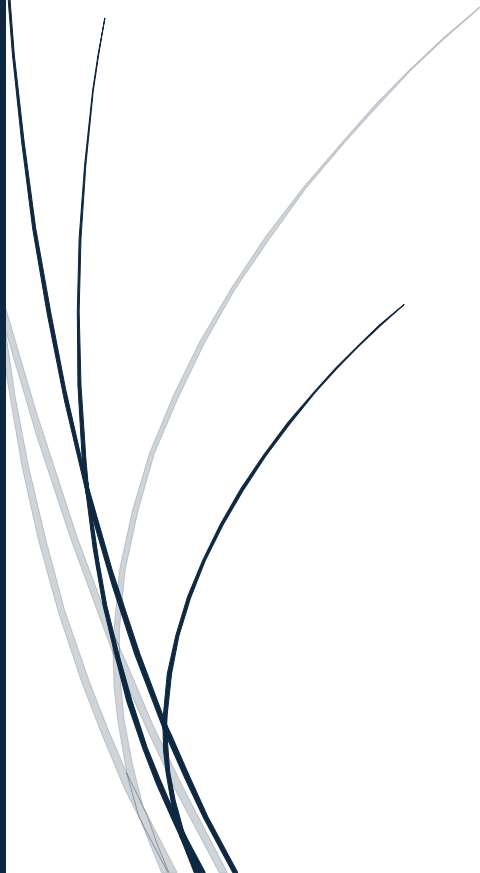


Fall 2025

The Gospel Gleaner

For the Lord, His Word, and His Church



In this Issue...

3 *The Need for Spiritual Renewal*
Andy Erwin

5 *The Church of God in Corinth*
Raymon Elliott

7 *By Whose Authority?*
Johnny O. Trail

9 *The Nicene Creed - What is it?
What can we learn from it?*
Thomas Southerland

14 *MCOB Update*

15 *The Wrath and Love of God*
Joshua Seth Houston

THE GOSPEL GLEANER

The first issue of the *Gospel Gleaner* was published in the spring of 1985. Much has changed in the world since then, but the mission and values of the *Gleaner* remain the same. Through the medium of electronic subscriptions, the *Gospel Gleaner* is more accessible than ever. Past issues can also be found on our website: www.gospelgleaner.com.

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The Need for Spiritual Renewal

Andy Erwin

The church in the United States is in a desperate state and needs spiritual renewal and revival. Such a plain statement should be an obvious truth to all who are aware of the present situation and interested in a greater manifestation of the glory and power of God.

At the time of this writing, I have lived forty-eight years on this earth as a citizen of this country. During my lifetime, the church has not grown numerically in the United States. In fact, the church has declined.

Now, what are the reasons for this? Why has this period of decline extended some fifty years? It isn't due to a lack of resources – money, facilities, programs, etc. It isn't due to a lack of opportunity. Assuredly, this generation has been presented with greater opportunities for growth than before.

Moreover, during my lifetime, we have become keenly aware of specific symptoms that have manifested as spiritual afflictions among God's people. However, we have not correctly diagnosed the real issue. We are merely attempting to treat the symptoms with sermons to address them, programs to treat them, and policies to correct, or even ignore them. Yet, the decline persists.

When we speak of symptoms, and there are many, it is because we have observed a decline in church attendance, the weekly contribution, and prolonged periods of soul-winning droughts. We see divorce, homosexuality, worldliness, juvenile delinquency, immodesty, and drunkenness among the members. We know of church divisions, bitterness, envy, and strife. We have witnessed apostasies both individually and congregationally. We have heard false doctrines and witnessed great doctrinal confusion among the people of God. The church has been led by men, oftentimes, who have a form of godliness but deny its power. Yet, again, these are merely symptoms of a greater problem – a sickness that manifests itself in these ways. In fact, my contention is that any symptom we may list can be attributed to the things we shall discuss.

The sickness we speak of is found in the troubled Christian's mind. It is a spiritual disorder of the mind – a spiritual depression. The Bible often speaks of this condition. David asked, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?" (Psalm 42:5a) His desire to overcome this spiritual depression caused him to look beyond it and trustingly write, "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance" (Psalm 42:5b).

The causes of such a state of spiritual depression are as many as the symptoms created by it. We can classify them under two headings – external factors and internal factors. However, whether we speak of the factors as being external or internal, they are due to the influence and attack of Satan. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Moreover, "our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). And we live among those, "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

In this "present evil age" (Galatians 1:4) and into a world "under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19), Christians are charged to keep the mission of Christ alive and preach the gospel. Conflict in the world is often assured in the New Testament for the child of God. Paul put it bluntly when he said, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). The question is not *if* but *when* – "My brethren, count it all joy *when* you fall into various trials" (James 1:2),

Various trials will come and can often be very discouraging to a Christian. During these times, we can "grow weary while doing good (Galatians 6:7), fall into a mood of spiritual depression, regression, and digression, ultimately leading to apostasy. We have seen this among

members and entire congregations of the body of Christ. In a state of spiritual depression, it is often challenging to remember that “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4); and that “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13). The words of Jesus which instruct us “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1) seem like more of an impossible struggle than normative Christian behavior during prolonged periods of spiritual depression.

If spiritual depression goes unchecked, it will inevitably lead to spiritual regression. A person will “drift away” (Hebrews 2:1) from the Lord and back into the world. A church may leave its first love (Revelation 2:4). If the regression persists, it will become dead (Revelation 3:1). What is true of the body collectively is true of the member particularly. Such states of spiritual depression, regression, and digression explain why we have lost so many members to worldliness and waywardness. A church cannot grow numerically in a state of depression, regression, or digression. A Christian cannot grow in God’s grace and knowledge if succumbing to such periods of despair and darkness.

Yet, even while such spiritual fainting is becoming increasingly prevalent and problematic in the church, the Bible continues to provide hope, treatment, and cure for our spiritual maladies and infirmities. We must look to the holy scriptures to find rest for our souls. We must “consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls” (Hebrews 12:3).

Mindfulness

The Bible provides many treatments for one’s possible spiritual malaise, and many of these treatments are echoed by modern psychologists for treating physical depression. God provided the answers long before man created the field of psychology as an academic and practical discipline.

The first treatment we wish to discuss is mindfulness. The Christian must gird up the loins of his mind (1 Peter

1:13). Peter’s expression may seem strange today, but the metaphor reminds us that we are in a battle for the mind. The mind is the primary instrument used to glorify God. If we can be brainwashed through the wiles of the devil, the suffering we are called to endure can become crippling and even devastating to our faith.

