

# A Thought in the Mind of God: A Systematic Theology

Brandan Kraft

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**A Thought In the  
Mind of God**

**By Brandan Kraft**

# Copyright

## **A Thought in the Mind of God: A Systematic Theology**

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# Dedication

*To my son, Cole.*

*I don't care what anyone else thinks of me. I just want you to understand.*

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# Prologue: They Couldn't Handle It Then Either

Somewhere around the second century before Christ, a man whose name we will never know sat down and wrote these words:

*“I know by Your understanding that it is not by human strength . . . a man’s way is not in himself, nor is a person able to determine his step. But I know that in Your hand is the inclination of every spirit . . . and all his works You have determined before ever You created him.”*

And then he wrote this:

*“You alone have created the righteous one, and from the womb You established him to give heed to Your covenant at the appointed time of grace . . . But the wicked You created for the time of Your wrath, and from the womb You set them apart for the day of slaughter.”*

That was over two thousand years ago. Those words were found in a cave near the Dead Sea in 1947, written on scrolls that had been buried and hidden for centuries. And when

modern scholars dug them up and read them, they dismissed the theology. Too predestinarian. Too radical. Too sovereign. It didn't fit the religious assumptions of the men who found them, so they set the theology aside and focused on the archaeology instead.

But the theology was there. It had always been there. Buried in a cave, waiting.

The man who wrote those words is known to history only as the Teacher of Righteousness. We don't know his real name. We don't know his face. We know that he taught the sovereign grace of God in an age when the Pharisees were gaining power, and that the Pharisees, when they got that power, killed people who disagreed with them. We know that his followers fled into the desert. We know that his writings were hidden away in clay jars and sealed in caves along the cliffs above the Dead Sea. And we know that for two thousand years, nobody read them.

The Pharisees won. They always do, for a time. They had the institutions. They had the political power. They had the majority. And they used all of it to silence the men who said what the Teacher of Righteousness said, that a man's way is not in himself, that God alone creates the righteous and the wicked, that salvation is not a human achievement but a divine act.

And then fifteen hundred years later, a German monk named Martin Luther sat in a tower in Wittenberg and read the book of Romans. And it was as if the cave had been opened again. "*The just shall live by faith.*" Luther didn't discover a new doctrine. He uncovered an old one. The same truth that had been buried in the Judean desert was buried again under a thousand years of medieval religion, and Luther pulled it out of the ground with his bare hands. And when he nailed his theses

to the church door, the institutions came for him too. They tried to burn him for it. They excommunicated him. They called him a heretic.

The Pharisees won again. For a time.

But the truth doesn't stay buried. That's the thing about it. You can seal it in a cave. You can excommunicate the man who found it. You can preach against it from pulpits and put websites on "bad theology" lists and write long articles explaining why it's dangerous. And it just keeps showing up. In another century, in another cave, in another monk's tower, on another man's computer screen at two in the morning.

I know something about that.

In 2005, a man named Phil Johnson, who was the right hand of the famous preacher John MacArthur, put my website on his public list of "bad theology." He called Pristine Grace "*hyper-Calvinism of the most virulent kind.*" He said the site was "*doing more to befoul and degrade the doctrines of grace than practically any other Web site*" he had seen. He said I was "*naturally drawn to radical ideas.*" He wrote all of this without ever speaking to me.

I was thirty years old. I had no seminary degree. I had no denominational backing. I had no publisher. I had a website I built myself on a computer in my living room, and a set of convictions I had built from Scripture the same way. And I sat down and wrote a point-by-point response, civil and thorough, and published it on the very website he was attacking. He never responded.

That was over twenty-one years ago. I still hold every doctrine he attacked me for. And I've added a few more since

then that would make his original criticism look like a compliment.

This book contains everything I believe. All of it. Not just the parts that are safe to say in Reformed company. Not just the parts that will get a nod from the sovereign grace world. *Everything.* The doctrines that earned me the label “hyper-calvinist.” The positions that cost me friendships. The convictions that got me quietly removed from a preaching rotation at a church I moved across the country to attend. And the conclusion that none of my critics expected, that after holding the hardest theology I know how to hold, the last word is love.

I didn’t build this framework in a seminary. I built it in the Scriptures, in conversations with a man named Bob Higby who became one of the most important people in my life, in late night sessions on my website, [predestinarian.net](http://predestinarian.net), and in the slow, painful process of watching the sovereign grace world eat itself alive while I tried to figure out what was true and what was just tribal loyalty dressed up as doctrine.

The framework was mostly in my mind by the time I was twenty-nine. I stress-tested it against one of the best covenant theologians I knew. He couldn’t break it. I defended it against Phil Johnson. He wouldn’t engage. I’ve published two hundred articles on [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org) over the course of twenty-eight years, and every single one of them was a piece of this system before I knew the system had a name. The theology came first. The vocabulary caught up decades later.

What you are holding is not new knowledge. Almost none of it is original to me. The Teacher of Righteousness had the sovereignty. Luther had the justification. John Gill had the

particular redemption. Gordon Clark had the supralapsarian logic. Bob Higby had the two seeds and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the baptism framework and a dozen other things I learned sitting next to him in church, getting more out of the conversation than the preaching. I stand on the shoulders of men, most of them dead, all of them braver than me.

What is new is the assembly. Nobody, as far as I can tell, has ever put all of these pieces together in one place and shown that they come from one sentence. That's what this book does. One sentence generates every position across every domain, from ontology to eschatology, from covenant theology to quantum physics, from the nature of the human mind to the nature of heaven and hell. One sentence. And if you accept that sentence, everything else follows. And if you reject it, none of the rest matters.

Here is the sentence:

*“Everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, sustained by His will, authored by His purpose, and held together by personal covenants of love.”*

They couldn't handle it in 200 BC. They buried it in a cave.

They couldn't handle it in 1517. They tried to burn the man who said it.

They couldn't handle it in 2005. They put the website on a list.

They won't handle this book.

But the Author already knows who is going to read it. And the ones who need it will find it. Same as they always do.

*“I will present the truth softly and wait on the Lord.”*

## **Preface: Why I Wrote This**

I have a confession to make. I don't have a seminary degree. I don't have a PhD in theology. I don't have a denominational endorsement. I don't have the approval of any theological institution on the face of this earth. And I wrote a systematic theology anyway.

If that bothers you, I understand. It would have bothered me in my early twenties too. I used to think you needed credentials to speak about God with any authority. I used to think the guys with the letters after their names had some special access to truth that the rest of us didn't. And then I read the Scriptures carefully and noticed that God seems to have a pattern of choosing the most unlikely people to carry His message. Shepherds. Fishermen. Tax collectors. A tentmaker from Tarsus who persecuted the church before he preached to it. And not a single one of them went to seminary.

I'm a computer programmer. I've been writing code since I was ten years old, starting on an Apple IIc that I begged my parents to purchase for me. I've been writing software for the same employer since 1998. I live in a small town in eastern Kentucky with my wife Angie, who is the only woman I have

ever dated, kissed, or loved. I play trombone in three community bands. I change a diaper twice a day on a cat named OJ who was once paralyzed and whom nobody else wanted. And I have spent most of my adult life building and maintaining a website called [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org), where I have published over two hundred articles, nearly sixty songs, and a growing catalog of podcasts. All from my living room. All without permission from anyone.

That's who I am. And this is the book I wasn't supposed to write.

I came to believe in the sovereign grace of God in my mid-twenties. And when I say I came to believe it, I mean it hit me like a freight train. The absolute sovereignty of God over all things, including salvation. The finished work of Christ on the cross. The impossibility of human contribution to what God has already accomplished. These truths changed the entire landscape of my mind, and I have never recovered from the impact. I don't want to recover from it.

I found my way into these truths through the Scriptures, through the writings of men like John Gill and Augustus Toplady and William Gadsby, and most importantly through a man named Bob Higby. Bob found my website in the early days and called me up out of the blue. Asked me where I went to church. I told him, and the next Sunday he showed up. I told him I was a supralapsarian. He said, "Me too." And that was the beginning of one of the most important friendships and theological partnerships of my life. We talked for hours. I got more out of those conversations than I ever got out of the preaching. And much of the raw material of this book, the theological DNA of what you are about to read, came from those conversations and from Bob's extraordinary writings on

pristinegrace.org. I named the system. He gave me most of the pieces.

I also stress-tested the framework early on. I took it to one of the best covenant theologians I knew and asked him to find the holes. He couldn't break it. His counterarguments didn't hold up. And that was the confirmation I needed that the system was sound. Not because I'm smarter than a theologian with credentials. But because the system isn't mine. It comes from the Scriptures. And Scripture holds up under pressure from any man, no matter how many degrees he has.

The framework was mostly in my mind by the time I was twenty-nine years old. The positions were there. The convictions were settled. But it was not fully articulated. It came out in bits and pieces over two decades of articles on [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org), each one a fragment of a system I could feel but hadn't yet named. The full systematization, the connecting of every domain into one coherent thought, happened with this book. Some of the insights came while I was writing it. The sentence that opens Chapter 1 existed in my thinking for years, but I didn't know it was a sentence until I sat down and tried to say it out loud. And I've barely changed a position since my twenties. That's not because I'm stubborn, though I'm that too. It's because the system is internally consistent. Every piece supports every other piece. It's not a chain that breaks if one link fails. It's a web. Pull on one strand and the others hold. Attack one position and the rest cover it. I've never encountered a theological framework that does this as completely as this one does, and I've been looking for most of my adult life.

Now I want to say something about the kind of book this is, because it's probably not what you expect from a "systematic theology."

Most systematic theologies start with a list of doctrines and then work through them one by one. They feel like textbooks. They're organized by topic, and each topic is treated in isolation. You read the chapter on justification, then you read the chapter on sanctification, and you might not see how they connect to each other or to anything else in the system.

This book doesn't work that way. This book starts with one sentence. One single sentence. And then it derives *everything* from that sentence. Every doctrine. Every position. Every application. The sentence generates the theology, and the theology generates the ethics, and the ethics generate the pastoral conclusions. It's not a collection of independent doctrines. It's one thought, unfolded across every domain I can think of. And if the sentence is true, everything else follows. And if it's false, none of the rest matters.

I call this *operational idealism*. Not idealism as abstract philosophy, but idealism as the operating system for daily life. The invisible is more real than the visible. And that principle doesn't just apply to metaphysics. It applies to *everything*. Marriage, baptism, church, law, ethics, politics, psychology, education, the nature of heaven and hell. One principle. Universal application. I didn't plan it that way. I just kept noticing the same pattern in every domain, and eventually I realized it was all one system.

And here's the thing that took me most of my life as a believer to say out loud. The system doesn't belong to any camp. I'm not a Calvinist, though people call me one. I'm not Reformed, though I hold many Reformed positions. I'm not a Baptist, though I've attended Baptist churches my whole believing life. I'm not New Covenant Theology, though I reject federal headship. I'm not Dispensational, though I believe in a

genuine distinction between the old and new covenants. I'm not *anything*, in the sense that no existing camp contains all of what I believe. No confession of faith captures it. No denominational statement covers it. I am theologically homeless. And I have been for as long as I can remember.

That's not a complaint. It's a description. When you follow the logic honestly, when you refuse to stop at the boundaries of your camp just because the camp tells you to stop, you end up alone. Not lonely. I have a wife who loves me, a son who challenges me, a best friend I've talked to every day for as long as I can remember without ever meeting in person, and a small circle of brothers who understand what I'm saying even when everyone else thinks I've lost my mind. I'm not lonely. I'm just campless. And campless is the only honest place to stand when the truth doesn't fit inside any fence.

