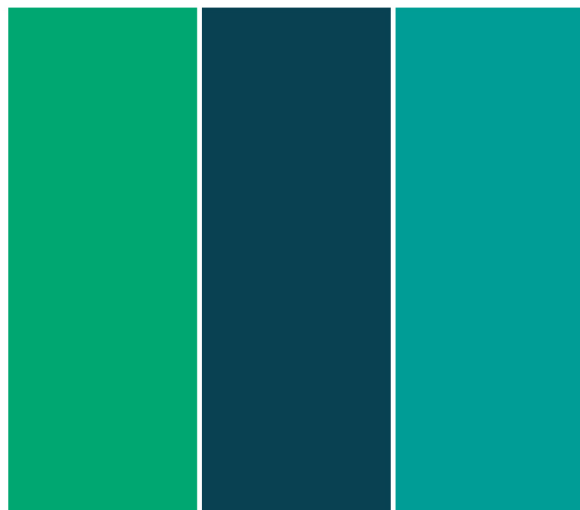




# **Foundations of the Christian Faith**

A Resource for  
Catechesis and  
Disciple-Making

**Timothy C. Tennent**



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In honor of Jacquelyn Tennent, Clyde Fortner, Charles Simpson, Chuck Farah, Bob Stamps, Gordon Fee, J Christy Wilson Jr., and Kevin Scott, who all had a vital role in my own discipleship.

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Part I

# Doctrine



# Introduction

## **CATECHESIS MANUALS**

Early spiritual training guides for children and new believers that usually included the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Apostles' Creed.

## **JUDE 1:3**

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

In recent years during my ministry I have seen how hungry God's people are to be taught the Word of God and to know the central teachings of the Christian faith. Throughout history the people of God have wanted clear summaries of the faith so that they could be clear on the essential truths of Christianity. Known as catechesis manuals, these were then used to develop spiritual training guides for children and new believers. The word *catechesis* is the same root from which we get our modern word *echo*. The idea is that we pass on the faith, and those who receive it would echo it, meaning that they would be able to say it back to us just as they heard it. Thus, the word *catechesis* simultaneously reinforces twin truths: the sacredness of the apostolic message and a warning against those who are tempted to reconstruct the faith to conform to modern sentiments or the latest cultural wind.

These early training guides were often based on summary passages such as the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Apostles' Creed. In fact, throughout the history of the church, Christians have recognized that there is no better summary of the Christian faith than the Apostles' Creed. For many centuries the church has used the Apostles' Creed as a basic guide to instruct believers in the faith. Likewise, millions of parents and grandparents across the world have used the Apostles' Creed as the basic guide for instructing their children and grandchildren in the faith.

These devotionals are dedicated to exploring the Apostles' Creed, which contains the twelve most basic affirmations of the Christian faith. If you read these carefully, you will be renewed in your own faith and better equipped to share your faith with your friends and neighbors. You will also be able to more effectively teach the faith to others.

One of the wonderful features of the Apostles' Creed is that it only uses language taken directly from the Scriptures. Therefore, I am including in each section some suggested readings. This feature enables the book to be used for personal devotion, as well as in small study groups or Sunday school. Also, each chapter concludes with a verse written by Julie Tennent drawn from the hymn that can be found in its entirety on page 60. The hymn reminds us that all learning and growth in the Christian faith should ultimately lead us to worship.

A creed is a historic statement of Christian faith. The purpose of a creed is to give a brief, clear summary of the Christian faith. There are two creeds in the history of the church that have been accepted by virtually all Christians everywhere. These two creeds are known as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Apostles' Creed is the shorter and older of the two. Though not actually written by the twelve apostles, it is based on a very early version known as the Roman Symbol or Roman Creed that dates back to the second century. It is called the Apostles' Creed because it reflects the faith of the apostles and is organized into twelve statements for each of the twelve disciples. An old tradition says that each apostle contributed one of the affirmations of the apostolic faith. Later, these twelve affirmations were brought together to form what we now know as the Apostles' Creed.

The twelve statements are:

1. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth,
2. and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
3. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
4. suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and was buried.
5. He descended to the dead.
6. The third day he rose again from the dead.
7. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
8. From there, he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
9. I believe in the Holy Spirit,
10. the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
11. the forgiveness of sins,
12. the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

#### **ACTS 19:9B-10**

He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

#### **APOSTLES' CREED**

One of the oldest longform creeds whose content has been affirmed virtually by all Christians, in all places, at all times. It consists of twelve statements which, according to tradition, were dictated by each of the twelve apostles and have been received as faithful summaries of biblical teaching.

## Article 1

# I Believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth

Notice that the entire creed is structured around the Trinity: I believe in God the *Father* . . . and in *Jesus Christ*. . . . I believe in the *Holy Spirit*. Each part of the creed begins with each person of the Trinity and says one or more phrases about who he is in himself and then makes a statement or two on what he has done for us. It is clear that the creed has been very carefully planned and structured for the benefit of the church.

However, even if we did not notice the overall Trinitarian structure, we should realize that it is a Christian affirmation with the very first phrase. If the creed had said, “I believe in God, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth” it could be an Islamic creed (every Muslim could affirm that) or a Jewish creed (every Jew could affirm that). The remarkable breakthrough in the very first phrase is the affirmation that God is *Father*. The creed opens with, “I believe in God, the *Father* Almighty.” It does not simply emphasize his power, his being almighty. Rather, he is first affirmed as the *Father* Almighty. We are learning something from the beginning about the nature of God. God is a father and, therefore, he cannot be fully understood as a solitary figure, but as one who is in relationship. God has intimate communion and relationship within himself, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is eternally the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This also means that God can be our heavenly father. He wants to reveal himself to us. He wants to know us. He wants us to experience his great love! Remember how Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, “Abba, Father . . .” This is the language of intimacy. The sound or word *dada* or *daddy* is one of the first things we ever learn to say. How fitting that when we, as the children of God, are first learning to speak as

### **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES**

Genesis 1:1; 49:25  
Isaiah 44:6  
John 1:1–3  
Acts 14:15  
Hebrews 11:3

### **2 CORINTHIANS 6:18**

“I will be a Father to you,  
and you will be my sons  
and daughters, says  
the Lord Almighty.”

### **1 JOHN 3:1A**

See what great love the  
Father has lavished on  
us, that we should be  
called children of God!  
And that is what we are!

**UNMOVED MOVER**

The final and efficient cause of the universe as set forth in the philosophy of philosophers such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. It is an argument for a being whose character is not necessarily knowable but whose existence explains the origins and the movement of the cosmos, since an infinite regression backward to the beginning of the universe is not logically possible.

There is beauty and symmetry in confessing God as both *Father* and as *Almighty*. *Fatherhood* denotes love, tenderness, nurture, and protection. *Almighty* denotes power, strength, authority, and might. The two beautifully complement one another.

Christians, we begin with our first “Christian” words, affirming God as *father*. Affirming God as *father* is the beginning alphabet of Christian faith. We already know with this one word that God is a person. God is not some mercurial force at the other end of the galaxy. He is not Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover” or the vague, generic god of the philosophers. He is a personal God. He is the embodiment of holiness, love, and justice.

The creed goes on to affirm that he is almighty, meaning he is absolutely omnipotent and holds all power. This means that nothing is too difficult for God. Notice the beauty and symmetry in confessing God as both *Father* and as *Almighty*. *Fatherhood* denotes love, tenderness, nurture, and protection.

*Almighty* denotes power, strength, authority, and might. The two beautifully complement one another. God has all power, but he exercises it in a way that reveals his love and compassion for us. In our own human experience, power and authority become abusive when they are not rooted in love and compassion. Likewise, love and compassion, however sincere, can degrade into mere sentimentality if not undergirded with power and authority. In God, these attributes find perfect balance and harmony. Today, misinformed leaders will sometimes argue that we should not call God *father* because some people have had abusive fathers. They urge us to replace the word *father* with the word *creator*. However, fatherhood speaks to the very nature of God. It is who God is. The word *creator* speaks to something God does. You cannot confuse or substitute the two. One denotes personal relationship; the other communicates function. In fact, it is even more important today to recall the greatness of God as father to help provide the positive vision of fatherhood that many are lacking.

The creed goes on to confess that God, who is both *Father* and *Almighty*, is also the creator of the heavens and the earth. Despite the language of intimacy which opens the creed, we nevertheless realize that we are not worshipping some tribal deity who only looks after our little group. We are being brought into relationship with the Creator of the entire cosmos! The one who spoke the universe into existence now calls us by name.

## Article 2

# I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

The Apostles' Creed should be viewed as a succinct summary of the entire Christian faith. If you were symbolically to take a boiling pot, throw all the Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, and even Roman Catholic and Orthodox teaching into it and boil it all down to a few basic phrases that would summarize the Christian faith around which every Christian on the planet should stand in agreement, then you would end up with the Apostles' Creed. Every word has been carefully chosen. Each phrase is pregnant with meaning. Every thought is theologically rich. The Apostles' Creed serves Christians in much the same way that the Ten Commandments served the people of God in the Old Testament. There are 613 laws in the Old Testament, and the Ten Commandments are the summarizing essence of the whole. Later, Jesus further summarized the Law down to only two: love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28–34). Both are ancient summaries of something that is much bigger and far more complex. Christians believe and practice many things that are not found in the Apostles' Creed or in the Ten Commandments. However, these great summary statements call us back to our core identity.

Today's devotion reflects on the phrase, “and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.” This is the second phrase of the Apostles' Creed. This phrase gets to the heart of who Jesus Christ is, apart from what he has done for us. Jesus is the central figure in the Christian faith. Of the twelve affirmations of the Apostles' Creed, six of them are about Jesus Christ. You cannot be a proper Christian without a clear understanding of who Jesus Christ is. This is the heartbeat of the New Testament revelation. All of the major heresies throughout the

### **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES**

Luke 2:11  
John 3:16; 20:28  
Hebrews 1:1–3

### **JOHN 1:1**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

*Christians believe and practice many things that are not found in the Apostles' Creed or in the Ten Commandments. However, these great summary statements call us back to our core identity.*

*Ancient heresies like Gnosticism and Arianism, and modern ones like the Watchtower (Jehovah Witnesses) and Mormonism deny the unique supremacy of Jesus Christ.*

#### **ATHANASIUS (AD 296–372)**

The fourth-century bishop of Alexandria who defended the full deity of Jesus the Son. He fought the Arian heresy, which asserted that Christ was of a similar substance of God, rather than of the same substance. The Arians created a tune that claimed, “There was a time when the Son was not,” making Jesus a subservient, non-eternal creature rather than God himself. Athanasius was exiled repeatedly for his defense of orthodoxy, but his writings (especially *On the Incarnation*) on the two natures of Christ and the biblical logic of salvation—that Jesus had to be both God and man—prevailed at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325).

history of the church—from the Gnostics and Arians of the ancient church to the modern-day Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons—end up unleashing forces that are destructive to the Christian faith because they set themselves against the unique supremacy of Jesus Christ. The Arians and modern-day Jehovah Witnesses teach that Jesus is a created being who doesn’t share in God’s eternity. Mormons deny the uniqueness of God, teaching that all of us can become gods. Gnostics did not believe that God would ever condescend to enter human flesh. Even modern Protestant liberals want to portray Jesus as just a great moral example, or someone on par with other great religious leaders, such as Muhammad or Buddha.

