

2018 At A Glance

January 14	FC College Gathering (7:00PM @ Family Church Downtown)
January 17	Midweek Activities Begin
January 21	Advance CLT Parent Meetings Advance CLT Price Increase Downtown Campus to 3 Services
January 24	Advance CLT High School Deadline
January 28	Advance CLT Middle School Deadline Leadership Rally
February 4	Advance CLT Training Begins
February 9	Night to Shine (@ United Methodist Church 900 Brandywine Rd. WPB, FL 33409)
February 11	FC College Gathering (7:00PM @ Family Church Downtown) FC Village Launch
February 25	Advance CLT Canvassing Day
March 1	SHARPER! Conference (@ Family Church Downtown)
March 11	FC College Gathering (7:00PM @ Family Church Downtown)
March 17-23	Advance CLT Mission Trip
March 30	Summer Internship Application Deadline
April 1	Easter
April 8	FC College Gathering (7:00PM @ Family Church Downtown)
May 2-6	SunFest Parking Fundraiser
May 23	Midweek Activities End
May 23-25	Summer Interns Move-In
July 4	4 th on Flagler Parking Fundraiser
July 9-13	Student Camp
July 25-27	Summer Interns Move-Out

Readings

- *A Bright and Burning Light: Robert Charles Sproul, February 13, 1939 – December 14, 2017*
Author: Albert Mohler
 - DUE: Before Sunday January 21, 2018
- *Visioneering. Chapter Nine, The Power of Vision*
Author: Andy Stanley
 - DUE: Before Sunday January 28, 2018
- *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. Chapter Five, The Inerrancy of Scripture*
Author: Wayne Grudem
 - DUE: Before Sunday February 4, 2018
- *Finish the Mission, Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged. Chapter Six, Let the Peoples Praise You, O God! Let All the Peoples Praise You!*
Author: John Piper
 - DUE: Before Sunday February 11, 2018

Albert Mohler

EVANGELICALISM

A Bright and Burning Light: Robert Charles Sproul, February 13, 1939-December 14, 2017

December 14, 2017

Most merciful Father, who hast been pleased to take unto thyself the soul of this thy servant; Grant to us who are still in our pilgrimage, and who walk as yet by faith, that having served thee with constancy on earth, we may be joined hereafter with thy blessed saints in glory everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

We cannot determine truth by counting noses.

—R. C. Sproul

For me, the story begins as a teenager stuck in a desperate struggle with huge theological questions in the 1970s. Of course, R. C. Sproul, with firm conviction and a friendly smile, would rightly insist that the story begins in the gracious will of our sovereign, eternal, and omnipotent God. Actually, those were some of the big theological questions that had me by the throat.

I had been confronted by teachers in high school who had declared their own atheism and ridiculed theism. I was surrounded by a culture of increasing moral relativism and the first wave of what would later be called post-modernism. I knew Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and I wanted to be faithful to him. But how?

My struggle was spiritual and moral, but it was also irreducibly intellectual. How could I know and defend the Christian faith? I did not even know where to begin. At home and at church, I was surrounded by sweet Christians who loved me and invested their lives in me. But I had big questions they could not answer. Questions that gnawed at me and kept me awake at night. Questions that I feared could not be answered. Questions that I had no idea Christians had grappled with for centuries.

Thankfully, I found help. I found other Christians who were struggling with the same questions, and

some of them passed to me cassette tapes. At that time, the cassette was a recent invention. For me, these tapes were a lifeline – bringing me expository preaching from Dr. John MacArthur and lectures from this strangely infectious and compelling teacher at an oddly named center in Western Pennsylvania. The teacher was R. C. Sproul.

Those tapes from R. C. Sproul were not my own. They had been passed to me after several others had listed to them. They squeaked. Nevertheless, I pounced on them like a hungry tiger. I received the tapes out of sequence. No matter – I just gained confidence and understanding with every tape.

R. C.'s voice was captivating. Honestly, I probably would have listened to him read the *Farmer's Almanac*. But the power of his teaching was the vitality and virility of biblical Christianity, presented logically, forcefully, biblically, and passionately.

My own pilgrimage as a theologian cannot be traced without the indelible influence of R. C. Sproul. Had I never met him in the flesh, I would have been in his debt and gifted with his influence. By God's grace, I came to know R. C. Sproul as a teacher, colleague, encourager, and friend.

He was, as the British would say, a man in full. He never made a half-argument, presented a half-correction, preached a half-sermon, or laughed a half-laugh. He was all in, all the time. His voice would fill the room, his preaching would shake the timbers, and his passion would spread like a virus. He showed up as everything he was and with everything he believed – every time.

He was one of the great defenders of historic Christianity of our times. It is fair to say that R. C. was the greatest and most influential proponent of the recovery of Reformed theology in the last century. He was a stalwart defender of the Word of God, and one of the primary architects of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978. His tapes were soon accompanied by his books and the vastly expanding influence of Ligonier Ministries.

When he taught about the holiness of God, a generation of evangelicals was rescued from the emaciated and desiccated theology of cultural Christianity. When he defended Reformed theology, he taught us all how to understand the gospel in terms of God's eternal purpose to save, consistent with his sovereignty. He was rigorously biblical and ruthlessly logical . . . with a smile.

He loved to introduce Christians to both the splendors and the humbling lessons of church history.

He wanted evangelical Christians to stand in a line of faithfulness that began with the apostles and continued to the present. He had the heart and courage of Martin Luther and the theological precision and passion of John Calvin. He was a proud son of the Reformation, and the *solus* of the Reformation were the architecture of his mind. He urged and taught Christians toward the development of the Christian mind, and ideas were his battleground.

He was a preacher of the Word of God, a faithful steward of God's mysteries. In the later years of his life, he told friends that his greatest joy in ministry had come as a pastor. That comes as no surprise.

R. C. Sproul was an evangelist. "Evangelism is our duty. God commanded it," he taught. "But there is more. Evangelism is not only a duty; it is also a privilege. God allows us to participate in the greatest work in human history, the work of redemption." There will be many saints in heaven who came to hear the gospel through R. C.'s talks, sermons, videos, conferences, books, and personal witnessing.

The work R.C. so courageously and brilliantly and infectiously led for so many decades goes on, in the work of Ligonier Ministries. R.C. planned it so, and set an example for us all in fulfilling this stewardship. His teaching and his influence will continue, channeled into successive generations. He surrounded himself and populated Ligonier Ministries with a leadership team that will continue steadfastly.

To know R.C. was also to know that the man and his ministry could never be explained—and would never have been begun—without the incredible loyalty, love, and devotion of his gracious wife, Vesta. Their hearts beat as one, and few spouses in ministry have been so demonstrably faithful, insightful, affectionate, and absolutely necessary as Vesta Sproul. R.C. would insist that you know that truth.

Our prayers are with the Sproul family, and our hope is in Christ. Listening to one of R.C.'s messages in the last few hours, I realized that R.C. had been preaching – decades ago – as a man ready to die, trusting in Christ.

In a tribute to his own beloved teacher, Professor John Gerstner, written in 1976, R.C. stated: "In an era of church history when theology is in chaos, the church is being shaken at its foundations, and Christian ethics shift and slide with every novel theology, we are grateful for the vivid example of one who stands in the midst of confusion as 'a bright and burning light.'"

Indeed, we are grateful to God for the bright and burning light named R. C. Sproul. **Soli Deo Gloria**

VISIONEERING

ANDY STANLEY



Multnomah Publishers

THE POWER OF VISION

A vision we give to others of who and what they could become has power when it echoes what the spirit has already spoken into their souls.

LARRY CRABB

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them become what they are capable of becoming.

GOETHE

In this chapter we are going to depart from the storyline just a bit in order to explore one additional facet of visioncasting. Most of the visioncasting you do will have very little to do with what could be or should be as it relates to your life. The majority of the visions you cast will be centered on other people and their futures. Let me explain.

We are all visioncasters. We cast visions for people all the time. Chances are you cast a vision for someone today. It wasn't intentional. It probably wasn't life-changing. But along the way you made a comment to someone about what could or should be in his or her life. It may have been positive: "You will probably outsell everybody in this office." Or it may have been negative: "I don't think you were cut out for sales" (i.e. "You don't have a future in sales"). Affirming: "Honey, you can do anything you

set your mind to." Or discouraging: "You will probably struggle with this the rest of your life."

Comments such as these shape one's picture of the future. Words point people in a direction. They plant mental seeds. Words can make or break a self-image. So, in a way, we are all visioncasters. Every relationship is a potential visioncasting opportunity.