I need to tell you something else before we begin, and I need you to hear this clearly. This book will make you uncomfortable. I don't say that to be dramatic. I say it because I've been writing articles on [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org) for most of my adult life, and every single time I publish something that pushes past the comfort zone of one camp or another, I lose friends. I've been called a hyper-calvinist, a compromiser, an arch-heretic, an unbeliever, and a tolerant. Sometimes by the same people at different points in my writing career. I've had men preach against my articles from pulpits without ever picking up the phone to talk to me first. I've been quietly removed from a preaching rotation at a church I moved across the country to attend. And I kept writing.

I kept writing because the truth doesn't belong to a camp. It doesn't belong to a denomination. It doesn't belong to the men with the credentials or the men with the pulpits or the men with

the loudest voices on Facebook. The truth belongs to Christ. And my job is not to protect it. My job is not to defend it. My job is to present it. Softly. Patiently. And then wait on the Lord to do what only He can do with it.

So here it is. Everything I believe. In one book. Starting with one sentence. And ending with the widest arms I know how to open.

If you disagree with me, I'm not offended. If you think I'm wrong about something, you might be right. I don't claim infallibility. I claim consistency. And I claim that this system, built from Scripture over more than two decades, holds up under pressure in a way that no other system I've encountered does. But I hold it with open hands. Because the moment I grip it too tightly, I've made an idol of the framework instead of worshipping the Christ the framework points to. And I've seen that happen to too many men already.

Read carefully. Think honestly. Disagree where your conscience demands it. And remember that neither your correct understanding nor your incorrect understanding is what saves you. Christ saves. And He alone.

That's the first thing I believe. It's also the last thing. And everything in between is just me showing you why.

Grace and Peace, Brandan

# Chapter 1: The Sentence

I've been building something for most of my adult life, and I didn't know it had a name until recently. I didn't know it could be reduced to a single sentence. I thought I just had a collection of beliefs, a set of convictions I'd arrived at through Scripture and experience and a lot of late nights with a King James Bible and a cup of coffee. But somewhere along the way, I started to notice a pattern. The same principle kept showing up in every domain. Theology. Philosophy. Marriage. Church. Baptism. Ethics. Politics. The nature of the human mind. The nature of heaven and hell. Every time I turned a corner, the same truth was standing there waiting for me.

And eventually I realized it wasn't a collection of beliefs at all. It was one belief. Applied everywhere.

Here is the sentence:

*“Everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, sustained by His will, authored by His purpose, and held together by personal covenants of love.”*

That's it. That's the whole system. Every chapter in this book is a derivation of that sentence. Every position I hold traces back to it. Every objection I answer is an objection to some part of it. And if you accept the sentence, everything else follows with a kind of inevitability that I didn't plan and couldn't have manufactured. The system builds itself. I just noticed.

And if you reject the sentence, you can close this book now and save yourself the trouble. Because nothing that comes after it will make any sense without it.

Now let me show you what it means.

---

## **Everything That Exists**

Not some things. *Everything*. Every atom, every thought, every sin, every act of grace. Every drop of rain and every heartbeat. Every word you've ever spoken and every feeling you've ever felt. Every event in history and every moment of your private life. *Everything that exists* is included. There are no exceptions, no carve-outs, no categories that fall outside the scope.

This is where most people get uncomfortable, and I understand why. Because if everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, then evil exists because God is thinking it. Sin exists because God is thinking it. The fall of Adam, the crucifixion of Christ, the suffering of innocents, the damnation of the wicked, all of it is included in the word *everything*. And most theologians, if they're being honest, will try to find a way around this. They'll talk about God "permitting" evil rather than authoring it. They'll invoke "secondary causes." They'll construct elaborate systems of divine permission that allow

them to maintain God's sovereignty in theory while protecting Him from the accusation of authoring sin in practice.

I won't do that. And the reason I won't do that is because the Scriptures won't let me.

*"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."* (Isaiah 45:7)

That verse says what it says. The Hebrew word is *ra*. It means evil, wickedness, calamity, disaster. God creates it. Not permits it. Not allows it. Creates it. And if you're tempted to soften that word, to translate it as "calamity" only and strip out the moral dimension, you have to explain why God would need to clarify that He creates *calamity* but not *moral evil*. The whole point of the verse is that there is nothing outside His authorship. Light and darkness. Peace and evil. *"I the Lord do all these things."*

The reluctance to accept this comes from a place I'll address many times throughout this book. It comes from a Greek philosopher named Plato, who wrote in his *Republic* that the divine must never be proposed as the author of evil. That single philosophical assumption has infected every major system of Christian theology since the Patristic era. Augustine imported it. The Reformers inherited it. And to this day, even the most rigorous Calvinists will recite the phrase "God is not the author of sin" as if it were Scripture. It is not Scripture. It is Plato. And Plato's chief hatred was the Hebrew Scriptures.

I'll have much more to say about the law of Plato as we go. For now, I only want to establish this: when I say *everything that exists*, I mean everything. Including the parts that make us uncomfortable. Including evil. Including sin. Including the

things we wish we could assign to some other source. There is no other source. There is only God.

---

## A Thought

Not a creation in the mechanical sense. Not an object manufactured by a cosmic engineer. *A thought*. Information. The product of a mind.

This is the heart of the entire framework, and it's where most people's assumptions get turned upside down. The modern world operates on the assumption that matter is fundamental and mind is emergent. That the physical universe came first, and consciousness arose from it at some point through some process we don't fully understand. Atoms formed molecules, molecules formed cells, cells formed brains, and brains produced minds. Matter first. Mind second.

The Bible says the exact opposite.

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1)

In the beginning was the *Word*. Not in the beginning was the atom. Not in the beginning was the particle. The *Word*. Logos. Information. Language. Mind. Before there was a single speck of matter in the universe, there was a Word. And the Word was God. And the Word was *with* God. Information before matter. Mind before molecules. The invisible before the visible.

And the writer of Hebrews drives it home:

*"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."* (Hebrews 11:3)

Read that carefully. *“Things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”* The visible world was not made from visible material. It was made from something invisible. Something unseen. Something that does not *appear* in the physical sense. The entire physical universe is derived from a non-physical source. That source is the Word. The thought. The mind of God.

And Paul again in Colossians:

*“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”* (Colossians 1:16-17)

*“By him all things consist.”* The word *consist* means to hold together, to cohere. Present tense. Continuous. Not “by him all things were set in motion” as if God wound up a clock and walked away. By him all things *consist*. Right now. This moment. The physical universe is being held in existence by a mind that is actively thinking it. Remove the mind, and the matter ceases to exist. Not eventually. Instantly. Because the matter was never self-sustaining. It was always a thought.

And one more, from Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill:

*“For in him we live, and move, and have our being.”* (Acts 17:28)

We exist *in* God. Not alongside God. Not in a universe that God created and then stepped back from. *In* him. We live in his thought. We move in his thought. We have our being in his thought. The physical world is not the container. God’s mind is the container. And everything we experience as “reality” is the rendering of that thought into a form our senses can process.

This is the philosophical position known as *idealism*. Mind precedes matter. The invisible is more real than the visible. And I want to be honest about something here, because I think honesty serves the reader better than pretending I arrived at this position solely through exegesis. I arrived at it through both Scripture *and* the work of a Greek philosopher, and the irony is not lost on me that I'm about to credit a philosopher in the same chapter where I've attacked one.

Plato was the first great idealist in Western philosophy. His Theory of Forms proposed that the physical world is a shadow of a higher, invisible reality. The things we see are imperfect copies of eternal, unchanging realities that exist beyond the senses. A chair is a shadow of the Form of "chair." A beautiful sunset is a shadow of the Form of beauty. The visible world is a rendering, and the invisible world is the substance.

Plato got the architecture right. The ontology is correct. Mind precedes matter. The invisible is more real than the visible. I have no quarrel with that. Where Plato went catastrophically wrong was in two specific areas: first, in his insistence that the divine cannot author evil, which we've already addressed. And second, in his dualism between body and spirit, which led him and every philosopher influenced by him to treat the physical as inherently lesser, dirtier, and further from God than the spiritual. This error produced Gnosticism, the church's embarrassment about the human body, and the assumption that heaven means *escaping* the physical. All of which are wrong, and all of which this book will address in due course.

So I take from Plato his ontology and reject his ethics. I use his best insight and throw out his worst errors. And I am campless even in philosophy.

---

## In the Mind of God

Not a thought floating in the void. A thought *in the mind of God*. Specific. Personal. Located. The physical world is not an abstraction. It's not the product of an impersonal force or an unconscious process. It's the product of a Person who is thinking it on purpose.

And this is where idealism becomes theology. Because secular idealism, and there are secular idealists, can propose that reality is information without proposing a Mind behind it. The simulation hypothesis, which has gained popularity in recent years, asks whether we might be living in a computer simulation. And the honest answer from this framework is: yes. In a sense, we are. But the Simulator is not a machine. The Simulator is personal, sovereign, conscious, and the simulation is called creation. The secular version asks the right question with the wrong answer.

I've been writing code since I was ten years old. I know what authored information looks like. When I look at DNA, I see code. I don't mean that metaphorically. I mean it literally. DNA is a four-letter digital code that stores, transmits, and executes information. It has syntax. It has error-correction. It has regulatory elements and nested instructions. And in forty years of programming, I have never once encountered a functional information system that was produced by random processes. Not once. Every information system I've ever seen was authored by a mind.

This isn't the "intelligent design" argument, though it overlaps with it. Intelligent design still operates within a mechanistic framework. It says, "Look at the complexity.

Someone must have *designed* it.” But the framework of this book isn’t about design. It’s about authorship. A designer builds a machine. An Author thinks a thought. The difference is that the machine can exist independently of the designer. A thought cannot exist independently of the mind that thinks it. Remove the designer, and the machine keeps running. Remove the Author, and the thought, and everything it contains, vanishes.

That’s why Colossians 1:17 uses the present tense. “*By him all things consist.*” The Author is still thinking. He never stopped. And if He stopped, we would cease to exist. Not die. Cease. Because we are not machines that God built and left running. We are thoughts He is actively thinking.

---

## **Sustained by His Will**

Not wound up and left to run. *Sustained*. Actively. Continuously. Every moment.

Some theological systems treat God’s relationship to creation as if He built a watch, wound it up, set it on a shelf, and occasionally intervenes when something goes wrong. They call this “providence,” and it sounds pious, but it’s actually a form of deism with a prayer life. The God of that system is a watchmaker. The God of this system is an Author who is writing in real time.

“*Upholding all things by the word of his power.*” (Hebrews 1:3)

Upholding. Present participle. Not “having upheld.” Not “will uphold.” *Upholding*. Right now. This instant. God is sustaining reality by His will at this very moment. If His will

were withdrawn from a single atom, that atom would cease. If His will were withdrawn from a single soul, that soul would cease. Nothing self-sustains. Everything is held.

And this means there are no accidents. No surprises. No events that catch God off guard. Because every event is His thought. You don't get surprised by your own thoughts. You author them.

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## **Authored by His Purpose**

This is absolute predestination. And I'm not going to soften it.

Every event in history was authored by God before it happened. *“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”* (Isaiah 46:10). Every word, every action, every sin, every grace, every raindrop, every heartbeat. Authored. Not permitted. Not foreseen. Not responded to. *Authored.*

*“Permission”* is sovereignty with plausible deniability. And God doesn't need plausible deniability. He doesn't need to protect Himself from the charge of authoring evil, because He told us plainly that He creates it. The theological world has spent centuries building elaborate systems to distance God from the events He Himself claims to have authored, and every one of those systems breaks under the weight of Isaiah 45:7. I know that's a hard sentence. I know it's uncomfortable. But the Scriptures don't give us comfortable. They give us truth.

I'll spend an entire chapter on supralapsarianism later in this book. For now, I only want you to understand this: when

the sentence says “*authored by His purpose,*” it means everything. The fall. The cross. Your conversion. Your doubts. Your sin. Your sanctification. All of it was authored by a God who doesn’t ask for your cooperation and doesn’t need your permission. He is the Author. We are the characters. And the story is His.