In contrast, the Scriptures declare the following about Jesus Christ: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1–2).

According to the Scriptures, the entire Old Testament was pointing to and preparing for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the past, there were many prophets and priests and means through which God the Father revealed himself, but now it has all culminated in the revelation of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Law. He fulfills the Jewish priesthood. He fulfills the sacrificial system. Jesus fully embodies God’s righteousness. All the prophets point to Jesus Christ. Indeed, all revelation points to Jesus Christ because he is uniquely God’s “only Son.” He is the second person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Today, there is a call by some to move away from the traditional language of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and move toward gender neutral language, such as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. There are two main reasons why this suggestion has been wisely rejected by the church. First, the language of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” is language taken directly from Scripture, which reveals the relational nature of God. If we lose the relational language that lies at the heart of the church’s language about the triune God, then we are left only with the abstract god of the philosophers or Allah (the God of Islam), who has no interest in revealing himself, only declaring his will. Non-relational language should not be used for the

## Article 3

# Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

From all eternity the Son is in the Father and the Father is one with Son. Yet, in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son (Gal. 4:4), the expression and extension of his radiance, Word, and glory, into the world. This is the great mystery of the incarnation. The Apostles' Creed declares, "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." The eternal God stepped off his throne and clothed himself in human flesh and stepped into our history. Because of the Trinity, God the Father continues to govern and rule the universe and, yet, God the Son is born into the world as the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. The very one who had created the world is now born into the world of his creation. This mystery leads us to stand in awe and to worship. Remember the words of Charles Wesley in reflecting on the mystery of this great truth:

Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity; pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.

God the Son is born into the world, and although he is the eternal God, he takes on human flesh and becomes a man. Remember, John's gospel declares, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14 ESV). Now, as the incarnate one, he is fully God and fully man. He is not a mixture of the two. Jesus Christ is not half God and half man. He is *fully* God and *fully* man, yet united into one person. This is such an amazing mystery that words can hardly describe it. Indeed, some of God's attributes are so incompatible with humanity that God the Son had to temporarily suspend the exercise of some of his attributes (such as omnipresence, i.e. being all places at the same time). Jesus was only in one place at a time. Jesus taking human form is such

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Luke 1:26–27, 35

Isaiah 7:14

*As the incarnate one, Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is not a mixture of the two. Jesus Christ is not half God and half man. He is fully God and fully man, yet united into one person.*

The Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle, the Christian assertion being that what is beyond all space and time, which is uncreated, eternal, came into Nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing Nature up with Him.

—C. S. Lewis,  
*The Grand Miracle*

*Mary is the only person of faith noted in the creed. Jesus' obedience to the Father is mirrored by the obedience of a young, Jewish peasant girl on earth—Jesus' mother.*

an amazing mystery that the apostle Paul, when describing Jesus in the book of Philippians, breaks out in a hymn of praise:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself. (2:6–8)

One of the great novels in English literature is Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. The story depicts the life of the son of King Henry VIII who was heir to the throne of England. He met a poor, ragged pauper boy on the streets of East London, and they realized that they shared a remarkable resemblance. They agreed to trade clothes. The Prince, the future King of England and heir to the throne, went out into the streets of London dressed as the pauper and nobody recognized him. People spat on him and pushed him aside, little knowing that he was the heir to the throne.

Likewise, the eternal Son of God clothed himself in our humanity and walked among us and most did not recognize him. John 1:10, 12 says, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. . . . Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

God the Son was conceived by the Holy Spirit and clothed in flesh in the womb of Mary, one of God's humble servants. We should always honor Mary as a wonderful example of obedience and submission to God. Her humility and obedience are recalled by virtue of her name appearing in the creed. The creed only references two people who lived in the first century, Mary and Pontius Pilate. Mary is, therefore, the only person of faith noted in the creed. In the next chapter, I will say more about why Pontius Pilate's name is mentioned. However, Mary's name appears to remind us that obedience and submission to God are not things that occur only in the rarified air of the heavenly counsels where the Son of God agrees to become incarnate and suffer on behalf of a fallen human race. Rather, Jesus' obedience to the Father is mirrored by the obedience of a young, Jewish peasant girl on earth. Indeed, in the wonderful providence of God, the great themes of salvation and



## Question 1

# Who is God?

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1 Chronicles 29:10–13

2 Chronicles 20:6

Job 42:2

Psalms 90

Isaiah 44:6

1 Corinthians 1:30

*In contrast to all of  
the world's religions,  
Christians affirm that God  
is personal and knowable.*

God is a personal being, infinite in love, knowledge, and power. He is perfect in wisdom, goodness, righteousness, justice, holiness, and truth. God is both the creator and sustainer of the universe. He is the final goal and judge of the universe, infinite and perfect in all his attributes.

The Jewish/Christian understanding of God is unique among all the religions of the world. Hinduism remains uncertain whether we can know that God is personal, or infinite in his perfections. Islam affirms that God is infinite in his perfections, but is uncertain if God can be personally knowable. Buddhism is officially nontheistic, denying all first causes, including God. In contrast, Christians affirm that God is personal *and* knowable.

To say that he is perfect in all his attributes is to declare that every attribute of God is enjoyed by him in its perfect state. He is infinitely pure, infinitely holy, infinitely righteous, infinitely loving, and so forth. Because we only know these attributes in fragmentary and distorted ways, we cannot fully comprehend how all these attributes are held perfectly and infinitely by God. Sometimes we may look at circumstances and not be able to discern how the justice or the love of God is manifest in certain situations. We do find comfort, however, in knowing that in the end, we shall see him as he truly is, and that he will make all things right. In the meantime, we can put our full trust and confidence in God's nature and character.

If you ever go to London you will probably visit Trafalgar Square. It is in the heart of the city and is a well-known tourist attraction. The most prominent feature in the square is Nelson's Column. It is a tribute to Lord Nelson's sea victory over the combined fleets of the French and

Spanish Navy in 1805. Although Nelson died in the conflict, the British fleet prevailed and this victory confirmed the superiority of the British navy. The problem is that the statue of Nelson is so high above the square (170 feet) that no one can see what he looked like. He is high and exalted above the square, but he is also removed from the people.

This is analogous to the Christian proclamation about God. He is exalted above all creation. He is perfect in his attributes. But until Christ came we could not fully understand or know what God is like. The Christian view is that in Christ—and only in Christ—is the glory of God known or understood. In Christ, God came down and lived among us, showing us his life and character in intimate detail. In the face of Christ the full glory and grace of God has been made known.

*In Christ, God came down and lived among us, showing us his life and character in intimate detail. In the face of Christ the full glory and grace of God has been made known.*

## Question 2

# How do we know what God is like?

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Psalms 19  
John 14:9–11  
Romans 1:18–20; 2:12–15  
1 Timothy 3:16  
Hebrews 1:1–2; 4:12

### SPECIAL REVELATION

All the ways God has made his character and purposes known specifically to certain people at particular times, but which are not universally known.

God has made himself known to us in acts of personal self-disclosure. This self-disclosure occurs in two major ways, known as general revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to all the ways God has universally made himself known to all people in all places and in all times. General revelation, sometimes called natural or universal revelation, has occurred in two major ways. Those two ways are outwardly through the created order and inwardly in the universal presence of human conscience. First, God reveals his presence, character, and attributes through the created order. Through creation we understand that God is a God of order, beauty, and power.

Second, God reveals his presence and moral character through the presence of human conscience. Even though there are areas where people differ about what is right or wrong, the very presence of the *categories* of right and wrong demonstrate that we live in a moral order. Even young children demonstrate deeply imbedded notions of fairness and longings for justice, and we teach them to “be kind” as a virtue we instinctively value. When someone murders or steals, we all can testify to a sense of “wrongness.” Likewise, when someone acts sacrificially to help or serve another person or creature, they have a sense of “rightness” about such actions. All this testifies to the presence of a moral order. Special revelation refers to all the ways God has made his nature and purposes known specifically to certain people at particular times, but which are not universally known. Special revelation also occurs in two major ways. The first is through the revelation of Holy Scripture. God has revealed his will, his character, and his purposes to specific people throughout time, and this revelation has been recorded in the Bible. This includes his mighty acts of deliverance, his miraculous

interventions, and the specific revelation of his moral character, as in the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. The second is through the revelation of God's Son, Jesus Christ. As noted in the previous meditation, it is through the incarnation of Jesus Christ that we come fully to understand who God is, his saving purposes, and his love. It is through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit that the purpose and will of God is applied to the life of the church and the individual believer. In the gospel of John it is declared that "no one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18 ESV).

Christianity is unique because in Christ, God seeks to reveal himself (not just his will). One of Islam's greatest theologians Al-Ghazali famously declared that Allah does not reveal himself, he only reveals his will. In Christianity, we discover that God not only reveals his will, but he also seeks to reveal *himself* and calls us to know him in a personal way.

*In Christianity, we discover that God not only reveals his will, but he also seeks to reveal himself and calls us to know him in a personal way.*

**JOHN 1:18 ESV**

*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

## Question 3

# What is the Trinity?

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Genesis 3:6; 17:1  
Psalm 46:10  
Isaiah 44:6  
Matthew 28:18–20  
John 1:1; 1:34; 10:30; 20:28  
Acts 5:3–4  
Romans 9:5  
1 Corinthians 2:9–16  
2 Corinthians 3:17; 13:14  
2 Thessalonians 1:12  
Titus 2:13  
1 Peter 1:1–2  
2 Peter 1:1

### 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14 ESV

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Christianity, like all monotheistic religions, asserts that there is only one God. We do not believe in three Gods. However, Christianity is unique in our understanding that the one God exists in three eternal and personal distinctions known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The church has used the word *Trinity* to capture this great mystery. The word *Trinity* is a combination of two words, “Tri” and “unity.” The “tri” refers to the three eternal distinctions; the “unity” is to reinforce that we believe in only one God. This is normally expressed by saying that we believe that God is one in essence, but reveals himself through three eternal personal distinctions known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The purpose of this revelation is primarily to demonstrate the personal, relational nature of God. God is, even apart from creation, eternally personal and relational. As the Puritans once observed, “God is, in himself, a sweet society.” There is relationship in the very nature of who God is. The whole universe flows forth from an eternal, relational tri-unity, not from a non-relational, solitary figure as taught by Islam.