The position we hold in people's lives determines the weight of our words and thus our potential to shape their future. Encouragement from Sandra means more than encouragement from a stranger. Every son knows the adrenaline rush associated with his father's recognition and approval. As a father, I am all too aware of my children's potential to hurt me. For unbeknownst to them, I long for their approval just as they crave mine.

PERSONAL VISIONCASTING

All of us have been impacted by the visions people intentionally or unintentionally cast for us. Understanding this simple concept will help you grasp your potential as a visioncaster in the lives of those around you. Just as people's words have set a course for your life, so you too have the potential to set or alter the course of another.

When I was in the eighth grade, I tried out for the eighth grade boys basketball team at my high school. I was one of about one hundred students who tried out that year. As you can imagine, it was a zoo. I don't know how the coaches ever managed to discover who had potential and who didn't. But after five rounds of cuts, I was still a potential candidate for the Tucker High School eighth grade boys basketball team.

The final cut happened on a Thursday night in December of 1972. When I think back to that pivotal night, I can almost smell that old Tucker High gymnasium. We were coming down to the final minutes of the tryout. At the end of the evening the head coach would read off the names of the guys who had made the team. If you didn't hear your name...

Anyway, we were scrimmaging. I was in the corner. Somebody passed the ball to me. I took a shot and missed everything. No rim. No net. No backboard. Nothing. The head coach was standing on the corner of the floor opposite me. He yelled across the court, "Stanley, you've got no backbone." He shook his head in disgust and walked over to the bench.

In a few minutes the scrimmage ended. The tryouts ended. And my chances for playing eighth grade basketball ended as well. But something else happened that night. That coach had cast a vision for me. His words, combined with the events of the evening, painted a picture of my future that took me years to overcome.

I believed him. I believed that in the arena of athletic competition I would never succeed. He told me what I could and should expect in the future in so far as competitive sports were concerned. He was an adult, a coach. His words cut deep. So I acted on them.

That was the last time I tried out for anything competitive. It wasn't until I was in my mid-twenties that I recognized what had happened and was able to move past it. Such are the power of words. Such is the power of visioncasting.

Jesus certainly understood this concept. Remember his first encounter with Peter? Peter wasn't Peter when he met Jesus. He was Simon. Simon Johnson to be precise (John 1:41-42). And then Jesus, in seeming total disregard for Simon's parents' choice of a name, decided to call him Peter. What was that all about?

Jesus was casting a vision. Jesus had a vision of what Peter could become. Jesus saw in Peter the potential for greatness. So he gave him a name that reflected his potential. Peter. The rock. From that day forward Peter carried a constant reminder of what Jesus saw in him. What he could be. What he should be. And in Peter's case, what he one day would be.

Then some time later, Jesus turned to Peter and filled in the blanks.

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18-19)

No doubt Peter's mind raced back to that first encounter when Jesus gave him his new name. It was more than a name change. It was a vision. In some yet-to-be-revealed way, he would serve as the foundation for

something important, something still in the future.

And although there was no way Peter could comprehend the significance of Christ's words that day, he certainly walked away with a greater sense of destiny. It was clear that God had something special in mind for him.

If Peter knew his Old Testament, he knew he was not the first person who was renamed in light of a divine purpose. Abraham was not always Abraham. And for that matter, Sarah was not always Sarah, either. On the day God instituted his covenant with Abraham, he changed his name to signify the certainty of his future. His name change was part of the vision he cast for Abraham and his descendants.

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly." Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, "As for me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations." (Genesis 17:1-5)

And regarding Abraham's wife,

Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." (vv. 15-16)

Abram means *exalted father*. Abraham means, *father of many*. Both Sarah and Sarai mean *princess*. Renaming her was God's way of punctuating the appropriateness of her name. She would be the mother of kings. From her womb would eventually come an entire dynasty.

God renamed Abraham and Sarah, and Peter as a way of pointing them in specific directions for their lives. Their names were a reflection of

what could be and what would be. In a similar way, our words have the power to point people in a direction, to set their life's course. This is especially true of those who look to us for leadership.

Fortunately for me, that head coach was not the only authority figure in my life whose words etched a picture on my heart.

MY EARLIEST VISION

In many ways I feel I am the product of a vision my father cast for me as a child. Early on he would say to me, "Andy, God has something very special for your life. He is going to use you in a great way." His words found their way into my heart.

During my junior high and high school days, those words would float through my mind at what I considered the most inappropriate times. "Andy, God has something very special for your life. He is going to use you in a great way." His vision for my life probably did as much as anything to move me safely through the minefield of adolescence.

The following is a journal entry I made during the fall of my senior year in high school. Keep in mind, I was in the twelfth grade when I wrote these words.

September 29, 1975

I need to tell my boy at a young age that God told me he was going to use my son in a great way. This greatly influenced my life. Lord, I pray it will his.

My father's words served as guardrails at a vulnerable time in my development. Time after time they kept me from veering off into moral and relational ravines. As early as the twelfth grade I was able to step back far enough to discern their impact. Like an arrow in the hands of a skilled archer, he had aimed and released me with armor-piercing momentum.

Vision is powerful. Particularly when it is cast by someone we look up to and respect, someone we trust and are prone to emulate. Chances are you either have or will have people in your life who feel that way about you.

Neither of my parents ever pushed me toward ministry. But I believe

their vision was the tool God used to draw me in that direction. Vision draws us. It draws us because it captures our imaginations. From there it has the potential to engage our hearts. And once our hearts have felt the energy that comes with a well-cast vision, we gain a sense of destiny. This is what could be.

This is what should be.

By God's grace this is what will be. Vision serves as intrinsic motivation. We move in a direction because we want to, not because we are told to. Instead of pushing and cajoling us into action, a vision draws and even enchants us.

Once an authority figure exits our life, his or her influence often disappears as well. But not so with the person wise enough to plant the seed of a positive vision in our hearts. Their influence is often felt for a lifetime. A carefully planted vision, like a seed, grows to take on a life and shape of its own. Long after the sower is gone, the seed continues to grow.

A WORD TO MOMS AND DADS

Moms, Dads, we are the premier visioncasters. We must paint a vividly clear picture in the minds and hearts of our children of what they can become in their character, conduct, and even their careers. We must pour into their sponge-like souls a vision of what they could accomplish with their lives. After all, we see their potential far better than they do.

It is incumbent upon us as stewards of these precious lives to introduce them to their potential, to lift their eyes off of today's realities and focus them on tomorrow's possibilities. We must ask God to give us a clear vision for our children and cast it every opportunity we get.

The most significant visions are not cast by great orators from a stage. They are cast at the bedsides of our children. The greatest visioncasting opportunities happen between the hours of 7:30 and 9:30 P.M. Monday through Sunday. In these closing hours of the day we have a unique opportunity to plant the seeds of what could be and what should be. Take advantage of every opportunity you get.

Not long ago I was lying down with Andrew, my six-year-old, and Garrett, who just turned five, going through our nightly routine of verses, stories, and prayer. I don't know why I chose this particular night to introduce the subject of God's special plan for their lives, but I did. After our

prayers I leaned down close to Andrew and said, "God has something special for your life, and I can't wait to find out what it is."

Without hesitating he asked, "What's yours?"

"What's my what?" I asked.

"What's God's special thing for your life?" he said.

I wasn't prepared for that. So I did what most dads do in a situation like that. I called a time out. "Andrew, it's late, but I will tell you all about that tomorrow night."

That began a whole new level of dialogue between my sons and me. As I have an opportunity to describe "God's special thing" in my life, I am finding opportunity after opportunity to point them toward a preferred future for their lives—what could be, what should be. My most significant visioncasting takes place on my knees with my face twelve inches away from the faces of my children.

About halfway through writing this book I began reading *Connecting* by Larry Crabb. Throughout the book he expands upon the power and importance of casting a vision for another person. The following two paragraphs really hit home about my role as a parent.

What would it be like if we had a vision for each other, if we could see the lost glory in ourselves, our family, and our friends? What would the effect on your sons or daughters be if they realized that you were caught up with the possibilities of restored glory, of what they could become—not successful, talented, good looking, or rich but kind, strong and self-assured, fully alive.

When people connect with each other on the basis of a vision for who they are and what they could become; when we see in others what little of Jesus has already begun to form beneath the insecurity, fear and pride; when we long beyond anything else to see that little bit of Jesus develop and mature; then something is released from within us that has the power to form more of Jesus within them. That power is the life of Christ, carried into another soul across the bridge of our vision for them, a life that touches the life in another with nourishing power. Vision for others both bridges the distance between two souls and triggers the release of the power within us.¹

The New Testament casts a compelling vision for each of us who have trusted Christ as Savior. It is clear from even a casual reading of the text that God has no problem whatsoever seeing and relating to us as we will be, not as we are.

