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The Existence of God

Robert Waggoner

You'll probably agree with the proposition that what people believe about God is a determining factor in how people behave. You'll probably also agree that such is true not only for individuals but also for societies. This means that whenever people believe in God, they have a consistent, single standard that motivates their behavior because God is one (Romans 3:30; Galatians 3:20; James 2:19) and he is unchanging (Psalm 15:4; Malachi 3:16; Hebrews 6:18; James 1:17). Therefore, collectively speaking, a society of believers will have a united society that strives to conform to the will of God.

However, whenever individuals do not believe in God, they have inconsistent and pluralistic standards motivating their behaviors because they are many and often change their minds. Therefore, collectively speaking, a society of non-believers will have a divided and permissive society that fluctuates according to the whims of its people.

A society with large segments of both believers and non-believers will find itself fraught with constant competition within its governing agencies. That is where we are in our country today. Belief in whether or not God exists therefore has practical im-

portance, not only for individuals, but also for societies as a whole.

How believers and disbelievers behave differently can be demonstrated in various ways. Believers in God affirm that God created the world (Genesis 1:1; Nehemiah 9:6; Isaiah 42:5; Revelation 10:6), that he interacts with humanity that he is the supreme law-giver, and that he will judge everyone. He will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Disbelievers in God deny these propositions. Notice how people behave differently in accordance with their beliefs about each of these propositions.

If you believe that God is your maker and that you were made in his image (Genesis 1:27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7), then you will believe that since God is spirit (John 4:24; 2 Corinthians 3:17) you also have a spiritual nature (Isaiah 42:5; 1 Corinthians 2:11) that needs to be nourished by the word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). On the other hand, if you deny that God is your maker, then you will consider yourself only physical in nature, and will not look to God for guidance.

If you believe that God is the supreme lawgiver, i.e., that God provides the ethical, social, political, cultural and legal standards for life (Genesis 1:28; 5:13-21; 8:16-17; 12:1-3; Exodus 3:5ff; 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 4:2; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 22:36-40), then you are likely to believe that there are absolute universal

standards applicable to everyone and you will yield yourself to obeying his commandments (Luke 18:20; 1 John 2:3-4). Moreover, you will want everyone else in your community to abide by his commandments because it will provide uniformity within your society.

On the other hand, if you do not believe in the existence of God, then you are likely to think that there are no absolute universal standards and you will not obey his commandments. Without God, law and ethics are considered relative, situational and autonomous. Your personal ethical standards may easily shift to the fluctuating political, social, and cultural values of your permissive society.

If you believe that God interacts with humanity as he did through Noah, Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and the apostles to bless humanity, then you may think that God may act through you to accomplish his purposes (Romans 8:28). You will probably seek to influence your community to be righteous (Proverbs 11:11; 14:34).

On the other hand, if you believe that there is no God then you will not be motivated toward godly living because you will probably believe that everyone's lifestyle is equally valid. You may not seek to influence your community toward godliness because you may consider that the wisdom of humanity is sufficient for its own

guidance. You may even think that believers in God are unrealistic.

If you believe that God will resurrect you from the dead (John 5:28-29) and that God will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:32), then you will probably seek to obey God's commandments, acknowledge that you sin, repent, and live righteously in order that you may have eternal life with God (John 3:15-16; Romans 2:7; Galatians 6:8). You will probably also strive to persuade others to live righteously in order that they too may have everlasting life.

On the other hand, if you believe that you will not be resurrected nor be judged by God, then you may be inclined to selfishly seek the pleasures and fortunes of this life. Moreover, you may have little incentive to care about the misfortunes of others (Luke 16:19-31).

These examples of contrasting beliefs are only a few of many that might be given, but they are enough to illustrate that belief in God is important and relevant not only for individuals but also for societies as a whole. How then can you prove to others that God exists?

Through the centuries, people have pondered about how to answer that question. Of course, the Bible declares that God exists but biblical declarations are considered not valid by disbelievers. Therefore, arguments that are meaningful to them must come from human reasoning.

Five major arguments from reason for believing in the existence of God may be stated briefly. **First**, religion exists in all cultures. While cultures may differ in their religious beliefs, no culture has ever been known not to be religious. That fact indicates that religion is ingrained within the human psyche. People look with awe at the immensity and grandeur of the universe and attribute its greatness to super human intelligence and power. Hence, there must be a God. This is called the intuitive argument for God.

Second, since it is impossible for people to think about that which does not exist and since people can think about God, then God must exist. God is considered to be "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." This is known as the ontological argument.

Third, within every individual there is a sense of "ought," i.e., some behaviors are right and other behaviors are wrong. There may be differences in what is considered by different cultures as being right and wrong, but everyone has an inherent sense of what ought to be. This is designated as the moral or anthropological argument.

Fourth, everything affected must have an adequate cause because nothing can come from nothing. Since the universe exists, it must have been affected by a cause greater than itself. Since motion exists, things that move must have been set in motion by

something or someone. Natural things are contingent upon something greater than themselves. Something greater than what is natural requires a Super-natural, i.e. God. This is the cosmological argument.

Fifth, since the universe exhibits design, purpose, unity, complexity, and order, there must have been a designer to give it purpose, unity, complexity, and order. This is the teleological argument. These arguments from reason as well as biblical arguments need to be proclaimed throughout the nations.

Knowing about God is important because individuals and societies live better when they abide by his ordinances. Ideally, individuals and societies who believe in God are unselfish, loving people that feel safe and care about their neighbors.

A society in which a large segment of its citizens does not believe in God becomes a selfish, uncaring society wherein people feel the need to protect themselves from criminals and scammers. Which kind society would you prefer to live in?

Ancient Israel became wicked as it departed from the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:1-6). To turn individuals and societies from wickedness to righteousness requires that they acquire a greater knowledge of God. People are blessed whenever they mediate upon the word of God (Psalm 1:1-3).

Great Doctrines of the Bible

by Robert Waggoner

Reviewed by Ronald Bryant

This volume is multifaceted. It sets forth biblical truth in exacting and scholarly fashion; yet, it is extremely readable and practical. The narrative is both challenging and encouraging. The seasoned preacher or teacher will find it an excellent resource. The novice will find it to be an excellent guide to understanding biblical truth and growth. In heart-warming fashion it exalts Scripture, and insists upon the application of truth.

The initial part of each section sets forth essential materials and in-depth arguments. Each is followed, on each page, with biblical passages which establish and re-enforce the focus. The author's personal convictions are strong and encouraging.

