Deus Homo*.

III. Insights from the Old Testament are essential for understanding this aspect of the Atonement.
   a. The Day of Atonement is instructive as to the transfer or imputation of our sins to Christ.
      i. It pointed to the concept of substitution.
      ii. It pointed to the importance of Jesus’ very life being given for us, not simply the shedding of His blood.
      iii. Propitiation: horizontal atonement
      iv. Expiation: vertical atonement
      v. What do we do with our guilt?
   b. The covenant structure of the Atonement is also revealed in the Old Testament.
      i. Blessing: God’s presence
      ii. Cursing: far as the curse is found
IV. Paul makes this aspect of the Atonement clear in Galatians 3:1–14.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is so offensive about the atonement of Christ?

2. Why is the Atonement a vital part of the Christian faith? What is instructive about the Day of Atonement in its relationship to Jesus’ work?

3. What other Old Testament passages reveal aspects of the atonement of Christ?

FURTHER READING

Hodge, A.A. *The Atonement*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 426–438
The Extent of the Atonement

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. One of the most controversial issues surrounding the Atonement is its extent.
   a. The Christmas Calvinist is someone who has “no L.”
   b. The L comes from the TULIP acrostic that was developed in Holland in response to the Remonstrants, a group of semi-Pelagian theologians. The L stands for “limited atonement.”
   c. Many people believe four points of the acrostic, but reject the L. They may call themselves “Calminians.”

II. What is not meant by the idea of limited atonement?
   a. The biblical idea of the Atonement is not best summarized by the aforementioned phrase. This problem is inevitable when you reduce a complicated doctrine to two words.
   b. This discussion about Christ’s sacrifice is not about its value. The value of the Atonement was infinite, once and for all.
   c. Even some pastors mistakenly say that limited atonement means that Christ’s atonement was sufficient for all, but efficient for some. But this description is not sufficient. That Jesus’ atonement is not applied efficiently to all people is true for any concept of the Atonement outside of universalism.
   d. Jesus did not die to obtain the possibility of salvation for some. But some evangelicals display a tendency toward universalism by claiming that Jesus died for everyone in the same way. This creates the unlikely possibility that all will be saved.
   e. Salvation is designed, in the Arminian view, in potential or conditional terms. It is the individual’s faith that determines the efficiency of the Atonement. Unless you believe, Jesus’ work is to no avail.
f. In this view, if Jesus’ atonement actually pays for our sin debt to God, and He then sends sinners to hell, God is guilty of punishing the same sins twice. So, for Arminians, God must save only potentially, and not really save anyone from His wrath.

III. How was the Atonement designed?

a. Who was the designer? God is the planner.

b. Why did God send Christ to die? Was it to pace up and down heaven’s streets, hoping that someone would accept His Son’s sacrifice?

c. With a hypothetical redemption, Jesus can die theoretically for everyone (universalism) and theoretically for nobody (futility).

d. At a recent meeting of scholars, a well-known Christian leader said that millions of people would be lost without the results of that discussion. R.C. disagreed.

e. Is salvation of man or of God? Jesus said, “I lay down my life for My sheep.” This does not sound potential at all.

f. In one sense, the offer of the Gospel is not universal. The promises of the Gospel are only offered to the believing, repentant sinner. God enables such a response (and thus enables us to meet His conditions), and so it is accurate to say that the Gospel is offered only to those who respond in faith.

g. If the Gospel offer is not universal, then can the atonement of Christ be universal? Every person for whom Christ dies is saved. Jesus died only for the elect.

h. But what about the passages that say Jesus died for the world? Those have been misinterpreted by those from the semi-Pelagian perspective to mean Jesus died for every single person in a potential way. This is reading far too much into those passages. They seem to refer only to the racial reality of the Atonement—that Jesus also died for non-Jews. Jesus died for Gentiles.

i. Did Jesus die for Satan or other fallen angels? No. But we accept this limit to the Atonement quite easily. Jesus did not die for those who were not God’s special objects of favor.

IV. How can someone embrace four points of Calvinism and not embrace limited atonement?

a. Total depravity, rightly understood, makes particular atonement absolutely necessary.

b. Unconditional election, rightly understood, makes particular atonement absolutely necessary.

c. The five points of Calvinism need to be taken as a group, for they cannot be logically held separately.

d. The Cross is a part of God’s eternal plan of redemption. It was His intention that Christ not die in vain but that He accomplish His goal: to save the elect.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is R.C.’s critique of unlimited or universal atonement? How is universal atonement different from the doctrine of univeralism (all will be saved)? How is it similar?

2. Briefly, what is R.C.’s argument for the necessity of a particular atonement? What problems does this position solve? What encouragements does this position give? What are some objections to it? How does R.C. answer them?

3. What are the problems with believing some points of Calvinism without embracing a particular atonement?

FURTHER READING

Sproul, R.C. *Mighty Christ*
Owen, John. *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 438–483
The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. What are the significant events in your life?
   a. R.C.’s conversion was very significant. He was engaged to a woman who thought he had gone crazy when he was converted. But when she was converted, one of her first comments was, “Now I know who the Holy Spirit is!”

II. Who is the Holy Spirit?
   a. The Holy Spirit has a will, knowledge, and affections, all of which add up to His being a person.
   b. A point of confusion is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times as compared to the New.

III. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit hovered over the waters. This begins our understanding of God the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.
   a. The gap theory does not help us at this point.
   b. Carl Sagan, on the first page of his book “Cosmos,” makes a point of saying that we live in a cosmos, not a chaotic universe. What we have in Genesis 1 is a proclamation of God’s oversight, via the Holy Spirit, of all that was made.
   c. The overwhelming power of God that is manifested in the Old Testament narratives is focused through the Holy Spirit. He is the dunamis (power) of God.
   d. The offices of the prophet, priest, and king were all charismatic offices, that is, empowered, gifted or anointed by the Holy Spirit. That the Holy Spirit could anoint or empower someone to do a certain task did not necessarily mean that he had been regenerated by the Spirit. Gifted, yes, but not internally changed.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are some biblical passages that indicate the personhood of the Holy Spirit?

2. What does Genesis 1 teach us about the Holy Spirit?

3. What is the primary difference between the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the New?

FURTHER READING

Ferguson, Sinclair. The Holy Spirit, pp. 15–26
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, I: 522–532
Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology, I: 302–308
The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. God did not create humans as empty sculptures. We were given “spirits.” God breathes into us His own life. The Holy Spirit is the genesis of life. In a broad sense, no one is conceived by anything other than the Holy Spirit.

II. The word for “spirit” in Hebrew and Greek is linked to breath and wind.
   a. When Jesus says He comes to give life to others, He is saying that He will give them spiritual life.
   b. In the New Testament, we see a new genesis described in depth: regeneration.

III. The New Testament uncovers more of the internal workings of the Spirit.
   a. The Spirit regenerates us.
   b. In Ephesians 2, the Bible teaches that people are not all beloved by God; we are born enemies of God.
   c. This teaching from Ephesians 2 is quite surprising to many in the church today. But the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in making enemies of God His friends.
   d. John 3 is clear on the necessity of the Spirit’s work in the life of a believer.
   e. There are no non-born again Christians. We must experience rebirth by the Spirit (John 3:5).
   f. Why is the Spirit designated as holy?
   g. The Holy Spirit inspired the original record of Scripture. But now He helps us understand the nature of Scripture. He illumines it for us.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How is the Holy Spirit involved in the creation of the universe? Of individual humans? Of new believers?

2. Why is the Spirit designated as “holy”?

3. How is the Spirit involved with the creation and reading of Scripture?

FURTHER READING

Bruner, F.D. A *Theology of the Holy Spirit*
Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 26–33
Owen, John. *The Holy Spirit*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 302–308
The Paraclete

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. In John 15, Jesus discusses hatred. This may be surprising, but it is a discussion of the world’s hatred of Him.
   a. If the world hates Me, the world will hate you.
   b. I will send you a Comforter.
   c. Who is the Paraclete? It is not exactly correct to say that the Paraclete is the only Paraclete—Jesus was the first.