For the Christian, mindfulness requires *remembering*. The church at Ephesus was told to remember from whence they had fallen (Revelation 2:5). The prodigal son had his moment of mindfulness when he came to himself and remembered the goodness of his father’s house (Luke 15:17 ff). In Timothy’s spiritual depression, he had to be reminded to “stir up the gift of God” in him (2 Timothy 1:6).

We must remember our calling and the precious place we have in the world as the people of God. We determine to add to our faith the virtues which characterize the Christian life, never forgetting, lest we become barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:8). “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (v.9).

We must remember the high price that was paid for our sins, “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). The death of our Lord should mean everything to us. It should inspire and energize us. The great love of God should dwell in our hearts and remind us daily that we are His and He is ours.

Loving God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, we remember the one work we must do – preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). If we do not preach the gospel, who will?

Let us remember that eternity awaits us. In eternity, we will be called to remember this life (Luke 16:25). Would we rather remember the awaiting eternity and live accordingly now, or live recklessly and remember a wasted life then? Either way, man will have to remember. It depends solely upon the disposition of mind, those things that will be remembered.

The Church of God in Corinth

Raymond Elliott

The apostle Paul wrote First Corinthians to the “church of God” in the city of Corinth. He referred to them as being “sanctified and called to be saints in Christ Jesus” and that is worthy to note. He also commended them at the beginning of this letter (1 Corinthians 1:1-9). However, there were many problems in the church that Paul dealt with and corrected. There were: (a) The factions (1:10-17); (b) The case of incest (5:1-7); (c) The lawsuits (6:1-8); (d) The abuse of the Lord’s Supper (chap.11). There were additional problems, but these will suffice for this article.

In chapter 5 we read about a very serious problem concerning “a man that has his father’s wife!” The woman was not the man’s mother, rather she was his father’s wife. And the man was committing fornication (*porneia*) with her. You can read in the rest of the chapter how they were to treat this brother. In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Paul wrote to the brethren regarding this brother who had been guilty of the terrible sin but who had undoubtedly repented. Paul wrote, “you ought rather to forgive and comfort him” and to “reaffirm your love to him.” The reason being, “lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.”

In 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9-11, we read about the character of some of the people who had responded to the gospel of Christ and who had become members of the church of God: “fornicators, idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor reviler, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” Also, observe that not all the members of the church in Corinth were guilty of these sins, but “some” were. In verse 11, Paul wrote, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” These vile sinners were washed in the blood of Jesus when they were baptized for the remission of their sins (1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 22:16, Revelation 1:5). They were declared to be

forgiven, holy and innocent when they gave their lives to God because they had been “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:3,5; Acts 2:38). They had been added to the church (Acts 2:47). And remember when God forgives a sinner, He also forgets their sins (Hebrews 8:12)!

Now consider the former life of the author of these letters to the church in Corinth. The apostle Paul in his defense before Agrippa described his former life as Saul the sinner, “Indeed, I thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and *when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them* (emphasis mine). And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:9-11).

Paul wrote later that he “obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” He also wrote that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:13-15). Paul knew that his sins had been ‘washed away by the blood of Jesus’ when was baptized (Acts 22:16); however, he seemed to have never forgotten his old life of sin. Furthermore, brethren were afraid of him, and it took Barnabas to inform them that Saul had truly been converted and had given his life to Christ, “and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:26-27).

Please consider the following:

- God, because of His divine nature, can forgive and forget the sins of the penitent, obedient sinner as mentioned in Psalm 103:12: “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Also, Hebrews 8:12, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, “and their sins and their lawless deeds: I will remember no more.”

- God “commands all men everywhere to repent” and “be converted, that your sins may be plotted out so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” Acts 17:30; 3:19; 2:38).
- The forgiveness of our sins is based on forgiving those who sin against us (Matthew 6:14,15).
- There are some sins that have a greater negative influence on the thinking of people and are more difficult to deal with, and often harder to forgive the guilty person. But we must be forgiving as the Lord taught us in Matthew 18:21-35.
- “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:10). Please remember that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Acts 3:23). We should also be reminded that we are sinners saved by the mercy, love and grace of God! (Ephesians 2:4-9).

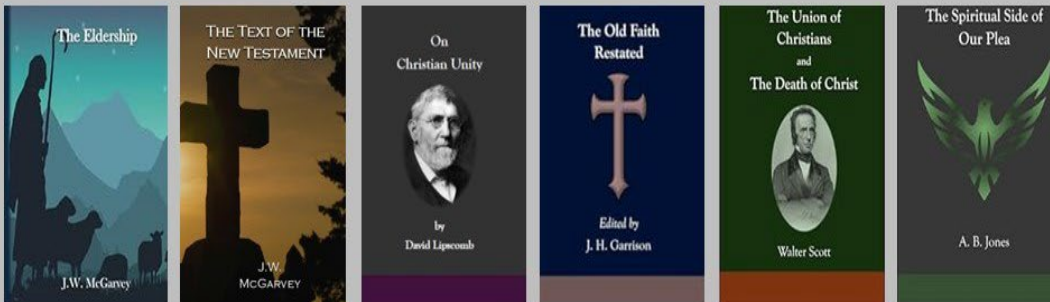
In Ephesians 4:32 we read, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” As children of God, we must be kind. This involves our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ and the penitent sinners.

“Brotherly kindness” is mentioned as one of the true characteristics of a child of God (2 Peter 1:7). After all, we are all kin to one another in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26,27). We should always be tenderhearted, that is to be compassionate toward others as was our Savior: “But when he saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

Oh, my brothers and sisters, we must be forgiving because our heavenly Father, in Christ Jesus, has forgiven us! And it is with kindness and love that I write that if these directives of the Holy Spirit are not found in our heart and are not in our practice, we should pray to God to forgive us and help us grow in these characteristics that should be found in the lives of the children of Heavenly Father.

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

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By Whose Authority?

Johnny O. Trail

Recently, an area congregation allowed a woman to pray for one who responded during the invitation. In response to this event, which was posted on social media, a good sister in Christ asked about the authority for such an action in the worship assembly.

Several responses were offered by members of the congregation where the event happened. Still, none of them answered the authority question or addressed the passage cited in contradistinction to the practice. Suffice it to say, we must seek authority for such a practice from the Bible, which does not exist. Colossians 3:17 says, "And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

One in defense of the action indicated that autonomous churches of the Lord's people are free to do as they choose. While autonomy is one characteristic of the Lord's church, it does not allow one to do as one desires. Autonomy is only exercised under the oversight of Christ, the head of the church. Any departure from biblical authority cannot be defended under the guise of congregational autonomy. Autonomy without Christ as the authority is like a body without the head. The church could not function scripturally and would be without biblical authority.