Each chapter serves to educate; to ground and to strengthen biblical insight and personal conviction. The book itself would be excellent for the equipping of leaders, teachers, and personal workers. Such could be done in the regular classes on the Lord's Day and mid-week classes.

There are forty chapters, and each is filled with clear enunciation of the major doctrines of the Bible. The major attraction of the book is the authors appeal to knowing the biblical text, and the application of the same. The questions are also excellent teaching tools.

Available from Gospel Light Publishing Company; gospellightbooks.com

\$22.95

The Deity of Christ

Owen Olbricht

One of the important questions concerning Jesus is, “Is He God or man? An examination of Scriptures will bring a careful student to the conclusion that Jesus is God.

John 1:1

John 1:1 is one of the crucial verses in determining whether or not Jesus is God. By John writing that the Word was God. He did not mean that the Word was *the* God, but that the Word was God, which expresses the nature of the Word who was with the God.

It is incorrect to say that Jesus was “a god” and not God (Jn. 1:1). It is correct to say Jesus was God, doing so without the article “a” (The article “a” does not appear in the Greek). In the sentence, “The Word was God,” Word is the nominative (subject) and God is predicate without an article.

Zerwick in his grammar comments on the use of the predicate without an article: “The **omission** of the article shows that the speaker regards the person or thing not so much as this or that person or things, but rather as *such* a person or thing, i.e. regards not the individual but rather its nature or quality.”¹

Other grammars could be quoted, all of which confirm the accuracy of the Zerwick quotation.

The weight of the evidence from the text and from grammar supports the conclusion that Jesus, the “Word,” is God; He has the God nature. By becoming flesh (Jn. 1:14), He was God with us (Mt. 1:23), God in a human body.

The Jews, in the following passages, correctly understood Jesus’ statements and realized that He was saying that He was God. To them this was blasphemy, which was why they sought to kill Him.

John 5:17, 18

After Jesus healed a handicapped man, He was answering the Jews’ accusation that He had not respected the Sabbath (John 5:16). He responded that He was working as My Father works. The Jews picked up on the word “My” instead of “the,” which implied Jesus had the same nature as God, and could have the same privileges as God.

“But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working. For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal to God’” (Jn. 5:17, 18).

The Jews realized Jesus meant God was His Father instead of the Father

of all people, making himself equal to God.

In the rest of chapter John 5, Jesus shows that He is with the Father,

- Jesus can do what the Father does (19).
- Jesus can give life to raise the dead as the Father can (21, 25).
- Jesus has the right of judgment and will judge instead of the Father (22, 27, 30).
- Jesus being honored gives honor to the Father (23).

John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19

By using the term, “I Am,” (Jn. 8:24, 28) was Jesus associating Himself with the “I Am,” the YHWH, “Yahweh,” of the OT who appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2, 14)?

The weight of scholarship accepts “I am,” as used in John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19, to mean that Jesus was identifying Himself with the “I AM” (Yahweh) of the Old Testament.

Newman and Nida comment concerning “I Am,” “In later Judaism the expression ‘I am’ is definitely used as a name for God. Thus, in those passages in John’s gospel where Jesus uses ‘I am’ in the absolute sense, he is identifying himself with God.”²

The mention of the Angel of the Lord (Ex. 3:2) in the burning bush calling Himself the “I AM,” gives good reason to associate Jesus with

the “I AM.” Also the Jews picking up stones to kill Jesus (Jn. 8:59) might imply that they understood Jesus’ statement, “I am,” to mean that He had the God nature, thus is God.

John identifies Jesus with the “I am” of the Old Testament by stating that Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, “These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory and spoke of Him” (Jn. 12:41). The statement John quotes (Jn. 12:40) is taken from Isaiah (Isa. 6:9, 10) when Isaiah saw the Lord on the throne (Isa. 6:1-7).

In this setting the One on the throne is called YHWH, “Yahweh,” in verses 3 and 5, also translated “Jehovah.” If the One on the throne is “Yahweh” that Isaiah saw, and Jesus is the One Isaiah saw, then Jesus can be identified as God, “Yahweh.” Seeing one is seeing the other for they are one (Jn. 14:9).

John 10:30-33, 36

The Jews told Jesus, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.” The Jews correctly conclude Jesus taught He was God. Jesus answered, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’” (cf. Psa. 82:6)?

If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken) do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the

Son of God” (Jn. 10:30-36)? Jesus was indicating that if prophets, who were merely men could be called gods, then surely He, being God, could be called God,

Newman and Nida wrote, “If those persons who received God’s Law...could be spoken of as ‘gods,’ how much more can the one whom the Father has chosen and sent into the world claim to be ‘the Son of God.’ ...Jesus is not claiming to be a divine being among many others; he is claiming a unique prerogative, and the Jews recognize this.”³

John 10:38; 14:10, 11

In explaining the oneness He had with the Father (Jn. 10:30), Jesus stated, “the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (John 10:38). They are one in nature and essence, and as such they can be co-joined, and act in unity in the work they do (see also 14:10, 11).

The Jews understood that Jesus was implying that His being in God and God in Him meant that He is God, the Son, who was with God, the Father. For this reason they sought again to seize Jesus (Jn. 10:39).

John 20:28

Did Thomas call Jesus God by saying, “My Lord, and My God”? (Jn. 20:28).

Thomas was addressing Jesus after seeing proof of His resurrection and realizing that Jesus’ resurrection, as He had promised, showed that He had

life in Himself, as the Father has life in Himself (Jn. 5:26). Jesus was, “I AM, that I AM,” existing because He exists, having life dependent on Himself and not on another. Thus Thomas did not classify Jesus along with created beings which depend on God for their existence, but with God who is self-dependent.

Other Passages

Jesus is either equated with the Father as having the same nature as God or is called God in the passages below. They show Jesus is the image of God and of His nature; therefore, He is God, not the Father, but the Son.

- “And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6b).
- “They shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, ‘God with us’ (Mt. 1:23).
- “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (Jn. 1:18; NASB).
- “The church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).
- “From whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 9:5).

- “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10b). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10a). Jesus is God before whom we all will appear (Jn. 5:22).
- “The god of this world had blinded the minds...so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4).
- “Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6).
- “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15).
- “Resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ, Himself” (Col. 2:2).
- “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). *Theoteos*, appearing only here in the New Testament, is used outside the New Testament, as defined by Danker, “the state of being god, divine character/nature, deity, divinity.”⁴
- Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13).
- “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3).
- “But of the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’” (Heb. 1:8).
- “Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above your companions” (Heb. 1:9).
- “Who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1).
- “We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:20).