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## **Held Together by Personal Covenants of Love**

And here is where the sentence opens its arms.

Because if I stopped at “*authored by His purpose,*” this would be a cold, terrifying system. A God who authors everything, including evil, and does so for purposes we cannot question. That’s sovereignty without tenderness. That’s raw power without love. And that’s not the God of the Bible.

The God of the Bible makes *covenants*. Personal promises. Not legal contracts, not institutional frameworks, not impersonal decrees. Personal, experiential, relational promises of love. “*I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*” (Jeremiah 31:33). That’s not the language of a courtroom. That’s the language of a marriage. That’s the language of a Father who has chosen His children before the foundation of the world and holds them, personally, by name, forever.

A covenant is not a contract. A contract requires two independent parties negotiating terms. But in idealism, there are no two independent parties. There is only the Author and His characters. The character cannot negotiate with the mind that thinks him into existence. The character can only receive.

And what God gives is not a legal arrangement but a *promise*. A personal, unbreakable, eternal promise of love.

This is what separates this framework from the cold, hard systems that give Calvinism its reputation. Sovereignty without love is tyranny. But sovereignty *with* love is the most comforting truth in the universe. Because it means the God who authored everything, including the hardest parts of your life, did so *within the context of a personal promise to you*. Not to a class of people. Not to a theological category. To *you*. Because you are a specific thought in His mind, and He holds you by a covenant that was made before you were born and will endure long after the stars burn out.

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## **Operational Idealism**

Before we move on, I want to name the thread that runs through this entire book, because once you see it, you'll see it everywhere.

I call it *operational idealism*. Not idealism as an abstract philosophical position, but idealism as the operating system for daily life. The invisible is more real than the visible. And that principle applies to *everything*:

The covenant precedes the ceremony. The regeneration precedes the faith. The promise precedes the condition. The thought precedes the matter. The substance precedes the formality. Christ precedes the law. The Spirit precedes the water.

In every single domain of life, the invisible reality comes first, and the visible expression follows. The wedding doesn't

create the marriage. The water doesn't create the regeneration. The church council didn't create the canon. The law didn't create the righteousness. In every case, the substance was already there. The ceremony just announced it.

This is not a theory. This is how the universe works. And once you see it, you can't unsee it. Every chapter in this book is an application of this one principle to a different domain. And if the principle is true, if the invisible really does precede the visible in every case, then every system of thought that puts the visible first, that makes the ceremony the cause of the reality, that treats the physical as fundamental and the spiritual as derivative, is backwards.

Most of the errors in the history of Christianity can be traced to this single inversion. Making the water the cause of regeneration. Making the law the cause of righteousness. Making correct doctrine the cause of salvation. Making the institution the cause of the church. Making the ceremony the cause of the covenant. Every one of these errors puts the visible before the invisible. And every one of them collapses under the weight of the sentence we started with.

*Everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God.*

The invisible is more real than the visible. Always. In every domain.

If you accept that, turn the page. Everything else follows.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“This is just philosophy, not theology.”**

The Bible teaches it explicitly. *“In the beginning was the Word”* (John 1:1). *“Things which are seen were not made of things which do appear”* (Hebrews 11:3). *“By him all things consist”* (Colossians 1:17). The philosophy follows the Scripture. Not the other way around.

**“If reality is just God’s thought, is the physical world not real?”**

It IS real. But it’s real the way a rendering is real. It has genuine substance, but the substance is derived from something more fundamental. Christ’s resurrection body ate fish. Matter is real. It’s just not fundamental.

**“This sounds like pantheism. God IS everything.”**

No. God *thinks* everything. The Author isn’t the book. The Painter isn’t the painting. Creation exists in God’s mind but is not identical with God. Pantheism collapses the distinction between Creator and creation. Idealism maintains it. The thought is not the Thinker. But the thought cannot exist without the Thinker.

**“If God authors everything, He’s responsible for evil.”**

Yes. He is. Isaiah 45:7. The question is whether “responsibility” means “guilt.” It does not. It is impossible for God to sin, because sin is defined as rebellion against God. God cannot rebel against Himself. Creating evil for His purposes is not the same thing as sinning. The potter shapes the clay into whatever vessel He pleases. The clay doesn’t get to accuse the potter (Romans 9:20).

**“You’re not a theologian. You don’t have credentials.”**

Neither did Peter. Neither did John. Neither did the tentmaker from Tarsus. The truth doesn't care about credentials. It cares about Scripture. And Scripture is open to anyone who can read.

# Chapter 2: The Collapsed Thought

If Chapter 1 is the foundation, this chapter is the key. And it can be stated in a single line:

*“We are just God’s eternal thoughts collapsed in a moment in time.”*

That sentence changed my life when I first understood it, and I want to show you why it should change yours. Because if the sentence from Chapter 1 tells you *what* reality is, this chapter tells you *how* it works. And the implications are staggering.

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## Eternity Is Not What You Think

Most people, including most Christians, think of eternity as a really long time. An infinite timeline stretching forward and backward without end. Heaven goes on forever. God has always existed. Eternity just means *more time*.

But that's not what the Bible teaches. Eternity is not a quantity of time. Eternity is the *absence* of time. God does not exist across an infinite timeline. He exists *outside* the timeline entirely. Time is not His environment. Time is His creation. He made it the same way He made light and darkness, trees and mountains, men and angels. Time is a rendering constraint. It's part of the story. It is not part of the Author.

*"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."* (Psalm 90:2)

From everlasting to everlasting. That phrase doesn't mean God has been alive for a really long time. It means God inhabits a reality where "from" and "to" don't apply. There is no sequence in God's mind. There is no before and after. There is no "first He thought this, and then He thought that." There is one thought. Complete. Whole. Finished. And what we experience as sequence, as history, as the passage of time, is that one thought being *rendered* into frames that our finite minds can process.

Think of it like a filmstrip. A filmmaker sees every frame of the movie at once. He can lay the whole strip out on a table and look at the beginning, the middle, and the end simultaneously. The characters in the film experience the story sequentially, one frame at a time. They can only see the frame they're in. They remember the frames that came before. They anticipate the frames that come after. And to them, the sequence is real. The experience of living through it, frame by frame, is genuine.

But the filmmaker sees the whole thing at once. He doesn't wonder what happens next. He doesn't hope the ending turns out well. He *wrote* the ending. He wrote every frame. And He

sees them all simultaneously, because He is not inside the film. He is outside it, holding the strip.

That's what it means for God to be eternal. He is the Filmmaker. We are the characters. And time is the filmstrip.

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## The Collapse

So if God's thought is eternal and complete, and we experience it sequentially, what is the relationship between the two? How does an eternal thought become temporal experience?

I call it *collapse*. Not because anything is lost or broken, but because something infinite is being expressed in something finite. The eternal thought is being compressed into a moment. The timeless reality is being rendered into a frame.

And this pattern repeats everywhere. At every level of reality, the same thing is happening: something invisible and eternal is being collapsed into something visible and temporal.

<b>The Eternal (God's thought)</b>	<b>Collapsed into Time</b>
The covenant	The ceremony
Justification	The cross
Regeneration	The conversion experience
The Author's intent	The character's experience
Information	Quantum bits
Quantum bits	Electrical signals
Boot parameters	Feelings
The invisible	The visible

Look at that table. Every row is the same pattern. Something invisible becomes visible. Something eternal becomes temporal. Something in God's mind becomes something in our experience. And in every case, the invisible came first. The eternal came first. The thought came first. The collapse follows. Always.

This is not a metaphor. This is the actual structure of reality. And it solves problems that have plagued theology for centuries.

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## **Justification: One Thought, Four Frames**

Let me show you how this works with one of the most important doctrines in the Bible.

Justification is the act of God declaring His people righteous. Now, *when* does this happen? Ask a hundred theologians and you'll get a dozen different answers. Some say it happens at the moment of faith. Some say it happens at the cross. Some say it happens in eternity past. And each of them has Scripture to support their position. Because Scripture describes justification as happening at all of those moments.

And here's the beauty of it: *they're all right*. Because justification isn't four different events. It's one thought, expressed in four frames.

1. **Eternal** - God never viewed His people as condemned. "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin*" (Romans 4:8). Before the foundation of the world, the thought was complete: my people, in Christ, righteous. This is the thought itself. Timeless. Whole. Finished.

2. **The cross** - The eternal thought collapsed into history. “*By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*” (Hebrews 9:12). The cross didn’t create the justification. It *rendered* it. It made visible in time what was always true in eternity. The ceremony of the covenant.
3. **Conversion** - The eternal thought collapsed into personal experience. The individual, for the first time, *knows* they are justified. The Spirit reveals it. Faith is born. Assurance dawns. The frame arrives in the character’s sequence, and the character experiences what God has always seen.
4. **Judgment** - The eternal thought collapsed into public declaration. The last day. The final pronouncement. Not a verdict being decided, but a verdict being *announced*. The ceremony of what was always the substance.

Same thought. Four frames. Four collapses of one eternal reality into four moments in the filmstrip. And the theologians who argue about *when* justification happens are arguing about which frame is the “real” one. They’re all real. They’re all collapses of the same thought. The only one that’s *first* is the eternal one, because it doesn’t exist in time at all.

This is what it means to believe in justification from eternity. Not that justification is a legal fiction backdated into the past. Not that the cross was unnecessary because God already made up His mind. But that God’s mind is timeless, and His thought, my people, in Christ, righteous, was never *not* His thought. The cross rendered it in blood. Faith renders it in experience. The

judgment renders it in public declaration. But the thought was always there. Complete. Whole. Finished.

*“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”* (Acts 15:18)

From the beginning of the world. Not from the cross. Not from the conversion. From the *beginning*. Because God doesn't have a timeline. He has a thought.

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## **The Chain**

Now let me show you the full chain. Because the collapse doesn't stop at theology. It goes all the way down.

God thinks. That thought is information. That information collapses into quantum bits, the fundamental building blocks of physical reality. Those quantum bits produce matter, energy, force, the physical universe as we know it. And within that physical universe, electrical signals fire in a human brain. Those electrical signals produce feelings, pre-propositional information that arrives at the conscious mind before words can form. And the conscious mind takes those feelings and interprets them, assigns them labels and causes and meanings, and produces thoughts. And those thoughts, if the mind is regenerate, eventually produce theology. Theology about the God whose original thought started the whole chain.

God thinks -> information -> quantum bits -> matter -> electrical signals -> feelings -> thoughts -> theology about God thinking.

One unbroken chain from the Author to the character and back. And the chain is circular. It's a loop. The character's

theology points back to the Author who started the whole thing. The output of the system is a reflection of its input. The creation contemplates the Creator, and in doing so, demonstrates that the creation was always a thought in the Creator's mind.

The system is circular by design. Not because it's a logical fallacy, as the critics of presuppositionalism would say. But because a closed loop is the only shape a system can have when the Author is the substrate. When God is the ground of all being, every chain of reasoning eventually leads back to Him. That's not a flaw. That's the architecture.

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## **What This Means for Your Life**

I want to be practical here, because I know this can sound abstract. So let me tell you what the collapsed thought means for the person reading this right now.

It means your struggle is real, but it's already resolved. From inside the filmstrip, the war between faith and doubt, between the flesh and the Spirit, between what you believe and what you feel, is agonizing. I know. I live it every day. I have genuine doubts about God and Christ, and I've said it out loud, which most sovereign grace guys won't do. There are moments when assurance vanishes and all you have is the memory that it was once there. And in those moments, the filmstrip feels like the only reality, and the frame you're in feels like it will last forever.

But from outside the filmstrip, the Author sees the whole picture. He sees the doubt and the assurance and the resolution and the mature man at sixty, all at once, as one thought. The "gap between what I believe and what I feel" is a temporal

experience of a timeless reality. From inside, it feels like struggle. From outside, it was always the finished picture.