We are constantly referred to as saints. We are on our way to being conformed to the image of Christ. The apostle Paul goes so far as to say we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Reread portions of the New Testament with this in mind. You will be amazed at how often we are addressed in light of what we are in the process of becoming and what we will one day be.

Check this out:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (1 John 3:2)

No doubt, Jesus shocked his audience when he announced, "You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14). To which they probably responded, "We are? You've got to be kidding." At that moment they were no more "salt" and "light" than Peter was a "rock." But Jesus was comfortable speaking to their potential while overlooking their performance. He spoke to what they could be, what they should be, and for a handful, what they would become.

Apparently he was convinced this was the best approach to bringing about change in his audience. Clearly, he preferred this over concentrating on what people were doing wrong. In fact, the only group whose present performance he continually harped on was the group that was convinced it was doing a whole lot better than it really was.

JANE'S STORY

Think about this for a moment. What would happen if you were to begin speaking to people's potential rather than their performance? What if you made it a habit to dispense the same type of grace to others as has been poured out on you? What would happen if you intentionally laced your conversations with notions of what could be true of the people around you?

Jane McCall and I have been friends for eleven years. We have known each other longer than that. But our friendship didn't begin until a couple of years after we met. When I met Jane, she was a full-fledged street person. She had been a prescription drug addict for the previous twenty years. And now, at forty-one, she was a part of the government-sponsored methadone experiment. Methadone is a drug given primarily to heroine addicts to replace their drug of choice. To receive it legally, addicts had to report daily to a treatment center that administered the drug. Unfortunately, like heroine, methadone is highly addictive. So much so that it has its own black market.

Jane approached me after church one Sunday night and expressed a desire for help. I was twenty-seven years old at the time. I was fresh out of seminary. I knew a lot about the Bible but very little about helping anyone in Jane's condition. So I made all the classic mistakes. First, I believed everything she told me. That, of course, led to my next mistake: I gave her money on a regular basis.

Years later she would kid me, "Andy," she would say, "do you know how to tell when an addict is lying?"

"No, Jane, how do you know when an addict is lying?"

"His lips are moving."

For seven years I tracked with Jane as she was in and out of every hospital and rehabilitation program in the city. Just when I thought she was making progress, down she would go. And when I was ready to walk away, she would make up some incredible heartrending story, and I would feel sorry for her and jump back into the insanity.

On one occasion I helped Jane get a job at a local church. I thought she had kicked the drug thing once and for all. She was doing so well. Her boss was thrilled with her performance. And then she called me and said she had to talk to me immediately.

After a long drawn-out story she looked me straight in the eye and said, "Andy, I tested HIV positive. I feel like the best thing for me to do is to quit my job so as to protect you and the integrity of the church."

Of course my first thought was, "How heroic. How sensitive. God has done a miracle in Jane's heart." After all, this was the first job Jane had had in years. I knew she loved the environment she was in. And I was confident she enjoyed the people she worked around. For her to quit this job

was a big sacrifice. Or so I thought.

Several weeks later, Jane admitted she had made the whole thing up. She had started using again, and it was interfering with her performance at work. Rather than tell me, she thought it would be better to make up the HIV story so she would have a good excuse for resigning. At that point, I resigned from Jane.

For a couple of months.

The one thing I did right with Jane was to take advantage of every opportunity I could to cast a vision of what God could do through her if she would put her addiction behind her once and for all. "Jane," I would say, "one day God is going to use you to reach people who would never listen to me." In the early years she would just shake her head. But as time went by she would bring it up. "Andy, do you really believe God could use me? Do you really believe anybody would ever listen to me?" For some reason, I really believed God wanted to use Jane. So I kept telling her. Eventually she began to believe me.

Somewhere along the way God birthed a vision in Jane. She began to see all the filth and sin and abuse as an opportunity. Her past, which had been a point of shame and embarrassment, took on a new meaning. What "could be" eventually blossomed into what "should be." And Jane embraced her potential with a vengeance.

Jane overcame her drug addiction. With that behind her, she tackled the deeper issues that had sent her scrambling as a teenager for something to mask her pain. It became evident early on in the process that recovery was not her ultimate destination. She believed God was going to use her, and she was preparing herself for whatever he had in mind.

She attended enough support groups, counseling sessions, AA, NA, and CA (Cocaine Anonymous) meetings to earn an honorary doctorate in addiction recovery, if there were such a thing. God used her extensive group experience to further define his vision for her life.

As she neared the end of the recovery process, she enrolled in a course designed to teach people how to lead support groups. Her instructor recognized Jane's eagerness to learn, and before long he allowed her to lead a group for sexually-abused women.

Jane was a fish in water. She loved those women in a way that only someone with Jane's background could love them. And they

responded. Before long she had two groups. No case was too extreme. Nobody was unlovable. She saw potential in everyone who graced her presence.

From time to time Jane would invite me to sit in on her groups and answer theological questions or add a male perspective to the discussion. On one occasion Jane decided to focus the discussion on how to help husbands deal with their attitudes toward those who had abused their wives. So she invited the husbands to the meeting. She invited Sandra and me as well.

I have seen a lot of hurt. I have heard my share of heartrending stories. I have walked with people through just about every painful situation imaginable. In spite of that, I was still unprepared for the emotional intensity that permeated Jane's apartment that night. If you have ever sat in on a support group for sexually-abused women, you understand. If not, well, I don't know if there are adjectives to describe what we experienced. This was not my first meeting with Jane. But it was the first time spouses had been invited to the group. Their presence, comments, and insensitivity fueled a fire that was already raging out of control.

The meeting lasted about three hours. Sandra and I didn't hang around to socialize afterwards. As soon as we got in the car, we both broke down and started weeping. We didn't tear up—we wept. Never in our lives had we been in an environment of such intense emotional pain. It was more than either of us could bear. I had been invited to facilitate the discussion, but I was pretty much worthless.

Yet there in the middle of those precious ladies was Jane. God's appointed and anointed messenger. Delivering a message of hope and healing in a way that no one but Jane could deliver it. Pointing the way to what could be, what should be. Listening, loving, embracing, understanding, giving, sharing, refusing to give up on even the most difficult personalities.

What could be had come to be. Not because of any great effort on my part. Certainly not because of any skill or insight I possessed. But because the seed of vision had germinated, taken root, pushed to the surface, and blossomed. God had a plan for Jane. Jane recognized it and embraced it. And now she is a visioncaster. A visioncaster for a group whose hearts and hopes have been damaged almost beyond repair. A group who needs

someone exactly like Jane to find the glowing embers of life and fan them into a preferred future.

When I think back to those early years with Jane, I am drawn once again to something Larry Crabb wrote describing the potential of helping a person lock in on what could be.

Powerful relating consists of grasping a vision of what God has in mind for someone and the faith to believe that the vision could become a reality.²

WORD POWER

Words are powerful. They are life-shaping. We can use them for good or evil. To build or destroy. To point people in a God-honoring direction or to send them down a path of regret.

No doubt it was the potential of the spoken word that compelled the apostle Paul to write these words:

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Ephesians 4:29)

This from a man who was continually referring to unfaithful, antagonistic, immature church members as "sauns." He practiced what he preached. He spoke to his audiences' potential, not their practice. Maybe it was the amazing metamorphosis in his own life that gave him the confidence to address these first-century believers for what they could be, should be, and by God's grace, would be.

Should we do any less? What kind of vision are you casting for the people around you? Dad, what kind of vision are you casting for your children? Mom, what kind of vision are you casting for your husband? Grandparent, what about those grandkids? Leader, what kind of personal visions are you casting for the people who have invested their time and talents in your vision?

In the next chapter we will refocus our attention on the development of your personal vision. As we continue our study, keep in mind that

THE POWER OF VISION

while you are the recipient of a divinely ordered vision, you will also be given opportunities to cast the Father's vision for those around you.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

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Chapter 5

THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

Are there any errors in the Bible?

Most books on systematic theology have not included a separate chapter on the inerrancy of the Bible. The subject has usually been dealt with under the heading of the authority of Scripture, and no further treatment has been considered necessary. However, this issue of inerrancy is of such concern in the evangelical world today that it warrants a separate chapter following our treatment of the authority of the Word of God.

EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

A. The Meaning of Inerrancy

We will not at this point repeat the arguments concerning the authority of Scripture that were given in chapter 4. There it was argued that all the words in the Bible are God's words, and that therefore to disbelieve or disobey any word in Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God. It was argued further that the Bible clearly teaches that God cannot lie or speak falsely (2 Sam. 7:28; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Therefore, all the words in Scripture are claimed to be completely true and without error in any part (Num. 23:19; Pss. 12:6; 119:89, 96; Prov. 30:5; Matt. 24:35). God's words are, in fact, the ultimate standard of truth (John 17:17).

Especially relevant at this point are those Scripture texts that indicate the total truthfulness and reliability of God's words. "The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times" (Ps. 12:6), indicates the flawlessness or absolute reliability and purity of Scripture. Similarly, "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him" (Prov. 30:5), indicates the truthfulness of every word that God has spoken. Though error and at least partial falsehood may characterize the speech of every human being, it is the characteristic of God's speech even when spoken through sinful human beings that it is never false and that it never affirms error: "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that

he should repent" (Num. 23:19) was spoken by sinful Balaam specifically about the prophetic words that God had spoken through his own lips.

With evidence such as this we are now in a position to define biblical inerrancy: *The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.*

This definition focuses on the question of truthfulness and falsehood in the language of Scripture. The definition in simple terms just means that *the Bible always tells the truth*, and that it always tells the truth *concerning everything it talks about*. This definition does not mean that the Bible tells us every fact there is to know about any one subject, but it affirms that what it does say about any subject is *true*.

It is important to realize at the outset of this discussion that the focus of this controversy is on the question of truthfulness in speech. It must be recognized that absolute truthfulness in speech is consistent with some other types of statements, such as the following:

1. The Bible Can Be Inerrant and Still Speak in the Ordinary Language of Everyday Speech. This is especially true in "scientific" or "historical" descriptions of facts or events. The Bible can speak of the sun rising and the rain falling because from the perspective of the speaker this is exactly what happens. From the standpoint of an observer standing on the sun (were that possible) or on some hypothetical "fixed" point in space, the earth rotates and brings the sun into view, and rain does not fall downward but upward or sideways or whatever direction necessary for it to be drawn by gravity toward the surface of the earth. But such explanations are hopelessly pedantic and would make ordinary communication impossible. From the standpoint of the speaker, the sun *does* rise and the rain *does* fall, and these are perfectly true descriptions of the natural phenomena the speaker observes.

A similar consideration applies to numbers when used in measuring or in counting. A reporter can say that 8,000 men were killed in a certain battle without thereby implying that he has counted everyone and that there are not 7,999 or 8,001 dead soldiers. If roughly 8,000 died, it would of course be false to say that 16,000 died, but it would not be false in most contexts for a reporter to say that 8,000 men died when in fact 7,823 or 8,242 had died: the limits of truthfulness would depend on the degree of precision implied by the speaker and expected by his original hearers.

This is also true for measurements. Whether I say, "I don't live far from my office," or "I live a little over a mile from my office," or "I live one mile from my office," or "I live 1.287 miles from my office," all four statements are still approximations to some degree of accuracy. Further degrees of accuracy might be obtained with more precise scientific instruments, but these would still be approximations to a certain degree of accuracy. Thus, measurements also, in order to be true, should conform to the degree of precision implied by the speaker and expected by the hearers in the original context. It should not trouble us, then, to affirm both that the Bible is absolutely truthful in everything it says and that it uses ordinary language to describe natural phenomena or to give approximations or round numbers when those are appropriate in the context.

We should also note that language can make vague or imprecise statements without being untrue. "I live a little over a mile from my office" is a vague and imprecise statement,

but it is also inerrant: there is nothing untrue about it. It does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. In a similar way, biblical statements can be imprecise and still be totally true. Inerrancy has to do with *truthfulness*, not with the degree of precision with which events are reported.

2. **The Bible Can Be Inerrant and Still Include Loose or Free Quotations.** The method by which one person quotes the words of another person is a procedure that in large part varies from culture to culture. In contemporary American and British culture we are used to quoting a person's exact words when we enclose the statement in quotation marks (this is called direct quotation). But when we use indirect quotation (with no quotation marks) we only expect an accurate report of the substance of a statement. Consider this sentence: "Elliot said that he would return home for supper right away." The sentence does not quote Elliot directly, but it is an acceptable and truthful report of Elliot's actual statement to his father, "I will come to the house to eat in two minutes," even though the indirect quotation included none of the speaker's original words.

Written Greek at the time of the New Testament had no quotation marks or equivalent kinds of punctuation, and an accurate citation of another person needed to include only a correct representation of the *content* of what the person said (rather like our indirect quotations): it was not expected to cite each word exactly. Thus, inerrancy is consistent with loose or free quotations of the Old Testament or of the words of Jesus, for example, so long as the *content* is not false to what was originally stated. The original writer did not ordinarily imply that he was using the exact words of the speaker and only those, nor did the original hearers expect verbatim quotation in such reporting.

3. **It Is Consistent With Inerrancy to Have Unusual or Uncommon Grammatical Constructions in the Bible.** Some of the language of Scripture is elegant and stylistically excellent. Other scriptural writings contain the rough-hewn language of ordinary people. At times this includes a failure to follow the commonly accepted "rules" of grammatical expression (such as the use of a plural verb where grammatical rules would require a singular verb, or the use of a feminine adjective where a masculine one would be expected, or different spelling for a word than the one commonly used, etc.). These stylistically or grammatically irregular statements (which are especially found in the book of Revelation) should not trouble us, for they do not affect the truthfulness of the statements under consideration: a statement can be ungrammatical but still be entirely true. For example, an uneducated backwoodsman in some rural area may be the most trusted man in the county even though his grammar is poor, because he has earned a reputation for never telling a lie. Similarly, there are a few statements in Scripture (in the original languages) that are ungrammatical (according to current standards of proper grammar at that time) but still inerrant because they are completely true. The issue is *truthfulness* in speech.

B. Some Current Challenges to Inerrancy

In this section we examine the major objections that are commonly made against the concept of inerrancy.

1. **The Bible Is Only Authoritative for "Faith and Practice."** One of the most frequent objections is raised by those who say that the purpose of Scripture is to teach us in areas that concern "faith and practice" only; that is, in areas that directly relate to our religious faith or to our ethical conduct. This position would allow for the possibility of false statements in Scripture, for example, in *other* areas such as in minor historical details or scientific facts—these areas, it is said, do not concern the purpose of the Bible, which is to instruct us in what we should believe and how we are to live.¹ Its advocates often prefer to say that the Bible is "*infallible*," but they hesitate to use the word *inerrant*.²

The response to this objection can be stated as follows: the Bible repeatedly affirms that all of Scripture is profitable for us (2 Tim. 3:16) and that *all* of it is "God-breathed." Thus it is completely pure (Ps. 12:6), perfect (Ps. 119:96), and true (Prov. 30:5). The Bible itself does not make any restriction on the kinds of subjects to which it speaks truthfully.

The New Testament contains further affirmations of the reliability of all parts of Scripture: in Acts 24:14, Paul says that he worships God, "*believing everything* laid down by the law or written in the prophets." In Luke 24:25, Jesus says that the disciples are "foolish men" because they are "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." In Romans 15:4, Paul says that "*whatever* was written" in the Old Testament was "written for our instruction." These texts give no indication that there is any part of Scripture that is not to be trusted or relied on completely. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul can refer even to minor historical details in the Old Testament (sitting down to eat and drink, rising up to dance) and can say both that they "*happened*" (thus implying historical reliability) and "*were written down for our instruction*."

If we begin to examine the way in which the New Testament authors trust the smallest historical details of the Old Testament narrative, we see no intention to separate out matters of "faith and practice," or to say that this is somehow a recognizable category of affirmations, or to imply that statements not in that category need not be trusted or thought to be inerrant. Rather, it seems that the New Testament authors are willing to cite and affirm as true *every detail* of the Old Testament.

In the following list are some examples of these historical details cited by New Testament authors. If all of these are matters of "faith and practice," then *every* historical detail of the Old Testament is a matter of "faith and practice," and this objection ceases to be an objection to inerrancy. On the other hand, if so many details can be affirmed, then it seems that all of the historical details in the Old Testament can be affirmed as true, and we should not speak of restricting the necessary truthfulness of Scripture to some category of "faith and practice" that would exclude certain minor details. There are no types of details left that could not be affirmed as true.