¹Maximillian Zerwick, English edition adapted from the fourth Latin edition by Joseph Smith (Rome, 1963), 55.

²Newman and Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John* (New York, NY: American Bible Society), 1980, 124.

³Newman and Nida, 344.

⁴Fredrick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, third edition, based on Walter Bauer’s sixth edition (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 452.

The Inspiration of the Bible

John T. Polk, II

God identified all that is Scripture.

“All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“Scripture” refers to “God-breathed” writings. “All” that is “Scripture” is the only acceptable basis for living the life of a Christian. “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Christians should never give “heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth” (Titus 1:14). There are no other religious writings that are God’s Scripture.

God controlled the thoughts in Scripture.

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12).

“The Gospel” of Jesus Christ did not originate in the imaginations of humans, nor was this doctrine taught

to Paul by humans, but it was given directly from God to the individual writers by “revelation” (Greek, *apocalypse*). This means that the writers’ thoughts stimulated by, and were formed around, the truth from God they were given.

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

He then listed six specific occasions the bodily-resurrected Lord was witnessed alive. The very ideas were planted in the writers’ minds. What was “received” from God was that which was written.

God controlled the writing of Scripture.

Peter declared: “knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Since Scripture is not the product of men’s minds, men cannot freely interpret its meaning. No church, nor group of men (individually or collectively!) has been authorized by God to

determine Scripture meaning, since the First Century Apostles. Scripture must interpret Scripture! Also, note that once the “revelation” was given, God guided the writers to include its meaning.

This definitely applies to the writings of the Prophets in the Old Testament, both before and after a specific prophecy, and to the details of its prophetic fulfillment in the New Testament. If this were not the case, then Paul could not have said: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (**Romans 15:4**). Confidence in God comes through confidence in His Word.

God chose the words expressing the thoughts in Scripture.

“But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (**1 Corinthians 2:10-13**).

Only the inner spirit of a person can reveal one's inner thoughts, so likewise is it with God. His Holy Spirit, knowing all, chooses what to reveal to Scripture writers, and from each individual man, selects from his vocabulary words that best and accurately expresses God's Will.

Men do not teach God what words to use, but God chooses what Words He wants. This is why there are no contradictions, there is no chaos, and there can be no contractions in the doctrine.

For example, the unique term “inspired of God” (**2 Timothy 3:16**) only occurs here in Scripture. God has woven human words together to make a tapestry of faith that says the same thing to everyone. Jesus said, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ”and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (**Luke 24:46-47**).

The facts of the Gospel give faith universally, and the response to that Gospel produces conversion universally. God-breathed Scriptures are the only source of instruction for faith and obedience to God. Nothing else will suffice.

Jesus said, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teach-

ing as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:6-7). Unity of believers comes only by accepting God’s Scriptures which teach the same doctrine to all.

God’s Scripture explains everything that must be understood.

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:1-5).

There is no “mystery” in God’s Plan that has not already been revealed in Scripture. Words convey ideas, and when read, understood, and accepted, God-chosen words have sown His ideas. To “have briefly written” these awesome ideas is a proof of Divine Inspiration, for no humans could have spoken so tersely but clearly.

God’s Scriptures are never to be lowered to the level of human writings.

“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as

the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The living God has written a word which gives life, hence “the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

God’s Scriptures are living, not because they are growing and changing, but because they bring a sinner’s dead soul back to life!

I conclude with Gausсен:

“Such, then, is God’s book. Its first line, its last line, all its teachings, understood or not understood, are by the same author; and that ought to suffice for us. Whoever may have been the writers—whatever their circumstances, their impressions, their comprehension of the book, and the measure of their individuality in this powerful and mysterious operation—they have all written faithfully and under superintendence in the same roll, under the guidance of one and the same Master, for whom a thousand years are as one day; and the result has been the Bible. Therefore I will not lose time in idle questions; I will study the book.” (*The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, L. Gausсен, D.D., Edinburg, Scotland, 1841, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, reprint 1979).

The Distinctive Nature of the Lord's Church

Tom McLemore

Few, if any, outside the Lord's church understand its distinctive nature. Sadly, an increasing number of members of the Lord's church are unaware of the distinctive nature of it. Though they are members of the Lord's church, their lack of understanding of the church's distinctive nature allows them to be led to join denominations, to view involvement in the worship, corporate life, and work of the church as unimportant or nonessential, and to accept erroneous doctrines and practices that corrupt the Lord's church. Consider with me some of the distinctive characteristics of the Lord's church.

Membership and Salvation

The Lord's church is *the only church of which one becomes a member in the process of being saved by Christ*. "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.' So

those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls....And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:37, 38, 40, 47).

The process of being saved does not make one a member of *any other church*. There is no denomination of which I am aware that considers one to have become a member of that denomination in the process of being saved. Every denomination of which I have knowledge will admit that they believe that one can have been saved and yet not be a member of that denomination.

Built and Saved by Christ

The Lord's church is the *only church that the Lord is building and of whom the Lord is savior*. The Lord is building his church by saving people, and everyone whom he has saved is in the Lord's church. Jesus declared, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the

church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (Ephesians 5:23).

“Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4, 5).

All other churches are being built by human beings. They may *claim* to be a church that is being built by Christ, but that claim is false because the membership of their church is constituted on some other basis than the result of people having been saved by Christ.

God as Father and Christ as Brother

The Lord’s church is *the only fraternity of which God is Father and Christ is brother*. One comes to be a member of the Lord’s church only by being *born* into it.

“But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12, 13).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into

Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26, 27).

“Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35).

Of no other church is one a member by this spiritual birth. One may be born anew and still not be considered by a denomination to be a member of that denomination. That shows that such denominations are no part of the family of which God is Father and Christ is brother.

Obedience to the New Testament

The Lord’s church is *the only church that is not the result of teaching that was developed by some human being, that is not the result of emphasizing a particular practice or characteristic of Christianity, and that is not the result of an interpretation of Scripture*.

Every denomination exists as the result of one or more of these things. In contrast, the Lord’s church is the result of hearing the gospel as presented in the New Testament, believing it, and obeying it.

The Lord’s church emphasizes, and its members strive to practice, ALL things the Lord commanded his apostles. The Lord’s church EXHIBITS all of the characteristics of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament.

Rather than teaching interpretations of Scripture, and drawing lines

of fellowship on the basis of such interpretations, members of the Lord's church teach, and draw lines of fellowship on the basis of, what the Scripture itself SAYS.