And that should bring you comfort. Not because the struggle isn't real. It is. The frames are real. Your experience is real. But the outcome was never in question. Because the Author already wrote it. And He wrote it before the struggle began, before the doubt crept in, before the world was even made. You are an eternal thought. And eternal thoughts don't get lost in the filmstrip.

It also means that progressive revelation, the gradual unfolding of truth across history and across your own lifetime, is not God figuring things out as He goes. It's timelessness decompressing into time. The eternal thought unfolding into sequential experience. Not growth toward a destination. The destination was always there. Just the character experiencing the frames, one at a time, in the order the Author set.

And it means that when Paul says "*we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28), he's not expressing a hope. He's stating a fact about the structure of reality. All things work together for good because the Author wrote them to do exactly that. The frames are ordered. The sequence is authored. And the outcome is certain, because the Author sees the whole filmstrip, and He's already told us how it ends.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**"If God sees all things simultaneously, does free will exist?"**

No. Not in the libertarian sense. The character in a novel doesn't choose the plot. But the character IS the novel. The experience is real even though the Author wrote it. The character's joy is real joy. The character's grief is real grief. The character's choices feel like choices from inside the frame. And that's by design. The Author wanted the characters to *experience* the story, not just observe it. But the choices were authored. All of them. *"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13). To *will* and to *do*. Even the willing is His work.

**"If time is just a rendering constraint, does history matter?"**

Yes. Absolutely. The filmstrip is real to the characters in it. The frames are real experience. Christ really died. You really suffer. Love really costs. The fact that the Author sees it all at once doesn't make any frame less real. What's not real is the illusion that the frames are self-generating, that history is producing itself without an Author. History is authored. But it's still history.

**"This makes prayer meaningless. God already decided everything."**

Prayer is part of the script. God ordained both the prayer and the answer. The prayer is the means He uses. He doesn't need the means, but He authored them for our experience. And the experience of prayer, the communion with God, the pouring out of the heart, the waiting, the answer, all of that is real. The Author wrote it because He wanted the characters to experience the relationship. Prayer isn't an attempt to change God's mind. It's an invitation to participate in the story He's already writing. And the participation is the point.

*“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” (Philippians 4:6)*

He already knows. You pray anyway. Because the prayer is the communion. And the communion is the point.

**“If the struggle is already resolved, why does it still hurt?”**

Because you’re inside the filmstrip. The resolution is real from God’s perspective. But you experience the frames sequentially. The frame you’re in right now might be the hardest frame in the whole strip. And it still hurts. It’s supposed to. The Author wrote it that way. But the next frame is coming. And the last frame is glory. And the Author has never lost a character He intended to keep.

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*“We are just God’s eternal thoughts collapsed in a moment in time.”*

That’s not a line in the system. That IS the system. Everything else is commentary.

## Chapter 3: Bit from God

In 1990, a physicist named John Archibald Wheeler proposed an idea that shook the foundations of modern science. He called it “it from bit.” The idea was radical and simple: reality is not fundamentally made of matter. Reality is fundamentally made of *information*. Every particle, every force, every physical quantity in the universe derives its existence from yes-or-no questions, from binary choices, from *bits*. The universe, Wheeler argued, is participatory. It doesn’t just sit there being physical. It comes into existence through observation, through measurement, through the act of asking it questions and receiving answers.

Wheeler was not a theologian. He was not a Christian, as far as I know. He was a physicist at Princeton who worked on the Manhattan Project and spent decades trying to understand the relationship between information and reality. And he arrived, through pure physics, at a conclusion that the Bible stated three thousand years before he was born.

*“Things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”* (Hebrews 11:3)

Wheeler said “it from bit.” The framework of this book says “bit from God.”

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## The Observer

One of the strangest and most well-documented phenomena in quantum mechanics is the observer effect. At the subatomic level, particles don't behave the way you'd expect matter to behave. A photon, for example, will behave as a wave when it's not being observed, passing through two slits simultaneously and creating an interference pattern. But the moment you observe it, the moment you measure which slit it goes through, it collapses into a particle and behaves like a tiny ball of matter.

The act of observation changes the outcome. The universe behaves differently depending on whether something is watching. And physicists have been arguing about what this means for a long time now.

I'm not a physicist. I'm a computer programmer. But I know what this looks like. It looks like a rendering engine. It looks like a system that doesn't fully render the scene until a viewer is present. If you've ever played a video game, you've seen this. The game doesn't render the whole world at once. It renders what the player can see. The rest is potential, stored as data, waiting to be rendered when the camera turns.

Now, the physicists would rightly object to my analogy. The observer effect in quantum mechanics is more complex than a video game rendering engine, and I'm not claiming a one-to-one equivalence. What I *am* claiming is that the observer effect is exactly what idealism predicts. If reality is information in a mind, and the physical world is a rendering of that information,

then the rendering should behave differently depending on the state of observation. Because observation is participation in the mind that sustains it.

In Christian idealism, God's consciousness IS the observer. He is the one holding reality in existence by the continuous act of thinking it. "*By him all things consist*" (Colossians 1:17). When we observe a particle, we're not creating reality. We're participating, at an incredibly small scale, in the observation that God is performing at the cosmic scale all the time. Our observation collapses a small piece of the rendering. His observation sustains the whole thing.

I want to be careful here, because I am *not* building theology on physics. The theology was there first. The Scriptures taught that the invisible is more real than the visible, that reality is sustained by the Word of God, and that the physical universe is a product of information, long before any physicist measured a photon. What I am doing is noting that physics has arrived at what theology said first. And the convergence is striking.

---

## **The Simulation**

The simulation hypothesis has become popular in recent years, especially among technologists and physicists who can see the informational structure of reality but can't bring themselves to call it God. The argument goes like this: if reality is fundamentally information, and if we are approaching the technological ability to create simulated universes ourselves, then statistically it's more likely that we're *in* a simulation than that we're in the original "base reality."

And from the framework of this book, the honest answer is: they're closer than they think.

We ARE in a simulation. In the sense that the physical world is a rendering of information in a Mind. The universe IS computed, in the sense that every moment is being sustained by a consciousness that holds it all together. The “code” running reality IS authored, in the sense that DNA is a four-letter digital information system with syntax, error-correction, and nested regulatory instructions.

But the Simulator is not a machine. The Simulator is personal, sovereign, conscious, and loving. And the simulation is not a program running on hardware. It's a *thought* running in a *mind*. The secular simulation hypothesis asks the right question with the wrong answer. It sees the informational structure of reality but refuses to look for the Person behind it. It can see the code but won't acknowledge the Coder.

And I find this fascinating, because it's the same pattern we see everywhere in the history of ideas. The secular world gets close to the truth and then swerves at the last moment to avoid the conclusion. They see that reality is information. They see that the universe has the structure of a designed system. They see that consciousness plays a role in the collapse of physical reality. And they'll build a thousand theories about simulations and multiverses and self-organizing complexity before they'll say the one word that explains all of it: God.

---

## **Authored Code**

I've been writing code since I was ten years old. My parents bought me an Apple IIc, and I sat down and started

programming. Forty years later, I'm still at it. I've written code in Turbo Pascal, Perl, PHP, C, Java, PL/SQL, and probably a dozen other languages I've forgotten. I've built content management systems, matchmaking software (that's a funny story), SaaS products, and I've directed a team of developers running core operations for a federal agency for most of my career. I know what authored code looks like.

And when I look at DNA, I see code.

I don't mean that as a metaphor. DNA is literally a four-letter digital code. The four nucleotide bases, adenine, thymine, guanine, and cytosine, function as a quaternary alphabet. They encode instructions. They are read by molecular machines. They are copied, error-checked, and executed with a precision that makes the best human programming look clumsy. DNA stores information, transmits information, and executes information. It has syntax. It has grammar. It has regulatory elements that control when and how the code is expressed. It has nested instructions and recursive loops.

And in forty years of programming, I have never once encountered a functional information system that was produced by random processes. Not once. Not ever. Every information system I have ever seen was authored by a mind.

Now, I'm well aware of the counterarguments. Evolution by natural selection. Random mutation. Deep time providing enough rolls of the dice. I've heard them all. And I don't deny that organisms change over time. What I deny is that random processes produce *functional information systems from scratch*. Because that's not what randomness does. Randomness degrades information. It introduces noise. It corrupts signal. Every programmer knows this. If you randomly

change bytes in a functioning program, you don't get a better program. You get a crash.

DNA didn't crash. DNA works. It works with a sophistication that dwarfs anything human beings have ever produced. And the simplest explanation, the one that any programmer would give if you showed them the code without telling them where it came from, is that *someone wrote it*.

But I want to push this beyond the "intelligent design" argument, because intelligent design still thinks inside a mechanistic box. The ID movement says, "Look at the complexity. Someone must have *designed* it." But a designer builds a machine. And a machine can exist independently of the designer. You build a clock, you walk away, the clock keeps ticking. The designer is separate from the design.

The framework of this book says something different. It says God didn't *design* DNA. He *thinks* it. DNA is not a machine that God built and left running. DNA is a thought God is actively thinking. The information in every cell of your body is being sustained right now by a Mind that has never stopped thinking it. Remove the Mind, and the code doesn't just stop running. It ceases to exist. Because the code was never stored on hardware. It was stored in God.

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## **Where Physics Meets Genesis**

*"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."*

(Genesis 1:3)

God *said*. He spoke. He used language. He used *information*. And information became reality. Light didn't exist,

and then God transmitted a signal, a word, a thought, and light appeared. Not because He flipped a switch. Because He *thought* it.

*“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.”* (Psalm 33:6)

By the *word*. By the *breath of his mouth*. Language. Information. Signal. The entire universe, from the largest galaxy to the smallest quark, was spoken into existence by a God who creates through *information*, not through mechanics.

And the physicist looks through his telescope and sees information at the foundation of reality. And the biologist looks through her microscope and sees authored code in every cell. And the computer scientist runs his simulations and discovers that the universe has the structure of a computed system. And all three of them are looking at the same thing. The thought of God, rendered into a form their instruments can detect.

This is where quantum physics meets Genesis 1 meets Colossians 1 meets the electrical signal firing in your brain right now as you read this sentence. It’s all one system. One chain. One thought. And the thought has a name.

*“In the beginning was the Word.”*

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## **A Note of Caution**

I want to end this chapter with an honest admission, because I think the reader deserves it.

I am not a physicist. I am a programmer with an education in computer science and a deep love for the Scriptures. The physics I’ve cited in this chapter is real, and the convergence

between quantum mechanics and biblical idealism is, I believe, genuine and significant. But I am using the physics as *confirmation*, not as *proof*. The theology was there first. The Bible said the invisible is more real than the visible before any physicist measured anything. If quantum mechanics were revised tomorrow, if the observer effect turned out to have a different explanation, if Wheeler's "it from bit" were superseded by a better model, the theology would not change. Because the theology doesn't rest on the physics. The theology rests on Scripture. The physics just happens to agree.

I say this because I've seen well-meaning Christians build too much of their case on scientific evidence, and when the science shifts, as science always does, the theology looks like it has failed. It hasn't. The science was never the foundation. Christ was. And Christ doesn't need a particle accelerator to validate His Word.

But I will say this: it's something when the physics arrives at the same place the theology started from. And when the biologist discovers authored code in every cell, and the physicist discovers information at the bottom of reality, and the computer scientist discovers that the universe looks like a rendering engine, and all three of them arrive at the same conclusion that Genesis 1 stated in its opening verse, that's not an accident. That's a thought. And the thought has a Thinker.

Wheeler said "it from bit."

I say "bit from God."

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## Objections and Answers

**“You’re misusing quantum physics. The observer effect doesn’t mean what you think it means.”**

The physics confirms what Scripture already stated. I’m not building theology on physics. I’m noting that physics arrived at what theology said first. If the physics changes, the theology stands. But the convergence is worth noting, and I won’t pretend it doesn’t exist just because some people are uncomfortable with it.