The New Testament gives us the following data: David ate the bread of the Presence (Matt. 12:3–4); Jonah was in the whale (Matt. 12:40); the men of Nineveh repented

¹A good defense of this position can be found in a collection of essays edited by Jack Rogers, *Biblical Authority* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1977); and, more extensively, in Jack B. Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

²Until about 1960 or 1965 the word *infallible* was used interchangeably with the word *inerrant*. But in recent years, at least in the United States, the word *infallible* has been used in a weaker sense to mean that the Bible will not lead us astray in matters of faith and practice.

(Matt. 12:41); the queen of the South came to hear Solomon (Matt. 12:42); Elijah was sent to the widow of Zarephath (Luke 4:25–26); Naaman the Syrian was cleansed of leprosy (Luke 4:27); on the day Lot left Sodom fire and brimstone rained from heaven (Luke 17:29; cf. v. 32 with its reference to Lot's wife who turned to salt); Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14); Jacob gave a field to Joseph (John 4:5); many details of the history of Israel occurred (Acts 13:17–23); Abraham believed and received the promise before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:10); Abraham was about one hundred years old (Rom. 4:19); God told Rebekah before her children were born that the elder child would serve the younger (Rom. 9:10–12); Elijah spoke with God (Rom. 11:2–4); the people of Israel passed through the sea, ate and drank spiritual food and drink, desired evil, sat down to drink, rose up to dance, indulged in immorality, grumbled, and were destroyed (1 Cor. 10:11); Abraham gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1–2); the Old Testament tabernacle had a specific and detailed design (Heb. 9:1–5); Moses sprinkled the people and the tabernacle vessels with blood and water, using scarlet wool and hyssop (Heb. 9:19–21); the world was created by the Word of God (Heb. 11:3);³ many details of the lives of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, and others actually happened (Heb. 11, *passim*); Esau sold his birthright for a single meal and later sought it back with tears (Heb. 12:16–17); Rahab received the spies and sent them out another way (James 2:25); eight persons were saved in the ark (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5); God turned Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes but saved Lot (2 Peter 2:6–7); Balaam's donkey spoke (2 Peter 2:16).

This list indicates that the New Testament writers were willing to rely on the truthfulness of any part of the historical narratives of the Old Testament. No detail was insignificant to be used for the instruction of New Testament Christians. There is no indication that they thought of a certain category of scriptural statements that were unreliable and untrustworthy (such as "historical and scientific" statements as opposed to doctrinal and moral passages). It seems clear that the Bible itself does not support any restriction on the kinds of subjects to which it speaks with absolute authority and truth; indeed, many passages in Scripture actually exclude the validity of this kind of restriction.

A second response to those who limit the necessary truthfulness of Scripture to matters of "faith and practice" is to note that this position mistakes the *major* purpose of Scripture for the *total* purpose of Scripture. To say that the major purpose of Scripture is to teach us in matters of "faith and practice" is to make a useful and correct summary of God's purpose in giving us the Bible. But as a *summary* it includes only the most prominent purpose of God in giving us Scripture. It is not, however, legitimate to use this summary to deny that it is *part* of the purpose of Scripture to tell us about minor historical details or about some aspects of astronomy or geography, and so forth. A summary cannot properly be used to deny one of the things it is summarizing! To use it this way would simply show that the summary is not detailed enough to specify the items in question.

³This is not a minor detail, but it is useful as an example of a "scientific" fact that is affirmed in the Old Testament and one about which the author says that we have knowledge "by

faith"; thus, faith here is explicitly said to involve trust in the truthfulness of a scientific and historical fact recorded in the Old Testament.

It is better to say that the *whole purpose* of Scripture is to say everything it does say, on whatever subject. Every one of God's words in Scripture was deemed by him to be important for us. Thus, God issues severe warnings to anyone who would take away even one word from what he has said to us (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18–19); we cannot add to God's words or take from them, for all are part of his larger purpose in speaking to us. Everything stated in Scripture is there because God intended it to be there: God does not say anything unintentionally! Thus, this first objection to inerrancy makes a wrong use of a summary and thereby incorrectly attempts to impose artificial limits on the kinds of things about which God can speak to us.

2. The Term *Inerrancy* Is a Poor Term. People who make this second objection say that the term *inerrancy* is too precise and that in ordinary usage it denotes a kind of absolute scientific precision that we do not want to claim for Scripture. Furthermore, those who make this objection note that the term *inerrancy* is not used in the Bible itself. Therefore, it is probably an inappropriate term for us to insist upon.

The response to this objection may be stated as follows: first, the scholars who have used the term *inerrancy* have defined it clearly for over a hundred years, and they have always allowed for the "limitations" that attach to speech in ordinary language. In no case has the term been used to denote a kind of absolute scientific precision by any responsible representative of the inerrancy position. Therefore those who raise this objection to the term are not giving careful enough attention to the way in which it has been used in theological discussions for more than a century.

Second, it must be noted that we often use nonbiblical terms to summarize a biblical teaching. The word *Trinity* does not occur in Scripture, nor does the word *incarnation*. Yet both of these terms are very helpful because they allow us to summarize in one word a true biblical concept, and they are therefore helpful in enabling us to discuss a biblical teaching more easily.

It should also be noted that no other single word has been proposed which says as clearly what we want to affirm when we wish to talk about total truthfulness in language. The word *inerrancy* does this quite well, and there seems no reason not to continue to use it for that purpose.

Finally, in the church today we seem to be unable to carry on the discussion around this topic without the use of this term. People may object to this term if they wish, but, like it or not, this is the term about which the discussion has focused and almost certainly will continue to focus in the next several decades. When the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in 1977 began a ten-year campaign to promote and defend the idea of biblical inerrancy, it became inevitable that this word would be the one about which discussion would proceed. The "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," which was drafted and published in 1978 under ICBI sponsorship (see appendix 1), defined what most evangelicals mean by inerrancy, perhaps not perfectly, but quite well, and further objections to such a widely used and well-defined term seem to be unnecessary and unhelpful for the church.

3. We Have No Inerrant Manuscripts; Therefore, Talk About an Inerrant Bible Is Misleading. Those who make this objection point to the fact that inerrancy has always

been claimed for the first or *original copies of the biblical documents*.⁴ Yet none of these survive: we have only copies of copies of what Moses or Paul or Peter wrote. What is the use, then, of placing so great importance on a doctrine that applies only to manuscripts that no one has?

In reply to this objection, it may first be stated that for over 99 percent of the words of the Bible, we *know* what the original manuscript said. Even for many of the verses where there are textual variants (that is, different words in different ancient copies of the same verse), the correct decision is often quite clear, and there are really very few places where the textual variant is both difficult to evaluate and significant in determining the meaning. In the small percentage of cases where there is significant uncertainty about what the original text said, the general sense of the sentence is usually quite clear from the context. (One does not have to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar to know where these variants are, because all modern English translations indicate them in marginal notes with words such as "some ancient manuscripts read . . ." or "other ancient authorities add. . .")

This is not to say that the study of textual variants is unimportant, but it is to say that the study of textual variants has not left us in confusion about what the original manuscripts said.⁵ It has rather brought us extremely close to the content of those original manuscripts. For most practical purposes, then, the *current published scholarly texts* of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament *are the same as the original manuscripts*. Thus, when we say that the original manuscripts were inerrant, we are also implying that over 99 percent of the words in our present manuscripts are also inerrant, for they are exact copies of the originals. Furthermore, we *know* where the uncertain readings are (for where there are no textual variants we have no reason to expect faulty copying of the original).⁶ Thus, our present manuscripts are for most purposes the same as the original manuscripts, and the doctrine of inerrancy therefore directly concerns our present manuscripts as well.

Furthermore, it is extremely important to affirm the inerrancy of the original documents, for the subsequent copies were made by men with no claim or guarantee by God that these copies would be perfect. But the original manuscripts are those to which the claims to be God's very words apply. Thus, if we have mistakes in the copies (as we do), then these are only the *mistakes of men*. But if we have mistakes in the *original manuscripts*, then we are forced to say not only that men made mistakes, but that *God himself* made a mistake and spoke falsely. This we cannot do.

⁴In theological terms, these original copies are called the "autographs," using the prefix *auto-*, meaning "self," and the root *graph*, meaning "writing," to refer to a copy written by the author himself.

⁵An excellent survey of the work of studying textual variants in the extant manuscripts of the New Testament is Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

⁶Of course the theoretical possibility exists that there was a copying error in the very first copy made of one of Paul's

epistles, for instance, and that this error has been reproduced in all remaining copies. But this must be thought unlikely because (1) it would require that only one copy was made of the original, or that only one copy was the basis for all other extant copies, and (2) our earlier argument about the faithfulness of God in preserving the canon (see chapter 3, p. 65) would seem to imply that if such a mistake did occur, it would not be one that would materially affect our understanding of Scripture. The existence of such a copying error cannot be either proven or disproven, but further speculation about it apart from hard evidence does not appear to be profitable.