II. The idea of the Paraclete has been associated with comfort.
   a. Frederick Nietzsche assaulted the idea of a living God, let alone a God who is with us as a comforter.
   b. Our idea of a comforter and the nature of the Holy Spirit’s comfort can be quite different.
   c. Paraclete means “to call someone alongside.” In Greek culture, this referred to a family attorney who was kept on retainer. Older translations use the word “advocate,” which is a good translation.
   d. If we follow the term comfort back in its history, we discover that it is a good translation as well. It developed from two words that meant “with” and “strength.” This takes us further away from viewing the Holy Spirit as a simple caregiver.
   e. We are conquerors, developed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit through the application of truth.
   f. In the Upper Room Discourse, we learn more about the Holy Spirit than in any other section of the Bible.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do we mean by the term Paraclete?
2. Who was the first Paraclete?

3. What passage of the New Testament gives us the greatest amount of insight into the work of the Holy Spirit?

FURTHER READING

Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 35–56
The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The Charismatic movement has had an incredible impact on the church.
   a. What are the roots of the movement?
   b. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
   c. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues originally were linked to a perfectionistic view of sanctification.

II. The history and doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is rooted in Wesleyan perfectionism.
   a. Originally, it was an experience that marked your perfection. The sign that accompanied it was speaking in tongues.
   b. This doctrine began to come over into different denominations. But how do you integrate this doctrine with historic Christianity?
   c. Neo-Pentecostalism was the result. The baptism was seen in this movement as the sign of a supernatural gifting of God. Neo-Pentecostals disagree over the sign of tongues.
   d. But they do agree that there is a time gap between conversion and the reception of the baptism. The body of Christ is split between the have’s and the have not’s.
   e. The basis for this view of the doctrine is the Acts narrative.

III. The biblical record in Acts must be the basis of our acceptance or rejection of this doctrine.
   a. What do the events of Pentecost (Acts 2) mean?
   b. There were all sorts of visible and audible signs during Pentecost. When Peter interprets these events, he quotes a passage from Joel.
c. The gifts of the Spirit no longer will be limited to prophets, priests, kings, and a few others.
d. This interpretation makes it hard to argue that this baptism is only for some believers. Joel makes it clear that the baptism or gifting of believers was to be for all people everywhere, not just a few.
e. The Jewish believers at Pentecost all received this new gifting. Not just some, all.

IV. There are three other mini-Pentecosts in Acts.
a. Non-Jews received this gifting in these situations found in Acts 8, 10, and 19.
b. These outpourings have suggested a permanent separation between conversion and gifting.

V. As the Gospel was preached to these various groups, the question of whether these people were “real” Christians naturally arose.
a. Luke says “yes” by tracing the expansion of the Gospel through its victories in those from “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.”
b. Paul says, “Were we not all baptized by one Spirit?” in reference to these Pentecostal events. All Christians are given these gifts, not just a few.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How did the Wesleyan movement understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
2. How do charismatics understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
3. How does Peter’s use of Joel in Acts shed light on the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
4. What is the significance of the three mini-Pentecosts in Acts?

FURTHER READING

Ferguson, Sinclair. The Holy Spirit, pp.57–92
Gaffin, Richard. Perspectives on Pentecost
The Gifts of the Spirit

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Why has more been written on the Holy Spirit in the last fifty years than in the two thousand previous?
   a. The charismatic movement has had a great impact on Protestantism and Catholicism.
   b. The subject of tongues and the broader question of the gifts of the Spirit have become popular and academic areas of interest.

II. Is the “speaking in tongues” in Acts the same thing that happened to the church at Corinth?
   a. At Pentecost, the miracle was not so much in the speaking as in the hearing. There was a miracle of translation, not a production of languages. But there is no explicit teaching of this in Acts, so we must not speculate too strongly.
   b. In Corinth, we see that there is a miracle of language. But that miracle is not uniformly reproduced in church history. The manifestation of tongues has varied in almost every way throughout history, which brings into question whether the event in Corinth is the baseline for the continuance of what we think of as “the gift of tongues.”
   c. Is the revival of tongues a sign of the “latter rain”?
   d. Was the tongues speaking in Corinth miraculous, or a natural and permitted event?

III. The most lengthy discussion of spiritual gifts in scripture is in 1 Corinthians 12–14.
   a. One of the most popular chapters in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13. In the midst of his discussion of spiritual gifts, Paul writes a poetic and powerful dissertation on love. This must be the basis for the use of the gifts.
   b. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul begins by stating he does not want people to be ignorant about spiritual gifts.
c. At the end of the first century, Clement writes the Corinthians and reminds them of Paul's letters, encouraging them to obey them. They were still struggling with misuse of the gifts, among other problems.

d. In 1 Corinthians 12:1–10, Paul lists various manifestations of the Holy Spirit present in the church. There is no reason to believe this is an exhaustive list. These gifts are diverse.

e. 1 Corinthians 12:11–13 discusses the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Here Paul teaches that all Christians have been baptized by the Holy Spirit, contradicting Pentecostal teachings. Also, he shows that the entire body has been equipped to minister, not just a designated few. The priesthood of all believers, which is clearly taught here, was emphasized by the Reformers.

f. 1 Corinthians 12:14–26 illustrates the need to allow this diversity to exist without limiting it or emphasizing one gift over the other.

g. Paul then goes on to list offices and gifts in the church, putting tongues last. Some are called “best gifts” and apostleship is demonstrated to be a more important office.

IV. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul revisits his straightforward teaching concerning the gifts.

a. In what sense is Paul using the word “prophesy” here?

b. In verses 4–6, Paul seems to clearly designate the tongues in Corinth as different from those in Acts.

c. Focusing on verse 6, tongues then and now were unintelligible. But they do not necessarily seem to be supernatural, but a natural event of religious ecstasy. Today, people may be speaking in tongues, and this speaking may be speaking with God, but it does not require miraculous enabling any more than normal prayer does.

d. Tongues takes place in many religions. There is no discernible difference between the various religious, ecstatic expressions in Mormonism or Catholicism and the experience of Christians who speak in tongues. They sound the same.

e. Paul goes on in verses 6–19 to show how this gift is to be used. The accent is on order, not disorder.

f. Tongues are not bad, but according to Paul, prophecy is better.

g. The warning for us is that we not exalt this particular gift as a sign of spirituality. It is not a sign of special empowerment of God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Are the “tongues” in Acts identical to the “tongues” in 1 Corinthians? Defend your answer.

2. What is the evidence that the miracle at Pentecost was a miracle of hearing? What is the evidence against this position?
3. What is the evidence that the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians is a language miracle? What is the evidence against this position?

4. In what passage of Scripture do we find the most information about spiritual gifts?

5. Have all Christians been baptized by the Holy Spirit? Explain.

FURTHER READING

Grudem, Wayne, ed. *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today?*
Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Final Word*
The Fruit of the Spirit

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The church has always struggled with the proper use of the spiritual gifts because of the human penchant for the extraordinary.
   a. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is much more important than the gifts.
   b. One can be very gifted, but be immature and cause great damage in the church.

II. In Galatians 5, Paul teaches concerning the importance of the fruit of the Spirit. But he begins by discussing the fruit of the flesh.
   a. Starting in verse 16, he says that we are to walk in the Spirit. There is no shortcut on the path to maturity.
   b. Paul contrasts flesh and spirit in verse 17. The Greek words sarx and soma are terms denoting the English word body. But sarx is used often to denote the metaphysical body, the sinful flesh. This is the use of “flesh” in Galatians 5.
   c. Paul contrasts the fruit of the Spirit with the fruit of the flesh (19–21).
   d. One of the most frightening passages in the Bible: “Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21). What does “practice” mean in this context?

III. The fruit of the Spirit are in contrast to the fruit of the flesh.
   a. What do you want on your tombstone?
   b. Notice the difference between the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit are to be manifested by all Christians.
   c. Our understanding of these fruit is lacking. For instance, meekness is maligned as weakness. Actually, meekness is having power but choosing to be gracious.
   d. Gentleness is associated with meekness, as it implies tenderness toward those who are weak and helpless. A gentle person is strong against the strong, but careful with the broken ones.
e. Joy is more than not being a sourpuss. It does not preclude experiencing
pain or sadness. It is an overarching attitude of happiness at being chosen
by God.
f. Longsuffering is related to patience.
g. These fruits imitate the character of God. It is God who is the source of the
fruit of the Christian life.
h. Kindness is somewhat difficult to explain, but we know it through experi-
ence—you know when someone is nice to you or mean to you.
i. Production of these fruits keeps us from grieving the Holy Spirit, whose goal
it is to sanctify us.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What biblical passage enumerates the fruit of the Spirit? What is the fruit of the
   Spirit?