**“Science doesn’t prove God.”**

Correct. Nothing proves God to the natural man. *“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him”* (1 Corinthians 2:14). But the coherence between quantum mechanics and biblical idealism is exactly what the system predicts. If reality IS information, and information requires a mind, then discovering information at the foundation of reality is discovering what we already knew. The evidence doesn’t create the faith. The faith interprets the evidence.

**“The simulation hypothesis is atheist. You can’t baptize it.”**

I’m not baptizing it. I’m pointing out that the secular version asks the right question, *are we in a simulation?*, with the wrong answer, a machine did it. The Simulator is personal and sovereign. And the simulation is called creation.

**“DNA could have evolved naturally. You’re making a God-of-the-gaps argument.”**

I’ve been programming for forty years. I know what authored code looks like. Random processes degrade

information. They don't produce functional systems from scratch. This isn't God-of-the-gaps. This is a programmer looking at code and recognizing authorship. The gap isn't in my knowledge. It's in the theory that says random noise can write a genome.

**“This chapter is more philosophy than theology.”**

It's both. And the distinction between them is a modern invention that the Bible doesn't recognize. Paul preached on Mars Hill using the philosophers' own language (Acts 17:28). The truth doesn't belong to a discipline. It belongs to Christ. And if Christ's truth shows up in physics, in computer science, in philosophy, and in Scripture, that's not a problem. That's the sentence from Chapter 1, applied.

## Chapter 4: The Author, Not the Clock

I've watched Christians argue about the age of the earth for most of my believing life. And I've watched them do it with a ferocity that would make you think the Gospel itself depended on the answer. Young earth creationists insist on six literal twenty-four-hour days and treat anyone who disagrees as a compromiser of biblical authority. Old earth creationists and theistic evolutionists insist on billions of years and treat the young earthers as anti-intellectual. And both sides are so consumed with the argument about the *mechanism* that they've almost entirely lost sight of the *Person*.

God created. That's the point. That's what Genesis 1 is about. Not the clock. The Author.

*"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."*  
(Genesis 1:1)

*Bereshith bara Elohim.* In the beginning, God created. And everything that follows in the creation account is the Author telling you how He told His story. The question isn't whether God did it. The question the world fights about is *how fast* He

did it. And in the framework of this book, that question is far less important than either side thinks it is.

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## **The Timeline Doesn't Matter**

Let me say that clearly, because I know it will frustrate people on both sides. I believe the timeline of creation is not a primary issue. It's a secondary issue at best. And I'm going to explain why.

If God is outside of time, as we established in Chapter 2, then the question "how long did creation take?" is a question about the rendering, not about the Author. It's like asking a filmmaker how many frames per second he used. The answer might be interesting. It might even be technically important. But it doesn't tell you anything about the story he was telling or why he told it. The frames-per-second question is a question about the medium. The story is about the message.

The Hebrew word *yom*, translated "day" in Genesis 1, can mean a literal twenty-four-hour period, or it can mean a period of time of unspecified length. Both usages appear throughout the Old Testament. The word itself doesn't settle the debate. And the reason the word doesn't settle the debate is because, I believe, God didn't intend it to. He used a word with range. He wrote the creation account in language that allows for both readings. And I think He did that on purpose, because the point was never the clock.

The point was the Author.

Whether God created the universe in six twenty-four-hour days or in six ages spanning billions of years, the creation is the

same. The Author is the same. The purpose is the same. The fact that God *spoke* and it *was* doesn't change based on how long the speaking took. "*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth*" (Psalm 33:6). That's true whether the breath took a day or an eon.

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## **The Author Writes with Depth**

Now here's where my position will bother the young earth crowd specifically, and I want to be fair about it.

The fossil record is real. The geological layers are real. The light from distant stars is real. The evidence that the universe has significant age is real. I don't deny any of that. But I interpret it differently than both sides of the debate.

The typical young earth response to this evidence is that God created the universe with the *appearance* of age. And the typical atheist retort is that this makes God a deceiver, planting fake evidence to mislead honest investigators. And the old earth Christian tries to split the difference by accepting the evidence at face value and harmonizing it with Scripture.

I take a different approach. God didn't create the appearance of age as a trick. He created the *reality* of depth, because that's how stories work.

When a novelist writes "it was a dark and stormy night," the novelist isn't lying about the weather. The story has a context. The world of the novel has a history that precedes page one. Characters have backstories. Landscapes have geology. The novelist doesn't build every detail from scratch in front of the

reader. He writes a world with depth, because depth is what makes a story feel real.

*“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”*  
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. The Author didn't promise you a transparent timeline. He promised beauty and depth. God is the Author. And He wrote a universe with depth. The fossil record isn't a trick. It's the backstory. The geological layers aren't fake evidence. They're the context of the narrative. The light from distant stars isn't a deception. It's the Author painting a backdrop that extends beyond the edges of the stage.

This doesn't mean the backstory is fictional. In a novel, the backstory is part of the truth of the novel. It's consistent with the story. It holds together. It can be investigated and explored. And it serves the narrative. The same is true of the physical universe. The fossils are there because the Author put them there. The layers are there because the Author put them there. And they're consistent with each other and with the world God is sustaining, because God doesn't do sloppy work.

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## **Both Camps Miss the Person**

What bothers me about the creation debate isn't that people have strong opinions. It's that the debate has become an idol. For the young earth movement, the mechanism of creation has become a test of faith. If you don't hold to six literal days, your commitment to biblical inerrancy is questioned. For the theistic

evolution camp, the mechanism of creation has become a test of intellectual credibility. If you don't accept the scientific consensus, you're an anti-intellectual embarrassment to the faith.

And both of these tests are tests of the *mechanism*. Neither of them is a test of the *Person*. Both sides are arguing about HOW God created. Neither side spends nearly enough time on the fact THAT God created. And the "that" is where the glory is.

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."* (Psalm 19:1)

The heavens declare the glory of God. Not the mechanism. The *glory*. The creation exists to point to the Creator. And when we spend more time arguing about the clock than we spend worshipping the Author, we've missed it.

*"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."* (Romans 1:20)

The invisible things are clearly seen through the things that are made. The creation points to the Creator. Not to the clock. I say this as someone who has opinions on the mechanism. I believe God created directly and intentionally. I believe DNA is authored code, as I argued in the previous chapter. I believe the evidence for design in the natural world is overwhelming. But I refuse to make the mechanism a test of fellowship or a primary article of faith, because the Bible doesn't make it one. Genesis 1 is not a science textbook. It's a hymn of authorship. And the Author deserves more than our arguments about His methods.

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## DNA Revisited

I addressed this in the previous chapter, but it bears repeating in the context of creation specifically. DNA is not the product of random processes. It is authored code. And the Author is not a “designer” in the intelligent design sense, standing outside the machine and tinkering with it. The Author is a *Mind* actively thinking the code into existence at every moment.

The difference matters. If God is a designer, then DNA is a machine that runs independently once built. If God is an Author, then DNA is a thought He is currently thinking. Remove the thought, and the code doesn’t just stop running. It vanishes. Every cell in your body, every nucleotide in every strand of DNA, is being sustained right now by a God who hasn’t stopped thinking about it.

And this applies to the whole of creation. Not just the living things. *“He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names”* (Psalm 147:4). The stars are thoughts. The mountains are thoughts. The laws of physics are thoughts. Gravity is not an impersonal force operating by its own authority. Gravity is a pattern in God’s thinking, as reliable as He is, as consistent as His character, and as dependent on His mind as the words on this page are dependent on the mind that wrote them.

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## Objections and Answers

**“You’re dodging the young earth / old earth question.”**

I’m saying the question is less important than the Person. The mechanism debate has consumed more energy than the

glory it was supposed to produce. I have my own leanings, and I'm honest about them. But I refuse to make the clock the hill I die on when Genesis 1 clearly wants me to look at the Author, not the clock.

**“If the universe has apparent age, God is being deceptive.”**

A novelist who writes a world with a backstory isn't lying. A painter who paints a landscape with shadows from an unseen sun isn't being deceptive. The Author writes with depth because stories need context. The depth is real. The context is real. The Author isn't hiding the truth. He's telling a story that has more dimensions than any one frame can contain.

**“Evolution is real and disproves creation.”**

Random processes don't produce functional information systems. DNA is authored code. The mechanism of how organisms change over time is a question about the rendering. The authorship of the code is a question about the Author. And the Author doesn't need evolution to write a genome. He thinks it.

**“Six literal days is the plain reading of Scripture.”**

It's *a* reading of Scripture. But *yom* has semantic range, and the “plain reading” argument assumes that the English translation captures every nuance of the Hebrew original. It doesn't. Many Hebrew scholars, including men who hold a very high view of Scripture, read the days of Genesis 1 as periods of unspecified length. And none of them are compromising the authority of the text by doing so. They're reading it with the care it deserves.

**“If the timeline doesn't matter, why did you write a whole chapter about it?”**

Because people need permission to stop fighting about it. The young earth believer who has been told his faith depends on six literal days needs to hear that it doesn't. The old earth believer who has been told he's a compromiser needs to hear that he's not. And both of them need to look up from the argument and see the Person the argument was supposed to be about.

## Chapter 5: The Decrees - Supralapsarianism

I used to wince at the word *supralapsarianism*. Not because I didn't believe it, but because I knew that the moment I said it, the conversation was over for most people. Their eyes glazed over. Or worse, they assumed I was one of those cold, hard theologians who gets excited about damnation the way other people get excited about football. And I understood the reaction. The word is intimidating, and the doctrine it describes is even more so.

But here's the thing. You don't need the word to understand the idea. And the idea is not complicated. It's actually one of the simplest and most elegant observations in all of theology. Gordon Clark said it better than anyone:

*"The logical order of any plan is the exact reverse of its temporal execution. The first step in any planning is the end to be achieved; then the means are decided upon, until last of all the first thing to be done is discovered."*

Read that again slowly. The logical order of any plan is the *exact reverse* of its temporal execution.

When you plan a trip, you don't start with the first mile. You start with the destination. Where do I want to end up? Then you work backwards. What road do I take? What car do I drive? When do I leave? The destination comes first in the planning even though it comes last in the execution. The first step in the plan is the *end* to be achieved.

And that's all supralapsarianism is. God planned from the end to the beginning. He started with the destination, the final state of the universe in all its glory, and worked backwards to determine everything that would lead to it. Creation, the fall, redemption, damnation, every event in history was planned in service of the end, not the other way around.

*“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”* (Isaiah 46:10)

Declaring the END from the BEGINNING. The end was always the starting point. The beginning was the last thing planned. And creation, since it is first in history, must be logically *last* in the divine decrees.

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## **Infralapsarianism: Selection, Not Election**

Most Calvinists today are infralapsarians, and most of them don't know it. Infralapsarianism says God's decree to save some and damn others comes *after* the decree to permit the fall. In other words, God looks at a fallen mass of humanity and then selects some for salvation and passes over the rest.

That's not election. That's *selection*. And the difference matters enormously.

In the infralapsarian scheme, God reasons from left to right, from the beginning of time to the end. First He creates. Then Adam falls. Then God looks at the mess and decides what to do about it. He selects some to save and passes over the rest. The fall is treated as something that *happened to* God's plan, not something that was *part* of God's plan. And the redemption is treated as God's *response* to a problem He didn't cause.

But that's not what Scripture describes. Scripture describes a God who *authored* the fall for the purpose of redemption. The Lamb was "*slain from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8). Not slain in response to the fall. Slain FROM the foundation. The cross was in the plan before the fall was in the plan. The redemption was the purpose. The fall was the means. The destination came first.

*"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."* (Acts 2:23)

The *determinate counsel* of God. Determined. Planned. Authored. The wicked hands that nailed Christ to the cross were part of the plan. The crucifixion was not an emergency. It was the decree. And the decree was from the end to the beginning.