The Christian idea that internal differentiation does not contradict God’s unity is even testified to in the created order. For example, a stone has little internal differentiation and, therefore, is not particularly unified in essence. If you split a stone into two pieces, you have not destroyed the essence of the stone, you have only created two smaller stones. However, if you cut a tiger into two pieces you do not get two small tigers, you get one dead tiger! Some of the lower creatures can be severed into two parts and still live and move independently for some time. Because their differentiation is low, their unity is likewise low.

The more conscious and intelligent a being is, the greater the differentiation and the more profound the unity.

A person possesses a mind, thoughts, and speech. We function as a unity despite internal distinctions. The same point could be made about the body, soul, and spirit of a person. The fact that God himself has internal differentiation does not contradict his unity. On the contrary, we observe this harmony of plurality and unity in all higher forms of life. The nature and essence of God is admittedly complex and mysterious. A common misunderstanding of God is that he took different forms at different times in history, but could only be in one form at any given time. This, however, is not a proper understanding of the Trinity. The three distinctions are co-existent, co-eternal, and equal. God decided in his self-revelation that the best way for humans to understand him is to see him as one God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three are not three separate modes, or operations, but three eternal relations within the one true God, the Trinity.

#### **TRINITY**

The revelation, doctrine, and experience of God as existing eternally as one being in three persons.

# Adam: The Fall

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Genesis 1:1–3:24

## CREATION EX NIHILO

Christian teaching that God created the universe out of nothing, not from pre-existing, eternal material.

The first of our essential Old Testament figures is Adam, the head of the human race. His story is where we all start, and in his story we find our own. As we read the creation account of Genesis 1, we learn about the nature of humanity and the special qualities and responsibilities with which God endowed us. First, the creation of man and woman comes at the apex of God's work. All of creation culminates in the making of man and woman. Second, we are given dominion and stewardship over the whole of creation. God commands us to rule over the three realms he has created: the realms of light/darkness, water/sky, and earth/land. We are to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth, and to subdue it. Third, unlike the rest of creation, we are created in the image of God. Notice that the rest of creation emerges from God's spoken word, *ex nihilo*, meaning "out of nothing." God creates man, however, by shaping him from the dust of the earth and then breathing into him the breath of life. The word for breath, or wind, in the Old Testament is the same word for Spirit—*ruah*—so in the breath of God, the spirit of God was given to us. Animals have bodies, minds, and wills, but only we have spirits, which makes us distinct from all of creation. The entire created order was created for our enjoyment, for us to practice the dominion of God.

## Created in the Image of God

What does it mean to say that we are created in the image of God? It does not refer to any physical resemblance with God because God, in his essence, is spirit, and therefore non-corporeal. No, the image of God means resemblance to him in three other ways. First, it means that we are endowed with moral responsibility. We are able to obey the commands of God and are morally accountable for our actions. Second,

the image of God means that we have the capacity for relationship with him. We can know him and be in fellowship and in communication with him. Third, it means that we have representative capacity to act as his regents on the earth, stewarding and extending his dominion. As bearers of God's image, Adam and Eve possessed moral, relational, and representative capacity and were fully endowed with God's holiness and righteousness.

God created man and woman in his own image and placed them in the garden of Eden to be holy and to live in an ever-deepening relationship with him. Everything they needed was provided in the garden. Genesis 2:15 says that the garden was given for them to *work* in, demonstrating that work is integral to God's plan for us and not just the result of human fallenness. Without the presence of sin, work is fulfilling and deeply satisfying. Even in eternity we will have meaningful work. God also provided *food* in this fruitful garden nestled between four lush rivers. Everything that was needed for sustenance and enjoyment was there. In the middle of the garden was a tree known as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree was an acknowledgment of what had already occurred before the creation of humanity. God had created an earlier order of angels, but some had rebelled and fallen and become agents of evil. By placing the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden, God is, in effect, acknowledging that this reality exists, that Satan has been cast down and will tempt us, but warning us not to go there. It is not some arbitrary command or petty regulation; it is a danger sign, warning us that Satan is in the world and will try to win us over, but we must not join him in his rebellion.

### ***Sin Breaks the Love Relationship with God***

When Eve encounters Satan at the tree, Satan begins the same way that he begins today: by raising questions about God's word. The serpent asks, "Did God *really* say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (3:1, emphasis mine), misquoting God's words that they could eat from any tree of the garden except one (2:16–17). Choices are vital if we have a doctrine of holiness, not just innocence. Holiness must be confirmed by real acts of obedience in the presence of real choices. A machine can

#### **IMAGE OF GOD**

The unique relationship that men and women have with God in creation, carrying all of its moral, relational, and representative qualities. Jesus Christ was the perfect image of God.

#### **GENESIS 1:27**

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

#### **TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL**

The tree at the center of Eden from which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat, and from which Satan (literally, the serpent) tempts them to disobey.



# Christ, the Second Adam

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Romans 5:1–21

## VICARIOUS ACTION

Something done on your behalf apart from your initiative. Both the actions of Adam's sin and Christ's obedience carry vicarious effects.

The opening chapters of Genesis teach us that we are hopelessly broken, and no human power can put us back together again. In Adam, we have all rebelled, partaken of the anti-sacrament, severed our relationship with God, and yelled in his face, “Not Your will, but *mine* be done!” Paul reminded us of this connection with Adam when he said, “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Adam, unlike us, did not have a tendency toward sin, and through a real choice, he chose to become a sinner. In that act, he was a representative man whose actions had consequences for the entire race. We, on the other hand, do not have the capacity to live a life apart from sin. We are born sinners, and we sin as a natural outgrowth of our sin nature.

## How Adam's Sin Affects All

The central question, then, is: How did Adam's sin make us sinners? What is the relationship between Adam's sin and our condemnation? You may think it's not fair that Adam's choices, thousands of years ago, are affecting you now. You may wish to be your own Adam or Eve, to be free of the connection we share with those first human beings. After all, it's just not fair. Be careful, though, because Paul is laying the groundwork for a very important doctrine in the Bible: that of *vicarious* action, something done on your behalf apart from your initiative. If you cannot be connected to Adam and his choices thousands of years ago, then you can also have no part in the actions of Jesus Christ, who also lived thousands of years ago and did things on your behalf, just as Adam did. The knife cuts both ways.

Verse 12 says that sin entered the world and death through sin because all sinned. Through Adam, sin entered the world, and death

(both physical and spiritual) is the greatest emblem of sin. When Paul said “because all sinned,” however, he was not saying that death comes to all because we have all subsequently sinned as the generations have unfolded. It is true that we have all sinned and confirmed Adam’s choice to be part of the rebellion, but what Paul meant is that we all sinned in Adam. In other words, you were there in the garden and sinned with Adam. This is a hard doctrine for modern people, especially Americans, who do not have a very strong sense of how we are connected to one another or to past generations. The Bible, on the other hand, presents the concept that you are not just an individual; inside of your loins reside all the future generations, or progeny, who will come forth from you. When Adam sinned, the Bible teaches that you were present in the body, or the loins, of Adam. In that way, we actually participated in the sin of Adam.

### ***You Are Here***

If you’ve ever gone shopping in a large mall and referred to the maps that show the whole scheme of the mall, you must have noticed that in one spot on the map is a small, helpful sign that reads, “You are here.” Without it, you could not orient yourself in relation to the full map. When you read this account of Adam and Eve, you should notice that the Bible puts a little sign there, reading, “You are here.” When Adam and Eve take the fruit and eat of the anti-sacrament, you are here. When they shout at God, “Not Your will, but *mine* be done,” you are here. In one fell swoop, Satan got the whole human race to disobey God.

What’s more, we have all confirmed Adam’s sin in our own lives, choosing our own will every day over the will of God. As Augustine said, “We are sinners by birth and by choice.” How can the human race be rescued out of the rebellion and avoid inevitable condemnation when, without exception, everyone is bound to become a part of it? The only way is to bring another Adam into the world, someone who will once again have the choice to obey or disobey, but this time will get it right. We have to find a way to go back and rewrite that first chapter of the human story. But how is that possible? God knows that the whole human race is ineligible, so it couldn’t be an inside job. What if he did

### **ROMANS 5:12**

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.

*When you read this account of Adam and Eve, you should notice that the Bible puts a little sign there, reading, “You are here.” When Adam and Eve take the fruit and eat of the anti-sacrament, you are here.*

# God's Global Plan to Abraham

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Genesis 12:1–9

*In order for the human race to grasp what God was going to do, there were many crucial elements that had to be in place: the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the concept of sacrifice, the priesthood, and many others.*

*The coming of Christ is like a great spiritual banquet; everything must be prepared in advance, and that takes time.*

You may be wondering why there was such a huge time gap between the first and second Adam. If, after all, the first Adam condemned the whole human race to die, and if there was no way out of it until God sent a second Adam into the world, why didn't God do it a week after Adam fell rather than wait thousands of years before sending Christ into the world? The first reason is that the consequences of that original sin were so great that it would take a very long time to prepare the human race properly for the entrance of the second Adam. In order for the human race to grasp what God was going to do, there were many crucial elements that had to be in place: the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the concept of sacrifice, the priesthood, and many others. The coming of Christ is like a great spiritual banquet; everything must be prepared in advance, and that takes time.

The second reason for the huge time gap is that God is the Lord of time, and therefore is not bound by it. Abraham and the other Old Testament saints were saved in the same way that you and I are saved. We look back several thousands of years to the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and God miraculously moves us back through time so we are now spiritually in Christ, just as we had been in Adam. But God can do this miracle in both directions! Abraham looked forward to God's provision and trusted God to move him miraculously forward in time so that he also was in Christ through faith. For the Lord, there is no major difference between our looking back and Abraham looking forward because everyone is looking toward Christ, and both are trusting in God's provision.

## God's Redemption Plan

So even though it would take a long time, God had already put his plan of salvation into place and promised that someday the second Adam would come to crush the serpent's head (see Genesis 3:15). In the meantime, he would continue to raise up faithful ones who would look forward, trusting in God's provision. After the fall, there was a blitz of generations before we come to the story of Noah, a faithful one in the time of much unfaithfulness. The biblical narrative then blitzes forward through many more descendants, who are learning, just as little children do, that God is far beyond what their towers can reach or their minds can grasp; that they are sinful, that God will judge, but that he will also provide. These first eleven chapters of Genesis show the human race in its infancy, learning basic lessons about God. Finally, we arrive at chapter 12, and the narrative slows down. It goes from near warp speed to a slow plod. Now, we are entering the timeline of human history and focusing on the life of one person rather than a historical timeline. God is about to begin with one man, and it is through this man that God is going to raise up the people who will bring Christ into the world.