2. What are the differences between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit?

3. What is the difference between the Greek words sarx and soma?

4. What is the meaning of the word “practice” in Galatians 5:21?

FURTHER READING

Edwards, Jonathan. Charity and its Fruits
Are Miracles for Today?

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The topic of the person and work of the Holy Spirit has several controversial questions connected to it. One of the most interesting is the nature of modern miracles.
   a. Did miracles end with the close of the apostolic age?
   b. Can Satan and his minions perform miracles?
   c. Most people think miracles do continue in the church today and they believe Satan can do miracles. But R.C. disagrees.

II. Those who do not believe in the occurrence of miracles today, by Satan or anyone else, hold a position that is frequently misunderstood.
   a. What is a miracle? Is it any supernatural work, or can it be something like the birth of a baby?
   b. “Expect a miracle” is not an appropriate saying because if they were ordinary and expected they would not be unexpected. Miracles in the Bible were concentrated around certain people, but these flurries of miracles were often hundreds of years apart.
   c. The Greek and Hebrew languages do not have direct correspondents to the word *miracle*. The concept we study in theology is one that is taken from three different words.
      i. Signs, powers, and wonders
      ii. John’s favorite word for *miracle* was *sign* because it signified something important in Christ’s teaching. See John 3, the story of Nicodemus, as an example. Also see Hebrews 2.
      iii. The point is that if an agent of revelation uses signs to prove his words are from God, what happens to that proof if another person, such as the devil, can duplicate those signs? The original proof would not mean anything.
iv. What about those who stand in churches or arenas and proclaim that they are about to perform miracles? If they are performing true miracles, then we need to heed what they say and write down every word as true.

v. For these reasons, theologians have given a very tight definition of miracle. In a broad sense, God has an ongoing supernatural activity in His church. But in a narrow sense, a miracle is an extraordinary work performed by the immediate power of God in the external, perceivable world. It is an act against nature that only God can do, such as bringing life out of death or something out of nothing. We do not see these events happening today.

vi. Christ was confirmed in His Sonship by the Resurrection.

vii. If Satan can do miracles, how do we know the Resurrection was not done by Satan? As terrible as it is to ask this question, how do we know that Satan did not miraculously support the ministry of Jesus Christ, make Him appear to be the Messiah, and lead all God’s people astray for two thousand years by this deception? We know because Satan cannot do miracles.

viii. What is a lying sign or wonder? Is it a real miracle or a fake one? It is a fake, an untrue trick.

d. Satan can be very clever, but do not give him the ability to do things that only God can do.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain the biblical arguments behind the position that affirms Satanic miracles and the occurrence of miracles in the church today.

2. What is the problem with this position? Explain the opposite position, which is held by R.C. Which do you think is right?

3. The Bible teaches that Satan and his followers can do false signs. Are these real miracles? What is the narrow definition of a miracle?

FURTHER READING

Collins, C. John. *The God of Miracles*
Grudem, Wayne, ed. *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*
Warfield, B.B. *Counterfeit Miracles*
Common Grace

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Another subdivision of theology is soteriology: a summary of the message of salvation as taught in Scripture.
   a. Salvation is seen as rescue from calamity.
   b. Grace is at the heart of soteriology.

II. The contrast between grace and justice is plain, but crucial.
   a. Justice has to do with works and falling short of some standard of merit.
   b. Grace is unearned and God is never obligated to deliver it (Rom. 9).
   c. Grace is unmerited favor.

III. The distinction between common grace and special grace is not as clear, but crucial.
   a. Common grace is given to all in a broad sense. God providentially causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. God preserves His creation, and this is part of His ordinary grace.
   b. Christianity has had a powerful positive effect on the world.
   c. In the past century, men and women began to deny historic Christianity. But they didn’t want to be out of a job, so they focused on dispensing common grace, caring for the sick and poor. This amounted to a denial of special grace. But we should not ignore either of God’s gifts.

IV. In common grace matters, can we be co-belligerents with non-Christians?
   a. In arenas of common grace, we join with those who have similar concerns.
   b. In arenas of special grace, such as a worship service, we remain separate.

V. “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”
   • God’s love of benevolence is key to understanding verses such as these.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between grace and justice?

2. What is common grace? How is it distinguished from special grace?

3. How does the doctrine of common grace affect our evaluation of modern cultural issues?

FURTHER READING

Election and Reprobation

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The doctrine of election is either the heart or heartburn of the church.
   a. This doctrine is open to many distortions and must be treated with great care.
   b. Ephesians 1 makes it clear that predestination is not something that was created by Augustine or Calvin. Serious students of the Bible must have some doctrine of election.
   c. Election is done to the praise of God’s grace. It is a glorious thing.
   d. “To choose beforehand” or “to select” are behind the Greek terms sprinkled throughout the Scriptures in relation to God’s objects of special favor.
   e. Election means that God has contemplated the mass of fallen humanity and has decreed to save some of those sinful people. To the rest, He distributes His just punishment. He is not fair—fair would mean punishing everyone.

II. Romans 9 is one of the key passages that explain election.
   a. Paul refers back to the entire history of redemption to prove his point about election. Specifically, he focuses on Abraham and his descendants.
   b. God selected prior to any good or bad works.
   c. The foreknowledge doctrine of election (or prescience view) is that God looks at our works and elects based on who will say yes or no to the Gospel.
   d. Does the doctrine of election mean that God is unrighteous?
   e. If Paul was teaching foreknowledge election, why would anyone assume that this would make God unrighteous? This is one of many critical blows to the prescience position.
   f. It is not of him who wills or runs, but of God who shows mercy.
   g. Election is also reprobation: God’s decree concerning the non-elect. Is predestination double or single?
h. Predestination is “double or nothing.” But which view?
   i. Positive-positive
   ii. Positive-negative
i. Nobody gets injustice. But some get mercy and some get justice.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of election?

2. What are two of the key New Testament passages that shed light on the doctrine of election?

3. What is the foreknowledge view of election?

4. Why is the foreknowledge view of election difficult to explain in the light of the objections Paul anticipates to his doctrine?

FURTHER READING

Boettner, Loraine. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, II: 313–353
Sproul, R.C. *Chosen by God*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 329–430
Effectual Calling

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The sovereignty of divine grace makes necessary a discussion of exactly what God does to draw someone to himself.
   a. Augustine and Pelagius continue to have their representatives in our time as both sides try to explain how someone comes to Christ.
   b. To what degree is grace necessary? Is the sinner’s first step of turning from death to life accomplished monergistically or synergistically?
   c. Monergism means “work alone” or “one worker.”
   d. Synergism means “co-operation.”
   e. Does the Holy Spirit add His power to our own, or is regeneration a unilateral work of God?

II. Ephesians 2:1–10 makes it clear that God is giving spiritual life to dead men.
   a. Dead people don’t co-operate. Lazarus was not invited to come out of the tomb—he was commanded. Then, he co-operated.
   b. God proves His rich mercy and love by saving dead men.
   c. We are justified through faith, but faith is not something we generate. Dead people don’t have faith.
   d. Unless we are born again (regenerate), we cannot enter the kingdom of God.
   e. A key difference between Reformed theology and many others is that most believe that faith precedes regeneration. But since the days of Paul, the church has been arguing that regeneration precedes faith. You cannot persuade a dead man to live. You can’t change people’s hearts, and neither can they change their own.
   f. Who chooses Christ, then? Does God choose for us?
III. Grace is a necessary part of salvation. But is it effectual or irresistible?
   a. Do dead people struggle? Do dead people resist? The Arminian view does not take seriously the deadness of the nature of man.
   b. Why do some become believers while others do not? Are some more righteous than others? Are some smarter? If God has left salvation up to us, then some are clearly superior to others. The Christian has reason to boast, counter to Ephesians 2:8–9.
   c. Romans 8:28–30 teaches that there is a chain, a series of logical events, which take place in all those who are saved. All who are internally called by the Holy Spirit are eventually glorified.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of “monergism”?
2. What is the definition of “synergism”?
3. Does regeneration precede faith or does faith precede regeneration? Explain.
4. Define effectual grace.

FURTHER READING

Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace*, pp. 68–112
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 517–558
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, X
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Luther called election the heart of the church. But he is known primarily as the recoverer of *sola fide*, justification by faith alone.
   a. The formal cause of the Reformation was the authority of the church, but the material cause was justification.
   b. The doctrine of justification answers the question: What must I do to be saved?

II. The divine justice of God seems to argue against a doctrine of justification at all.
   a. You can’t simply work harder (legalism), for no one is made righteous by good works.
   b. The Gospel is good news because it delivers man from the judgment of God’s law.