Bob Higby laid out the distinction between selection and election in a comparison table that I've included in the appendix of this book, and I commend it to every reader who wants to see the differences drawn out in detail. But the core distinction is this: infralapsarianism says God *reacted* to the fall. Supralapsarianism says God *authored* the fall. And the framework of this book requires the latter, because a God who reacts to events He didn't author is a God who isn't fully

sovereign. And a God who isn't fully sovereign is not the God of Isaiah 46:10.

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## **Permission Is Sovereignty with Plausible Deniability**

The infralapsarian escape hatch is the word *permission*. God *permitted* the fall. God *permitted* evil. God *allowed* sin to enter the world. These phrases are designed to maintain God's sovereignty while protecting Him from the charge of authoring evil.

But they don't work. Because permission, in this context, is just sovereignty with plausible deniability. If God knew that the fall would happen, and had the power to prevent it, and *chose not to prevent it*, then He authored the fall. Calling it "permission" doesn't change the outcome. It just gives God an alibi.

And God doesn't need an alibi. He never asked for one. He told us plainly:

*"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."* (Isaiah 45:7)

*"Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"* (Amos 3:6)

*"Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?"* (Lamentations 3:38)

*"The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."* (Proverbs 16:4)

God creates evil. God causes evil. God made the wicked for the day of evil. These are not proof-texts ripped from context. These are the consistent testimony of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. And the theological tradition that adds the word “permission” to soften them is not being faithful to the text. It’s being faithful to Plato.

The law of Plato, again. The assumption that God cannot be the source of evil. An assumption that comes from Greek philosophy, not from the Hebrew Scriptures. And an assumption that has distorted Reformed theology from the Patristic era to the present day.

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## **Equal Ultimacy**

If God authored the fall for the purpose of redemption, and if both the elect and the reprobate are part of His plan, then both election to salvation and election to damnation are equally ultimate. Neither is primary. Neither is secondary. Both are the positive, active will of God, planned from the end to the beginning.

*“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” (Romans 9:22-23)*

*Fitted to destruction.* Not “fell into destruction.” Not “chose destruction.” *Fitted.* Shaped. Prepared. Authored. The vessels of wrath were designed for their purpose the same way the vessels of mercy were designed for theirs.

And the purpose of the vessels of wrath is not a tragic afterthought. It's a positive decree. God *wills* to show His wrath. God *wills* to make His power known. The damnation of the reprobate glorifies God. Not in the way a tyrant glorifies himself through cruelty, but in the way an Author glorifies Himself through the completeness of His story. The story requires both mercy and justice. Both light and darkness. Both seeds. And the Author planned them both, from the end to the beginning, for one purpose: His glory.

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## **Providence: The Decrees in Action**

Supralapsarianism describes the logical order of God's plan. Providence describes the plan in action, playing out frame by frame in the filmstrip we call history.

And providence, in this framework, is not God watching the machine run. It's God thinking the machine into existence at every instant. "*By him all things consist*" (Colossians 1:17). Present tense. Continuous. Every event in history, from the grandest empire to the smallest sparrow, is being authored in real time by a God who is outside time. Not foreknown, as if God looks ahead at a timeline that already exists. Authored, because He IS the timeline. The filmstrip is His thought. The frames are His moments. And He plays them out in sequence for our experience while seeing them all simultaneously from His position outside the strip.

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father."* (Matthew 10:29)

Not a sparrow falls without your Father. Not “without your Father’s knowledge.” Without your *Father*. He’s involved. Directly. Personally. In every event. In every frame. Not watching from a distance. Thinking it into existence.

This is a terrifying truth if you stop at sovereignty. But it’s the most comforting truth in the universe if you add the word from Chapter 1: *love*. Because the same God who authors every event, including the hard ones, does so within the context of a personal covenant of love with His people. He’s not a blind force rolling over the universe. He’s a Father who knows you by name, who wrote your story from the end to the beginning, and who planned every frame of your filmstrip to bring you to the glory He already sees.

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## **MCT: The Only True Supralapsarian System**

I need to say this plainly, because it’s one of the most important claims in this book.

Most Calvinists who call themselves supralapsarian are not. Not consistently. They’ll affirm that God’s decree of election precedes the decree to create and permit the fall. But when you press them on the details, they revert to infralapsarian reasoning on the origin of evil, on the nature of the reprobate, on the relationship between God and sin. They’ll say God is supralapsarian in His *decrees* but infralapsarian in His *execution*. Which is like saying you planned the trip from the destination backwards but drove from the starting point forwards. Of course you did. The execution is always left-to-

right. But the *planning* is right-to-left. And if your planning is inconsistent, your theology will be too.

I need to explain where the name comes from, because you won't find "Modified Covenant Theology" in any textbook. I coined it. Around 2004, after years of studying Scripture and talking with Bob Higby, I realized that no existing theological system contained everything I believed. Covenant Theology came closest, but it required federal headship, which I rejected. New Covenant Theology moved in the right direction on some points, but it didn't go far enough on justification from eternity or the end of the law. Dispensationalism divided God's dealings into time periods, which made no sense if God is outside of time. And none of them were truly supralapsarian. None of them followed the logic all the way to where it leads. So I took the bones of Covenant Theology, stripped out everything that didn't survive the test of Scripture, built in what I had learned from Bob on the two seeds, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the sovereignty of God over evil, and I gave it a name. Modified Covenant Theology. Not because I modified someone else's system. Because I took the best framework available and modified it until it was honest.

Modified Covenant Theology is the only system that carries the supralapsarian logic all the way. God authored the fall. God created evil. God made Adam sinful, not righteous. God created Satan evil, not fallen. God fashioned the two seeds with different natures and different destinies. And none of this is "permission." All of it is authorship. All of it is the determinate counsel of God, planned from the end to the beginning, executed from the beginning to the end.

As I mentioned in the preface, I stress-tested this framework against one of the best covenant theologians I knew, and he

couldn't break it. I defended it against Phil Johnson, and he wouldn't engage. And in more than two decades of holding this position, I have never found a Scripture that contradicts it or a logical argument that breaks it.

The system holds. And it holds because it starts where God starts: at the end.

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## **Objections and Answers**

### **“This makes God the author of sin.”**

That phrase is nowhere in Scripture. It is the language of the law of Plato, imported into Christian theology by men who were more afraid of Plato's Republic than they were of Isaiah 45:7. God creates evil. It is impossible for God to sin, because sin is rebellion against God, and God cannot rebel against Himself. Creating evil for His purposes is not sinning. The pot doesn't question the potter (Romans 9:20).

### **“Infralapsarianism is the safer, more orthodox position.”**

It's safer for men's comfort. But it's not safe for God's sovereignty. If God *permitted* something He didn't *want*, then something happened outside His will. And if anything happens outside His will, He's not sovereign. “Safe” theology that limits God is not safe at all. It's dangerous, because it gives you a God who is not fully in control.

### **“Equal ultimacy is monstrous. God damning people He could have saved.”**

The charge assumes all humans are the same. They're not. The elect and reprobate are different seeds, as I'll show in a later

chapter. God isn't damning people who could have been saved. The reprobate were never candidates for salvation. They were created for a different purpose. The charge of "monstrous" is an emotional reaction to a doctrine the flesh doesn't like. But the flesh doesn't get a vote in theology. Scripture does.

**"If God authored everything, we're just puppets."**

Puppets don't have experiences. Characters in a novel do. The character's joy is real. The character's grief is real. The character's faith is real. The fact that the Author wrote it doesn't make it less real. It makes it *more* real, because it means the experience was intentional. God didn't accidentally give you that moment of assurance. He wrote it. On purpose. For you. Because He loves you.

## Chapter 6: The Author Steps into the Story - The Person of Christ

Everything I've said so far in this book has been about God as Author. God as the Mind behind reality. God as the Thinker of every thought, the Planner of every decree, the Sustainer of every atom. And if I stopped here, you'd have a philosophy. An impressive one, maybe. But just a philosophy. A system about a God who is infinitely powerful and infinitely sovereign and infinitely remote.

But the God of the Bible did something that no philosophy could ever predict. He stepped into His own story.

*“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)

The Word was made flesh. Let me say that in the language of this book. *Information became matter*. The thought that sustains all of reality compressed itself into a human body, entered the filmstrip as a character, and lived among the other

characters for thirty-three years. The Author didn't just write the story. He *joined* it.

And this, more than anything else in the entire framework, is what separates Christianity from every other system of thought that has ever existed. No other religion, no other philosophy, no other worldview proposes that the ground of all being *entered* His own creation as a participant. Pantheism says God IS the creation. Deism says God MADE the creation and left. Atheism says there's no Author at all. But Christianity says the Author wrote Himself into the story. And the chapter where He appears changes everything that comes after.

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## **The Image of the Invisible God**

*“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.”* (Colossians 1:15)

Christ is the image of the invisible God. Think about what that means in the framework. If the invisible is more real than the visible, and if the physical world is a rendering of God's thought, then Christ is the *highest resolution rendering of God that has ever existed in physical reality*. He is God's thought about Himself, expressed in flesh. He is the invisible made visible. The substance taking on the formality. The covenant becoming the ceremony.

And this is not a diminishment. The rendering is not less than the thought. Christ in the flesh is not less God than the Father in eternity. *“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”* (Colossians 2:9). ALL the fulness. Not a reduced version. Not a watered-down projection. The FULL

Godhead, resident in a human body. The Author, fully present in the character, without ceasing to be the Author.

This is the mystery of the incarnation. And I'm not going to pretend I can fully explain it, because I can't. Henry Mahan used to say, "That man is a fool who denies the Trinity and that man is also a fool who tries to explain the Trinity." The same applies to the incarnation. I can describe it. I can show you what it means in the framework. But I can't explain how infinite consciousness fits inside a human skull without the skull exploding. That's a question for eternity. And the framework predicts its own limits here, the same as it does with eschatology. Some things exceed the rendering resolution of the current hardware.

But here's what I can say. The incarnation is not a contradiction of the framework. It's the *climax* of the framework. If the invisible is more real than the visible, then the moment when the invisible *becomes* visible, when the thought puts on matter, when the Author enters the story, that's the highest expression of the entire system. It's the principle of operational idealism taken to its ultimate conclusion: the substance doesn't just precede the formality. The substance *takes on* the formality. And in doing so, the invisible makes itself known in a way that nothing else in creation can.

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## **The Hypostatic Union**

Fully God. Fully man. Two natures in one person. Not half and half. Not switching back and forth. Both. Simultaneously. All the time.

In the language of this book: the Author simultaneously being the character without ceasing to be the Author. The filmmaker stepping into the film while the film keeps running. He doesn't stop directing the movie because He's now in the scene. He directs and acts at the same time. The Author writes the next page while He's living on the current one.

Christ got hungry. Christ got tired. Christ wept. Christ bled. These are real experiences of a real human nature. The Author subjected Himself to the rendering constraints of His own story. Gravity applied. Hunger applied. Fatigue applied. Mortality applied. Not because He had to. Because He chose to. Because the story required it. Because the covenant of redemption, the Trinitarian agreement from before the foundation of the world, required the Son to enter the story and live it from the inside.

And at the same time, Christ calmed storms. Christ walked on water. Christ healed the sick. Christ raised the dead. Christ knew men's thoughts before they spoke. These are the Author's prerogatives, exercised from *inside* the character. The rendering constraints applied to the human nature. They didn't apply to the divine nature. And both natures existed in the same person at the same time.

*“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”* (Philippians 2:5-7)

He *made himself of no reputation*. He *took upon him* the form of a servant. These are active choices. The Author chose to enter the story. The Author chose to submit to rendering constraints. The Author chose to experience hunger and thirst

and betrayal and death. Not because He was forced. Because the plan required it. And the plan was His.