The Lord's church is the result of fulfilling 1 Peter 4:11. "Whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God" – the oracles of God are the Scriptures.

Without Addition, Subtraction, Substitution, or Interpretation

The Lord's church *exists* on the basis of what the Scripture SAYS without addition, subtraction, substitution, or interpretation. It is *characterized by and practices* what the Scripture SAYS without addition, subtraction, substitution, or interpretation. The Lord's church *in every respect* is the result of the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Lord's church exists because people are baptized in the name of the Sacred Three, and the life of the Lord's church is simply a putting into practice of all that Jesus commanded

without addition, subtraction, substitution, or interpretation.

It is "The Church"

The Lord's church is *the only church that needs no name*. While there are many descriptions of the Lord's church in the New Testament, one will search in vain to find a name for the church. It is simply "the church" (Acts 8:3; 9:31; 20:28; 12:28; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 25, 27, 29, 32; Philippians 3:6; Colossians 1:18, 24).

The New Testament refers only to the Lord's church, and there is not another church within its pages from which it must be distinguished. The essence of the term "denomination" is the practice of assuming a name for the purpose of distinguishing. Every denomination has a name and must have a name, because none of them is the church of the New Testament.

They are distinct from the church of the New Testament, and they must distinguish themselves from the church in the New Testament by assuming a name. In contrast, the Lord's church is the church of the New Testament distinct from all denominations, and therefore needs no denominational name.

No Other Choice

The Lord's church is *the only church made up of people who had no choice to make with respect to the church of which they would be members*.

In contrast to the cry, “Be saved, and join the church of your choice,” those who have chosen to obey the gospel of Christ had no choice to make between churches.

In the process of saving them through their obedience to the gospel, those who were being saved were being added by the Lord himself to the Lord’s church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Distinct from the notion, “I want to be saved, but I am not interested in being a member of any church,” those who have chosen to obey the gospel had no choice to make. In the process of saving them through their obedience to the gospel, the Lord added them to his church.

In the New Testament, there is no such thing as a saved person who was not a member of the Lord’s church. On the other hand, all denominations distinguish being saved from being members of their particular denomination. To them, one church is as good as another. Not so, to the Lord!

Conclusion

The Lord’s church is distinct in nature. It is unique. It is the only true church. It alone is exclusively divine in origin, existence, direction, and destiny. If you will obey the gospel, you will be added to it as the Lord saves you, and as a faithful member of it, you will be precisely where the Lord would have you to be for the rest of your life on earth!



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GOD DESIRES WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

Andy Robison

Nobody reads minds. I have no idea what you are thinking unless you tell me. You have no idea what I am thinking unless I tell you.

That is the thrust of the illustration Paul used in 1 Corinthians 2:11 regarding God's revelation to mankind through the apostles: "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God."

We do not know what God is thinking unless He tells us. In verse 12, Paul affirms the necessary revelation was given to the apostles: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." Verse 13 tells us Paul and the other inspired men passed on those revelations. We have them compiled in the completed Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Our relationship to God is based solely on that which He has revealed. His word is the basis for faith (Rom. 10:17). Our feelings or imaginations about what God might or might not accept have no place in our quest to please Him. When we in essence say, "I don't think God would mind if we..." we arrogantly claim to read God's mind on unrevealed matters.

We must, to please God, stick to what is written (Deut. 4:2; 29:29; Prov. 30:5-6; 1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:11; Gal. 1:6-8; Rev. 22:18-19). Therefore, the sincere worshiper is the truth-seeking worshiper. He is not one who allows his practices to be guided by wishes. Rather, he is guided by authority. He finds that authority in the Scriptures, using common-sense principles of interpretation.

In common speech, most people understand statements of authority and the subtle nuances of them. A parent orders a child to play in the yard. There is no instruction on what games the child must play, so there is freedom to choose. There is, though, limitation on where to play because of the specification, "In the yard". The child may not go to the neighbor's yard, or in somebody's house, even though the parent did not say, "Do not go" to those places. The silence in the first case (a generic command) frees. The silence in the second case (a specific command) limits.

So, the sincere seeker approaches the Scriptures, wondering what to do to show love and appreciation to Almighty God. He finds Jesus' demand that worship must be "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). He starts by seeking instructions from God's word, which is "truth" (John 17:17).

He will see that early disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) and that early worship services included a time for preaching (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-16:2, especially chapter 15). So he will conclude that when the believers “come together as a church” (1 Cor. 11:18), preaching was included. Not wanting to add to or take away from the word of God, he will—with the local brethren, and under the authority of the local eldership if one is present—include in the planned worship a time for preaching.

He will see that the worship period of the church included a great emphasis on the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23ff.), and note that such service took place on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). He will place appropriate emphasis on that example and the one in Acts 20:7 where the “disciples came together to break bread”—“on the first day of the week”. Since such specification is exemplified, he will observe the limitation of silence, and only observe such on the first day. He would not want to add to God’s word. And, he will observe it every first day, for he does not want to take away from God’s word, either.

He will make the same conclusion concerning the collection for the saints (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

This seeker will note that throughout the Scriptures, prayer is offered. Examples of prayers come from individual hearts (Phil. 1:3-11) and group

occasions (Acts 4:23-30). Since he sees that no limitations on days of the week occur here, he will conclude that such prayers may be offered anytime, but certainly must be included in the Lord’s Day service (cf. Rev. 1:10). He knows that in the worship described in Corinth praying took place (1 Cor. 14:15).

He will also note that singing then took place (1 Cor. 14:15), but also that singing may be done anytime (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13).

(Note: The worship in Corinth had the acts of worship we ascertain from the rest of the Scriptures, but also had elements of the miraculous which were limited to the first century. Instructions about regulating the miraculous no longer directly apply since we don’t have those, but the principles of decency and order [1 Cor. 14:40] do.)

Curious to this person desirous of living by New Testament Christianity is that the mention of “singing” puts a limitation on worship which most of the world of Christendom does not observe. This seeker correctly reasons that the commands to sing, and to make melody in the heart, and to speak to and teach one another in song, inherently limit what the worshiper may do musically in praise of God. The mention of singing limits the sincere seeker. He does not want to add instruments, because God—by the common sense law of silence—left that out when He specified sing-

ing. He does not want to perform a solo because that would rob his brethren of speaking back to him in song. In sincerity, this Christian opts for congregational singing in the public worship, without any non-vocal, unintelligible elements. Incidentally, then, he likely finds the emotive result to be quite fulfilling.