III. Justification is God’s way of declaring a person righteous.
   a. *Simul iustus et peccator*: We are justified sinners.
   b. Is this a legal fiction?
   c. Justification is *by* faith alone.
   d. The instrumental cause of justification, according to the Roman Catholic church, is baptism.
   e. According to Reformed theology, the instrument is faith.
   f. Mortal sin destroys justification in the Roman system, but through penance and the sacraments, it can be restored. So Rome has two causes of justification: baptism and penance.
   g. The struggle of the sixteenth century came down to the difference between infusion and imputation.
   h. The righteousness of Christ for us, not in us, is the key to our justification.
   i. Christ was being punished for our sins, not His, when He was on the cross. Imputation is the legal transfer of our guilt to Christ and then the transfer of Christ’s righteousness to us.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was the formal cause of the Reformation?

2. What was the material cause of the Reformation?

3. What does the term *justification* mean?

4. What is the instrumental cause of justification according to Protestants? According to Roman Catholics?

FURTHER READING

- Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone*
- Buchanan, James. *The Doctrine of Justification*
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, III: 41–113
- Kistler, *Justification by Faith Alone*
- Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 558–631
- *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIV
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Do Catholics believe that we are saved by works?
   a. No. They call faith the foundation of justification. But it is not sufficient to justify us. There also must be works, at least the works of penance.
   b. Rome believes we need grace plus merit.

II. What is saving faith?
   a. Luther was accused of teaching a cheap faith, antinomianism, or the freedom to live as you please as long as you intellectually affirm the right things.
   b. If a man says that he has faith but not works, can that faith save him?
   c. Fides viva, or “a living faith,” is what we must have for salvation. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.
   d. Our works do not form any grounds for our justification.

III. What are the elements of saving faith?
   a. Notitia, or knowledge, refers to the content of our faith.
   b. Assensus refers to our emotional readiness to affirm the truth.
   c. Fiducia, or trust, refers to our faith in God.

IV. What is conversion and what are the other benefits of saving faith?
   a. Conversion is synergistic—we perform repentance as a part of it.
   b. Metanoia means “a changing of the mind.”
   c. Adoption is another benefit of saving faith.
   d. The fruits of justification mentioned in Romans 5 are peace with God and access to Him.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does Roman Catholic theology teach that we are justified by works? Explain.

2. What did Luther mean by the Latin phrase *fides viva*?

3. Name and define the three elements of Christian faith?

4. What is the meaning of repentance?

FURTHER READING

Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone*
Buchanan, James. *The Doctrine of Justification*
Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, III: 114–212
Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace*, pp. 152–191
Kistler, Don. *Justification by Faith Alone*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 633–688
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XI
Adoption and Union with Christ

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The apostle John calls us “children of God.” This is no small thing.
   a. In our culture, we take for granted that all people are children of God.
      Nineteenth century liberal theology has polluted our culture at this point.
   b. Von Harnack’s *What is Christianity?* said that the universal fatherhood of
      God and the universal brotherhood of man were the essence of Christianity.
   c. The fatherhood of God is a radical concept. In the first century, it was an
      astonishing idea that anyone could be related to God.
   d. J. Jeremias studied the idea of the fatherhood of God in Judaism. “Father”
      was not among the titles that people called God.
   e. Jesus, however, went on to call God “Father” frequently. Judaism did not
      refer to God as “Father” until the tenth century A.D.

II. Jesus extended the privilege of calling God “Father” to His disciples.
   a. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus told His disciples to pray to “our” Father.
   b. This immediately passed on the truth of God’s Fatherhood to His people.
   c. We obscure the idea of sonship to God when we say things like, “If the Holy
      Spirit lives inside you, you are as much a son of God as Jesus is.” This fails to
      protect the unique nature of Jesus’ Sonship.

III. The unique nature of Jesus’ Sonship is shown in John 1, especially around verse 10.
   a. “As many as received Him, He gave the power [or authority] to be called the
      children of God.” So sonship is a gift.
   b. Romans 8:12 says that we are sons of God who are led by the Spirit of God,
      the Spirit of adoption.
   c. God brings us into His family when we are regenerated. We are a part of the
      family of God. The elect are all God’s adopted children.
IV. The mystical union of the believer with Christ is a mystery. It transcends our natural experience.
   a. The Greek words *en* (in) and *eis* (into) describe the nature of our union with Christ. Once we have gone *into* Christ, then we are *in* Christ.
   b. If I am in Christ, if He is in me and I am in Him, what does that say about my relationships with others in the church? This union extends beyond “me and Jesus,” creating the bond of unity we experience with true believers.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the essence of Christianity, according to Adolf Von Harnack?

2. Why was Jesus’ use of the title “Father” shocking to first century Jews?

3. What biblical passages describe the unique Sonship of Christ?

4. How does our union with Christ affect our view of the communion of saints?

FURTHER READING

- Ferguson, Sinclair. *Children of the Living God*
- Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace*, pp. 54–67
- Roberts, Maurice. *Union & Communion with Christ*
- Westminster Confession of Faith, XII
Sanctification

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Sanctification is partial, but real.
   a. When R.C. first became a Christian, he would listen to R.J. Lamont as he drove. “What’s on your partially sanctified mind?”
   b. Justification is not partial. It is immediate.
   c. It is bad news that our sanctification is partial, but it is real. By it the people of God are actually made holy. Sanctification begins immediately after regeneration.
   d. The fruit of our sanctification is inevitable and immediate. People cannot be converted to Christ and never bring forth fruits. There are no “carnal” Christians.
   e. We are not justified by the profession of faith, but the possession of faith.

II. Our growth in sanctification is not a straight line. It has peaks and valleys. Sometimes we may enter very dark valleys. Maturity means the peaks and valleys are smoothed out a bit.
   a. Some in the church teach perfectionism, an instantaneous infusion of God’s sanctifying grace.
   b. Others believe in a “leap” corresponding to belief in certain doctrines or experiences. The error here is that one doctrine or experience cannot cause, mechanistically, a victorious Christian life.
   c. It is a rare thing for a Christian to see immediate victory over some sin. Nothing happens fast. There are no three easy steps to growth.
   d. In Philippians 2:12–13, Paul says we should work out our own salvation, but that God is working with us even more so.
   e. Note that “fear and trembling” is a real part of the work of sanctification.
   f. Sanctification is a cooperative process. It is synergistic, not monergistic. We are active at some points and passive at others.
III. The errors of activism and quietism are evident in the theology of sanctification today.
   a. Being active without embracing activism is as simple as not being a legalist. Self-righteousness is the danger here, and activism teaches a self-reliance that is deadly.
   b. Quietism says that we should “Let go and let God.” There are times to be passive and depend upon God, no doubt. But the teaching that we can offer nothing to the work of sanctification is deadly.
   c. Antinomianism and legalism are also distortions of the doctrine of sanctification. The legalist legislates where God has given us freedom. The antinomian gives freedom where God has given real direction. But we may not create new laws and we may not ignore the ones He plainly has given.
   d. Avoiding these errors will go far to aid our sanctification.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is perfectionism? Is this doctrine dangerous? Why or why not?
2. What is quietism?
3. What is activism?
4. What is the difference between antinomianism and legalism? Why are both of these errors harmful to the body of Christ?

FURTHER READING

Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, pp. 527–544
Calvin, John. The Institutes of Christian Religion, III: vi–x
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, III: 213–258
Hoekema, Anthony. Saved by Grace, pp. 192–233
Kistler, Don, ed. Trust and Obey
Piper, John. The Pleasures of God
Westminster Confession of Faith, XIII
Perseverance of the Saints

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. What is “tubing it”?
   a. People get involved with religious things, but then they drop out, stop coming to church, and repudiate Christ.
   b. Those who are truly converted do not fall away. But as we make Christianity more appealing to the unconverted, they often “accept” Jesus but do not deal with their sin and repent.
   c. The parable of the sower helps us understand the background to spurious conversions.

II. The Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation teaches that we can lose our salvation through mortal sin.
   a. Mortal sin makes it necessary for us to have a new penance, a new justification.
   b. Semi-Pelagians also believe we can lose our salvation, a belief springing from their free-will theology.
   c. Election and perseverance go together. There is no question that perseverance flows logically from election. The question is whether perseverance flows from the Bible.