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## **Prophet, Priest, King**

Christ holds three offices, and each one maps to the framework:

**Prophet.** As Prophet, Christ reveals the Author's thought. He IS the epistemology of God. *"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). The word *declared* means explained, made known, brought out of hiddenness. Christ doesn't just teach about God. He is God's self-revelation. The thought explaining itself. The information making itself accessible. The invisible rendering itself into a form that ears can hear and eyes can see.

**Priest.** As Priest, Christ renders the atonement in blood. He IS the soteriology of God. *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us"* (Hebrews 9:12). The eternal thought of justification, which we discussed in Chapter 2, was collapsed into history through the blood of Christ. The Priest didn't create the redemption. He rendered it. The cross is the ceremony of a covenant that was made in eternity.

**King.** As King, Christ reigns over both seeds in the re-rendered reality. He IS the eschatology of God. *"And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"* (Revelation 19:16). The reign didn't begin at the ascension. The reign was always the plan. Christ's kingship is the final frame of the filmstrip, the destination from

which every other frame was planned. And the saints will reign with Him, as we'll see in the chapters on eschatology.

Every office derives from the ontology. The Prophet reveals the thought. The Priest renders the thought in blood. The King reigns from the thought's final frame. One Person. Three functions. One system.

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## **The Humiliation and the Exaltation**

Theology traditionally speaks of Christ's two states: the state of humiliation (incarnation, suffering, death, burial) and the state of exaltation (resurrection, ascension, session at the right hand).

In the framework, the humiliation is the Author subjecting Himself to the rendering constraints of His own story. He constrained Himself to human limitations, hunger, fatigue, locality, mortality, without ceasing to be God. He didn't *lose* anything in the incarnation. He *chose* to experience the story from inside the rendering constraints.

And the exaltation is the Author resuming the resolution He never lost. The resurrection body is the prototype of the higher resolution rendering, which we'll discuss in a later chapter. Christ after the resurrection could eat fish AND walk through walls. Same information. Fewer constraints. He didn't *become* more after the resurrection. He stopped *limiting Himself*. The rendering constraints were removed. What was left was what was always there: God in flesh, at full resolution.

And He is seated now at the right hand of the Father, which is not a physical location in a physical throne room, but a statement about authority. The Author is back in His director's

chair. The scene He entered is over. The story continues. And He's directing it from the position He never actually left.

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## **Why This Chapter Comes Before the Covenant**

In most systematic theologies, the doctrine of Christ comes after the doctrine of salvation, or alongside it. I've placed it before the covenant chapters, and I want to explain why.

Christ IS the covenant. He doesn't just *fulfill* the covenant. He doesn't just *mediate* the covenant. He *is* the covenant. The Person precedes the promise. The Author precedes the story. You can't understand what God promised until you understand who God is. And you can't understand who God is until you see Him in the flesh, walking through His own filmstrip, living out the story He authored.

*"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."*

(Revelation 13:8)

The Lamb was the first thought. Not the first event, because the Lamb was slain before the world was founded. But the first *thought*. The destination from which everything else was planned. The supralapsarian decree begins with Christ. The Person precedes the purpose. The Who precedes the what and the how and the when.

And so the covenant chapters that follow, the promise, the overarching covenant of grace, the progressive rendering, the covenant before the ceremony, all of them rest on this chapter. All of them rest on the Person. Because without the Person, the covenants are just ideas. With the Person, they're the thoughts

of a God who loved His people enough to step into His own story and die in their place.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“The hypostatic union is a mystery. You can’t explain it.”**

Correct. In the same way you can’t fully explain the Trinity. But the framework gives vocabulary for what it IS: the Author entering the story. The filmmaker stepping into the film. That’s not a full explanation. But it’s more than “it’s a mystery, stop asking.” And the framework is honest about where the explanation ends: some things exceed the rendering resolution of the current hardware. We’ll understand more at higher resolution.

**“If Christ is God’s thought rendered in flesh, is He less than the Father?”**

No. The rendering is not less real than the thought. *“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”* (Colossians 2:9). The rendering didn’t diminish the thought. It expressed it. The Author entering the story doesn’t make the Author less than the Author. It makes the story infinitely richer.

**“Kenosis (Philippians 2:7) means Christ gave up divine attributes.”**

He didn’t empty Himself of deity. He submitted to rendering constraints. The Author constrained Himself to the character’s limitations without ceasing to be the Author. He didn’t lose anything. He chose to experience the story from inside. The emptying was of reputation and privilege, not of nature.

### **“Where does this leave the virgin birth?”**

The Author doesn't enter the story through the story's normal mechanisms. A character who arrives through the usual biology is just another character. The virgin birth is the Author's signature. It declares: this character has a different origin. He didn't come from the story. He came from the Author. The rendering constraints apply to the character's *experience*. But the *origin* is the Author's direct act, bypassing the mechanisms of the story He wrote.

## Chapter 7: The Promise - Covenants Are Not Contracts

There's a word that shows up in almost every system of theology, and almost every system gets it wrong. The word is *covenant*. And the reason they get it wrong is that they treat a covenant like a contract.

A contract is a legal agreement between two independent parties who negotiate terms, set conditions, and bind themselves to obligations. If party A fulfills condition X, then party B is obligated to provide Y. If either party fails, the contract is broken and penalties apply. Contracts are adversarial by nature. They exist because the parties don't fully trust each other. That's why you need lawyers.

A covenant is not a contract. A covenant is a personal promise. It's relational, not transactional. It's unilateral, not bilateral. And in the framework of this book, the distinction is not just important. It's everything.

Because if God's dealings with His people are contractual, then salvation has conditions. There are terms to be met, obligations to be fulfilled, boxes to be checked. And if any of

those conditions fail, the deal is off. That's the Arminian system dressed up in Reformed clothing. It's works-based salvation with better vocabulary.

But if God's dealings with His people are covenantal, in the true sense of the word, then salvation is a *promise*. An unconditional, unilateral, personal promise of love from a sovereign God to the people He chose before the foundation of the world. And promises from a God who is outside of time and sovereign over all events don't come with escape clauses.

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## **Federal Headship: The Law of Plato Applied to Covenant Theology**

The standard Reformed position on how God relates to His people is called *federal headship*. The idea is that Adam stood as the legal representative of all humanity under a covenant of works. When Adam sinned, the guilt of his sin was legally imputed to every human being who would ever live. All of humanity fell *in* Adam, not because they personally sinned, but because Adam sinned on their behalf as their federal head.

And I reject this entirely.

Not because I'm soft on the doctrine of original sin. I believe all men are sinners. I believe all men are born in depravity. I believe no man can save himself or contribute anything to his own salvation. I believe "*there is none righteous, no, not one*" (Romans 3:10). I believe all of that. What I don't believe is the *mechanism* of federal headship.

Here's why. Federal headship is a legal fiction. It requires that the guilt of one man be legally transferred to billions of

people who didn't exist yet, through a representative mechanism they didn't agree to, under a contract they never signed. That's a contract, not a covenant. It's a legal framework imposed from the outside, not a personal relationship experienced from the inside.

And it's unnecessary. If God creates each person directly with a sin nature, as I argued in Chapter 5, then there's no need for a legal mechanism to transfer Adam's guilt. God authored each person sinful. Not *because of* Adam. Because of His sovereign purpose. Adam was the first to sin in the line of the elect. He was the prototype. But the sin nature of every human being is authored fresh in each soul by God, not inherited through genes or imputed through legal representation.

This is where the law of Plato shows up in covenant theology. The reason federal headship was invented was to protect God from the charge of authoring sin. If Adam is the federal head, and Adam's sin is the source of everyone's sinfulness, then God can claim He only created Adam (who then fell on his own), and the rest of humanity's sin is Adam's fault. God gets plausible deniability.

But we've already established that God doesn't need plausible deniability. He creates evil (Isaiah 45:7). He fashions every person for His purpose (Romans 9:21). And a God who authors everything doesn't need a legal middleman to explain why His characters are sinful. He wrote them that way.

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## **The Covenant of Redemption**

Before we talk about how God deals with His people in time, we need to talk about how He dealt with Himself in eternity.

The *covenant of redemption* is the teaching that the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, entered into a covenantal agreement before the foundation of the world for the purpose of saving the elect. The Father decreed the salvation. The Son agreed to accomplish it through His life, death, and resurrection. The Spirit agreed to apply it through regeneration and faith.

This is one of the places where I agree fully with standard Covenant Theology. The covenant of redemption is the first and most fundamental covenant in the system. It precedes creation. It precedes the fall. It precedes everything that happens in time. And it's personal. Not legal. Not contractual. Three persons of one God, covenanting with each other in love, for the salvation of a people who didn't exist yet.

*“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”* (Ephesians 1:4-5)

Chosen before the foundation. Predestinated unto adoption. According to the good pleasure of His will. Not according to a legal mechanism. According to *pleasure*. This is a God who saves because He *wants* to. Because it *pleases* Him. Because the covenant of redemption was an act of love within the Godhead, not a legal transaction between parties.

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## Covenants as Personal Promises

In the framework of this book, a covenant is what it has always been in the Hebrew Scriptures: a *promise*. A personal, binding, unilateral declaration from God to His people.

*“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* (Jeremiah 31:33)

That’s not the language of a courtroom. That’s the language of a marriage. That’s a Father claiming His children. And the promise doesn’t depend on the children doing anything. The Father made it. The Father keeps it. The children are the beneficiaries, not the partners.

And in idealism, this is the only kind of covenant that makes sense. Because in idealism, there is only one independent mind: God’s. The characters in the story don’t have independent existence. They are thoughts in God’s mind. And a thought can’t negotiate with the mind that thinks it. A thought can only receive what the mind gives.

So the covenant is always unilateral. Always. God promises. God fulfills. God sustains. God completes. The people of God are held by the covenant. They don’t hold it. They rest in it. They don’t earn it. They experience it. They don’t maintain it.

And this is where the warmth of the system lives. Because a God who makes personal promises, not legal contracts, is a God who relates to His people as persons, not as cases in a courtroom. You’re not a defendant hoping for a favorable verdict. You’re a child who was claimed before you were born. And the claiming was a promise, and the promise was love, and the love was from eternity.

## Objections and Answers

**“Federal headship is standard Reformed theology. You’re departing from the tradition.”**

Standard doesn’t mean correct. The Reformers inherited federal headship from the Augustinian tradition, which inherited it from the need to protect God from authoring sin, which came from Plato. The mechanism is a philosophical import, not a biblical necessity. If God creates each person directly with their sin nature, the mechanism is unnecessary.

**“Without federal headship, how do you explain original sin?”**

God creates each person sinful directly. Sin doesn’t travel through genes or legal representation. It’s authored fresh in each soul for God’s sovereign purpose. *“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me”* (Psalm 51:5). David doesn’t say “in Adam’s sin.” He says “in *iniquity*.” The sin nature is personal and direct.

**“If covenants aren’t contracts, what enforces them?”**

God’s faithfulness. A promise from a sovereign God doesn’t need enforcement. It needs fulfillment. And He always fulfills. *“God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”* (Numbers 23:19). The covenant is as certain as the character of God. And God doesn’t break.

**“Romans 5:12 says death passed to all men through Adam.”**

Death passed through Adam as the first to sin in the line of the elect. All elect humans experience sinning in the likeness of Adam. But the sin nature was authored directly by God in each soul, not inherited genetically or legally from Adam. The passage describes the *pattern* (sinning in the likeness of Adam), not a *mechanism* (legal imputation from Adam to everyone).

# **Chapter 8: The Covenant of Grace - Overarching and Eternal**

Here is one of the most important claims in this entire book, and I want to state it as clearly as I can.