## God's Promise to Abraham

The covenant with Abraham in chapter 12 reminds us that God has not forgotten his original plan. His plan is to establish a human family who will live in loving relationship and communion with him. This is what God intended for the whole human race when he told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Often, we make the mistake of thinking God's main plan is to redeem people because that dominates so much of the Bible. But his plan of redemption is necessary only in order to get us back to the original goal, which is fellowship, communion, worship, and ruling and reigning with Christ.

According to tradition, Abraham's father was not only an idol worshipper, but also an idol maker. So God takes the initiative. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us; while Abraham was still in the

### GENESIS 3:15

*"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*

*The covenant with Abraham in chapter 12 reminds us that God has not forgotten his original plan. His plan is to establish a human family who will live in loving relationship and communion with him.*

Part II

# Ethics

## Introduction

# The Ten Commandments and the Moral Code of the Old Testament

The Ten Commandments appear twice in the Old Testament. The first time they appear is when the Israelites have been delivered out of centuries of slavery and brought through the Red Sea. One of the early stops in their wilderness wanderings was Mount Sinai (also called Mount Horeb). It was there that Moses received the Ten Commandments from God.

The Ten Commandments appear a second time in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 5. By this time, a whole new generation stands before Moses, as the previous generation had died in the wilderness because of their unbelief and rebellion against God. Moses is at the end of his life, and the book of Deuteronomy contains five final sermons Moses gives to the people before he dies. The Israelites are all gathered on the plains of Moab and listening to Moses restate the law a second time. This is why the book is called *Deuteronomy*, a word that means “Second Law,” meaning the Law is being repeated a second time. Thus, in Deuteronomy 5, the Ten Commandments are repeated, as is much of the legislation that appeared earlier in Leviticus.

When Moses originally received the Law from God, it took place on Mount Sinai. Moses ascended the mountain and received the Law through a series of revelations from God over a forty-day period. We do not know precisely how these laws came to Moses, but the New Testament indicates (and it was widely taught in Judaism) that the Law was given to Moses through the mediation of angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). However, something dramatic happened with the Ten Commandments. These commands were given directly by God to Moses and were actually written on two tablets of stone by the very “finger” of God. Exodus 31:18 says that “he [God] gave to Moses, when

### **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES**

Exodus 20  
Deuteronomy 5

### **DEUTERONOMY**

Literally, “second law” since the book records the second time the law was given near the end of the Israelite’s desert wandering.

**DECALOGUE**

Literally, “ten words,”  
referring to the Ten  
Commandments.

*The Ten Commandments are not simply a set of negative commands. Rather, the Ten Commandments represent the pathway out of our own self-orientation and into a whole new orientation that puts God, ourselves, and others in their rightful places.*

he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God” (ESV).

These commands are actually called the Ten Commandments in several passages of Scripture, including Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13, and Deuteronomy 10:4. The phrase can also be translated “Ten Words,” and frequently the Ten Commandments are referred to by Jewish and Christian teachers as the Decalogue, which means the “Ten Words.”

Traditionally, Jewish rabbis, dating back to a third-century rabbi named Simlai, have identified 613 distinct laws that appear in the Old Testament. Rabbi Simlai identified 248 of these as “positive commands,” namely, commands for us to do something. For example, Leviticus 19:36 commanded the Israelites to use just measurements and weights. It was common at that time for people to sell food in the market by weight. Some merchants would secretly cheat people by using weights that were below the standard weight. This command showed God’s interest in promoting integrity in the marketplace.

Three hundred sixty-five of the commands were “prohibition commands,” telling God’s people to avoid certain things. For example, Leviticus 19:14 commanded them not to put an obstacle in front of a blind man, demonstrating God’s special kindness toward those with special needs.

The 365 “thou shalt nots” and the 248 “thou shalts” add up to the overall number of 613. So, if there are 613 laws, what makes the Ten Commandments so special, and why were they given to us in such a dramatic fashion?

The Ten Commandments are broad, summative commands. This means that all of the 613 laws of the Old Testament will, in one way or another, find their fulfillment and logical expression in one of the ten. Thus, the Ten Commandments are a wonderful way for someone to understand the heart of the Law. They are not simply a set of negative commands. Rather, the Ten Commandments represent the pathway out of our own self-orientation and into a whole new orientation that puts God, ourselves, and others in their rightful places.

It has been observed that of the 613 laws, only 77 of the positive commands and 194 of the negative commands apply today because

## Commandment 1

# You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me

This first command, found in Exodus 20:3, stands at the head of the Ten Commandments. It begins in a way that, for some, may seem surprising. One normally thinks about moral commands as relating to our relationship one with another. If the Decalogue had begun with commands such as, “Do not steal,” or, “Do not lie,” and so forth, it would have sounded a lot like an array of moral codes ranging from the Eightfold Path of Buddhism to the Egyptian code of Ma’at to the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi. All of these ancient codes regulate a whole range of outward behavior, from purchasing property, to settling disputes between people, to divorce, but they do not reference any moral obligation toward God. The Ten Commandments, conversely, build all morality on the foundation of our moral obligation toward God. This reinforces the fact that, biblically speaking, there is no such thing as morality that is not theological. In other words, all morality in our relationships must be first rooted in a right relationship with God.

The first commandment calls us to have no other gods before him. This command reaches far deeper than merely closing the door on an atheistic worldview. Just because you do not deny the existence of God does not mean that you have kept this commandment. Even if you affirm that God loves you and is the source of your redemption, you may not have fully kept this command. The first commandment is about the whole orientation of our lives. It means the end of a compartmentalized life that gives God a certain portion (like Sunday morning) and then orients the rest of our lives around our own perceived needs and goals.

The New Testament demonstrates the direction of this first command when Jesus himself is asked, “Which is the greatest commandment?” Jesus replies by saying, “You shall love the Lord your

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Exodus 20:3

Deuteronomy 5:7

Jeremiah 35:15

*The first commandment is about the whole orientation of our lives. It means the end of a compartmentalized life that gives God a certain portion.*



**MATTHEW 22:36–40**

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

**HEART**

In ancient thought as well as throughout the Bible, the heart refers to the core of a person's being, not just the emotions. This idea runs parallel to the biblical understanding of love as a conscious commitment to God with one's entire being, not just emotions. God's promise is that he will give us new hearts (Ps. 51:10; Ezek. 36:26).

God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:36–40 ESV).

No study of the Ten Commandments would be complete without a reflection on this teaching of Jesus. I have already pointed out that the Ten Commandments are a grand summary of the 613 laws of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments even further, as all fall under two general headings: (1) Love God and (2) Love your neighbor. Jesus' words in Matthew are clearly a summary of the Ten Commandments, since they are divided into these two general areas. The first four commandments deal with loving God (no other gods before me, no idols, do not misuse the name of the Lord your God, and remember the Sabbath day) and the last six focus on loving your neighbor (honor your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, and do not covet).

When Jesus is asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He begins by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (vv. 37–38 ESV). Notice that Jesus calls this the “great” and the “first” commandment. It is not just an allusion to the first part of the Ten Commandments (commandments 1–4), but, in particular, an exposition of the first of the Ten Commandments. The way we have no other gods before us is to have our whole orientation around the true and living God. We obey this command by loving God with all our hearts, souls, and minds! This means that the whole focus of our lives is on him. It encompasses our hearts, our minds, our whole strength and will.

Jesus himself gives us the greatest exposition of the first commandment. His use of words like *heart*, *soul*, and *mind* gives us in seed form the full range of human life and activity. When Jesus says we are to love God with our whole hearts, he is not referring primarily to an emotional or privatized love in the way this term is often used to describe our devotion to God. It, of course, does not exclude this. Jesus actually

## Commandment 2

# You Shall Not Make for Yourself an Idol

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Exodus 20:4  
Deuteronomy 5:8  
Ephesians 5:5

### LEVITICUS 26:1

“Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God.”

The second command, probably more than any of the Ten Commandments, seems rather remote to many contemporary Christians living in the Western world. This commandment, on the surface, focuses specifically on the prohibition of idolatry. The primary manifestation of idolatry in the ancient world was in the making of idols and the use of them in various acts of worship. In the context of the ancient world, an idol refers to any man-made material object used to represent God. The prohibition against idolatry appears throughout the Old Testament.

The second commandment specifically prohibits making an idol “in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Ex. 20:4). This command is designed to eliminate all impulses to make idols of the stars or planets, or of any creature on the earth, whether in the sky or on land or in the sea. Other places in the Old Testament mention specific materials that were apparently used in idol making. For example, in Leviticus 19:4 Moses said, “Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves.” The casting of metal, especially in the ancient world, was an old but specialized technology. The shaping of idols was widespread, and Israel had to be warned against it. Another part of Leviticus makes reference to idols carved from stone: “Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God” (26:1).

In reflecting on the second commandment, we should be wary of two potential dangers. The first is the assumption that idol worship and the kind of idol making described in the previous texts was only to be found in the distant ancient world. The second is the assumption that given the absence of literal idol making and idol worship in our

society, the second commandment is no longer relevant for contemporary Christians today.

Let's examine both of these assumptions. Over the last twenty-five years, I have traveled to India every year to teach at New Theological College (NTC), a training school located in the mountains of North India, close to the Ganges River and at the heart of the Hindu religion. Over the years I have seen hundreds of idols of various gods and goddesses, especially Shiva and various incarnations of Vishnu, such as Rama and Krishna. They can be found, quite literally, in Hindu temples in every corner of the country, as well as in Hindu homes and various public places. Some of these idols are massive figures that tower over an entire city and were built with great sacrifice and effort. Others are small idols that can be found on a shelf in a home or in someone's business. Hindus living in the twenty-first century are, therefore, unaware that idol making and worshipping various forms of graven images is an offense to God's holiness.

It is important to remember that the Bible is for all peoples in all cultures, and this particular command in its original form and force is just as applicable to Hindus (as well as other religious groups in the world) as it was to the Israelites when it was first given. We should also not underestimate the presence of physical idols in all parts of the world. Due to the rise of global migrations, as well as the growing fascination with Eastern religions, idols can now be found all over the world. Hindu and Buddhist temples are being built across the Western world, and they are becoming increasingly common.