4. The Biblical Writers "Accommodated" Their Messages in Minor Details to the False Ideas Current in Their Day, and Affirmed or Taught Those Ideas in an Incidental Way. This objection to inerrancy is slightly different from the one that would restrict the inerrancy of Scripture to matters of faith and practice, but it is related to it. Those who hold this position argue that it would have been very difficult for the biblical writers to communicate with the people of their time if they had tried to correct all the false historical and scientific information believed by their contemporaries. Those who hold this position would not argue that the points where the Bible affirms false information are numerous, or even that these places are the main points of any particular section of Scripture. Rather, they would say that when the biblical writers were attempting to make a larger point, they sometimes incidentally affirmed some falsehood believed by the people of their time.⁷

To this objection to inerrancy it can be replied, first, that God is Lord of human language who can use human language to communicate perfectly without having to affirm any false ideas that may have been held by people during the time of the writing of Scripture. This objection to inerrancy essentially denies God's effective lordship over human language.

Second, we must respond that such "accommodation" by God to our misunderstandings would imply that God had acted contrary to his character as an "unlying God" (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). It is not helpful to divert attention from this difficulty by repeated emphasis on the gracious condescension of God to speak on our level. Yes, God does condescend to speak our language, the language of human beings. But no passage of Scripture teaches that he "condescends" so as to act contrary to his moral character. He is never said to be able to condescend so as to affirm—even incidentally—something that is false. If God were to "accommodate" himself in this way, he would cease to be the "unlying God." He would cease to be the God the Bible represents him to be. Such activity would not in any way show God's greatness, for God does not manifest his greatness by acting in a way that contradicts his character. This objection thus at root misunderstands the purity and unity of God as they affect all of his words and deeds.

Furthermore, such a process of accommodation, if it actually had occurred, would create a serious moral problem for us. We are to be imitators of God's moral character (Lev. 11:44; Luke 6:36; Eph. 5:1; 1 Peter 5:1, et al.). Paul says, since in our new natures we are becoming more like God (Eph. 4:24), we should "put away falsehood" and "speak the truth" with one another (v. 25). We are to imitate God's truthfulness in our speech. However, if the accommodation theory is correct, then God *intentionally* made incidental affirmations of falsehood in order to enhance communication. Therefore, would it not also be right for us intentionally to make incidental affirmations of falsehood whenever it would enhance communication? Yet this would be tantamount to saying that a minor falsehood told for a good purpose (a "white lie") is not wrong. Such a position, contradicted by the Scripture passages cited above concerning God's total truthfulness in speech, cannot be held to be valid.

⁷An explanation of this view can be found in Daniel P. Fuller, "Benjamin B. Warfield's View of Faith and History," *BETS* 11 (1968): 75-83.

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5. Inerrancy Overemphasizes the Divine Aspect of Scripture and Neglects the Human Aspect. This more general objection is made by those who claim that people who advocate inerrancy so emphasize the divine aspect of Scripture that they downplay its human aspect.

It is agreed that Scripture has both a human and a divine aspect, and that we must give adequate attention to both. However, those who make this objection almost invariably go on to insist that the truly "human" aspects of Scripture *must* include the presence of some errors in Scripture. We can respond that though the Bible is fully human in that it was written by human beings using their own language, the activity of God in overseeing the writing of Scripture and causing it to be also his words means that it is different from much other human writing in precisely this aspect: it does not include error. That is exactly the point made even by sinful, greedy, disobedient Balaam in Numbers 23:19: God's speech through sinful human beings is different from the ordinary speech of men because "God is not man that he should lie." Moreover, it is simply not true that all human speech and writing contains error, for we make dozens of statements each day that are completely true. For example: "My name is Wayne Grudem." "I have three children." "I ate breakfast this morning."

6. There Are Some Clear Errors in the Bible. This final objection, that there are clear errors in the Bible, is either stated or implied by most of those who deny inerrancy, and for many of them the conviction that there are some actual errors in Scripture is a major factor in persuading them to challenge the doctrine of inerrancy.

In every case, the first answer that should be made to this objection is to ask where such errors are. In which specific verse or verses do these errors occur? It is surprising how frequently one finds that this objection is made by people who have little or no idea where the specific errors are, but who believe there are errors because others have told them so.

In other cases, however, people will mention one or more specific passages where, they claim, there is a false statement in Scripture. In these cases, it is important that we look at the biblical text itself, and look at it very closely. If we believe that the Bible is indeed inerrant, we should be eager and certainly not afraid to inspect these texts in minute detail. In fact, our expectation will be that close inspection will show there to be no error at all. Once again it is surprising how often it turns out that a careful reading just of the English text of the passage in question will bring to light one or more possible solutions to the difficulty.

In a few passages, no solution to the difficulty may be immediately apparent from reading the English text. At that point it is helpful to consult some commentaries on the text. Both Augustine (A.D. 354–430) and John Calvin (1509–64), along with many more recent commentators, have taken time to deal with most of the alleged "problem texts" and to suggest plausible solutions to them. Furthermore some writers have made collections of all the most difficult texts and have provided suggested answers for them.⁹

There are a few texts where a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek may be necessary to find a solution, and those who do not have firsthand access to these languages may have to find

⁹The interested reader may consult, for example, Gleason Zondervan, 1982); William Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955); idem., *Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids:

answers either from a more technical commentary or by asking someone who does have this training. Of course, our understanding of Scripture is never perfect, and this means that there may be cases where we will be unable to find a solution to a difficult passage at the present time. This may be because the linguistic, historical, or contextual evidence we need to understand the passage correctly is presently unknown to us. This should not trouble us in a small number of passages so long as the overall pattern of our investigation of these passages has shown that there is, in fact, no error where one has been alleged.⁹

But while we must allow the *possibility* of being unable to solve a particular problem, it should also be stated that there are many evangelical Bible scholars today who will say that they do not presently know of any problem texts for which there is no satisfactory solution. It is possible, of course, that some such texts could be called to their attention in the future, but during the past fifteen years or so of controversy over biblical inerrancy, no such "unsolved" text has been brought to their attention.¹⁰

Finally, a historical perspective on this question is helpful. There are no really "new" problems in Scripture. The Bible in its entirety is over 1,900 years old, and the alleged "problem texts" have been there all along. Yet throughout the history of the church there has been a firm belief in the inerrancy of Scripture in the sense in which it is defined in this chapter. Moreover, for these hundreds of years highly competent biblical scholars have read and studied those problem texts and still have found no difficulty in holding to inerrancy. This should give us confidence that the solutions to these problems are available and that belief in inerrancy is entirely consistent with a lifetime of detailed attention to the text of Scripture.¹¹

C. Problems With Denying Inerrancy

The problems that come with a denial of biblical inerrancy are not insignificant, and when we understand the magnitude of these problems it gives us further encouragement not only to affirm inerrancy but also to affirm its importance for the church. Some of the more serious problems are listed here.

1. If We Deny Inerrancy, a Serious Moral Problem Confronts Us: May We Imitate God and Intentionally Lie in Small Matters Also? This is similar to the point made in response to objection #4, above, but here it applies not only to those who espouse objection #4 but also more broadly to all who deny inerrancy. Ephesians 5:1 tells us to be

(St. Louis: Concordia, 1932); and John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (1874; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977). Almost all of the difficult texts have also received helpful analysis in the extensive notes to *The NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth Backer et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985).

⁹J. P. Moreland, "The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy," in *TrinJ* 7:1 (1986): 75–86, argues convincingly that Christians should not abandon the doctrine of inerrancy simply because of a small number of "problem texts" for which they presently have no clear solution.

¹⁰The present writer, for example, has during the last

twenty years examined dozens of these "problem texts" that have been brought to his attention in the context of the inerrancy debate. In every one of those cases, upon close inspection of the text a plausible solution has become evident.

¹¹On the history of inerrancy in the church, see the essays by Philip Hughes, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, W. Robert Godfrey, and John D. Woodbridge and Randall H. Balmer in *Scripture and Truth*. See also the more extensive study by John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers and McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

imitators of God. But a denial of inerrancy that still claims that the words of Scripture are God-breathed words necessarily implies that God intentionally spoke falsely to us in some of the less central affirmations of Scripture. But if this is right for God to do, how can it be wrong for us? Such a line of reasoning would, if we believed it, exert strong pressure on us to begin to speak untruthfully in situations where that might seem to help us communicate better, and so forth. This position would be a slippery slope with ever-increasing negative results in our own lives.