Having then, established five acts of worship from his New Testament study (preaching, praying, and singing, with—on the first day of the week—the Lord’s Supper and giving), he turns his attention to worshipping God in spirit (John 4:24). He has the truth of what should be done. Part of that truth means making sure that his spirit is right before God when He approaches boldly the heavenly throne in praise.

Whose spirit is correct? It needs to be a spirit controlled by love of brethren (cf. John 13:34-35) and by right living. The seeker sees long passages in the New Testament about how the new man in Christ is supposed to live (Eph. 4:17-5:21; Col. 3:1-17).

Seeing examples in the Old Testament (from which he may still learn [Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-11]) of God rejecting even His authorized worship because of the people’s sinful lifestyles (Isaiah 1:10-17; Amos

5:21-24), he realizes this approach of God cannot be just a ritualistic set of motions from a hypocritical heart.

He needs to draw near to God with his heart and not just his mouth, thus avoiding the Lord’s rebuke (Matt. 15:7-9). He needs to examine himself (1 Cor. 11:28; cf. 2 Cor. 13:5) to make sure he is not disqualified from communion with God.

Then, if the potential worshiper has so searched the word of God, he can be sure his worship is pleasing to the Father. God has revealed in His word what He wanted done in worship by the commands, examples, and the reasonable implications from them. This man followed what God said, and did not wonder if God might accept something else. He did not follow his hunches, and did not propose any extra-biblical, special revelation to him.

This is the meaning of worshipping in spirit and truth.



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“What do we do if they NEVER leave the building?”

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Matthew 19:3-9

Mike Kiser

1. The idea of a second marriage no longer lifts a brow in the Lord's church.
 2. Some are alright. We should not question them. Knowledge of some is not obtainable. Those that are adulterous ought not to be condoned.
 3. Jesus taught us sufficiently and clearly on this subject.
- I. The Basic and Total Doctrine Set Forth.
- A. Other passages to be considered with this passage: Matthew 5:31, 32; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2, 3; I Corinthians 7:10-17.
 - B. Here is what we learn:
 1. God created the sexes, male and female.
 2. Because of the difference, man would seek out the woman for his wife.
 3. The union is so intimate, the two are spoken of as one flesh.
 4. The joining together is said to be God's doing.
 5. From the beginning it has never God's will they separate.
 6. Men do not have a right to separate what God joins together.
 7. One putting away a mate and marrying another commits adultery.
 8. One who marries one put away becomes an adulterer.
 9. Only immorality is a ground for putting away a mate.
 10. One who puts away a mate because of immorality may marry another.
 - C. Moses allowed divorce.
 1. It was a social concession for the benefit of the woman.
 2. He "suffered" the putting away of the wife.
 3. Jesus did away with the concession and went back to the beginning.

II. Some Seek to Misinterpret Jesus' Teaching.

- A. "Jesus was explaining Moses' law." He did not make a reference to Moses' law. He carefully distinguished His from Moses. "I say unto you."
- B. "God does not join alien sinners in marriage. Only His children." Jesus was speaking to Jews, does this apply to Jews only? Marriage is honorable for all. Hebrews 13: 4; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 10-16, 27, 39. Christ has authority over all men. Matthew 28:18-20; Philippians 2:9-11
- C. "Baptism washes away a sinful state." Repentance comes before baptism. Baptism does not make that which is unholy holy. John the Baptist did not try to get Herod baptized but to give up his sinful relationship. Matthew 14:1-5

III. The Problem of Divorce and Remarriage in the Church.

- A. Fellowship with the immoral will nullify the great good of the church; stain her purity; diminish her glory; and destroy her power in the community.
- B. Some adulterous cases may not be known. There should not be reason to suspect every married couple that comes among us. We should know from "whence" they come and "who" they are.
- C. When adulterers are known, the elders must be concerned.
 1. They can talk to the couple about their marriage. Sometimes one or both may acknowledge they did not have a right to divorce and re-marry.
 2. If they claim they have a right, and there is no reliable testimony to the contrary, then do not accept hearsay and gossip.
 3. If their marriage is un-scriptural then endeavor to teach them the truth; rebuke; and admonish them. If they will not repent, then withdraw fellowship from them. I Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6

Conclusion

1. The church needs to give emphasis to this doctrine that it may be pure; that sinners may be saved; and that the younger generation may not make the mistake that so many have made.
2. Christ word is sufficient on this matter.

The Transgender Question

Jackson Erwin

One serious question that Christians have been battling over the last few years and especially in today's society is the idea posed by those on the political and moral left that there is a distinction between gender and sex. This question is one that is now in the workforce and even in some state legislatures and school boards (such as that of the West Point School Board of Virginia).

In December 2018, a teacher at the West Point High School, Peter Vlaming, was fired for not calling a transgender student (a female who thought she was a male) by the pronoun of her choice.¹ That is, he refused to call the student "he," while also choosing not to call her "she" either.

Though he did not "mis-gender" the student by calling her by her correct and biological pronoun, he was still fired for what is often called an act of "discrimination" and "hate."

Cases such as this are more prevalent today than at any point in America's history, and such situations are simply caused due to a lack of

knowledge, respect, and love for God's Word and the natural order of things.

Christian's can no longer sit quietly on the sidelines of this issue. (We never should have in the first place!) As Peter said, every child of God must, "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Our society now makes gender malleable, and thus creates an environment in which the reproductive organs of a newborn do not validate the sex of the child.

We believe that the question of transgenderism is a matter of right and wrong and should not be answered based upon emotions or feelings, but wholly upon facts.

It is through this view that science, the Bible, and statistics should be evaluated, and thus determine whether there is any factual basis in the transgender movement and its beliefs.

Let us examine whether (1) Sex and gender are the same things; and (2) if culture and the mindset of a given society should determine whether an individual is male or female.

¹<https://www.faithwire.com/2018/12/10/christian-teacher-fired-after-refusing-to-use-trans-students-preferred-pronoun/>

Is Sex and Gender the Same?

One website gives the overall sum of the view for differentiating the two, writing, “The terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are used interchangeably in the daily routine, yet they do not have the same or nearly same meaning. Actually, the term ‘sex’ refers to the biological and physical difference between men and women while the term ‘gender’ refers to characteristics, behaviors, roles, expectations etc. between the both.”²

The same article also includes a graph at the beginning which puts "gender" underneath "culture" and "sex" underneath "biology."

However, a vital flaw can be seen both in their definition and in the graph. If society decides what is male and what is female, and has thus made the difference between sex and gender, why are the two terms used "interchangeably in the daily routine"?

Should Society Be Allowed to Define Gender?