As to the second assumption, we should not think that we have kept the commandment by merely avoiding the kind of outward idolatry that we might associate with popular forms of Hinduism. The second commandment would apply to anything we put in the place of God. In the contemporary world the word *idol* is used to describe any person or thing that we greatly admire. Many people think of certain film stars as idols, and everyone knows the popularity of the singing competition show *American Idol*, which has launched the careers of many rising singers by making them idols. This is an example from popular culture, but it does underscore how an idol can be anything we

*The absence of literal idol making and worship in our society doesn't mean the second commandment is no longer relevant for contemporary Christians.*

*The human heart is a perpetual idol factory.  
—John Calvin, Institutes*

## Commandment 3

# You Shall Not Misuse the Name of the LORD Your God

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Exodus 20:7  
Deuteronomy 5:11  
Ezekiel 39:7  
John 10:33

What does it mean to “misuse” the name of the Lord (Ex. 20:7)? This cannot be properly answered without first understanding the importance of someone’s name in the biblical material. We often choose names based on how they sound, or because of some family connection, without much consideration for the deeper meaning. However, in the ancient world names were chosen with meanings that reflected the character of the father or mother, or certain anticipated character traits for the child. So, for example, though the name Abimelech is just an odd name to us, in Hebrew it means “my father is king,” thereby reflecting something about the child’s father. The name Hannah means “favor” or “grace,” and the name Benjamin means “son of the right hand,” both indicative of circumstances surrounding the child’s birth or, possibly, qualities hoped for in the life of the child. The point is that biblical names are closely identified with one’s character.

We all know that circumstances can cause someone to change his or her name to reflect a new situation. Abram (meaning “exalted father”) became Abraham (“father of nations”). In the New Testament, Jesus gives Simon the name Peter (Greek) or Cephas (Aramaic), which means “rock.” In the book of Revelation we are promised that God is going to give to each of those who overcome “a white stone with a new name written on the stone” (2:17).

To invoke someone’s name meant to call upon the character of that name and the power associated with it. So, when we say, “Bless his holy name,” or we pray, “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be your name” (Matt. 6:9 KJV), we are acknowledging the holiness and the sacredness of his name. To “call upon the name of the Lord” is to invoke all the power and character associated with that name. This is why the Lord is given so many different names in the Bible, such as Savior, King

*To invoke someone’s name meant to call upon the character of that name and the power associated with it.*

of kings, Everlasting Father, Chief Shepherd, Comforter, Wonderful Counselor, high priest, light of the world, Prince of Peace, Redeemer, Lamb of God, the true vine, and so forth (see Isaiah 9:6; 45:21; 53; 63:16; John 1:29; 8:12; 14:26 KJV; 15:1; 1 Timothy 6:15; Hebrews 2:17; 1 Peter 5:4). In short, a name in the Bible is not merely a useful appendage to help facilitate one's identity. Rather, it is linked with the whole of the character and the very essence of the person.

To misuse God's name, therefore, involves a whole range of ways in which we do not show proper respect or reverence for the character and power of God. To use God's name in profanity is an obvious example. But, like the other commandments we have examined, it is too easy to distance ourselves from the force of the command by giving ourselves the false assurance that we have kept the commandment simply because we do not use God's name in some profane expression or vile oath. This command also extends to all the myriad ways we invoke God's name in casual and, sometimes, flippant ways. This happens in the relaxed talk among Christians who are quick to invoke God's name, attributing our certain knowledge of what God thinks about this or that situation, whether political, religious, or in the sporting world. We misuse God's name when we allow songs or choruses that diminish the majesty and character of God to be used for worship.

To misuse God's name also involves things we may not readily recognize as a violation of the third commandment. Christianity is not merely a private matter. To be a Christian is to be invited as a Christian into the whole of life. We work as Christians. We play as Christians. We shop as Christians. We marry as Christians. We think as Christians. We watch films as Christians. There is no part of our lives that is exempt from the lordship of Jesus Christ. We are, in essence, bearers of the name of Christ in the whole of life. This means that his reputation has been bound up with ours.

This is a sobering thought. It means that when we do things or live in ways that are dishonoring to God, we bring shame and disrepute to the name of Christ. Likewise, when we demonstrate extraordinary patience or sacrificial love or faithful service, we bring honor to the

**MATTHEW 6:9 KJV**

*Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

*We are, in essence, bearers of the name of Christ in the whole of life. This means that his reputation has been bound up with ours.*

# Holiness and the Attributes of God

## Introduction

This little book is a series of reflections on the doctrine of holiness. Holiness is central to the Christian understanding of the gospel because the gospel does not begin with us or with our response to God. It begins with God himself, who has revealed himself as a holy God. One of the most repeated phrases in the Old Testament describing the nature of God is his statement, “I am holy.” The same declaration is found in the New Testament: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15–16). We are called to be holy because he is holy. To be in relationship with God is to be brought into the household of holiness. The word *holiness* comes from a Hebrew word *kadash*, which means “to separate” or “to set apart” or “to distinguish.” It is, therefore, a word about God’s position in relation to us and to a world that occupies the household of sin. However, before we can even begin to explore the biblical doctrine of holiness, we must first understand the nature of all of God’s attributes, and how our contemporary perspective on holiness has become distorted.

## The Nature of God

If you were asked to write down a list of the attributes of God, what would that list look like? If you are like most people, you would write down such adjectives as *almighty*, *powerful*, *loving*, *full of grace*, *merciful*, *all-knowing*, *righteous*, *sovereign*, and titles such as *Creator*, *Judge*, *Lord*, *King*, *heavenly Father*, and so forth. If you had time to really think about it, you might include attributes such as *omnipresent* (present everywhere), *eternal*, *infinite*, and so forth. You might also include the word

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1 Peter 1:15–16

## HOLINESS

From a Hebrew word *kadash*, which means “to separate” or “to set apart” or “to distinguish.”

*We only experience God's attributes in fragmentary and imperfect ways. But what we can only know partially, God embodies in full perfection.*

#### **OMNIPRESENCE**

All or everywhere, from the Latin *omnis* meaning "all." Simply put, it means that God is present in all places, all the time. However, another way of expressing this is that there is no place over which God's knowledge and power do not reach. This helps clarify and distinguish Christian theism from pantheistic notions of God and maintains his transcendence. This is one of the classic attributes of God with the prefix *omni*. Others include omnipotence (all powerful) and omniscience (all knowing).

*holy* on the list. If we spent enough time and thought on the list, I am sure that it could get very long, indeed. We might eventually begin to include things like *self-existent*, *uncreated*, *immutable* (unchangeable), and *immanent* (present with us right now).

Even if we have never taken time to sit down and make such a list, we all have some sort of list in our minds, don't we? We have a certain inner sense about what God must be like and certain actions that we are quite sure God should do or, perhaps, would never do.

I want to devote this first meditation to the two main problems we have in thinking about such a list, whether we have written it down or not. Then, I want to propose an alternative approach that avoids the two problems. Let us examine these two problems briefly.

#### ***Our Experience with Attributes***

First, whatever attributes we have ascribed to God, we should realize that we have only experienced these attributes in fragmentary and imperfect ways. In other words, we have only a vague human idea of what mercy or love or holiness is, but we have never really experienced any of these attributes in their perfect form. For example, if someone says, "God is our heavenly Father," we might naturally think about our own fathers, and this might make some wonder if this really is a good description, especially if our fathers were aloof or uncaring. If we have only known corruption in human judges, then it can really influence how we might think about God as Judge. Other attributes, like omnipresence or self-existence, can become almost like theoretical ideas since we have never experienced anyone who is present everywhere, or who is not created. So, right at the threshold we are already in difficulty if we think about God's attributes only in terms of our own experience of them. What we can only know partially or, perhaps, only theoretically, God embodies in full perfection.

#### ***Putting God's Attributes in a Hierarchy***

The second problem we have in thinking about God's attributes is that we tend to place them in a kind of hierarchy. In other words, we tend to see some attributes as trumping others. We think some attributes are

# God's Holy Revelation of Himself

## SCRIPTURE READING

Deuteronomy 29:29

Psalms 19

John 1:14

Romans 1:20

*The Bible is much deeper than merely a revelation of things we need to know. The purpose of the Bible is not merely to help us understand things about God, but to help us know him and his saving purposes for us.*

## The Bible and the Holiness of God

To understand how God's holiness is revealed to us, we should first understand something about the nature of the Bible itself. The Bible is the record of God's disclosure of himself and his saving purposes in the world. It should not be viewed primarily as a rule book on how we are to live our daily lives, even though we find plenty of guidance there. The Bible is much deeper than merely a revelation of *things we need to know*. The purpose of the Bible is not merely to help us understand *things* about God, but to help us know *him* and his saving purposes for us. The Bible is even more than a handbook or field guide to show us how to get saved, though it is never less than that. The Bible is, at its deepest level, God's revelation of himself. As Christians, we believe that the Bible is without error in all that it affirms. We also believe that when we read the Bible, we read it in the presence of the risen Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we read the Bible in community—with those who have read it or heard it for centuries before we ever lived, and in the ongoing presence and power of the triune God. The Scriptures reveal who God is and where we stand in relation to him. They reveal God's saving purpose for us. The Bible is God's Word to us and to all people. It is a revelation of how we can enter into the full fellowship, beauty, abundant life, and eternal joy of the triune God.

The Bible, therefore, should be viewed more like a grand, multi-act drama or play in which God reveals truths about himself and about us. The Scriptures record God's personal acts of redemption whereby he provides a way for us to move from our alienation from him to full reconciliation with him and to participate in the flourishing that is found only in his divine life. This chapter will explore the source of our



alienation from God that has shattered his image in us and separated us from being full participants and partakers of his holy love.

### ***Holiness and the Image of God***

The Bible begins by revealing the majesty of God in creating the world. Because God is a perfect Creator, the creation fully reflected his perfections. This is particularly seen in his creation of men and women in his own image. As God's image-bearers, we were created to enjoy full fellowship with him and to participate in his holiness and love. What does it mean to say that we are created in the image of God? Let me say, to begin with, that it does not refer to any physical resemblance with God because, God, in his essence, is spirit (John 4:24). The image of God refers to a deeper reality, although our physical bodies are the perfect design to manifest the image of God. While our physical bodies are an important part of how the image of God is expressed, the image of God primarily points to three realities.