III. What is the biblical evidence for the perseverance of the saints?
   a. Philippians teaches a clear doctrine of perseverance. “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.” This is without doubt. But there are problematic passages that cause some to doubt the force of passages like these.
   b. Hebrews 6:1–6 is such a passage. Does this go against the teaching of Paul to the people of Philippi?
c. Some suggest that the author of Hebrews is not describing regenerate people, only church members. But read Hebrews 6:4–6 and see whether all these descriptions would allow for such a reading. The key point is “brought back to repentance.” Could unbelievers ever be said to repent in the first place? No.
d. Does this not lead to a denial of perseverance? No. But it does seem that the writer is speaking of believers.
e. The answer to this problem is found by discovering the audience to which this was written. The author seems to be writing to people in danger of the Judaizing heresy.
f. If that is true, the writer could be using the ad hominem argument, taking his opponent’s presuppositions and making an argument with them, against the opponent. See Hebrews 6:9, which seems to say he has been speaking offhandedly, not teaching in a straightforward way.
g. This seems to be the answer: the writer is speaking using the Judaizers’ own logic against them. This section then would not be a repudiation of the teaching from Philippians.

IV. The preservation of the saints is accomplished by God. He has promised not to rest until we are found perfect.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between a mortal sin and a venial sin in Roman Catholic theology?

2. What are some of the biblical passages that teach the perseverance of the saints?

3. Does Hebrews 6 undermine the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? Explain.

4. Why does the doctrine of election necessitate the doctrine of perseverance?

FURTHER READING

Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, pp. 545–554
Calvin, John. The Institutes of Christian Religion, III: 24: 4–9
Hoekema, Anthony. Saved by Grace, pp. 234–256
Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology, II: 593–616
Westminster Confession of Faith, XVII
Biblical Images of the Church

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The church is described in the Bible with many titles and metaphors.
   a. The background of the English word *church* is found by observing the various names for “church” around the world. They are commonly derived from the Greek *kuriache*, or those who are possessed by the *kurios*, or Lord.
   b. *Ekklesia* is another Greek word that we translate “church.” This Greek word is based on the verb *kaleo*, or “to call.”
   c. Augustine described the church as a *corpus per mixtum*, a mixed body. Wheat and tares exist together in the visible church. In our vernacular, it is a “mixed bag.”
      i. The invisible church
      ii. The visible church
      iii. Not two separate spheres but distinct.
      iv. The true people of God are largely a part of the visible church

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the background of the English word *church*?
2. What is the basic meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*?
3. What is the difference between the invisible church and the visible church?
4. What is the significance of Augustine’s description of the church as a *corpus per mixtum*?
FURTHER READING

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV: 1
Clowney, Edmund. *The Church*
Kistler, Don, ed. *Onward Christian Soldiers*
Kuiper, R.B. *The Glorious Body of Christ*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 1–366
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV and XXVI
The Church: One and Holy

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. There are other metaphors used to describe the church.
   a. The church is described as a body, with Jesus Christ as the head.
   b. The church is also called the Laos Theou, or the “People of God.”
   c. The church is described as a building, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone. The rest of the church is made up of the individual stones.

II. What are the chief characteristics of the church?
   a. In the fourth century, the church was defined as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic in its character.
   b. These terms are rarely used in Protestantism, but they remain an excellent description of the true church.

III. What does it mean that we are “one”?
   a. The church is a community of saints, or communio sanctorum.
   b. The visible church always will be fragmented. The invisible church is necessarily one.
   c. Why should we split? Certainly not over minor matters. The error of schismatic behavior is as bad as remaining linked to a corrupt body.

IV. What does it mean that the church is holy”?
   a. No institution has been so gifted as the church of God. When we fail to obey the mission God has given us, relatively speaking, we are more blameworthy.
   b. So how can we say the church is holy? We appear to be very unholy.
c. “Holy” means “set apart.” The church is holy in the sense that it has a sacred mission. And God has promised that the church will not fail in her mission. The gates of hell will not prevail against her.
d. The church is subject to the concentrated ministry of the Holy Spirit.
e. The church is where the saints (holy ones) are gathered, so this makes the church a holy institution as well.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the biblical metaphors used to describe the church? What aspects of the church do each of these metaphors communicate?

2. What do we mean when we say we believe the church is “one”?

3. Why is schism such a serious sin?

4. What do we mean when we say we believe the church is “holy”?

FURTHER READING

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV: i
Clowney, Edmund. *The Church*
Kistler, Don, ed. *Onward Christian Soldiers*
Kuiper, R.B. *The Glorious Body of Christ*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 1–336
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV and XXVI
The Church: Catholic and Apostolic

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. One day, I was on a train to Romania . . .

II. The third characteristic of the church is that it is “catholic,” or universal.
   a. The Apostles’ Creed says that we believe in the “catholic” church. But this is not referring to the Roman institution.
   b. The fellowship of the church goes beyond regional boundaries.

III. The final characteristic of the church is that it is apostolic.
   a. In the first century, the primary authority in the church was vested in the apostles. An apostolos is one who is sent from a kurios to represent him.
   b. There is a significant difference between the disciples (learners) of Christ and His apostles.
   c. Those who rejected the apostles rejected Jesus. Groups such as the Gnostics disputed the authority of the apostles, but tried to keep an allegiance to Jesus and other biblical characters.
   d. Apostolic authority is challenged today, especially by higher critics and feminist theologians.
   e. Those who attack the foundations of the church may appear to continue in the church, but when the foundation is destroyed, the building is unlivable.
   f. The abandonment of apostolic authority is at the heart of the demise of the visible church in Europe.
   g. During the Reformation, as today, it was debated as to who was the true church. The question is stated more accurately, “What is a true church?” “What are its marks?”
i. Proper preaching of the Gospel
ii. Proper administration of the sacraments
iii. Proper discipline and government of God’s people

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain what we mean when we confess our belief that the church is “catholic.”

2. What do mean when we say that we believe the church is “apostolic”?

3. What is the difference between an apostle and a disciple?

4. During the Reformation, what were said to be the “marks” of a true church?

FURTHER READING

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV: i
Clowney, Edmund. *The Church*
Kuiper, R.B. *The Glorious Body of Christ*
Kistler, Don, ed. *Onward Christian Soldiers*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 1–336
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV and XXVI
Worship in the Church

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Revelation 5 is one of the most powerful passages of worship in the Bible.
   a. Every Christian should be able to relate to this kind of heavenly worship.
   b. We were created to worship God. Once we are regenerate, we have a capacity and a hunger to express the worth and value of God.
   c. One of the key functions of God’s church is to express worship.

II. Worship is the vocation of the church. But what is worship?
   a. Worship is a measure of worth, value or honor. Worship honors God as God.
   b. Romans 1 teaches that, in our fallen state, our basic sin is refusal to worship God.
   c. In the Old Testament, worship was seen primarily as an offering or a sacrifice. Some sacrifices were done simply to honor God. Music and praise were seen as a kind of sacrifice in that system, and it is not error to give this kind of sacrifice today (Rom. 12:1–2).
   d. Adoration is another kind of worship that is characterized by expressions of intense love from our inmost being. This is a spiritual expression of love that defies precise definition.

III. What does it mean to worship God in “spirit and in truth”?
   a. John 4 is where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman and tells her how to worship God. But what does it mean?
   b. The second part is not too difficult. We are not to worship God falsely—neither through idolatry nor hypocrisy.
   c. The first part is more difficult. It probably refers to “soulful” worship, worship that flows from the heart, from the very depths of our being.
   d. During the Reformation, the priority was proper worship of God. All the Reformers were concerned with worshiping God in truth, that is, purifying their churches from idolatry.
e. The patterns of worship were dictated in Old Testament times. One principle we can learn from this was that the entire person should be involved in worship: the mind and the five senses. The heart? The will? The spirit?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is worship a matter of taste or obedience?

2. Why is worship so significant in the life of the church?

3. What changes in worship were due to the inauguration of the new covenant at Christ’s first coming?

4. What does it mean to worship God “in spirit and in truth”?

FURTHER READING

Sproul, R.C. A Taste of Heaven
Engle, Paul. Discovering the Fullness of Worship
Old, Hughes Oliphant. Worship
Rayburn, Robert. O Come, Let Us Worship
The Sacraments of the Church

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. It is the privilege of an ordained minister to administer the sacraments.
   a. As important as it is, sacramentology is a hotly debated issue, with many controversies surrounding it.
   b. One reason we use the word *sacraments* is that these actions are sacred.
   c. This explains the seriousness of the debate.