Moreover, Paul taught the same doctrine in every church he addressed or spoke to. 1 Corinthians 4:17 says, "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, *as I teach everywhere in every church [Emp.—JOT]*." The various churches mentioned in scripture are not denominational bodies located in different places with varied doctrine teachings.

As a matter of fact, they were encouraged to have the same mind and judgment in matters of doctrine and practice. 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions

among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." While congregations of the Lord's people were autonomous in nature, they were called upon to "speak the same thing," and be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Those instructions are applicable in our age, too.

In the same vein, the one making the argument for autonomy implied that the church is a "denomination." If the church one attends is a denomination, they had better seek the church that scripture describes. God has given us a pattern to discern regarding the hallmarks of the New Testament church. If it does not meet this pattern, it is not the church authorized in scripture.

Still, another tried to say that the events in Corinth regarding the exercise of the miraculous gift of prophecy by women authorized them to participate in the worship assembly. For such a deduction to be reasonable, several premises must be supported. For one thing, it must be assumed that the prophesying happened in a setting where men and women were present. The Apostle Paul never authorized a woman to have a leadership role over a man in a mixed worship assembly. 1 Timothy 2:12 says, "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence."

Moreover, the word prophesy must be taken into consideration. The Greek term for prophesy originates from two root terms: *Pro* (forth) and *phemi* (to speak). The term is more general than most people realize, and it can be translated as "to teach, refute, reprove, admonish, comfort" (Thayer 1958, pg. 553). Finally, the context of 1 Corinthians chapter eleven is about women wearing veils and not speaking in the church.

When interpreting any passage, context is of the utmost importance. In specific contexts, prophesying means praising God and giving thanks. Consider 1 Chronicles 25:3, "Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six,

under the direction of their father Jeduthun, *who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the LORD [Emp. JOT].*"

As referenced in I Timothy 2:12, it is to be pointed out that Paul did not allow a woman in a mixed worship assembly to have a leadership role. Wayne Jackson correctly points out, "The negative conjunction *oude* (nor) is explanatory in force, suggesting that the kind of female teaching prohibited is that which exercises dominion (i.e., leadership) over the man (Lenski

1964, 563; see also Arndt & Gingrich 1967, 595). And so, while it is clear that women of the early church did prophesy, it is equally certain that they did not subordinate men to the role of students in any public teaching capacity."¹

Sadly, some seek the unscriptural expansion of women's roles in the Lord's church. As with any position one seeks to advance, one must provide biblical authority for views. May we endeavor to seek the Bible's guidance in all matters of worship, morality, and godly living.

[The following article is a term paper submitted by one of the fine students at McGarvey College of the Bible.]

The Nicene Creed – What is it? What can we learn from it?

Thomas Southerland

The year 2025 marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The significance of this moment is crystallized in history because of the document it produced: the Nicene Creed. Various sects within Christendom utilize this creed as a confession of faith.

Christian theologians from generations that preceded the Nicene Creed generally focused on the oneness of God and "found distinctions within the Godhead mysterious."¹ However, in 325 AD, the Nicene Council convened to discuss theological concerns over the nature of divinity, especially the oneness of Christ with the Father. The council provided carefully processed answers to each of the questions studied.

The Council of Nicaea

The Roman Emperor Constantine played a pivotal role in the council's formation, but scholars debate his impact on the outcome of the theological topics. Even

though he lacked formal ecclesiastical authority, Constantine took an active role in the council.

F.W. Maddox writes, "It is interesting that although Constantine had not been baptized and held no church office, he yet took a very active part in discussing this difficult theological problem."² Constantine's primary concern was unity within church leadership. He viewed the brewing theological division as a danger to the civil and religious stability of the Roman Empire. Therefore, he sought to broker a consensus among the bishops. His philosophical outlook is evident in his appeal to unite despite intellectual diversity.

In a letter to Arius, Constantine urged the disputing parties to pursue unity:

"Even the philosophers themselves, although associated in one sect or profession, were frequently at variance on particular points. But although they differ, in consequence even of the excellence of their

¹ Jackson, Wayne (n.a.) "A Review of Recent Arguments for Women Preachers," Christian Courier. <https://christian-courier.com>

¹ J. N. D. Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1968), 224.

² F. W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing, 1961), 130.

knowledge, they again unite, on account of their fellowship, in the same general purpose.”³

The central theological issue addressed by the Council of Nicaea was the nature of Christ’s relationship to God the Father. The Arian controversy was the main point of contention among the various teachings circulating at the time. Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria, held a high-Christological view in that he believed that Jesus was more than a mere man. However, he began teaching in Alexandria that “Christ had no eternal pre-existence with God, who alone is eternal, unchanged.”⁴ He believed that Jesus was created and subordinate to the Father. He made his argument memorable by formulating the statement, “There was when he was not.”⁵ Athanasius, a bishop from Alexandria, stood in direct opposition to Arius, arguing for the co-eternal and consubstantial existence of Jesus.

Constantine, wary of the divisive potential of such debates, urged restraint. In a letter to Arius, he disapproved of the escalation of the debate: “You Arius, advanced that which should either not have entered into your mind at first, or after having gained admission, should have been locked up in silence.”⁶ Constantine’s intervention in these matters underscores the political dimensions of the council’s proceedings.

Other theological ideas also contributed to the debate. The Sabellians, a group associated with Modalistic Monarchianism, sought to preserve the deity of Jesus by proposing a successive revelation model. Modalists held that there was one God who “unfolds or expands himself into a threefold, successive revelation. First as the father in the Old Testament, then as the Son in the New Testament, and third in the Spirit by enlightening, quickening, and saving.”⁷ As Faulkner notes, these groups did not view Christ as a mere man in the modern “Unitarian sense, nor did they believe He came into the world by ordinary means.”⁸ Their views, while different from Arianism, further complicated the theological landscape.

The Relationship of the Father to the Son

The main challenge addressed by the Council of Nicaea was reconciling the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit with the monotheism of the Hebrew Scriptures. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut 6:4). This passage affirms the oneness of God that undergirds both Jewish and Christian theology. This foundational belief is affirmed in the opening statement of the creed, “We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.” However, the New Testament introduces complexity by attributing divine roles and attributes to Jesus. “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil 2:6). Who is, “The brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb 1:3). “Who is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). Of whom God said “Let all the angels of God worship him” (Heb 1:6).