*When the Bible says that we are created in God's image, it refers to a moral capacity, a relational capacity, and a representative capacity.*

### ***What It Means to Be Created in the Image of God***

First, being created in God's image means that we are endowed with a moral responsibility. We are able to bear and to obey God's commands, and we are morally accountable for our actions. Second, we are created to be in relationship with God. This means that we have the capacity to know God and to communicate with him and therefore to be in fellowship with him. Third, it also means that we are the extension of God's dominion and rule in the earth; we represent God. We are called to be his regents, his stewards, who represent him before the rest of creation. So, when the Bible says that we are created in God's image, it refers to a *moral capacity*, a *relational capacity*, and a *representative capacity*. These capacities are not given to the animals, at least not in the way they are granted to humans. Adam and Eve, therefore, were the bearers of God's image and were perfectly endowed with God's holiness.

#### **GENESIS 3:8**

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

### ***Fallen in Sin***

The Scriptures teach us that God created man and woman in his own image and he placed them in the garden of Eden. They were meant to

# God Calls His People to Be Holy

One of the questions people often ask is, Why did God choose the Jewish people? There are thousands of people groups in the world, so why did God choose the Jews? Perhaps you remember William Ewer's famous quip: "How odd of God to choose the Jews." He could have chosen the Egyptians or the Hittites or the Incas. The Scriptures say that God did not choose Israel because they were more numerous or more powerful than any other nation, but simply because he wanted to show them his love (Deut. 7:7–8). Sometimes people mistakenly think that by choosing Israel, God was excluding other nations and showing them some kind of favoritism compared to other peoples. However, from the beginning, when God first called Abraham and made a covenant with Israel, he made it clear that he was blessing the descendants of Abraham (Israel) *so that* they might be a blessing to every nation on earth. Genesis 12 records the covenant God made with Abraham. He said, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; *and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*" (vv. 2–3, emphasis added).

God chose Israel as the instrument through which he would restore his image to humanity and bring blessing to the whole world. When God later repeated the covenant to Abraham, he said that it was through his seed that all nations would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). That seed was an early hint that God would send to earth his only Son, Jesus, who was the seed, or offspring, of the Jewish nation. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul made this clear when he said, "Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Exodus 19:6

Leviticus 19:2

1 Thessalonians 4:7

## GENESIS 12:2–3

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

*Israel was also to prepare the world for the day when we would be called to “disciple the nations” and thereby reestablish God’s holiness in every nation of the world.*

#### **NATIONS**

Not political states but ethnic groups whom would be the object of God’s love and redemption. See Isaiah 60:9; Revelation 5:9–10.

From the outset God had a plan to send his Son into the world to reestablish his presence in the world. Sin is, at its root, the absence of God. Holiness, at its root, is the presence of God. There would be no greater invasion of God’s holiness in the world than that of sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. He would, therefore, establish a single people, Israel, and call them to holiness in order to demonstrate before the world what it meant to be a people brought back into relationship with him. This was to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. Israel was also to prepare the world for the day when we would be called to “disciple the nations” and thereby reestablish God’s holiness in every nation of the world. But the first step in this grand drama would be to start with one nation and reveal God’s holiness to them.

#### **God’s Covenant with Abraham**

God’s covenant with Abraham, found in Genesis (12:1–3; 17:5–6; 18:18–19; 22:17–18), contains three distinct parts. First, God would bless Abraham numerically by giving him many descendants. Second, he would give the Israelites a land (this is why it is called the promised land). Third, he would use them to bless all nations on earth. The word *nations* here does not mean political countries as we know them today, but each and every ethnic group in the world, which number in the thousands.

The descendants of Abraham did multiply and eventually relocated to Egypt, where they were enslaved for four hundred years by Egyptian pharaohs. At the right time, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and told him that he was on holy ground. The presence of God was holy, and Moses was being called to lead the Israelites into a new level of their relationship with God. They were led out of Egypt and were given the Law.

#### **The Law of God**

The Law was nothing more than a covenant between God and the Israelites that would establish them as a holy people. They were given 613 distinctive laws that would set them apart from the nations. Some of the commands make perfect sense to us, such as “Do not deceive your neighbor” or “Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight” or

Part III

# Ordinances

# Baptism

As the risen Lord, Jesus Christ commanded his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19; see also Mark 16:16). The book of Acts gives ample testimony that this is exactly what the disciples did. For example, Acts records the first public sermon of the church on the day of Pentecost. In this sermon, Peter called for a response to his message with the following words: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, we see that baptism is regarded as the public act of our repentance and the public transfer of a new believer from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God.

In the New Testament, it is not sufficient to simply pray a sinner’s prayer and be privately justified before God. Christianity, as the redeemed community, is to be a public witness before the world. In short, we are not only saved as individuals, but we are saved into a new community, known as the church of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the public sign of this transfer and should be the normal first step expectation of all new believers.<sup>2</sup>

## Meaning of Water in the Scriptures

Why are new Christians asked to engage with water in such a public fashion? In the Scriptures, water has four main purposes/meanings, all of which are symbolically represented in Christian baptism. First, water is used around the world for cleansing. When a Christian undergoes baptism, it is an outward sign of the inward spiritual cleansing that has taken place through the gospel. In the Old Testament, priests

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Numbers 19:1–8  
Matthew 28:19  
Romans 6:3–4  
1 Corinthians 7:14; 12:13

### SIGNIFICANCE OF WATER

–Used for cleansing  
–Symbol of Holy Spirit  
–Symbol of birth  
–Symbol of death  
and resurrection

*In the Bible water is a symbol of cleansing, the Holy Spirit, birth, death to sin, and resurrection.*

were required to cleanse themselves with water before entering into the presence of God. (See, for example, Numbers 19:1–8.) In the same way, the waters of baptism symbolize the spiritual cleansing that is necessary to enter into the presence of a holy God.

Second, water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In John 7, Jesus declared, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (vv. 38–39 ESV). The association of water and the Spirit is another profound mystery. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon him in a special way (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:9–10; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:31–32). So, the waters of baptism symbolize the presence and infilling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the new believer. The apostle Paul teaches “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13 ESV).

#### **ROMANS 6:3–4 ESV**

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

Third, water is a symbol of birth. At the time of our physical birth, the first sign of new life is the “breaking of water” that accompanies the new birth. We are born “out of water” into the world. In the same way, the presence of water symbolizes that a new, spiritual birth has taken place and we are being brought into the world as a new creation. Jesus told Nicodemus that no one could see the kingdom of God unless he was “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Nicodemus was amazed because he thought that Jesus was saying we must somehow reenter the womb and be born a second time. However, Jesus was using an analogy, comparing our spiritual birth with our first physical birth.

Finally, water is used to symbolize our death to sin and our resurrection to new life. There is no real connection between water and burial, but when we go down into the waters of baptism and then emerge from the water, it is symbolic of our being buried with Christ, and then rising to new life. Paul asks, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,

# The Lord's Supper (Communion)

The Lord's Supper invites us into a deep mystery that can never be fully fathomed. However, as a basic primer, one way to start is to look at the Lord's Supper through three different lenses: past, present, and future.

## Lens of the Past

The first thing to realize when you stand before the Lord's Supper is that there is a whole story of redemption represented in front of you that began long before you, or even your most distant ancestors, were ever born. We are stepping into the middle of something. It is a story that began before us, and it is a story that is still unfolding, until its final consummation. So, we cannot even begin to understand what we are stepping into until we first look back.

This looking back begins by remembering that God instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper at the Jewish Passover. The Passover meal was the annual commemoration of the Jews celebrating and remembering God's dramatic intervention in saving the children of Israel out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery. The Jews would partake of a meal that remembered and reenacted what God did that first Passover night when the blood of the lamb spared them from the judgment of death.

In the same way, when we take the Lord's Supper, we look back on our redemption from spiritual bondage. Jesus Christ inaugurated a new Passover. In Jesus Christ, God has, once again, intervened in human history. Through his incarnation, death on the cross, bodily resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father, the powers of sin

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Mark 14:22–25

John 6:53–59

Acts 2:42

1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:17–34

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:26

*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

*When we take the Lord's Supper, we look back on our redemption from spiritual bondage.*

and death have been defeated. We look back and remember our own baptisms, and our own great redemption, and how God delivered us from bondage and brought us into his adoptive family. When we look back we see a great sequence of redemptive acts of which we are now a part.

### **Lens of the Present**

The second lens through which we can capture something of the mystery of the Lord's Supper is the lens of the present. Communion is a celebration of the presence of Christ with his people today. We do not simply look back and remember what God once did. We celebrate the ongoing unfolding of his grand plan of redemption. Christ meets us at the table today. Christians have often discussed what happens when the minister stands up front and consecrates the elements of bread and wine in this sacred service. This seems to focus too much on the elements themselves, as if we are trying to find something magical or, at least, some mystery in the elements themselves. However, we can miss the main point, which is not the presence of the elements, but the promised presence of Christ at this table. We should never miss the more profound transformation that occurs at the Lord's table. It is the Lord's presence, not just the bread and wine, which transforms us as the people of God.

We are now part of this grand, unfolding story of God's redemption as we feed upon Christ and realize that we are not in this journey alone. We have one another, and Christ is present with us now. The one loaf reminds us that we are now part of the body of Christ. This is not a denominational belonging, or denominational togetherness per se, though we all need to be rooted in traditions that allow us to fully flourish. The foundation of all the fellowship and joy we have with one another is rooted and grounded in our common belonging to Christ; we are his body. We are Christians. By Christ's promised presence here, we are transformed anew by his presence in the elements. Whenever Christ is present, everything is transformed. How can anything remain untransformed in the presence of Christ?

*Communion is a celebration of the presence of Christ with his people today.*

#### **THREE VIEWS ON COMMUNION**

**Transubstantiation**—a Roman Catholic position affirming that the elements are transformed into the literal body and blood of Jesus.

**Consubstantiation**—a view held mostly by high Protestant denominations whereby the elements are brought into union with Christ but remain distinct from him.

**Memorialism**—a view held mostly by baptists and low churches in which Communion receives its significance through faith and merely acts as a symbol.



# Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Matthew 6:9

## HEAVEN

The physical realm beyond the earth (air, space), as in Genesis 1:1 or Deuteronomy 11:11. Or, it can signify the spiritual realm where God dwells, though of course even this concept accommodates God to our spatial thinking. The “kingdom of heaven” inaugurated by Jesus is the place where God’s reign and will is observed perfectly.

*We should not miss the fact that the phrase “Our Father” simultaneously implies both the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the communion of the saints.*

## Our Father . . .

At the very threshold of the Lord’s Prayer, in Matthew 6:9, we find a glorious revelation unmatched in the religious history of the world, and known to us only by divine self-disclosure. The two words “Our Father” usher us into a vibrant relationship with God. We pray not as slaves seeking to hear and obey a powerful master, but as children who have been graciously ushered into the joyous presence of their father. We come not as lone and isolated searchers after God, but as a part of the great communion of the saints. It is not “My Master,” or even “My Father,” but “Our Father.” We are brought into the joyful presence of both the Trinity (of which Jesus and the Spirit also join in by saying, “Our Father”) and all the company of the redeemed. We should not miss the fact that the phrase “Our Father” simultaneously implies both the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the communion of the saints. We, as the people of God, are brought up into the fellowship which heretofore has only been enjoyed in the mysteries of God’s own triune life.