II. The number of the sacraments of the church is one of the debated issues.
   a. The Roman Catholic Church has seven sacraments, all of which are said to infuse grace into the soul.
   b. The first sacrament administered is baptism. It pours the grace of justification into the soul. This grace is *ex opere operato*, which means “through the working of the works.”
   c. The sacrament does not work automatically, but it can be hindered by the recipient.
   d. Even if a Catholic loses his justification, he is not rebaptized.
   e. At confirmation, the second sacrament, new grace is given to the child to prepare him for this new phase of his life.
   f. Penance is the third sacrament. It is the “second plank” of justification. Grace is infused and, if justification is lost, it can be regained via penance.
   g. Matrimony is the fourth sacrament and, as before, gives grace to those about to be married.
   h. Holy orders is the fifth sacrament. It is given to those in ministry to enable them to dispense grace and offer the prayer of consecration, which changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.
   i. The sixth sacrament is extreme unction. It originally was not called “last rites,” but was based on James 5, an anointing for healing.
j. The sacrament we have left out is the eucharist. The Lord's Supper dispenses grace to the recipient. It will be discussed in full in a subsequent lecture.

III. The Protestants reduced the seven sacraments to two.
   a. Luther wrote *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* against the sacerdotalism of the Roman institution. Sacramental salvation was attacked in this book and justification by faith alone was exalted.
   b. The Reformers said that the sacraments must have been directly instituted by Christ. This limited the number to two. Other activities, such as ordination, could be ordinances, but not sacraments.
   c. The Reformers also said that the sacraments functioned *ex opera operantis*, meaning that the benefits are received by faith.
   d. Sacraments are signs and seals. They are the Word dramatized. They represent God's guarantee that we will receive the benefits of salvation.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of the term *sacrament*?
2. What are the seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism?
3. What two sacraments do Protestants recognize?
4. What reasons do Protestants give for recognizing only two sacraments?

FURTHER READING

Berkouwer, G.C. *The Sacraments*
Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV: xiv
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 337–377
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXVII
Baptism

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The sacrament of baptism is practiced in a variety of ways.
   a. We baptize adults and children, and we do so for different reasons.
   b. Are you baptized? So what?
   c. The baptism of John the Baptist is not the model for baptism today. It was
directed specifically to the Jews, who were technically in Old Testament
times. It should not be used as a pattern for today.
   d. There was a Jewish practice known as proselyte baptism, one performed on
   Gentiles. John the Baptist proclaimed the need for Jews to be baptized in a
   similar manner.

II. When Jesus instituted the new covenant, He gave new signs to represent it.
   a. Remember that God gave a sign to Noah to represent the covenant God made
   with him.
   b. God gave a sign for the old covenant as well: circumcision.
   c. Paul asked, “What advantage is it to be a Jew?” The question was rhetorical—
   he was saying that the things that made them Jewish (such as the bearing of
   covenant signs) were not insignificant.
   d. The cutting of circumcision represented not only the blessings of the cov-
   enant, but the cursings as well. On this basis, Paul was completely opposed
to the Judaizing movement (see Galatians).
   e. There is significant continuity between the old covenant and the new. But
   not identity. They are not separate, but they are distinct.
   f. The reality of our union with Christ is made clearer by our baptism. God has
   made promises to us, and baptism reminds us of those promises.
   g. In Colossians 2:8–12, Paul discusses exactly what the rite of baptism signifies
   for us.
   h. If I were the only person in the world God had ordained to save, then Jesus
   would have had to die on the cross for my sins.
i. There is a continual deepening of our identification with Christ throughout the Christian life. Baptism symbolizes our participation with Christ.

III. Who qualifies for baptism?
   a. Just as the Old Testament signs were given to believers and their children, the New Testament signs likewise were given. This command was nowhere recanted or altered.
   b. The Old Testament sign also symbolized faith in God—there is no change at this point in the New Testament.
   c. The validity of baptism depends not on the recipient or the baptizer, but on God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the different modes of baptism? What are the doctrines or concepts that surround each one?

2. What is the key word to describe baptism in the Bible and in this lecture?

3. Who is qualified for baptism? Is there anyone to whom baptism should be refused?

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Hyde, Daniel R. *Jesus Loves the Little Children*
The Lord’s Supper

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The New Testament makes the Lord’s Supper a central part of the corporate worship of the church.
   b. The Passover meal Jesus shared with His disciples emphasizes the importance of this sacrament.
   c. Jesus changes the classical wording of the Passover rite when He makes reference to the bread being His body and the wine His blood.
   d. This announcement of the new covenant marks an important point in redemptive history: the beginning of the new covenant and the end of the old. Christ’s death becomes central to the Christian faith from this point on.

II. But theological controversy has come from this event in the Upper Room. A major point of division for Christians around the world is the exact nature of the Lord’s Supper, both its essence and form.
   a. The Protestant Reformation marked a separation from the Catholic errors concerning the sacraments, but among themselves, the Protestants could not agree on the mode or manner of the presence of Christ in the sacraments.
   b. Luther retreated to the words of institution: *Hoc est corpus meum*—“This is My body.”
   c. Priests did the Mass in Latin, which was unknown to the people. They were ridiculed by the common man, who said things like, “Look at the priest and all his hocus pocus!” This portion of the Mass is where that phrase originates.

III. The major views of the Lord’s Supper are claimed by the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, the Anabaptists, and the Calvinists.
   a. The Roman Catholic view is that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus. The response of the people is, “Hey, it still looks like bread and wine, and not only that, it tastes the same!”
b. The doctrine of transubstantiation was developed to answer these objections. The philosopher Aristotle said that all objects are made up of substance and accidens. The raw matter and the appearance to the senses of a given object were separated in his system.

c. So in the miracle of the Mass, the substance (inner core, essence) of the bread and wine change. The accidens, or appearance, does not. This was a double miracle—not only did the substance change, but the accidens did not follow that change. Supernaturally, the accidens is sustained even though the substance changes.

d. Objection: Luther said this is more miraculous than necessary. Jesus can be physically present without the bread and wine being changed. Jesus is added to the bread and wine; thus we call this view consubstantiation. The “con” means “with.”

e. Calvin objected to all of these views; he was concerned that a physical body (which Jesus has) can be in only one place at a time, and Jesus says His is in heaven. Thus, Jesus’ body (which is clearly said to be present in some way by Rome and Luther) can’t be present in the sacraments in any form. But the divine nature of Jesus can be everywhere at once. The divine nature of Christ is therefore present at the Lord’s Supper. He is really there, but spiritually, not physically.

f. The Anabaptists view the Lord’s Supper merely as a memorial. There is no miracle and no grace is communicated; we only perform a holy duty as instructed by our Lord (point f not covered in the lecture, but included for completion).

IV. The time factors of the past, present, and future relate to the Lord’s Supper.

a. The Lord’s Supper focuses us on the past, as the Anabaptists emphasize.

b. It also focuses us on the present meeting we have with Jesus as we partake of the bread and wine, as taught by the other three positions in some way.

c. It also focuses us on our future, on the time when we will sit with Jesus and all the saints and happily partake of His holy food in heaven.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What important point of redemptive history does the Lord’s Supper celebrate?

2. What are the various views in Protestantism concerning the Lord’s Supper? How do they agree? How do they differ?

3. What is the view of your church? How can your church better perform the Lord’s Supper?
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Bruce, Robert. *The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*
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Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 421–548
Wallace, Ronald S. *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXIX
Death and the Intermediate State

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. This section of our study deals with eschatology. This word is derived from the Greek word *eschaton*, meaning “last.” The beginning of this study is a frank look at death.
   a. Death is the last enemy to be subdued by Christ.
   b. “If a man dies, will he live again?”
   c. What does death mean to the Christian?

II. Paul’s letter to the Romans explains the origin and current nature of death.
   a. Romans 5:14 asks, “Was there sin prior to Moses’ law?” The answer is “Yes,” because death existed, and without law there is no sin. Without sin there can be no death.
   b. Death is not a part of the natural order of things. It is a part of the fallen order of things.
   c. When God told Adam and Eve that when they sinned they would die, He was speaking spiritually. But the curse had a physical component as well: They were rendered under the power of death from that time on. It was an act of mercy that they were allowed to live so long after their sin. All of us are on “death row” because of sin.
   d. From a Christian perspective, death is not the punishment for sin. Jesus Christ has paid that penalty. In light of the Cross, death is a moment of transition. Its significance has changed.