The doctrine of creation presents another theological dilemma. Genesis 1 identifies God as the creator, while John 1 recognizes Jesus as the creator: “In the beginning was the Word... All things were made by him.” (John 1:1-3). The book of Hebrews declares that Jesus was the one, “By whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:2). “All things were created by him, and for him” (Col 1:16). If Jesus is not fully divine, then the Bible’s attribution of creation to him borders on blasphemy. It is wrong to assign a noncommunicable attribute of God, such as creatorship, to anyone other than God. Creatorship is unique to God alone. The Bible and the Nicene Creed articulate Jesus’s role in both physical and spiritual creation, and in doing so, expressly affirm his divine status.

Like the Bible, the creed utilizes the word begotten to emphasize the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father, by definition, must have progeny. His identity as a father is tied to the Son. The apostle John expresses this relationship: “For God so loved the world,

³ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History*, intro. Christian Frederick Cruse, with Isaac Boyle, Historical View of the Council of Nice (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955), 37.

⁴ John Alfred Faulkner, “The First Great Christian Creed,” *The American Journal of Theology* 14, no. 1 (1910): 47–61, accessed July 11, 2025, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3154902>.

⁵ Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 224.

⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 36.

⁷ Faulkner, “The First Great Christian Creed,” 47–61

⁸ Faulkner, “The First Great Christian Creed,” 47–61

that he gave his only begotten Son." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14). "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:18). "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." (1 John 1:9). The term "begotten" is crucial here. Jairus's daughter was his only begotten child (Luke 8:42). However, Isaac was also referred to as Abraham's "only begotten" (Heb 11:17), even though Abraham had another child, Ishmael. In biblical usage, the word begotten often denotes uniqueness.

The Nicene Creed uses the language of "begotten, not made" to distinguish the Son from created beings. Eusebius explains that the council wrote the final document this way because "made" is a term common to creatures, whereas "begotten" signifies a unique origin from the Father, of a more excellent substance than anything created.⁹ Though his views could be characterized as partially subordinationist, Justin Martyr says Jesus, "Was begotten from the Father, by His power and will, but not by abscission, as if the essence of the Father were divided; as all other things partitioned and divided are not the same after as before they were divided."¹⁰ Even though they may not rise to the full Nicene view, Martyr's writings relate a high view of Christ in the second century and are early attestations to the oneness of the Father and the Son.

The phrase "begotten before all worlds" affirms the Son's eternal existence within the creed. The council did not invent this belief; it was a widely held truth they affirmed in writing. In the early third century, Tertullian believed that the Son was "never separated from the Father or different from the Father because 'I and the Father are one.'" This will be the projection of truth, the guardian of

unity, by which we say that the Son was brought forth from the Father, but not separated."¹¹

The Athanasian view during the time of the Nicene Council holds that Jesus Christ, as Logos, existed eternally with the Father and was revealed in time through the incarnation.¹² Lewis Ayres does not think the Athanasian view represented a full trinitarian argument.¹³ However, the Nicene Creed is evidence enough to show it contains the necessary elements to yield the correct language regarding the eternity of the Son. It is essential to recognize that Nicene theology was not monolithic or fully developed in the minds of its early defenders. Athanasius, though a staunch pro-Nicene figure, did not always articulate a fully formed trinitarian framework. Some of his arguments were not carried forward into later tradition. His emphasis on unity and diversity within the Godhead emerged gradually and did not become structurally central until later.

The creed states that the Son is "consubstantial with the Father."¹⁴ The term homoousion (ὁμοούσιον) is used here, meaning "of the same essence." This wording became a theological milestone when incorporated into the Nicene Creed. It asserts that the Son shares the same divine nature as the Father. He is not of a similar essence, but of the same essence. Augustine clearly summarized the doctrine of the Trinity: "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of one single and the same substance or essence." This statement encapsulates the Nicene vision of three distinct persons, yet one divine essence.¹⁵

Augustine later elaborates on the Godhead, "The names 'Father' and 'Son' indicate relationship but not substance,"¹⁶ preserving unity and equality within the Godhead. Even later, Alexander Campbell, who disagreed with Augustine on many things, is in harmony with him on the oneness of the Father and Son, stating: "an idea cannot be without an image or a word to represent it," suggesting that the Word (Logos) is the eternal

⁹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 45.

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 128.

¹¹ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, trans. W. J. Sparrow-Simpson and W. K. Lowther Clarke (London/New York: Macmillan, 1920), ch. 8, 44.

¹² Faulkner, "The First Great Christian Creed," 47–61.

¹³ Lewis Ayres, "A Response to the Critics of Nicaea and Its Legacy," *Harvard Theological Review* 100, no. 2 (2007): 159–71, accessed July 12, 2025, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4495110...>

¹⁴ Nicene Creed.

¹⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate* I.2.4.

¹⁶ Augustine, *De Trinitate* V.

expression of the Father's mind. The Son or Logos was never absent, never created.¹⁷ Thus, the same historic Christian belief is held throughout many centuries, as well as being affirmed by the Nicene Creed.

Christological Affirmations

The Nicene Creed's Christological affirmations are among its most theologically rich and historically contested elements. These statements were crafted not only to affirm the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ but also to refute heresies that threatened sound doctrine within the early church.

The 325 version of the creed includes the phrase "God of God," which was later omitted in subsequent revisions but remains clarified by the phrase "Very God of Very God." Once again, this is a statement that points to the co-eternal and consubstantial nature of the Son, who is not subordinate to God, but the express image of God (Heb 1:3).

The apostle John emphasizes the light and deity of Jesus in his writings. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not... That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:4–5, 9). These expressions emphasize the full divinity of Christ, affirming that he is subordinate to God, but truly God in essence and being. Just as light from light is of the same essence, so is the Son from the Father.

Concerning the human incarnation of Jesus, the creed states: "Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate."¹⁸ The belief that the incarnation of Christ was not just a divine appearance, but a redemptive act is reflected here. Christ's descent from his place of heavenly glory is not figurative or symbolic. The incarnation of Christ is Jesus's literal movement from the side of God from all eternity, downward into the human experience. His purpose and motivation are clear;

Christ came to Earth for the salvation of humanity. This was a point of general agreement among early Christians, though the mechanics of the incarnation sparked intense debate.