## . . . in heaven

We pray from the limited frame and perspective of earthbound space and time. However, God dwells in heaven. He is outside of time. He sees the end from the beginning. When we pray, we enter into his presence, knowing that we are thereby entering into his perspective and lordship over all of time and history. He is on the throne of the universe; we are not. This phrase reminds us that we are submitting our perspective to his perfect wisdom, right at the outset of our prayer. So often what

we call “unanswered prayers” have actually been answered from the perspective of heaven, but we have failed to discern the answer because it came to us in an unexpected way.

### Hallowed be your name

Earlier, in our discussion on the third commandment, I pointed out that to call upon someone’s name is to call upon the character of that person and the associated power identified with him or her. So, when we say, as the New American Standard Bible puts it, “Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name,” we are acknowledging the holiness and the sacredness of his name.

The Bible gives God many names. However, all of those names are summarized by one title: holy. The word *hallowed* means “holy.” It is not that there is a hierarchy of names, with ones like “Lion of the Tribe of Judah” and “Judge” near the bottom, and names like “Lamb of God” and “Savior” a bit higher, and finally, “Holy” at the top. God’s character qualities cannot be ranked like that, because he bears all of them in their perfected state and in perfect harmony with all the others. Rather, the name “holy” should be seen as containing all of God’s other qualities and characteristics within the one affirmation. Thus, when we pray, “Holy is your name,” we are, in that one phrase, confessing all of God’s nature and character in the single word!

Interestingly, of all the names and titles attributed to God, only “holy” appears in triplicate form. It is known as the Trisagion, meaning “triple holy,” and appears in this form twice in the Bible. It first appears in Isaiah 6 when the prophet has his vision of heaven and sees the six winged seraphs flying around the throne and crying out day and night, “Holy, holy, holy” (vv. 2–3). The threefold “holy” appears again in John’s vision of heaven in Revelation. He also sees “six winged creatures” who cry out day and night, “Holy, holy, holy” (Rev. 4:8).<sup>1</sup>

It is significant that both the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer have this wonderful convergence in protecting and honoring the holiness of God’s name. This is the foundation for all prayer and, indeed, our entire relationship with God. When Moses first encountered God

#### TRISAGION

The utterance and attribution of “holy” to God three times by angelic beings in Isaiah 6:2–3 and Revelation 4:8.

#### REVELATION 4:8

Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”

# Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

## Your kingdom come

When we think about the word *kingdom*, our mind quickly goes to faraway images associated more with medieval Europe than with the world in which we live. Therefore, it is important at the outset to understand what the word *kingdom* means. It does not primarily refer to a geographical place, such as the United Kingdom or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It also should not be understood to refer to any particular political party or plan. In the Bible the kingdom of God is more about God's reign than a particular geographic realm or governance plan. The kingdom of God is about God's kingly reign. God is the King. He rules and reigns over all.

When Jesus teaches us to pray that God's kingdom would come, it is a prayer that the rule of God would be fully known and established in the church, in our lives, and throughout the world. It transcends every country or political system because it sits in judgment over them all and, in the end, will triumph over them all. In the book of Revelation, Jesus is given the name "KING OF KING AND LORD OF LORDS" (19:16).

This is the heart of the kingdom of God: Jesus Christ is Lord! To pray for God's kingdom to come is an acknowledgment that the rule and reign of God is coming and so we are praying for the hastening of that day, and that we would be fully in harmony with God's reign as it is breaking into the present order.

## Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

There is a great gulf between the rule and reign of God in heaven and the rule and reign of God on earth. In heaven, God's sovereignty is fully known and acknowledged. In heaven, there is no sin, injustice, or any

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Matthew 6:10

Mark 1:15

1 Corinthians 15:25–26

Revelation 19:16

*In the Bible the kingdom of God is more about God's reign than a particular geographic realm or governance plan.*

**KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

Used interchangeably with "kingdom of God" in the Gospels. It is the in-breaking reign of God inaugurated by Jesus the Messiah, which is a kingly title. The kingdom is often referred to as "already-not-yet," meaning it is inaugurated in Jesus but not fully consummated until his second coming.

This present and future dimension to the kingdom of God is an important tension to remember as followers of Jesus.

**MARK 1:15**

"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

*God's rule reverses the power of sin and overturns death itself. Jesus declared in word and deed that the in-breaking of God's rule has finally come.*

deviation from God's glorious rule and reign. On earth, God's rule is only seen in distorted, fragmented ways. When we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are longing for the day when the reality of God's rule that is already present in heaven would fully manifest itself in the earth. In the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, we were able to see up close the rule and reign of God fully present in him. In Jesus Christ the rule of God was inaugurated into the world in a fresh way. The first words of Jesus in his public ministry were, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). It is the announcement of the great invasion of God's rule into the broken, fallen world of sin and death. God's rule reverses the power of sin and overturns death itself. All through Jesus' ministry we hear him speaking of the kingdom of God, declaring in word and deed that the in-breaking of God's rule has finally come.

Every gathering of believers around the world should be seen as a little outpost of the kingdom of God. The church is to be the living example of God's rule and reign in the world. The kingdom of God is, therefore, being dynamically revealed in history as his reign and rule extends through the preaching of the gospel and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In the church and in the lives of Christians, we should see the realities of heaven made fully manifest. The world may be full of deceit and greed, but it should never be so in the church. The world may be full of evil and injustice, but it should never be so in the church.

This is why it is so embarrassing when scandals break out in the church or in the lives of Christians. It discredits the very foundation upon which the church stands, namely, that it is an outpost of the rule and reign of God. This is also why it is so important for such scandals, when they do occur, to be swiftly acknowledged and repented of, so that "God's name [will not be] blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Rom. 2:24).

This is why we daily pray that God's rule and reign would come and that the gap between his rule in heaven and his rule on earth would become narrower. When we fight for justice, we help narrow the gap. When we stand against evil, we help narrow the gap. This process continues until Jesus comes and fully consummates his kingdom,

# Give us today our daily bread

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Exodus 16:13–33

Psalms 144

Matthew 6:11

James 1:17

## MATTHEW 6:26

Look at the birds of the air;  
they do not sow or reap or  
store away in barns, and yet  
your heavenly Father feeds  
them. Are you not much  
more valuable than they?

*Once we properly orient  
ourselves to his rule  
and reign, then we are  
invited to ask God to meet  
our specific needs.*

This is the point in the Lord's Prayer when we transition from our prayers related to God's holiness, his will, and his kingdom, to our own needs. There is nothing wrong with a prayer that contains the word *give*, but we should not start our prayers this way. Before we ask God to give us something, we must first orient ourselves to him and his rule and reign. This is why the Lord's Prayer is the model prayer. It reminds us to first orient ourselves to him. The Scriptures say, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise" (Ps. 100:4). It does not say, "Enter his presence with petitions and his courts with requests." However, once we properly orient ourselves to his rule and reign, then we are invited to ask God to meet our specific needs.

As a model prayer, the phrase "our daily bread" has two important features on which we should focus. First, the word *bread* as it is used in this prayer symbolizes all of our basic needs. In ancient Israel, as in many parts of the world even today, bread was the staple of life. If Jesus' ministry had been in South India or in China, he might have said, "Give us our daily bowl of rice." The point is that bread represents our daily needs. By extension, the phrase reaches beyond food and would include everything we need for daily life, including food, clothing, housing, honest government, health, family, and friends, to name just a few.

The second, and equally important, feature of the phrase "our daily bread" is the force that lies behind the word *daily*. Notice that when God promises to meet our needs, it is a *daily* promise. In the days of the wilderness wanderings, the manna was provided daily. No manna was to be hoarded for future weeks (Ex. 16:13–33). It is an early example of God teaching his people about daily dependence upon him. While the

word *bread* encompasses everything we need in this life, it does not always come in advance installments. Many of us have sufficient provisions for our lives for months, or even years, in advance. This is a great blessing from God, but it can lead us to a lower awareness of our daily dependence upon God for everything we need.

The Scriptures give us a picture of two people with barns that are filled. The first picture is the righteous man of Psalm 144. He has a barn “filled with every kind of provision.” The picture is one of abundance. His “sheep will increase by thousands” (v. 13). His “oxen will draw heavy loads” (v. 14). How blessed is the one “of whom this is true” (v. 15).

The second picture is the rich fool of Luke 12. His barns are also full of grain and goods. He had such an abundant crop that he had no place to store all of his grain. So, he decides to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He then says to himself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (v. 19). But, unlike the righteous man of Psalm 144, this man is called a “fool” by God because he didn’t realize that God was the source of his life. In fact, he did not realize that on that very night he was going to die (v. 20).

These two pictures reveal the importance of trusting God daily for our provisions and being generous with what we have. It may very well be that our abundance may be today’s daily source for us as well as our neighbor in need.

#### **JAMES 1:17**

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

#### **LIFE IN THE FIRST CENTURY**

Studies show that the majority of people living in first-century Galilee were at or below the sustenance level—there was no middle class. The prayer for daily bread expressed a genuine need for many in Jesus’ audience.

# Our Bodies Are Speaking to Us

Today's church faces a major dilemma in attempting to answer the pressing challenges to the biblical moral framework: Should it tackle these issues one by one, or is there an underlying foundation that undergirds a host of related issues? As we will discover, we have good reason to start at the beginning of the Christian story—the creation of our world. Getting this right holds the key to a proper framework for other presenting issues we face as a society.

The doctrine of creation and, in particular, the gift of our physical bodies, is one of the most neglected teachings missing in today's church. Casting a positive vision for the body will help God's people speak into many concerns that seem to multiply with each passing year. More important, it will help us understand and relate to the struggles which people from all walks of life express in our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Exploring the biblical vision for the body is, therefore, an urgent need for all Christians. It promises to provide a beautiful reality in which the church can engage in worship and mission.