Has society decided that they are different or not? In addition to this point, it should also be noted that it hasn't even been until the 21st century that any major push was made to distinguish the two terms, and most people today do not agree with the transgender ideology. Yet, it seems as if the majority of society believes that the gender is malleable simply be-

cause the vast majority of news outlets, social media, and “scientific” websites are overwhelmingly controlled by the political left.

Also, if society determines whether gender is malleable or not, what if the vast majority of people reject transgenderism twenty years from now? Is it then no longer malleable? Obviously, the view that society determines what is male and female has some serious contradictions.

An examination of scientific facts is also needed, since this is a scientific question. Does scientific reasoning and logic provide substantial evidence that one can be biologically male and mentally female? Can one be born with male or female appendages, but have the mind and feelings of the opposite gender?

The Left Argues Against Scientific Facts and Logic

The *New Atlantis* writes, “The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex — that a person might be “a man trapped in a woman’s body” or “a woman trapped in a man’s body” — is not supported by scientific evidence.”³

Even some transgender advocates acknowledge the lack of scientific proof in support of transgenderism. The *Washington Post* made this ob-

²<https://www.differencebtw.com/difference-between-sex-and-gender/>

³<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/number-50-fall-2016>

servation in an article entitled *Biology is Not Destiny: Seeking a Scientific Explanation for Trans Identity Could do More Harm than Good*. In this article, Alex Barasch wrote:

“Both good science and good advocacy dictate that we’re better off acknowledging what we don’t know about ourselves than overstating what we do. It doesn’t help the LGBTQ community to pin our validity on what we might learn, if only we could scan the right brains or pinpoint the right genes — and if we trust the volume of the frontal cortex over what a person tells us about themselves, we deny them their autonomy and their humanity. Rather than waiting for firmer biological footing, those who really want to advance the cause should start by believing trans people when they speak up about who they are.”

Transgenderism is thus defended by its advocates by asserting all one must do is just *believe* he/she is a male in woman’s body or a woman in a male’s body!

It should also be noted that it wasn’t until June of this year that the World Health Organization declared that Gender Dysphoria (which was previously called Gender Identity Disorder) was not a mental disorder, but purely a “sexual health condition.”

Before this decade, it was widely recognized as being a mental disorder in which the individual is confused about who he/she is. Because of this

personal and mental struggle, the transgender suicide rates were incredibly high. About 50% of teenage boys who suffer from this say that they attempted suicide at some point in their lives, along with about 30% of teenage girls, and about 42% of non-binary teens.⁴

With this suicide crisis, the idea has now been pressed that sex change operations will help lower the suicide rate and fix the identity crisis of transgenders. However, there has been *no statistical change*. In fact, those who go through the surgery are 20x more likely to commit suicide than the general population.⁵

Since the problem of suicidality has not been fixed either with sex changes or the acceptance of media, the question then should be asked, “How do we fix it?”

A Solution

We can fix the problem in three ways:

- 1.) We must accept the fact that those who are biologically male are male, nothing else (the same goes for women).
- 2.) We must accept the principles of the Bible as being true and sufficient for life and godliness.
- 3.) We must train our children by the basic principles of biology

⁴ Statistics are taken from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

⁵<https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/02/14305/>

and let them know and understand their gender based upon their sex, showing them that they are one and the same.

- 4.) We must teach our children to love and respect the word of God.

In the Bible, we find no evidence to support the transgender movement and its concept that gender/sex is malleable. From the example of Deuteronomy 22:5, in which the LORD says, “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God” to that of Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth, that the men would not have the hair of a woman (1 Cor. 11), the Bible shows that there is a clear and distinct line for men and women.

Since every individual is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) and since men and woman are created with their own body-types and appendages for the work in which God assigned them (Gen. 2:24), we must honor every person in the biological aspect which God created them.

Conclusion

Transgenderism is not in harmony with science or the Bible; and we cannot contradict and/or deny this basic rule of biology that has been held since the world began in order to appease the radical left and *attempt* to

appease the 0.6% of society that is transgender.

We must love every person in this world, a just as God did (Jn. 3:16), but love does not mean that we must tolerate error, even abominations. We must “reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 2:4).



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Knowing about God or Knowing God

Ronald D. Bryant

The Bible is from God. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Paul declared, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

He also wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Three specific conclusions arise from careful examination of the Bible, and it can be affirmed:

1. The Bible claims to be the word of God.
2. Upon studying it, the Bible seems to be the word of God.
3. Upon the most thorough examination, the Bible proves to be the word of God.

Additionally, a study of the Bible establishes that it is not only a revela-

tion from God, it also reveals God. It is the only source of information and instruction from God. Apart from it there is no such information or instruction.

God spoke in creation, and the created realm came into existence. In that act, He is revealed as the creator of all things, and the source of life. In the life of the first man and woman, God is revealed providing them all that was necessary to life, and to fellowship with Him.

He is revealed as Sovereign, and as compassionate provider. He is revealed in His dealing with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, then with the descendants of Jacob. He is revealed in delivering the nation of Israel out of Egypt, and in the giving of the Law through Moses. He is revealed in the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. In and through the Law and the prophets He predicted the coming of the Savior, His kingdom, and the new covenant.

In the New Testament, God is revealed in the life and work of His Son. Jesus’ life, mission, and ministry; His suffering and death had been predicted by the prophets in the Old Testament – in the Law, the psalms, and the prophets (Luke 24:44-49).

Three specific conclusions arise from a careful study of the record of the life of Christ:

1. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.
2. In reading the record of His life, He appears to be the Son of God.
3. In the most careful study of the record of His life, He proves to be the Son of God.

All the Scriptures were intended of God to inform, and to draw us to Him in faith and obedience—in and through Jesus Christ and the gospel. Of greater importance, they were given to enable us to not only know about God, but of greater moment, to know Him (cf. Hebrews 8:6-12; John 17:3).

What can we do, what must we do, to move from knowledge about God, to knowing Him? It is to be insisted that there is a way! We can come to know Him, and He desires that we do so! We can come to know what is true about Him, and we can come to embrace each truth revealed. We can and must come to not only accept but to meditate prayerfully upon each revealed truth, to the point of allowing each truth to lead us to commune with Him and yield to Him.

Only when our mental and spiritual thoughts come to be ruled by adoration, reverence, and humility before Him, will we be enabled to know Him. Until we allow the truth about Him to teach us what He is like and

how we are to think about Him, we will not come to know Him.

There is also this to consider: How can anyone express or manifest that which he does not possess?