Jesus is described by both the Bible and the Nicene Creed as being made flesh by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (Matthew 1:18,23). This affirms both the divine and human natures of Christ. Shaff states that, "Mary is not merely the mother of Jesus' human nature, but of the theanthropic person, the union of divine and human natures in one person. However, she is not the mother of the eternal Logos in His pre-incarnate state but of the incarnate Logos."¹⁹

The capitalized "V" in virgin denotes a progression towards Mariolatry. The later use of terms like God-bearer were controversial. While intended to affirm the unity of Christ's person, such terms also contributed to the rise of Mariolatry. Shaff promotes a safer theological approach. He advises adhering to New Testament designations such as **μήτηρ Ἰησοῦ** (mother of Jesus) or **μήτηρ τοῦ Κυρίου** (mother of the Lord), which preserve reverence without theological excess.²⁰

The council affirmed in their writing that the Son, "Was made man." Docetism held that all flesh was evil; thus, Jesus could not be real flesh and blood but was instead an apparition. This phrase was placed in the creed to affirm the full humanity of Christ and counter Docetism, which denied the reality of Christ's human nature. He was not merely appearing as man, nor was his body a shell for divinity. He became truly human, sharing in the full experience of human life yet without sin as stated in Hebrews 4:15 "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

The creed includes all the basic elements of Jesus's suffering, stating that Jesus was, "Crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, buried, rose the third day." This summarizes the Biblical account of the crucifixion and

¹⁷ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (Pittsburg: Forrester & Campbell, 1839), 39.

¹⁸ Nicene Creed, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 14 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 13

¹⁹ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 2, *The Greek and Latin Creeds with Translations* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 64.

²⁰ Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 64.

resurrection in much the same way that Paul did in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4. The historical specificity of “Pontius Pilate” grounds the crucifixion in real time and space. “The subject of suffering was the theanthropic person, Jesus Christ in His unified divine-human nature. Yet, suffering occurred according to His human nature, since divinity, by definition, cannot suffer.”²¹ This distinction preserves both the integrity of Christ’s divinity and the authenticity of His human experience.

The resurrection is central to the gospel and thus viewed by the council as necessary to write into the creed. That Jesus, “Rose the third day”²² affirms both Old Testament prophecy and New Testament historical witness. The resurrection is the vindication of Christ’s identity and the foundation of Christian hope. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).

Another phrase deemed essential to understanding the relationship of the Father and Son concerns the ascension and return of Jesus. He is said by the creed to have “Ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father and will come again with glory.” The ascension marks the return of Christ to divine glory, as he was before his incarnation. It is recorded in Acts 1:9 “While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” His promised return (John 14:3), is both a future hope and an anchor to the Christian soul (Heb 6:19). It affirms that the world is constantly marching toward a divine encounter with the Son in his glory as revealed in 2 Peter 3:10.

The Holy Spirit

The latter portion of the Nicene Creed was revised in 381 AD. It was expanded to include a more precise statement on the Holy Spirit. This development was deemed necessary by the Council of Constantinople for affirming the Spirit’s divinity. The Spirit is identified in the creed as “The Lord and giver of life who proceeds from the Father

and the Son.” “The giver of life,” affirms his divine role in creation, regeneration, and sanctification. This is an accurate synopsis of the Biblical account of the Spirit’s role: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” (Gen 1:2), “The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.” (Job 33:4), “And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Romans 8:10). This language elevates the Spirit beyond a mere force or influence, identifying Him as a divine person within the Trinity as also seen in Acts 5:3–5, where Annanias and his wife were guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit which was tantamount to lying to God.

“Who is worshiped and glorified... Who spoke by the prophets” The affirmation of worship and glory places the Spirit within the same category of reverence with both the Father and the Son. The Spirit “spoke by the prophets” and thus, claimed his role in divine revelation. “But holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet 1:21). The inspiration of Scripture is attributed to the Spirit, in a way that links the Old Testament prophecies to the divine instruction given to the New Testament church.

The phrase “proceeds from the Father and the Son” became a significant point of contention. The original creed stated that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The phrase “and the Son,” was added later, leading to heated theological divisions. However, the biblical text supports the idea of the Spirit proceeding both from the Father and the Son. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26). The inclusion was intended to affirm the Spirit’s full participation in the divine essence. Turner expresses the timelessness of the trinity to include the Holy Spirit: “The Father is not older than the Son, and the Holy Spirit is neither older nor younger than the Father or Son.”²³

²¹ Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 64.

²² NPNF

²³ Rex Turner, *Biblical Theology: Fundamentals of the Faith*, ed. Don Shackelford, Rev. Augmented ed. (Montgomery: Amridge University Press, 2010), 91.

This point counters any notion of temporal hierarchy and reinforces the coeternity of the three persons.

The Church, Baptism, and the Return of Jesus

The final clauses of the Nicene Creed shift from doctrinal affirmations to declarations of the church's nature, how it functions, and eschatology. This section describes the assembly of God as "One holy catholic and apostolic church."²⁴ This fourfold description of the church encapsulates its identity. The church is one. It is united in faith and fellowship. This agrees with Ephesians 4:4–6. The church is holy: Set apart for God's purposes (Eph 5:27). The church is catholic. It is universal in scope and mission (1 Cor 1:10). Finally, the church is apostolic, being rooted in the teachings and authority of the apostles (Eph 2:19–21). These attributes were intended to distinguish the true church from heretical sects and to affirm continuity with the apostolic foundation.

The Nicene Creed articulates "One baptism for the remission of sins." Baptism is presented as a singular, unifying event in the life of a Christian. It was to be received as the entry point into the church and a life of grace. Rex Turner astutely observes "the formula of baptism prescribed by Jesus in Matthew 28:19, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, implies a trinitarian understanding of God." Thus the "eternal name of the Godhead is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— coeternal and consubstantial."²⁵

The creed concludes with a declaration of Christian hope: the resurrection of the dead and eternal life by confirming belief in the "Resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." In accordance with biblical language (John 5:29), this affirms that history is not cyclical or meaningless but directed toward a divine consummation (2 Pet 3:12). The resurrection is both physical and spiritual (1 Cor 15:44), and the "life of the world to come" is not a comforting abstract thought, but a concrete promise rooted in the physical resurrection of Christ.

Jesus said, "if it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2).

Conclusion

The precise language of the Nicene Creed accurately conveys biblical truths in places where the scriptural language might be ambiguous. An important lesson reveals itself in the zeal and diligence of those who convened at the Council of Nicaea; though clarity is desirable, caution must be taken to ensure the writing of creeds does not impose biases onto biblical texts that are not explicit in the original meaning. Eusebius viewed the creed as a middle-of-the-road compromise,²⁶ a diplomatic effort to preserve unity without completely alienating those with differing views. The creed's precision and scriptural grounding have withstood the test of time, having been affirmed by many, though not all, Christians for generations.

At its core, the doctrine of the Trinity presented in the Nicene Creed is not a philosophical abstraction but a faithful articulation of the plain teaching of Scripture.²⁷ Even though the word Trinity is not used in scripture, "Theologically, we will be safe in using the word if we are careful to define it as the term that shows the distinctions in the one divine essence of the three personalities-Father."²⁸ The creed's language — "God of God", "Light of Light," and "begotten, not made" — reflects a careful effort to preserve biblical truth while guarding against false teaching. The affirmation that Jesus Christ is consubstantial with the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is glorified alongside them, anchors the Christian confession upon the oneness of God while acknowledging personal distinctions within the Godhead.