The first building block of a positive vision for the human body is that creation is good. The starting place for understanding the purpose of our bodies should be the beginning—the creation story. Following every day of creation, God observed all that he made and deemed it good. This includes the human body (Gen. 1:26–31). Our bodies, therefore, are trustworthy and invested with profound dignity. Rather than follow the modern mantra of “Trust your heart,” the Bible warns that the heart is deceitful and can lead us astray (Jer. 17:9). The body, however, remains a trustworthy gift from God. Accordingly, the Genesis creation account establishes a moral framework rooted in complementary elements. Night and day, heaven and earth, male and female, etc.,

## **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES**

Genesis 1:27, 31  
Psalm 115:15  
Jeremiah 17:9  
Acts 17:24  
1 Timothy 4:4–5

## **JEREMIAH 17:9**

*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

*The first building block of a positive vision for the human body: creation is good.*

*The second building block for a proper theology of the human body: our bodies are icons of spiritual realities.*

#### MEANS OF GRACE

*The ways that God has appointed to convey his grace to people. It is another way of describing the channels through which disciples grow as followers of Jesus.*

*The ways in which God grows us as Christians, or what the church has traditionally called “the means of grace,” are all physical: reading or hearing Scripture, receiving the Lord’s Supper, praying through various postures, serving the poor with our hands, etc.*

establish boundaries which creation should observe in order to flourish the way God intended.

The second building block for a proper theology of the human body is that our bodies are icons of spiritual realities. This means that the material world is invested with purpose and reflects deeper, spiritual truths. The first of these is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In his divine foresight, God gave us the gift of the human body in order to foreshadow the way he would live among his people (1 Peter 1:20). If our bodies are not trustworthy, that casts doubt on the person and work of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. According to the Bible, the thread of redemption runs through creation, the incarnation, Jesus’ resurrection, and ascension—all the way to the bodily resurrection of the saints and New Creation. In other words, the human body has always served as the physical icon anticipating the mystery of Christ.

Furthermore, the material body is the way in which God is unfolding his plan of salvation. This means that we participate in salvation in bodily form. We receive grace from God and extend it to others through the gift of our bodies. The ways in which God grows us as Christians, or what the church has traditionally called “the means of grace,” are all physical: reading or hearing Scripture, receiving the Lord’s Supper, praying through various postures, serving the poor with our hands, etc. These are all embodied experiences. At creation, our bodies were fashioned as an apt receptacle for receiving and extending God’s grace.

Starting at the beginning of the biblical story provides us with two valuable building blocks for understanding the human body: creation is good and our bodies are icons of spiritual realities. These truths invest our bodies with God-given, objective value. They also compel us to think of ourselves as an integrated whole.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

### 1. *Biblical Foundations*

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. . . . God saw all that he



# Marriage Points to Spiritual Mysteries

We live in a time when the Bible's teaching on marriage is mostly incomprehensible to the wider culture. However, Christians will find it difficult to have a voice in larger society until we get our own house in order first. We cannot assume our culture's view of marriage and dress it up with a few Christian details. When confronted by the Pharisees on a question regarding divorce (Matt. 9:1–11 and Mark 10:2–12), Jesus called his listeners back to the created order itself, effectively moving us away from all the endless presenting difficulties and asking the deeper, more foundational question: What is God's design and purpose for marriage? This is where the Christian understanding of marriage begins.

None of the questions being hurled at the church by the surrounding culture can be addressed properly in the current climate because the very foundation upon which marriage is designed and built has been eroded. We end up trying to make an incomprehensible case in the larger context of utilitarianism. That is to say, the cultural view of marriage typically considers it an arrangement to find personal fulfillment and happiness. Marriage is defined, so the narrative goes, as a legal arrangement which allows two people to fulfill each other's emotional needs and sexual desires. Individual freedom, personal autonomy, and one's own fulfillment are very high values in the West, and resultantly, marriage has been domesticated to fit within that larger functional framework. If we accept this view then we forfeit the divine foundation for marriage and we must acknowledge that any two people who find fulfillment in one another can be considered a marriage—and inversely, should that fulfillment ever diminish or cease, the marriage may also. Instead, we ought to look at the view of marriage presented

## **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES**

Matthew 9:1–11  
1 Corinthians 7:4  
Ephesians 5:32

## **UTILITARIANISM**

A theory of ethics that claims our conduct should promote the personal happiness of people, especially the greatest number of people possible. A leading proponent was John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century.

*The cultural view of marriage typically considers it an arrangement to find personal fulfillment and happiness.*

*The third building block for a theology of the body: there is a divine design for marriage.*

in the Bible, from cover to cover. In doing so, we discover the third building block for a proper theology of the human body is the divine design for marriage.

Several characteristics and purposes of marriage emerge from the biblical story. First, marriage is unitive. Jesus, referencing Genesis 2:24, said that a man shall leave his father and his mother and become “united to his wife,” and the “two will become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5). Marriage is consummated in a sexual act which unites the two as one flesh. The definition of “unitive” is clearly a reference to sexual union. The reason for this leads to the second point.

Second, marriage is procreative. When God calls us to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28 ESV), it is a vision of fruitfulness and becoming co-creators with God. Bearing children creates a family unit which reflects the life-giving mystery of the triune God. While we know that not every marriage produces children, everyone is someone’s child and part of this glorious work of re-creation and co-creation which God has made possible through marriage.

Third, marriage is a binary between a man and a woman. The creation of man and woman is a sign that delivers Adam from his own solitude. It enters him into full communion with another as an icon of the intended relationship the human race is purposed to have with God. These two, separate glories coming together is fundamental to the whole structure of the created order. It is meant to symbolize all of the binaries of creation, such as light and darkness, day and night, earth and sky, water and land, sun and moon, culminating in male and female. The like and unlike come together in complementarity and unity.

*These two, separate glories of male and female coming together is fundamental to the whole structure of the created order.*

Fourth, marriage is self-giving. Marriage on a whole is not less than discovering personal fulfillment, but it is so much more than that. The apostle Paul radically broke with the contemporary cultural narrative by saying that we are actually not free to do what we want with our own bodies. Rather, Paul said, “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife” (1 Cor. 7:4). We may go through seasons where personal fulfillment diminishes,

# Children as a Reflection of the Trinity

In the Bible's first pages, the gifts of family and children enter into the story in a central way. Marriage is the vehicle of blessing for Adam; God notices Adam's loneliness, so he creates Eve in order to dispel the solitude. They become an intimate union, not the least of which in a physical way. They give themselves to one another. Children then enter into the picture as a way to be fruitful and bless both the parents and creation. Husband and wife become father and mother, and children become the recipients of the blessing of life to be enjoyed in God's purposeful creation.

What is the meaning of these details in the story? Are family and children merely functional blessings meant to be enjoyed, delayed, or controlled at will? This is where the fourth building block for a proper theology of the human body enters: childbearing is a gift to us as a way of imaging the communal and triune nature of God. Rather than being a reality to control, childbearing is a gift from God that has both practical and spiritual blessings. We have, however, been conditioned by our culture to view this as controversial, or with an eye of suspicion. But Eve's ability to bear children despite the fall reminds us that God's original plan to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28 ESV) remains intact.

Several theological points are signified through the gifts of marriage and childbearing. First, we realize through the creation story that it is only through the "one flesh" act of sexual union that we are enabled, through the gift of God, to join him as co-creators. A new little life proceeding from that sacred union dispels our solitude and deepens our self-sacrifice for another. Eve came out of Adam, and now, a new little Adam comes forth from Eve. God invites us to join him in his creative act. He is the unique creator of everything, but we as image-bearers take on this privilege.

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Genesis 1:28

Psalms 127:3–5

Mark 9:37

*The fourth building block for a proper theology of the human body: family and children are a gift to us as a way of imaging the communal and triune nature of God.*

*God is a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Father, mother, and child reflect the unity in diversity that is inherent to the biblical God we know as Trinity.*

Furthermore, childbearing is meant to be a reflection of the Trinity. A host of dynamics in the inner-life of the family point us to the perfect life of the Trinity: gift-giving, mutual submission, joyful exercise of kingly and queenly authority, love, discipline, self-donation, and, miraculously, creational capabilities through the act of childbirth. Family units and childbearing, therefore, reflect the life of the Trinity. God is a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Father, mother, and child reflect the unity in diversity that is inherent to the biblical God we know as Trinity. While not everyone has children, everyone is someone else's child and participates in this beautiful fulfillment of the original vocation for humanity.

Remarkably, the Bible begins and ends with a marriage. In the garden of Eden, Adam was literally married to Eve. At the end of Revelation, the redeemed are symbolically married to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. In this way, marriage is a symbol and reminder that we are to be united with Christ. The final consummation will happen at the end of the age when we join him in the final resurrection. Until then, we are invited to be united to him through life in the Holy Spirit.

*The Bible begins and ends with a marriage. In the garden of Eden, Adam was literally married to Eve. At the end of Revelation, the redeemed are symbolically married to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.*

Finally, the family also symbolizes the multiplication and fruitfulness of the gospel. More and more people are brought into the fold through the saving act of the gospel. One of the primary metaphors for describing what happens through our relationship with Jesus Christ is that of adoption. We are adopted by our heavenly Father and given the divine dignity of calling Jesus our brother. Families remind us that God wants to grow and deepen his relationship with all of humanity by adopting them as sons and daughters. Admittedly, not all families reflect the loving nature of the life of the Trinity. Neglect, abuse, and misplaced priorities are painful realities that have hurt individuals and undermined the place of the family in our society. But no matter how short our world falls of this vision, it is one worth upholding. This is even greater cause to go back to the beginning and recapture the beautiful vision of holy love and reciprocal self-donation between husband and wife, and parents and children.

# Foundations of the Christian Faith

## A Resource for Catechesis and Disciple-Making

The journey of Christian discipleship can only be embarked upon with a sure foundation under foot. For ages the church has provided a tool set of basic doctrines, ethics, and ordinances through which a child or convert could be initiated into ever increasing Christlikeness. This process is called “catechesis” (to sound down, or echo) and it has traditionally been a teaching exchange between a seasoned Christian and a new believer.

Working its way through doctrinal affirmations like the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and other foundational content on the means of grace, this collection of writings by Timothy Tennent forms core material that may be used by leaders and laypeople alike. Scripture references, notes, and suitable hymns highlight key concepts and provide additional value that can be engaged at varying degrees.

As Christianity in the Western world experiences a diminishing influence upon its surrounding culture, and as Christian families struggle to effectively pass their faith onto children, the rediscovery of catechesis will serve God’s people as they and future generations reinherit the treasures of biblical faith, or, the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). This work will prove to be an indispensable reference for those charged with teaching and modeling Christian faith to others.

**This collection of indispensable writings by Timothy Tennent covers a range of core topics and practices, including:**

The Trinity  
Baptism  
The Lord’s Prayer  
The Lord’s Supper  
The Old Testament  
The Ten Commandments  
The Apostles’ Creed  
The Order of Salvation  
The Holy Spirit  
Sanctification  
Theology of the Body  
Marriage and Family

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