III. Paul’s message to us from Philippians is that death has an aspect of victory and blessing, as well as defeat.
   a. In 1:19ff, Paul says that he is torn between praying to stay on earth or dying and being with Christ. Our faith staggers at this statement of Paul’s faith in the immediate care for His soul by Jesus.
b. Many Christians are unafraid of death. But the process we may have to go through to die is very fearsome. Dying can be terribly painful, and God does not promise to spare us from suffering.

c. Paul’s passionate faith and fearless determination come through in this passage. Paul saw dying for Christ as a gain. Perhaps it would be a loss for his beloved left on this earth, but it would be a gain for him.

d. Life and death were seen by Paul as the good and the far better.

IV. What happens to us when we die?

a. “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” This refers to our belief that, though we die, God will raise us from the grave.

b. First Corinthians 15 teaches that, just as Christ was raised, we will be raised from the dead. What will we look like? Paul does not know. But we will be able to recognize each other.

c. We will have glorified bodies. But between the time of our deaths and our resurrections, our souls reside in heaven. We will be souls without bodies, souls that are active and aware. There is an unbroken continuity of personal existence. There is no soul sleep.

d. Even though we are in changing bodies and changing circumstances, our minds remain unchanged. Our personalities remain unchanged, by and large. Just because our souls are in a time of transition does not mean they must sleep.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is the attitude of the Christian toward death one of mixed feelings? How is this reflected in the average funeral service of a Christian?

2. What do we know happens to the Christian immediately after death? The non-Christian?

3. God’s Word leaves many of our questions about death unanswered. What are some of your unanswered questions about the nature of death? If God does not answer them in Scripture, how do you handle them?

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Bunyan, John. Pilgrim’s Progress (Starting with paragraph 383, “But being a little strengthened, and better able to bear their sicknesses,” is an excellent metaphorical description of the death of the saint, seen through the deaths of the characters Hope and Christian.)
Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, III: 713–770
Nash, Ronald. When a Baby Dies: Answers to Comfort Grieving Parents
Westminster Confession of Faith, XXXII
The Resurrection

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. What is the meaning of the word resurrection?
   a. The Greek word simply means “to rise again.” But the word takes on deeper theological significance in the way the New Testament uses it.
   b. “We believe in the resurrection of the body,” the phrase from the Apostles’ Creed, does not refer to the raising of Christ but ourselves. In our case, we are confessing that our bodies, while undergoing the corruption of the grave, nevertheless will be raised and glorified in the Last Day.

II. What is the biblical teaching concerning this resurrection?
   a. In Romans 8:11, Paul says that since Christ has been raised from the dead, we will be changed. Is that change simply spiritual, or is this referring to our final resurrection? He goes on to make reference to the raising of Jesus’ mortal body, and then compares that raising to ours. This is not a reference only to the spirit—it is a reference to the body, as well.
   b. The New Testament does not view the Resurrection as an isolated event. Jesus’ raising is the first of many.
   c. Was Jesus the first to be resurrected? Yes, because all others who were raised from the dead eventually died. Jesus rose to never perish, and this points to the change that takes place at resurrection.
   d. There are many similarities between the resurrection of Jesus and the raisings of others in the Bible—but the main difference is that Jesus’ body underwent radical changes to become a glorified body.

III. The main doctrinal passage in the Bible concerning the Resurrection is 1 Corinthians 15.
   a. Following Zeno, Paul uses the reductio ad absurdum argument against those who oppose the doctrine of the Resurrection.
b. Paul shows that you cannot have the Christian faith without the doctrine of the Resurrection. Some theologians claim that you can have Christianity without a supernatural emphasis, such as the Resurrection. Bultmann gives an excellent explanation of the doctrine as taught by Paul, but denies its truth.

c. The apostle Paul does not base his case simply on the problems that come from not having a Resurrection. This method of argument is common today, but it proves nothing. Paul goes on to appeal to eyewitnesses, including his own account of seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus.

d. In 1 Corinthians 15:35, the question is asked, “What will our bodies in heaven look like?” Paul says he does not know. But he makes an analogy to nature (following Plato) to argue that what we will look like will resemble our former bodies in the way a tree resembles the seed from which it grew. There will be some continuity, but there will be significant discontinuity.

e. Will our bodies look like Jesus’ in the Upper Room? Was His the prototype, or did it have further glorification to attain when He ascended? We do not know.

f. We will be immortal in heaven. But will we be inherently immortal? No. We will remain sustained by God. God guarantees our immortality, not our own strength.

g. The highest form of life is not what we see now. The apex of human life is still in the future.

h. We will be like Jesus, receiving the same glorious resurrection as He received.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Summarize Paul’s argument for the resurrection of the body.

2. What is the relationship between Jesus’s resurrection and ours?

FURTHER READING

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Davis, Stephen T. *Risen Indeed*
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 561–582
The Kingdom of God

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Introduction
   a. “Until kingdom come” is a casual expression about something that has permanence.
   b. The Lord’s Prayer explains what this phrase means. The kingdom has come and His will is being done, even now in heaven. But in this world, this is not true in the same way.
   c. God’s kingdom is universal and eternal. But the voluntary submission of creatures to God is in process. This is clear since Old Testament times.
   d. The kingdom of heaven is not different from the kingdom of God. Matthew was writing to Jews and he did not want to offend them by using the name of God. So he circumlocuted God’s name, using the term “heaven” to represent God’s name.
   e. The kingdom of God is not totally in the future. The biblical evidence is overwhelming about this.
   f. In the New Testament, the kingdom of God is said to be at hand. Jesus illustrates this through His “party” attitude. The King is in your midst, so rejoice!

II. How do we make visible the invisible kingdom?
   a. First, by being Christ’s witnesses here.
   b. Second, by living out His Lordship over us now.
   c. Third, by looking to the future consummation of the kingdom.

III. The progressive character of the kingdom is illustrated in the parables.
   a. “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.”
   b. “The kingdom of God is like bread growing.”
   c. “Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.”
   d. Just because the kingdom is invisible does not mean it is unreal.
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is the kingdom of God present? In what sense is the kingdom of God future?

2. Is the kingdom of heaven different from the kingdom of God?

3. In what ways do we make the invisible kingdom visible?

4. What are some of the biblical passages that illustrate the progressive character of the kingdom of God?

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Mathison, Keith. *From Age to Age*
Ridderbos, Herman. *The Coming of the Kingdom*
MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. The idea of the Millennium is very controversial. R.C. has changed his position repeatedly and is not dogmatic at almost any point.
   a. Why? It is because of the nature and genre of the literature in which our facts about the Millennium are found. See Revelation 20 for details on the one thousand-year binding of Satan.
   b. The two basic issues concern its nature and its chronology.
   c. Millennial views are described via prefixes, such as premillennial or postmillennial.

II. How do we read prophetic or apocalyptic literature?
   a. To interpret it literally means that we interpret it as it was intended, not that we interpret it the way we read epistles. Figurative sections of Scripture should be read like poetry; that is “literally” the correct way to interpret them.
   b. Consistency is very difficult for those who espouse a “literal at all cost” way of reading Scripture.

III. The various millennial views are quite distinct.
   a. Premillennialism sees the many events of the last days occurring prior to the one thousand-year reign of Christ and the corresponding binding of Satan.
      i. Historic premillennialism
      ii. Dispensational premillennialism
   b. Amillennialism does not see a literal one thousand-year period in Revelation 20.
   c. Postmillennialism sees Christ returning after the events of the last days, and coming to a victorious church rather than a decadent one, countering dispensational premillennialism.
IV. Preterism
   a. Full preterism teaches that all predicted events in the New Testament occurred prior to A.D. 100.
   b. Partial preterism teaches that many of the prophecies have come true, and that the first 20 chapters of Revelation have been accomplished.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of premillennialism? Amillennialism? Postmillennialism?

2. What is the predominant eschatology in evangelicalism today?

3. What is the difference between partial preterism and full preterism?

4. What event do preterists believe Matthew 24 and much of Revelation predicted?

FURTHER READING

Mathison, Keith. *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*
Bock, Darrell, ed. *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*
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The Return of Christ

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Karl Barth observed in 1949 that Christians should be reading the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. This comment was sparked by the rise of the modern state of Israel.

II. Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be occupied until the “times of the Gentiles” were fulfilled.
   a. In Romans 11, Paul uses this phrase as he discusses the question, “What about Israel?”
   b. The events in this century have made some say that we are in the final days. The expectations of the return of Jesus are at a fever pitch.
   c. This is something for us to place our hope in, but the questions of how and when Jesus will return is an ongoing debate.