Whether they consent to the Nicene Creed or not, Christians essentially embrace the principles laid out therein through faith in the Bible. To confess that Jesus is the Son of God is to embrace the heart of the gospel. It is the necessary condition for salvation, the gateway into the church, and the prerequisite for baptism. These acts

²⁴ Nicene Creed.

²⁵ Turner, *Biblical Theology*, 91

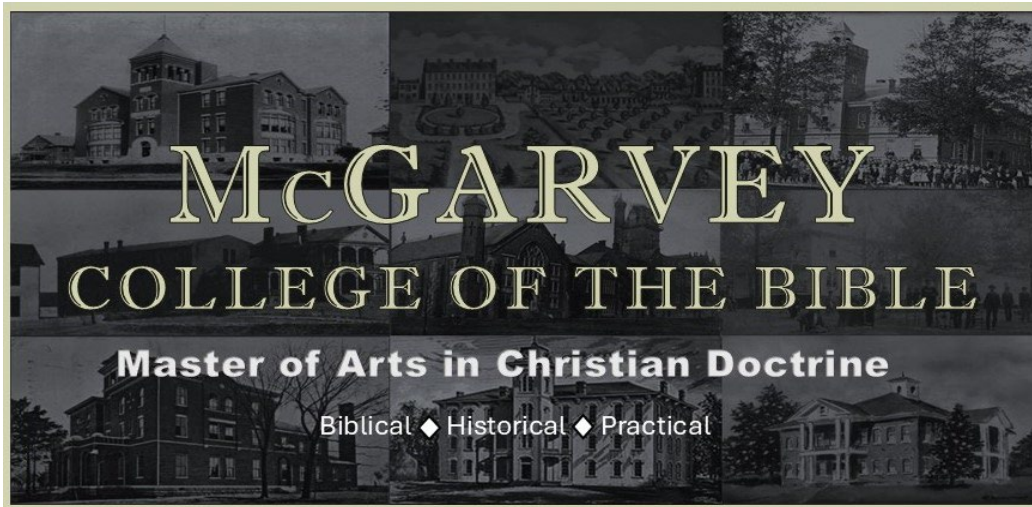
²⁶ F Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom*, 130.

²⁷ James R. White, "Loving the Trinity", Volume 21 / Number 4 issue of the Christian Research Journal, Christian Research Institute, accessed August 19, 2025, <http://www.equip.org>.

²⁸ J. J. Turner and Edward P. Myers, *Doctrine of the Godhead: A Study of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1985), 39.

— confession, baptism, and worship are not mechanical rituals but expressions of faith. They embody the believer's trust in the revelation of God's nature through the scriptures, and our hope in the redemptive work of Christ. The Nicene Creed, though uninspired and not viewed as

authoritative, is still worthy of study. It accurately conveys the Bible's teachings in a way that genuinely binds the church together in shared belief and hope in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



It has been a busy time for McGarvey College of the Bible. Our summer classes have concluded, and our fall classes will soon begin. We will again have students enrolled in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the United States. We will study subjects specifically addressing the Bible's teaching on salvation and scripture.

We are pleased to report on the progress many students are making in their studies, and their ability to write for publication is improving. Writing clearly and well offers many advantages to a preacher in terms of grammar, vocabulary, logic, sequence of thought, and confidence in public speaking.

We are also generally impressed with the students' doctrinal soundness. Love for the truth is essential to every gospel preacher and those who aspire to preach. It is heartwarming to teach men who are genuinely dedicated to the Lord and desire to know and do His will.

I have been travelling recently and preaching in gospel campaigns and meetings in West Virginia and Oklahoma. The campaign in West Virginia resulted in over 200 Christians requesting prayer for spiritual renewal and strength. The meetings in Oklahoma were conducted consecutively by the Meeker and Prague congregations, with each

church and other area churches supporting one another. The two congregations coordinating their meetings and supporting each other worked very well and increased their spirit of fellowship.

In the coming weeks, I will give reports on MCOB on Sunday evenings for various churches. If you are in the area, I would love to see you!

Sept. 21 – Smyrna CoC (Culleoka, TN) 5 pm

Sept. 28 – Poplar Grove CoC (McEwen, TN) 5 pm

Oct. 5 – Liberty CoC (Gleason, TN) 6 pm

Oct. 12 – Sycamore Chapel CoC (Ashland City, TN) 6 pm

Oct. 19 – Curry CoC (Curry, AL) 5 pm

Oct. 26 – Wartburg CoC (Wartburg, TN) 6 pm

Nov. 2 – Washington Street CoC (Fayetteville, TN) 5 pm

Nov. 9 – St. Andrews Road CoC (Columbia, SC) 10 am

Please feel free to contact me for more information about this work.

Andy Erwin

drandyerwin@mcgarveycollege.online

The Wrath and Love of God (Part One)

Joshua Seth Houston

Debates concerning the character, nature, attributes, and essence of God continue to plague theological discussions. At the center of such deliberations is debate concerning God's love and wrath. Issues concerning how God's love and God's wrath comingle as divine attributes bring into question the problem of evil, universal salvation, and divine justice. Such questions have instituted a theological doctrine that I will call "separationism." Separationism asserts that God's wrath and love cannot unite simultaneously in one divinely perfect entity. Separationism understands wrath and love as singular and divided terms (i.e., God is all wrath or all love but never both). However, separationism is not compatible with a biblical theology of God because God's holiness is the foundation for his attributes. Wrath and love not only coexist within the holy nature of God but rely on one another for their own existence.

The Problem of Separationism

Separationism presents two primary perspectives: either God's love outweighs his wrath, which would therefore impart salvation to all whether they choose to accept it or not or God's wrath against sinners will result in the total annihilation of all evildoers. The debate is not a new one. Most notably, one may observe Tertullian's

¹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, trans. Peter Holmes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), 1.

² Tollinton observes Marcion's infatuation with the subject when he writes, "The dissimilarity between the harsh and just deity of the one and the good and gentle God of the other, impressed [Marcion] more and more." See R. B. Tollinton, "The Two Elements in Marcion's Dualism," *JTS* 17 (1916): 265.