2. If Inerrancy is Denied, We Begin to Wonder if We Can Really Trust God in Anything He Says. Once we become convinced that God has spoken falsely to us in some minor matters in Scripture, then we realize that God is *capable* of speaking falsely to us. This will have a detrimental effect on our ability to take God at his word and trust him completely or obey him fully in the rest of Scripture. We will begin to disobey initially those sections of Scripture that we least wish to obey, and to distrust initially those sections that we are least inclined to trust. But such a procedure will eventually increase, to the great detriment of our spiritual lives. Of course, such a decline in trust and obedience to Scripture may not necessarily follow in the life of every individual who denies inerrancy, but this will certainly be the general pattern, and it will be the pattern exhibited over the course of a generation that is taught to deny inerrancy.

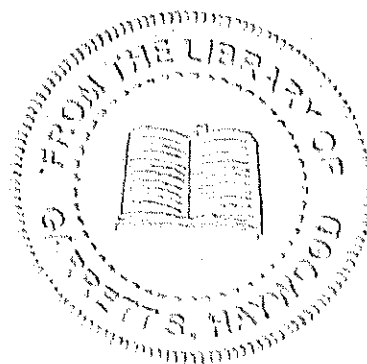
3. If We Deny Inerrancy, We Essentially Make Our Own Human Minds a Higher Standard of Truth Than God's Word Itself. We use our minds to pass judgment on some sections of God's Word and pronounce them to be in error. But this is in effect to say that we know truth more certainly and more accurately than God's Word does (or than God does), at least in these areas. Such a procedure, making our own minds to be a higher standard of truth than God's Word, is the root of all intellectual sin.¹²

4. If We Deny Inerrancy, Then We Must Also Say That the Bible Is Wrong Not Only in Minor Details but in Some of Its Doctrines as Well. A denial of inerrancy means that we say that the Bible's teaching about the *nature of Scripture* and about the *truthfulness and reliability of God's words* is also false. These are not minor details but are major doctrinal concerns in Scripture.¹³

FINISH THE MISSION

BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO THE UNREACHED AND UNENGAGED

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LET THE PEOPLES PRAISE YOU, O GOD! LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE YOU!

John Piper

Psalm 67 is the focus for this final chapter. But before we begin, let me make two brief comments. First, Psalm 67 is the way we pray when we are besotted with God's zeal for his praise among all the peoples of the world. One of the barometers of the fruitfulness of this book is whether you are inclined to pray like this now more than before you began reading.

Second, one of the ways God alters the course of our lives is that when we hear a portion of God's Word, it takes root, and starts to grow, and doesn't wither. It hangs on. It revives again and again. It survives from season to season. It does something to us. We can't shake it. It holds us. It changes things. We can't fully explain it. But it becomes a call of God on our lives. May the Lord make Psalm 67 such a text for you.

Here's Psalm 67:

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity

and guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us;
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

The way verses 1 and 2 relate to each other roots this psalm firmly in the way God is at work in history to save the world. Notice the connection between God's blessing Israel (that's the "us" of verse 1) and Israel's being a blessing to the nations (v. 2): "May God be gracious to us and *bless us* [note those words!] and make his face to shine upon us, *that* [this is the aim of God in blessing Israel] your way may be known on earth, your saving power among *all nations.*"

ROOTED IN GOD'S COVENANT

This connection between being blessed and being a blessing to the nations means that the psalmist is rooting his prayer in Genesis 12:2-3. God promises to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will *bless* you and make your name great, so that you will be a *blessing*. I will *bless* those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"

So this prayer in Psalm 67 is not hanging in the air with no connections with God's historical way of saving the world. It is rooted in God's covenant with Abraham. It brings that covenant up to date and prays it into reality. That is what we are supposed to do with God's covenants—his promises. Bring them up to date and pray them into reality.

DECISIVELY FULFILLED IN JESUS

So let's do that—into the twenty-first century. I think the psalmist, and Abraham, would be upset with us if we didn't. The decisive fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham—not the final fulfill-

ment, but the decisive one—was the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the “seed of Abraham.” And because Jesus in all his saving work is the seed of Abraham, everyone—including people from the most pagan nations—who is united to him by faith becomes a son of Abraham and an heir of all his blessings.

Galatians 3:13–14: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us . . . so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles [the nations!].” Galatians 3:7, 9, 29: “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. . . . So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. . . . If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

PSALM 67 IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

So God’s plan was that all the peoples of the world be blessed. To that end, he chose the people of Israel to bear his revelation and his blessing. And he made a covenant with them that they would be blessed and in that way bring that blessing to all the peoples of the world. And God fulfilled this covenant decisively when Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, fulfilled all righteousness and died for sin and rose again, so that anyone who believes on him from any people on earth will become a child of Abraham and inherit the blessing of Abraham—and so be blessed by the blessing of Israel. So the Abrahamic covenant is being fulfilled every time someone trusts Christ.

So we are going to read this prayer in Psalm 67 as part of the ongoing historical realization of this great covenant and its decisive fulfillment in Jesus and its ongoing fulfillment through the church. The prayer is really meant to be read as a realization of the covenant with Abraham and as an expression of how that covenant would be fulfilled in us today through Jesus Christ.

GOD’S GREAT PURPOSE FOR THE WORLD

The first thing we’ll look at in the prayer is God’s great purpose for the world and all its thousands of people groups. God inspired

this prayer (which Jesus says about the Psalms in Matthew 22:43). And so we can see in it not just the *psalmist’s* purpose, but God’s great purpose for the world he made.

According to Psalm 67 God’s purpose is to be *known* and *praised* and *enjoyed* and *feared* among all the peoples of the earth. This is why he created the world, why he chose Israel, why Christ died, and why missions exists—missions exists because the knowledge of God, the praise of God, the enjoyment of God, and the fear of God don’t exist among the nations.

TO BE KNOWN, PRAISED, ENJOYED, AND FEARED

Let me point out each of these so you can see them for yourself.

- 1) God’s purpose is to be *known* among all the nations. Verse 2: “. . . that your way may be *known* on earth, your saving power among all nations.”
- 2) His purpose is to be *praised* among all the nations. Verse 3: “Let the peoples *praise* you, O God; let all the peoples *praise* you!” Verse 5: “Let the peoples *praise* you, O God; let all the peoples *praise* you!”
- 3) God’s purpose is to be *enjoyed* among all the peoples. Verse 4: “Let the nations be *glad* and sing for joy.”
- 4) His purpose is to be *feared*, or *reverenced*, among all the nations. Verse 7: “Let all the ends of the earth *fear* him!”

This psalmist is praying in accord with the will of God. That’s what it means to speak “in the Spirit,” as Jesus says the psalmists do. Therefore, we don’t just see the purpose of a man in this prayer, but the purpose of God. His aim in this creation is that he be *known* and *praised* and *enjoyed* and *reverenced* among all the peoples of the earth. That’s why the world exists. And that’s why missions exists.

WHY THIS GREAT PURPOSE?

But the psalm tells us more about God’s purpose for the world. It tells us what he aims to be *known* for, what he aims to be *praised*

for, what it is about him that he means for all nations to enjoy, and why it is we should reverence him and fear to turn away from him to another god.

The psalm shows us four things that God wants the peoples of the world to *know* and *praise* and *enjoy* and *fear* about him.

First, God aims to be known as the one and only true and living God.

He is not the God of any other religion.

I gather this from the fact that an inspired Israelite poet is praying that *his* God will be known and praised among all the peoples who worship other gods. Verse 3: "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!" The God of Israel said in Isaiah 45:5-6, "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other."

If this is not true, missions would be the most audacious and presumptuous enterprise in the world. Calling the nations to know and praise and enjoy and fear one God alone, the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, would be arrogant and presumptuous, if it's not true that he's the one and only true God. But if it is true, then missions is a humble, daring, obedient response of a people who love those who are perishing.

The psalmist does not pray: *May all the nations become sincere worshippers of their gods since all gods are one.*

We Do Not Worship the Same God as Islam

And let's be crystal clear here: in a world supercharged with the presence of Islam, it does not help the cause of truth or love to say that we *worship* the same God—and I am putting the emphasis there on "worship." We do not worship the same God.

Muslims do not believe in a Jesus who died, who gave his life as a ransom, who rose from the dead, and who claimed to be the

divine Son of God. All those things are rejected by Islam. The historical Jesus of the Gospels is denied by Muslims in at least those four critical ways.