III. The Ascension teaches us much about the return of Christ (Acts 1).
   a. “Men of Galilee, why do you stand staring up into heaven?”
   b. The return of Christ will be personal, visible, and glorious.

IV. The crisis of the parousia is caused by the apparent delay in Jesus’ predicted return.
   a. According to nineteenth century critics, Jesus was disappointed that God did not vindicate His efforts.
   b. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”
   c. Others, such as C.H. Dodd, have said that all the prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled in the first century.
   d. “This generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.”
   e. It seems as if Jesus was correct that the temple would fall and that Jerusalem would not perish. But did Jesus return 40 years after His prediction?
f. Evangelicals have responded to this by saying that the word *generation* does not refer to a time frame but to a type of people. “This kind of people will be around when I return,” is a possible meaning, but unlikely.

g. Other evangelicals have said that “all these things” refers only to the first two events.

h. Full preterism teaches that Jesus’ return occurred in A.D. 70. The Jewish age ended and the age of the Gentiles began. Many hold to a secret Rapture and a hidden resurrection that happened in A.D. 70.

i. The return of Christ in A.D. 70 was but a typological fulfillment, though. It was a foretaste of His great future coming, just as many prophesied events are fulfilled typologically soon after the prediction, only to be fulfilled truly at a later date.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What do we learn about the return of Christ from the record of the ascension of Christ in Acts 1?

2. What is the crisis of the parousia?

3. What are some of the explanations of Jesus’ phrase “this generation” in Matthew 24:34?

4. What is the relationship between the judgment coming of Christ in A.D. 70 and His coming in glory at the end of the age?

**FURTHER READING**

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MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Nietzsche announced in the nineteenth century that God had died. Humanism prepared the world to believe that we do not need God.
   a. Civilization is divided into three phases, according to Compte—infancy, adolescence, and adulthood.
   b. World War I was supposed to be the “War to end all wars.”
   c. In all this was the “good” news that since God does not exist, we do not have to worry about facing divine judgment.
   d. Life and death were both meaningless. Optimism was turned to gloom.

II. The New Testament teaches that life and death are real and meaningful. But that means that accountability is a reality.
   a. In Acts 17, Paul declares to the Gentiles a God who, in former times of ignorance, was more tolerant. But a critical change has occurred and all men everywhere will be judged in light of the coming of Christ. Since this watershed event has occurred, God will judge unrepentance much more harshly.
   b. The Old Testament warned of the Day of the Lord, a day of great judgment.
   c. Kant said that every human being has a sense of “oughtness” built into his or her mind. This sense is the foundation of his argument for the existence of God. His argument demands divine judgment.
   d. Our own minds record our sin. But all our deeds also are located in the mind of God.

III. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus ends His sermon on the Mount in a dramatic fashion.
   a. “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”
   b. We will be judged and rewarded or punished according to our works.
c. In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches that He will judge men who pretend to love and serve Him. The parable of the ten virgins is used to illustrate this truth.
d. These warnings concerning final judgment must be heeded. They are among Jesus’ most fearful teachings.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does Acts 17 teach about the judgment of God?

2. What do we learn about God’s judgment in the Sermon on the Mount?

3. What does Matthew 25 teach about the final judgment?

FURTHER READING

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Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 597–604
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXXIII
Eternal Punishment

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. Jesus affirms the reality of a future judgment. But what happens after judgment? There is a verdict and—for the unredeemed—a penalty.
   a. God is the perfect judge. He will judge us on the basis of works—either ours or Christ’s.
   b. No person has been or ever will be judged unjustly by God.
   c. “If the Lord should mark iniquity, who would stand?”
   d. No person ever can say he had no idea about God and His basic requirements. Romans 1 teaches that men suppress the clear knowledge of God and His higher attributes.
   e. People will not be judged for rejecting Jesus if people have not actually rejected Him. But they will be judged for rejecting the Father, whom they do know.

II. Our destiny is unalterable after judgment.
   • It is appointed for man once to die, and then judgment. There is no purgatory.

III. The doctrine of hell is one of great difficulty.
   a. How can we be eternally happy in heaven knowing that our mother or wife is in hell?
   b. Our basic affections are rooted in this world. In heaven, we will be sanctified enough to love the vindication of the righteousness of God.
   c. Even in our most righteous moments, we are much closer to Hitler than Jesus.
   d. Hell is so bad that we would not believe in it for a moment except that Jesus taught so clearly about it.

IV. Revelation 20 gives us an image of hell that, while poetic, has a frightening clarity.
b. The lake of fire imagery is just the worst thing that Jesus could use to describe it. The people in hell may be praying that they could have the pleasure of resting in a lake of fire. The reality must be worse than the symbol.

V. What is the nature of hell?
   a. It is not separation from God’s presence but separation from the graces of God.
   b. There are degrees of punishment in hell. God is a perfect judge.
   c. It is not a place of annihilation. This ancient heresy has seen a revival in our time, but Scripture remains clear—conscious, eternal punishment is reserved for those who die in unbelief.

VI. Objection: How could God punish a finite person with infinite punishment? Because this finite person has committed the ultimate offense against God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is mankind judged on the basis of works? Explain.

2. Will those who never have heard of Jesus be judged for rejecting Jesus?

3. How can we be joyful in heaven knowing that loved ones are in hell?

4. Is hell a literal lake of fire?

5. What biblical evidence do we have that implies that there are degrees of punishment in hell?

6. What is the doctrine of annihilationism?

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Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, III: 868–880
Peterson, Robert. Hell on Trial
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The Believer’s Final Rest

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

I. What happens at the end of the Christian life?
   a. Each Sunday, we experience the Sabbath rest, which foreshadows the coming eternal rest.
   b. Modernists deny the reality of heaven, asking on what basis we have any confidence as to the nature of the next life.
   c. When Lazarus died, Jesus took the opportunity to teach by saying to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25).

II. In John 14, Jesus teaches that we are not to worry about our future in heaven or the exact nature of the afterlife.
   a. At the Last Supper, in the Upper Room, Jesus makes a point to address the fears of His disciples.
   b. “If it were not so, I would have told you” (John 14:2).
   c. Jesus has prepared a place for His people. We have every reason to be confident of its reality.
   d. In 1 John 3:1–2, a key eschatological passage in the New Testament, we discover that whatever our exact nature in heaven, we will be, in important respects, like Christ in His glorified state.

III. The beatific vision of God (visio Dei) is one of the great promises He makes to His people.
   a. “Beatific” is not an ordinary word to us, but words like Beatitudes are. The message of Christ in Matthew 5 gave the hearers great blessings and promises, a degree of pleasure that transcends any happiness we could experience on earth.
b. The vision itself carries with it a great blessing. As John says, we don’t know what we will be like, but by seeing God, we will be blessed to such a degree that we will be like Him.

c. The Old Testament says that there is a limit: No man can see God. Even Moses, who begged to see Him, was not allowed to see God. The intimate vision of God was forbidden.

d. One of the hardest things about the Christian life is that we serve an invisible God.

e. If God is invisible, how can we see Him in the first place? Notice the Beatitude that says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” When we receive the fullness of our sanctification, the barrier of sin will be removed.

f. But how can we see a spirit? Great thinkers have struggled with how the Christian will see God. The illustration of the difference between watching televised events and real events helps us understand this.

g. What we will have in heaven is spirit-to-spirit communication. We don’t know how that will work, but it helps us understand how we can “see” an invisible, spiritual God.

IV. In Revelation 21, we get another vision of the nature of the afterlife.

a. When the Bible talks about heaven, it focuses on some odd things, things that will be there and things that will not be there. We assume these are symbolic representations, given the nature of this kind of literature, but it should not surprise us if God does have a lavish place prepared for us.

b. Why no sea? The sea represented violence and catastrophe.

c. There will be no tears. In this case, this means there will be no sadness.

d. In verse 22 and following, we learn that there will be no sun or temple or moon. Is this a dark place? Or a place without a church?

e. God’s heaven will be full of Him. He will fulfill everything that was just a shadow of Himself.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does the Sabbath act as a foretaste of heaven? How does that give us direction on how to “keep the Sabbath”?

2. What is the beatific vision? How is it a blessing?

3. How can we “see” an invisible God?

4. According to Revelation 21, heaven is filled with things we would not expect, but absent of things very common to us today. What is the final image we get of heaven from Scripture? What about it surprises you?
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