³ This saying made waves when the Christian singer, Kim Burrell, used it as a response to homosexuality, resulting in her

introduction to his work *Against Marcion*. He writes, "Wherein is described the god of Marcion. He is shown to be utterly wanting in all the attributes of the true God."¹

One may call Marcion the first proponent of separationism. Marcion (c. 85–c. 160) asserted that the God of the OT is evil and the God of the NT is one of righteousness and love.²

Separationism is gaining popularity within contemporary Christian circles. Modern mantras such as "Love the sinner, hate the sin" express such separations in which the sinner is separated from the sin.³ However, a biblical theology of sin never separates the sin from the sinner. This does not negate God's love for the sinner. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (John 3:16), and God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). This does not imply that God will force salvation on humanity.⁴ The gift of salvation is freely given, but it must also be freely received.

Is God defined by his actions or is there a singular constant that contextualizes his character? If God's actions define who God is, the definition of "God" must be ever-changing since his actions are ever changing. Thus, one cannot define God based on his actions alone. The second option is to define God based on his essence (i.e., his foundational feature). But is God like water where the material is the union of multiple components? One looks at water

removal from the *Ellen* show. See Jonathan Merritt, "One Problem with Kim Burrell's 'Hate the Sin, Love the Sinner' Argument," *USA Today*, January 4, 2017.

⁴ Universalism makes the choice of salvation an impossibility. Universalism teaches that God's redeeming quality extends to all regardless of the person's desire to accept or reject it. However, love must be freely given and freely received. Though on the surface, universalism highlights the love of God, the doctrine pol-lutes the love of God by taking away the quality of freedom.

and says, “Yes, this is water,” without stopping to think that water is composed of two elements—hydrogen and oxygen. Even still, these atoms (whether hydrogen or oxygen) are composed of protons, neutrons, and electrons. To ask, “What is water?” is to ask both “What are the attributes of water?” (i.e., colorless, transparent, odorless, etc.) and to ask, “What is water made of?” In the same way, one must define God’s attributes based on his essence.

Since the enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the definition of “God” has become a philosophical query rather than a theological assertion.⁵ J. I. Packer states, “There was a time when the subject of God’s attributes (as it was called) was thought so important as to be included in the catechism . . . which all adult members were expected to know.”⁶ There is admittedly a danger of defining God. Either one risks placing God in our context or one risks placing ourselves in his. Definitions of God range from one-word descriptions (e.g., love, holy, perfect, eternal, etc.) to theological treatises and scholarly monographs. Charles Hodge suggests the Westminster Shorter Catechism holds the best definition of God, which states, “God is Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”⁷ The catechism defines God in two categories: external and internal. God’s external being is Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. God’s internal being is wise, powerful, holy,

just, good, and true. The Westminster Shorter Catechism’s inclusion of “holy” as an internal description of God places holiness alongside the other qualities. However, the internal qualities (i.e., wise, powerful, just, good, and true) are not theologically significant in themselves. The fact that the God possess these qualities does not in itself make the God of the Bible any different from the gods of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, or Rome. To be sure, humanity possess such attributes. God defines wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and truth only when these standards are set in holiness. Holiness then belongs as a quality of God’s external being. For God to be “God” he must both define holiness and be defined by holiness.

As Thomas Aquinas wrote, Since the object of the will is some good which the intellect appreciates, God can will only what accords with his wisdom. His wisdom is like a law of justice. It ensures that his will is right and just, and that he does justly whatever he does by his will, in the same way as we do legitimately whatever we do according to the law. But while we obey the law of one who is above us, God is a law unto himself.⁸

God’s wrath appears in the context of divine judgment always as a reaction. Love differs in that love is active and stative simultaneously. There is never a moment when love is absent from God. Conversely, God can exist without exerting wrath. When contextualized by holiness, wrath

⁵ Immanuel Kant concludes that religion must fall outside the scope of theoretical reason. However, instead of atheism or agnosticism, Kant advanced “philosophical theology” that grounds religion on practical reason. Kant sought to establish the limits to knowledge “in order to make room for faith.” Such a faith has its source in the needs of pure practical reason, and it is through these needs that Kant maintains that we can extend our cognition for practical purposes. This allows the formation of a conception of God and the afterlife in the service of the highest good. Kant coins the term “pure rational faith.” Note that Kant always intends by these terms to be practical rather than theoretical. See, Lawrence Pasternack and Courtney Fugate, “Kant’s

Philosophy of Religion,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edited by Edward N Zalta, Stanford University, 2021, Accessed 8 Nov. 2021. See also, Paul Helm, “Philosophy of Religion,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 6, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophy-of-religion>.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 21.

⁷ Packer, *Knowing God*, 21.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A. M. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978), 87.

presents itself in the form of judgment and discipline. Judgment and discipline exist in the context of love.

Separationism in the Church Fathers

Separationism is not overtly present in the patristic authors, although some allusions to the issue occur. While some early Christian commentators denied God's ability to be wrathful on the basis of his divine love, the majority defended God's wrath by differentiating between divine wrath and human anger.⁹ For example, John Chrysostom uses God's wrath as a motivator for the spiritually fallen Theodore to repent.¹⁰ Chrysostom's letter to Theodore, though heavy on themes of repentance, includes a discussion of God's love toward sinners.¹¹ Furthermore, Irenaeus categorizes the wrath of God into temporary, moderate, and eternal classes, which all proceed out of righteousness.¹² The monk, John Cassian, evaluated wrath from a human perspective suggesting that wrath is not appropriate in the life of the Christian except in matters of hating sin.¹³

The greatest promotion of separationism comes from Marcion. I have briefly introduced Marcion's beliefs above; thus, I will not revisit them here. Lactantius is most helpful as he offers a rebuttal to philosophical arguments concerning the wrath and love of God.

Many persons [believe] ... that God is not subject to anger; since the divine nature is either *altogether* beneficent, and that it is inconsistent with his surpassing and

excellent power to do injury to anyone; or, at any rate, he takes no notice of us at all, so that no advantage comes to us from his goodness, and no evil from His ill-will (emphasis added).¹⁴

The word "altogether" presents the greatest point of confusion. The consensus of those asserting this doctrine is that God is completely, wholly, and totally beneficent, which reflects God's universal love. This is also Marcion's fallacy. For the philosophers, either God is all-loving and thus cannot exert wrath or God does not care implying the existence or nonexistence of God has no bearing on humanity.

Augustine's homilies on 1 John (an exposition on the love of God) and Chrysostom's letter to Theodore (an exposition on the wrath of God against sinners) both allow room for both love and wrath as extensions of God's righteousness. A short comparison of both demonstrates that the authors understand God as sovereign and righteous, which allows God to extend love to the obedient and wrath to the disobedient. For Chrysostom, Irenaeus, and Augustine, God's righteousness supersedes all else.