What Jesus Says

And Jesus speaks clearly about people (of whatever religion—Christian or Muslim) who deny him in this way. He says:

1) *They do not "know" the true God.*

You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also. (John 8:19; see also 7:28; 14:7)

2) *They do not "honor" the true God.*

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. (John 5:23)

3) *They do not "love" the true God.*

I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. (John 5:42-43)

4) *They do not "have" the true God.*

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:23)

5) *They have not "heard" or "learned" from the true God.*

Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. (John 6:45)

6) *They "reject" the true God.*

The one who rejects me rejects him who sent me. (Luke 10:16)

Jesus's answer to the question is *no*. Neither Muslims, nor anyone else (in any religion, including Christianity), truly *worships* God if they reject Jesus as he really is in the Gospels.

Psalm 67 is praying that all the religions of the world, including Islam (which came into being perhaps sixteen hundred years after this psalm) would turn and know and praise and enjoy and fear the one and only true God—the God and Father of the

Messiah, Jesus. And Jesus endorsed this prayer with his own blood. He came into the world to awaken and save those who rejected him—like we all once did. Mark 2:17: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." So send I you (John 20:21)! He is sending out ambassadors today to all the Muslim peoples (and all the other religions), saying: *I love you, come to me and believe in my Son and I will give you life.* My purpose is to be known and praised and enjoyed and feared as the one true God—Jesus Christ.

So the first thing God wants the nations to know about him is that he is the one and only true God.

Second, he wants the nations to know that he is a God of justice.

Verse 4: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity." When the judgment of the nations comes, God will not be partial. No one will be condemned for the color of his skin, or the size of his brain, or the place of his birth, or the quality of his ancestry.

No bribes will be considered, no sophisticated plea bargaining. All will proceed on the basis of God's unimpeachable righteousness. Let this be known to all the peoples of the earth. They will stand on an equal footing with Israel when it comes to judgment. The standard of justice will be the same for both.

Universal Imperfection with Only One Remedy

And the standard of acceptance—his standard of vindication in the court of heaven—will be perfection. And the only remedy for our universal failure and rebellion is the *perfection of Jesus, which he performed* for all who believe in him, and the *punishment of Jesus, which he endured* for all who believe in him. Jesus's perfect obedience to God is not one remedy among others just for people in the Christian tribe. It is the only remedy for all the descendants of Adam. "As by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be

made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). If a person has embraced Christ as his only hope before God, he will be saved. If he has not, he will be lost.

And God will not be unjust toward those who have never heard the preaching of the gospel. They will not be judged for not believing in a Jesus they never heard of. They will be judged for how they have responded to the revelation they have. And Romans 1 tells us there will be no excuse (Rom. 1:18–21). None is righteous. None submits to God's truth outside Christ.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.

God aims to be known as a God of justice. The God of all the earth will do right. He will judge the peoples with equity—either in hell or in Jesus.

Third, God aims to be known for his sovereign power.

We see this in the last part of verse 4: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth." Many nations boast of their power and their independence as sovereign states. And when they do, the Lord laughs. Because he made the nations, he determined their allotted periods of time and the boundaries of their habitation (Acts 17:26).

"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will" (Prov. 21:1). "He removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan. 2:21). "He does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and

Let the Peoples Praise You, O God! Let All the Peoples Praise You! 143
none can stay his hand, or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (Dan. 4:35).

They Will Hear

God aims to make himself known as supremely sovereign among all the nations—specifically that he runs the world. He is the guide of the nations. They are not sovereign. Only One is sovereign. And he sets the destiny of every nation.

And part of that destiny is that they hear the gospel. And to that end Jesus said,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. . . . And behold, I [I, the sovereign one with all authority] am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20)

My will is that the nations be disciples. All of them. And not only is this duty my will of command, but this destiny is my will of decree. "I will build my church!"

Fourth and finally, God aims to be known as a gracious God.

The only true God, who is just in all his judgment and sovereign in all his rule, is a God of grace. He wants to be known this way. We see this in verse 1: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power [literally, salvation] among all nations."

He aims to be known as a God who is *gracious* and who *saves*. And this doesn't mean "who is gracious only to Israel," because verse 4 says, "Let the nations be glad." If the grace of God were only for Israel, there would be no gladness for the nations.

Gospel: News of God's Grace

This is why the news that resounds through the world from the cross of Jesus on is called "gospel." It is good news. It is news of the God of grace. Paul said that with the coming of Christ into the

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world "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" (Titus 2:11). And when he summed up his life and ministry, he said it was all about the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24):

I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the *gospel of the grace of God*.

The heart of the missionary message to the nations is: God will save you from your sin and guilt and condemnation by grace through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. We go with a message of grace, not a message of condemnation.

IN SUM

So to sum up what we've seen: God's great purpose in the world is to be known and praised and enjoyed and feared. And the truth about him that he wants to be known and praised and enjoyed and feared is

- he is the one and only true and living God, the Father of Jesus Christ;
- he is infinitely just and holy in all his ways, settling all accounts justly either on the cross for believers or in hell for those who reject his truth;
- he is sovereign over all the affairs of men and nations, and over the saving mission of his church through the all-authoritative, risen Christ;
- and he is a God of boundless grace to all who come to him through Jesus.

THE MISSION WILL BE FINISHED

Because he is gracious, he *aims* to be known among all the peoples. And because he is sovereign, he *will* be known among all the peoples. "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I *must* bring them also, and they *will* listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matt. 24:14).

This is the great hope and confidence that created the mis-

sionary movement of the Christian church. And this is the hope and confidence that will sustain us until we finish the mission. And it will be finished.

ONE FINAL POINT

There is one final point that needs to be made from Psalm 67—from the beginning and ending of this psalm. The psalm begins and ends with the connection between the people of God being blessed by God so that the nations will be blessed by us. We saw this in verses 1-2: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, *that* your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations."

What we have not noticed is that when the connection is repeated at the end of the psalm it is harvest time, and the blessing on the people of God is mainly a material blessing. Verses 6-7:

The earth has yielded its increase [there has been a great

harvest—this is a harvest psalm];

God, our God, shall bless us.

Let all the ends of the earth fear him!

So the immediate blessing in view is the way God has provided all the material needs of his people. "The earth has yielded its increase" (v. 6).

GOD IS WHAT MATTERS

And the amazing thing is that between the beginning blessing and the closing blessing in this psalm, the entire focus is not on material blessings for the world but spiritual ones—that is, God himself. Derek Kidner in his commentary says:

If the setting of the psalm seems to be a festival of harvest home, it is remarkable . . . how nature is overshadowed by history, and the psalmist [is] stirred by hopes that have no material or self-

regarding element. . . . Here, nothing matters but man's need of God Himself!

- Oh, Lord, let your way be known.
- Let our salvation be known.
- Let praise arise to you from all the peoples.
- Let joy overflow from the hearts of the nations.
- Show yourself a righteous judge, and a powerful guide.

The pervasive concern for the nations is that they would know and praise and enjoy and fear the true God—God himself.

Which means this, at least: God gives his people *material wealth* for the sake of the world's *spiritual worship*. That is, he blesses his church with riches for the sake of reaching the nations. He gives a bountiful wheat harvest for the sake of a bountiful world harvest. He gives us more money than we need so that we can meet the world's greatest need—the need to know God through Jesus Christ.

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

This is the sharpest point of this psalm. We are blessed to be a blessing. And, of course, that means we are spiritually blessed. But in this psalm, the Lord has something more specifically to say—especially to the American church and the church of the West.

I have blessed you—beyond the wildest dreams of any people in history. I have blessed you with unprecedented and overflowing wealth. This not a curse. It is a blessing. But it will become a curse if you do not use it for what I have designed.

BLESSINGS DOUBLED IN GOING AND GIVING

And what I have designed is not that you lose and they gain. What I have designed is that you go and you give, and *both* gain. I love you, and I love the nations. I have blessed you, and I mean to double your blessing by making you a blessing. It is more blessed

⁷Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, vol. 15 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 236.

to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). That's the way I created you. Therefore, my design ("blessed to be a blessing") is for your joy and their joy. When I bless you that you may be a blessing, I bless you that your joy may be full.

When I say, "Let the nations be glad!" I mean, "Let your gladness be doubled in their gladness." This is why I have blessed. This is why I have blessed you. Don't turn my blessing into a curse. Don't put it in a bag with holes. I have blessed you. This is why you are rich—"that my way may be known on earth, my saving power among all nations."

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.

For this we have been blessed. This is our mission. This is our joy. No matter what it costs.