How can one who does not possess faith manifest faith? How can one who does not possess humility before God express humility? How can one who does not fear or reverence God express fear or reverence for Him? How can one devoid of adoration for God express adoration for Him? Finally, how can people commune with God, if they do not actually know Him?

There is this disturbing fact, in our daily lives, very few of us give ourselves to deep thought about God!

Even in the worship assembly, we seldom give great attention to His presence or purpose! Even a casual glance at the customary order and activities of our assemblies produces more questions than answers.

Arguably, many congregations have cultivated to themselves some very bad habits, which serve the moment but do not produce deep awareness of God, nor of the honor of being in His presence.

Questions: Why do we seldom have a call to worship, yet, insist upon prolonged announcements that are already in hand in the bulletins? How many of the songs that we sing exalt or actually praise God?

How many sermons are ruled by the speaker's person and personality, rather than the beauty of coming to know and honor God? How often is the assembly about us, and not about God? Honestly, how much of our personal and corporate concern and effort is about communing with God? Is there not cause for concern? Are we vitally concerned with knowing about God, and with knowing Him in our fellowship?

The following passages suggest that God is concerned for us; that He wants us to know Him:

"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

"For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isaiah 57:15).



THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH (2)

Relevant Passages to Consider

Andy Erwin

With this article I intend to follow-up on the thoughts we introduced in our last issue concerning the Bible's teaching of the new heavens and new earth (Isa 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 21:1-2).

I would like for us to study a few of the most often cited proof texts used by those who advocate the doctrine of a renovated earth.

As stated in the previous article, for the doctrine of the renovated earth to receive such overwhelming support among Evangelicals, surely we will find a clearly stated passage in Scripture which teaches that Jesus died to redeem the cosmos just as He died to redeem mankind.

In addition to this, I would then like to state my convictions for what I believe to be the biblical doctrine of the new heavens and new earth. It is not sufficient merely to expose error in this regard, but we must also determine to elaborate truth.

Acts 3:21

It is argued by restored creationists that Christ's regeneration is of cosmic proportions and that this is also the meaning of Acts 3:21.

In his commentary on Acts, David Lipscomb, an avowed restored creationist, affirmed, "The restitution of all things' refers to the restoration of God's order and rule on the earth, which had been disturbed by the re-

bellion of man and the transfer of the earth to the evil one” which would occur at Christ’s return.¹

However, a full examination of the text will show that the restoration being advocated by Peter pertains to “turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (v.26), through the ministry of the Prophet/Christ (vv.22-23), and the subsequent blessing for all the families of the earth (v.25) – all of which was to occur in “these days” (v.24).

The “restoration of all things” certainly appears to refer to a spiritual restoration of mankind and not a physical restoration of the cosmos. But, if we are wrong on this point, the restoration of God’s order still does not imply the need for a renewed earth over a completely new earth. His order can be restored regardless of the newness of the earth involved.

Romans 8:21

On Rom 8:21, again David Lipscomb believed, “...then the whole creation will share this deliverance and be freed from the corruption and mortality to which it has been subjected by the sin of man. It shared the corruption and mortality of man’s sin, and will share his deliverance from it.”²

Paul’s statement in this passage is truly the centerpiece to the renewed earth doctrine. Observe:

According to Romans 18:19-23, the creation, including our bodies, was subjected to the futility and bondage of a fallen world. God subjected the world to frustration in the hope of liberating the creation from its bondage. This world, full of its sin, violence and disease, is not the world God created. God’s good creation has been marred, but his redemptive intent is to renew it...In the end, God will reverse the curse and renew the earth, living among his people just as he did in the Garden.³

We ask, is this really what Paul is teaching? What is meant by “creation”? If the creation is referring to the earth, Peter (2 Pet 3:10-13) could very well be describing its deliverance. If Paul is speaking of the earth, this would obviously be anthropomorphic language, wherein the earth is given human qualities through a figure of speech known as personification.

However, if the redemption of the cosmos is under consideration, Paul’s statement does not necessarily imply a renovated earth. If it does so imply, why does this not apply to the sun and moon (Rev 21:23; 22:5)?

¹ David Lipscomb, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1896), 54.

² David Lipscomb and J.W. Shepherd, *Romans* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1943), 153.

³ John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, *Kingdom Come: Embracing the Legacy of David Lipscomb and James Harding* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2006), 186.

Why does a “new earth” require *renewing* of the old; yet, “new heavens” require the *annihilation* of the old and creation of something that is altogether *new*? (See our previous article for a discussion of the word “new” in the OT and NT.)

Mounce sees this inconsistency and argues, “John is not supplying his readers with information about future astrological changes but setting forth by means of accepted apocalyptic imagery the splendor that will radiate from the presence of God and the Lamb.”⁴

However, we ask, what function would these heavenly bodies serve if not to give light? The sun and moon have been placed to mark time, and time will cease to function in eternity – a point which is repeated by John (Rev 22:5).^{5 6}

Herein is perhaps the greatest inconsistency of the renewed earth theory. Renewal is argued for the earth under the premise that God will not destroy anything he has created. Yet, God also created the sun, moon, and stars and renewed creationists permit their destruction.

Paul could also be writing about something else, perhaps even about

our resurrection and the changing of this present physical body into a glorious spiritual body likened unto Christ (see 1 Cor 15:35 ff.; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2). It is not unusual for Paul to speak of Christians as a “creation” (Col 1:15), specifically a *new creation* (2 Cor 5:17).

The suffering and even persecution which Christians face in this life cannot be compared to the pleasures, joy, and glory to be revealed “in us” (v.18). His creation (the church) certainly earnestly expects and awaits the resurrection when our new bodies shall be revealed. As Christians, we groan within ourselves and eagerly await the resurrection – i.e. the redemption of the body (v.23). Thus, the redemption of the body, not the cosmos, could very well be the topic of discussion.

Ephesians 1:9-10 and Colossians 1:19-20

In Eph 1:9-10, Paul mentions “the fullness of the times” when God will gather together “all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.” In Col 1:19-20, Paul writes about the reconciliation of things in on earth and in heaven. These passages are also used as proof texts for renewed creationists.⁷ In these passages Middleton believes, “Paul does not myopically limit the

⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* in The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 395-396.

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 573.

⁶ To this point Harrington agrees that John is here describing the heavenly Jerusalem. Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* in *Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 218.