Holiness: God's Fundamental Essence

"Holy" is both a state of being (i.e., noun) and a description of the being (i.e., adjective). Charles Hodge defines holiness as a general term for the moral excellence of God.¹⁵ Therefore, God's holiness exists in an *ex lex* system, that is, God is not bound by any external law.¹⁶

⁹ Michael McCarthy, "Divine Wrath and Human Anger: Embarrassment Ancient and New," *Theol* 70 (2009): 847.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *An Exhortation to Theodore after His Fall* 1.10 (NPNF 1/9:98–99).

¹¹ Chrysostom, *An Exhortation*, 95.

¹² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.28.1 (ANF 1:501).

¹³ John Cassian, *The Twelve Books of John Cassian on the Institutes of The Coenobia, and the Remedies for the Eight Principal Faults* 8.6.259 (NPNF 2/11.259). See also, 8.7.259.

¹⁴ Lactantius, *A Treatise on the Anger of God* 8.159 (ANF 7:243).

¹⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1895), 413.

¹⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 414.

Rather, God is a law unto himself. The issue then is not whether God can do immoral things (e.g., lie, murder, steal, etc.) but that to do such things exists outside his nature. The “holiness” of God does not refer to a divine attribute. Holiness is the fullness of God—a synonym of his deity. God does not do holiness; holy is what God is. That is not to say, however, that God does not do holy things. Justice, mercy, grace, truth, love, and wrath must all occur in the realm of holiness. Holiness itself is not an action. Holiness is a state of being.

God is the source of holiness. John Schmitt writes concerning the holiness of Israel, “The Israelites are to be holy because their God is holy, yet this God is not seen in the Torah as ‘the Holy One’ who simply epitomizes holiness.”¹⁷ Though Schmitt is correct in asserting such a title does not exist for God in the Pentateuch, one cannot deny that themes of holiness appear throughout Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.¹⁸ The charge to “be holy as I am holy” (Lev 21:8; Exod 19:6) implies that Israel cannot be holy outside of their relationship with God, which is modeled in the law of Moses. Clifford Barbarick suggests that, because God extends his holiness to humanity, one can become like God by means sanctification in Jesus.¹⁹

The community will embody the holiness of God (moral transformation), but they do so only because they have been born anew from the imperishable seed of the word of God (ontological transformation). In 1 Peter, therefore, theosis is divinely empowered. Humans do not achieve deification through their own efforts. Rather, the author

repeatedly attributes the means of the transformation to the work of the Father, Son, and spirit.²⁰

Thus, those who become holy only do so by means of God’s provision through Jesus Christ. Humanity cannot achieve holiness on its own. Such a notion is popular in Martin Luther’s theology. Luther’s idea of “passive holiness” asserts that God alone is intrinsically holy and that all other holiness derives from him. This means that without God, nothing can ever be holy on its own.²¹ Because of his holiness, God invites us to become holy through the work of Jesus on the cross.²²

Since holiness is the fundamental essence of God, holiness must be the foundation on which every attribute of God exists. Admittedly, there is a sense in which the equation God = holy (and reflexively, holy = God) is circular reasoning. If God’s truth does not rest on holiness, God is nothing more than an objective know-it-all, a walking encyclopedia. If God’s love does not rest on holiness, God is nothing more than a heavenly hippie. If God’s wrath does not rest on holiness, God is nothing more than a tantrum thrower. However, such assumptions assert human moral and ethical reasoning (whether deontological, teleological, or relative) over God’s nature. God’s holiness, while encompassing these qualities, surpasses purity, separation, sanctification, and righteousness. These things exist within holiness but cannot define holiness on their own. Holiness is the transcendent nature of God.

To Be Concluded in the Next Issue of the *Gospel Gleaner*.

¹⁷ John Schmitt, “The God of Israel and the Holy One,” *HS* 24 (1983): 27.

¹⁸ The Mosaic laws demand separation from surrounding nations. Even God’s holy place in the tabernacle separates God’s presence from all else.

¹⁹ See Clifford Barbarick, “You Shall Be Holy, For I Am Holy: Theosis in 1 Peter,” *JTI* 9 (2015): 287–97.

²⁰ Barbarick, “You Shall Be Holy,” 297.

²¹ John Kleinig, “Luther on the Reception in God’s Holiness,” *ProEccl* 17 (2008): 77.

²² Emmanuel Durand, “God’s Holiness: A Reappraisal of Transcendence,” *ModTheol* 34 (2018): 420.

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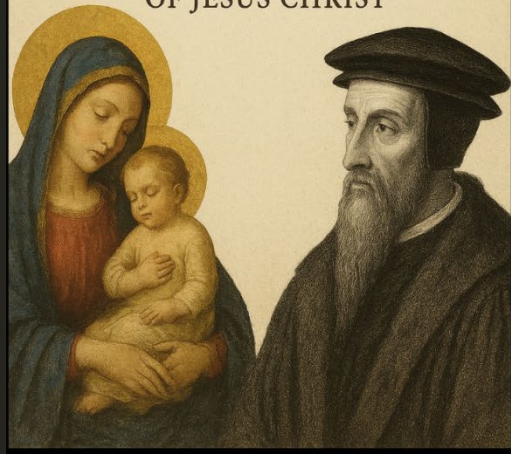


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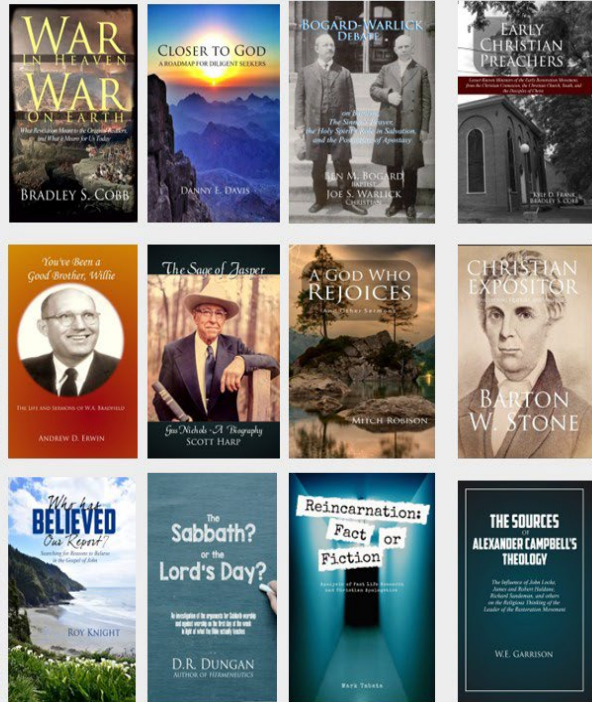
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