⁷For examples see: J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 157-159.; N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 104.

efficacy of Christ's atonement to humanity. Rather, the reconciliation with God effected by Christ's shed blood is applied as comprehensively as possible to *all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*"⁸

F.F. Bruce also connects these three passages (Rom 8:21; Eph 1:9-10; and Col 1:20), stating: "all creation is to share in the fruits of Christ's redemptive work...So here, the universe has its place in God's secret purpose, now revealed."⁹

Again we ask, is this really Paul's message? Or, is this interpretation the consequence of reading into the text the renewed creation theory? Could it not be true that Paul is herein utilizing a figure of speech known as a *metonymy*?

In a metonymy of the subject, the subject is put for the adjunct, and in this case, the place or the thing containing it, is put for the thing which is being contained.¹⁰

Examples of metonymy of the subject, wherein the world is put for its inhabitants is a figure often employed by John (see John 1:10; 3:16, 17; 6:33; 7:7; 14:17, 31; 17:21; 1 John 2:2; 3:1; 5:19). But, the figure of

speech is also used by Paul (see Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 4:9; 11:32; 2 Cor 5:19) and we believe this is the case in these passages.

In the epistle to Ephesus, Paul speaks of the "mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (1:9-10).

Allowing Paul to be his own commentator, we turn to Eph 3:3 ff., and we find that the "mystery" under consideration, which was being revealed to Paul at that time – in the fullness of times – was "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (3:6).

This is the "fellowship of the mystery" between Jews and Gentiles – all creation – in the church, according to His eternal purpose (3:8-13).

Moreover, the "redemption of the purchased possession," has been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and thus has a guarantee of an inheritance (1:13-15).

The redeemed possession has been purchased by the blood of Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit; neither of which can be said about the cosmos, but both can be said about the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 3:16-17).

In Paul's epistle to the Colossians, those things in heaven and earth being

⁸ J. Richard Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 11 (2006): 87-88.

⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 261.

¹⁰ E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 567.

reconciled to God and receiving peace with God are thus reconciled “through the blood of His cross” (1:20). For whom did Jesus shed His blood? Paul tells us in Acts 20:28 and in Eph 5:25 that Christ’s blood bought the church.

We – the church – have redemption through His blood (Eph 1:7). Jesus experienced death for every man (Heb 2:9) and will save those who obey Him (Heb 5:8-9). Individuals are reconciled to God by His blood and the word of reconciliation. In this sense the “world” is reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:19).

We can provide scores of passages which teach that Christ shed His blood for our sins. Renewed creationists are going to have to provide at least *one* passage in Scripture which clearly teaches that Jesus died to redeem the cosmos. These passages (Acts 3:21; Rom 8:21; Eph 1:9-10; and Col 1:20) simply do not provide the proof their doctrine requires.

Our Lord’s Return

Seeing that the heavens and the earth will be destroyed, burned up, and dissolved with fervent conflagration at Christ’s return (2 Pet 3:10-13), according to His promise (cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22), we look for a new heavens and a new earth (cf. Rev 21:1-2). We look for the new heavens and earth to appear after our Lord’s return and final judgment on mankind (Rev 20:11-15). Christ’s return should be viewed as literal. Upon His return, Paul wrote, “then comes the end” (1

Cor 15:23-24). He will initiate the general and universal resurrection of the dead (John 5:28-29; 1 Thess 4:6 ff; 1 Cor 15:23 ff). He will then make a judgment upon humankind, thus, bringing the kingdom into its eternal state (Matt 25:31 ff).

Jesus will come in power and glory (Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; 2 Thess 1:7). His coming will be sudden and unexpected, preceded only by normal human activity (Matt 24:37-39, 42-44, 45-51; Acts 1:7).

The second coming will be visible to every eye (Acts 1:11; Rev 1:7). His angels will accompany Him (Matt 13:39-49; 16:27; Mark 8:38; 2 Thess 1:7). The spirits of those now in Paradise will also return with the Savior (1 Thess 4:14; Jude 14). These spirits will be given their new spiritual bodies at the resurrection. The mortal bodies which are in the graves shall be changed into spiritual bodies in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:35-54; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

We will hear the shout of the archangel and the last trumpet will sound (John 5:28; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16). His appearing is revealed *only* as a single event.

At His appearing, the dead in Christ will be raised first, those living will be caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess 4:16-18). No saved person will be left behind on earth. The world then will be destroyed (2 Pet 3:10-13). No wicked person will be left on earth as there will be no earth. The only thing to remain from this

world will be the citizens of the kingdom (Dan 2:44; 1 Cor 15:24, 52; Heb 12:26-29).

After His return, all nations shall be gathered before His throne of judgment (Rev 20:11-15). Judgment will be according to His word and according to our deeds (John 12:48; 2 Cor 5:10; Ecc1 12:13-14). All will be judged (Rom 14:10-12).

Death and Hades (Rev 20:14), the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41), and all who are disobedient to Christ (1 Thess 1:7-9; Rev 20:15; 21:8, 27) will be cast into the lake of fire which is the second death – i.e. eternal punishment in hell (Mark 9:48; Rev 14:11).

The righteous and the redeemed throughout the ages will witness a new heavens and new earth coming down as a bride adorned for her husband. God will dwell among them. In this celestial New Jerusalem, the inhabitants will never again know sin, sickness, or sorrow.

The New Heavens and New Earth

The Isaiah passages speak of salvation and of a new creation. We would agree with Chisholm that these passages speak of a transformation which must occur in human society, where justice and peace will prevail.¹¹ The question remains, when, where, and how will this justice and peace prevail?

The justice and peace foretold by Isaiah can only be experienced on this earth under a new covenant and kingdom inaugurated by the Servant, the Christ of God. However, even then it is experienced in a limited sense. God's justice and peace will not be experienced in its fullest sense until judgment is made final and the new earth is brought down (Rev 21:1 ff).

Only by understanding the “already but not yet” tension of the kingdom can we grasp the correlation between Isaiah, Peter, and Revelation. Christians are now blessed as citizens of God's kingdom (Col 1:13; Heb 12:25-28); but we are not yet blessed as fully as we will be in heavenly state of the kingdom (Matt 25:34).

In a limited sense we can already appreciate the concept of a “new heavens and new earth” – *a new order* – even a new order in and under the rule of Christ, His covenant, and His kingdom. Yet, not yet, have we truly experienced the new heavens and new earth which shall appear after the final judgment.

We look for a new heavens and a new earth according to His promise. Christians will dwell upon a new earth – i.e. heaven – for eternity, as described in Rev 21-22. Christ has gone to prepare this place (Jn 14:1-6), it shall be presented as an adorned bride after the final judgment, and there we shall live with the Godhead and all the redeemed for ages without end.

¹¹ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 135.