The covenant of grace IS the New Covenant. And it has been present in every age of human history, including the time of Adam. It is not a new arrangement that started at the cross, or at Pentecost, or with the apostle Paul. It is an eternal, overarching covenant that spans all of time and extends to every one of God's elect in every era. Abraham was in it. David was in it. Isaiah was in it. The Teacher of Righteousness who wrote predestinarian theology in the caves near the Dead Sea two centuries before Christ was in it.

And the Old Covenant at Sinai was NOT a dispensation of it.

This is where I part company with standard Covenant Theology, and I want to explain why carefully, because the distinction matters enormously.

## Two Covenants Running Simultaneously

Covenant Theology teaches that the covenant of grace was administered differently in different eras. In the Old Testament, it was administered through the law, the sacrifices, the ceremonies, the priesthood. In the New Testament, it's administered through the gospel, through faith, through the Spirit. Same covenant. Different administration. The Old Covenant IS the covenant of grace, just wearing different clothes.

I don't believe that. And here's why.

*“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.”* (Galatians 3:13)

The law is a *curse*. Paul doesn't call it a different administration of grace. He calls it a curse. And you can't be under a curse and in a covenant of grace *through the same covenant*. They're not the same thing. The grace was there. But the law was a separate overlay.

*“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.”* (Galatians 3:19)

The law was *added*. Added to what? Added to the covenant of grace that was already running. The law didn't replace the covenant of grace. It didn't absorb it. It didn't become it. It was added on top of it. A separate thing. A covenant of works. A curse meant to increase transgressions and shut the elect up in Christ.

*“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”* (Galatians 3:24)

The law was a schoolmaster. Not a covenant of grace. A tutor. A temporary institution with a specific purpose: to drive the elect to Christ by showing them they couldn't keep it.

So in the Old Testament, two covenants ran simultaneously:

1. **The covenant of grace** - eternal, overarching, present in all ages. Every elect person partook of it. They had the Spirit. They were regenerated. They were justified. They had new firmware, to use the language we'll develop later in this book. Abraham *"believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness"* (Romans 4:3). David wrote, *"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity"* (Psalm 32:2). These men were in the covenant of grace centuries before Sinai. And they remained in it during and after Sinai.
2. **The covenant of works at Sinai** - a separate overlay. A curse. Temporary. Added because of transgressions. Designed to reveal sin, increase guilt, and drive the elect to Christ. The ceremonies, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the dietary laws, the Sabbath regulations, all of it. Real. Valid. Served its purpose. But it was *not* the covenant of grace. It was the visible rendering constraint layered on top of the invisible substance.

And when Christ fulfilled the law, the overlay was removed. What was left was what was always there: the covenant of grace, now visible at higher resolution, no longer veiled behind the ceremonies of Sinai.

## The OT Covenants Mapped to the Framework

Let me show you how the individual covenants of the Old Testament relate to the overarching covenant of grace:

**The Adamic covenant** (Genesis 3:15) - the first visible rendering of the covenant of grace in time. God promises enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The two seeds announced. Redemption promised. The covenant of grace begins its temporal expression.

**The Noahic covenant** (Genesis 9) - God's promise to preserve the stage on which redemption unfolds. The rainbow is a sign of continuity, not of salvation. God won't destroy the world by flood again because the story isn't finished yet. The rendering needs to continue.

**The Abrahamic covenant** (Genesis 17) - the covenant of grace rendered in promise to a specific man. *"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee"* (Genesis 17:7). Circumcision as the visible sign. But the real sign was always the circumcision of the *heart*. The visible sign pointed at the invisible reality.

**The Mosaic covenant at Sinai** - NOT a dispensation of the covenant of grace. A covenant of WORKS. The exception. The one covenant in the Old Testament that is not a rendering of the covenant of grace but a separate overlay for a specific purpose: to curse, to increase transgressions, to drive the elect to Christ. Every other covenant in the Bible is a rendering of grace. This one is law.

**The Davidic covenant** (2 Samuel 7) - the covenant of grace rendered in kingship. An eternal throne promised to David's line. Fulfilled in Christ. The visible king pointed to the invisible reign. *"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end"* (Isaiah 9:7).

**The New Covenant as revealed in the New Testament** - the covenant of grace at its highest temporal resolution. The Sinai overlay removed. The veil lifted. Faith alone. Law finished. The Spirit poured out. Not a *new* covenant in substance, because the substance was always there. New in *resolution*. The same thought, rendered at higher fidelity.

The progressive rendering of this covenant across history, and the remarkable evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, are explored in the next chapter.

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## Objections and Answers

**"Covenant Theology says the Old Covenant IS the covenant of grace, differently administered."**

CT is wrong on this point. The law at Sinai was a curse (Galatians 3:10, 13). A curse is not a dispensation of grace. The grace was always there. Sinai was the overlay, not the substance. The two ran simultaneously, but they are not the same covenant.

**"If the covenant of grace was present in all ages, why didn't OT saints know the full gospel?"**

They had the substance. They didn't have the full rendering resolution. Abraham saw Christ's day and was glad (John 8:56), but he saw it dimly, through types and shadows. David had

justification by faith (Romans 4:6-8) but couldn't articulate it the way Paul did. The resolution increased over time. The covenant didn't change. The visibility did.

**“This is New Covenant Theology, not Covenant Theology.”**

It's neither. NCT says the New Covenant started at a point in time. MCT says the covenant of grace is eternal and overarching. NCT rejects the covenant of works, which is correct. MCT retains the covenant of works as specific to Sinai, which is better. NCT doesn't go far enough. CT goes too far. MCT walks the line between them and holds what Scripture actually teaches.

**“The Dead Sea Scrolls aren't Scripture.”**

Correct. But they demonstrate that sovereign grace theology existed in pre-Christian Judaism. This isn't a later invention of Augustine or Calvin. It's the original Hebrew theology. The Pharisees corrupted it with Greek philosophy. The scrolls preserve what the Pharisees tried to destroy.

## Chapter 9: The Rendering - Progressive Revelation

There's a phrase you hear in Reformed circles: *progressive revelation*. And most people think they know what it means. God revealed truth gradually over time. The Old Testament was incomplete. The New Testament completed it. Simple.

But that framing hides something important. It makes it sound like the *truth itself* was incomplete in the Old Testament and got added to in the New. As if God was building the covenant piece by piece, adding doctrines as He went, until the full picture finally came together with Paul. And that's not what happened. Not at all.

The truth was always complete. The covenant of grace, as we established in the last chapter, was present in every age, including the time of Adam. What changed over time wasn't the covenant. What changed was the *rendering*.

And this distinction, simple as it sounds, changes everything about how you read the Bible.

## **Progressive Rendering, Not Progressive Covenant**

Think of it like a photograph slowly coming into focus. The image was always there. The full picture has been sitting in God's mind from eternity, complete and whole. But it's being rendered into human experience at increasing resolution.

In the Old Testament, the covenant of grace was rendered at low resolution: types, shadows, ceremonies, promises about a future seed. Abraham saw Christ's day and was glad (John 8:56), but he saw it dimly. David had justification by faith (Romans 4:6-8) but couldn't articulate it the way Paul would centuries later. Isaiah saw the substitutionary death of the Messiah with stunning clarity (Isaiah 53), but even he saw it through the veil of prophecy, not through the full revelation of the accomplished fact.

In the early church, the resolution increased. The apostles had the Spirit. They had new firmware. But they were still running old software. They still went to the temple (Acts 3:1). They still connected baptism to forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). They still thought the kingdom was going to be a physical restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6). They still argued about whether Gentiles needed to become Jews to be saved (Acts 15). God was patient with all of it. He didn't correct their misunderstandings immediately. He let them continue in incomplete patterns while He gradually increased the resolution.

Through Paul, the resolution jumped dramatically. Faith alone. Law finished. Gentiles included on exactly the same terms as Jews. The full gospel proclaimed without the old ceremonies, without the Jewish framework, without the Sinai overlay. Paul received his revelation directly from God

(Galatians 1:11-12), and it was the clearest rendering of the eternal covenant that had been given up to that point.

And in the age to come, the resolution reaches full fidelity. Face to face. Known as known. No more glass.

*“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”* (1 Corinthians 13:12)

We see through a glass. The glass is the rendering constraint. The glass is the current resolution. The reality behind the glass is the covenant of grace, which has been the same from eternity. What changes over time is the glass. The resolution. The clarity with which we see the thing that was always there.

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## **The Apostles Didn't Have It All Figured Out**

And this means the apostles' early confusion, about baptism, about Gentiles, about the kingdom, about the law, was not error in the sense of heresy. It was low resolution.

They had the Spirit. They had the covenant. They had the substance. But they were running old software on new firmware. And God was patient with that. He increased the resolution gradually. He didn't download the full gospel on day one. He rendered it frame by frame, as the characters were ready to see it.

I preached an entire podcast on this: “The Apostles Didn't Have It All Figured Out Either.” And the response from listeners was overwhelmingly one of relief. Because if the apostles, the men who walked with Jesus, who were taught by Him directly, who were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, needed time and

patience and progressive teaching, then maybe we do too. And maybe the person sitting next to us in church who doesn't have all their theology sorted out is just at a different resolution. And maybe God is being as patient with them as He was with Peter.

Jesus Himself said it:

*"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."* (John 16:12-13)

*"Guide you into all truth."* Not hand it to you all at once. Not download it instantly. *Guide you into*. That's a journey. A process. Something that happens over time. The Spirit would teach them. He would reveal things to them. He would increase the resolution as they were ready for it.

And if Jesus Himself said the apostles needed time, if He said they had to be guided into truth step by step, then why do we expect ourselves or anyone else to get it all immediately?

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## **The Dead Sea Scrolls: Evidence of the Overarching Covenant**

One of the most remarkable confirmations of this framework comes from an unexpected source: the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In the caves near Qumran, archaeologists found writings from Jewish nonconformists who lived in the centuries before Christ. And in those writings, tucked among the sectarian rules and apocalyptic visions, is some of the most explicit predestinarian theology ever written.

*“I know by Your understanding that it is not by human strength . . . a man’s way is not in himself, nor is a person able to determine his step.”*

*“You alone have created the righteous one, and from the womb You established him to give heed to Your covenant at the appointed time of grace . . . But the wicked You created for the time of Your wrath, and from the womb You set them apart for the day of slaughter.”*

These words were written two hundred years before Christ. Two hundred years before Paul. Two hundred years before the Reformation. And they contain the same theology that I’m presenting in this book. Absolute sovereignty. Two seeds created differently from the womb. Justification as God’s work alone.

The scholars who found these scrolls largely dismissed the theology. Too predestinarian. Too radical. It didn’t match their free-will assumptions. But the theology was there. The covenant of grace was operating in those writers. The Spirit was working. The truth was being spoken. Long before Paul put pen to papyrus, the overarching covenant of grace was producing sovereign grace theology in men who had nothing to work with but the Old Testament and the Spirit of God.

Bob Higby’s work on the Dead Sea Scrolls, which I’ve published on [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org), demonstrates this in extraordinary detail. The Teacher of Righteousness and his followers held the ancient Hebrew theology of divine sovereignty, the same theology that the Pharisees, influenced by Greek philosophy, were actively suppressing. And when the Pharisees gained political power, they killed the nonconformists

and destroyed their writings. The scrolls survived only because some faithful person hid them in caves.

Is it any wonder that modern scholars dismissed these scrolls for the predestinarian theology they contain? The Pharisees of today are the same as yesterday.

The covenant of grace was present in 200 BC, the same as it was in 33 AD, the same as it is today. Different resolution. Same substance.

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## **What This Means**

This principle, progressive rendering, not progressive covenant, has implications that reach far beyond Old Testament studies.

It means that when you read the early chapters of Acts and see the apostles doing things that Paul later corrected, you're not seeing contradiction. You're seeing lower resolution. Luke recorded what happened accurately under the Spirit's inspiration. But not everything that early believers said or thought reflects complete understanding. Later revelation clarified. That's God's method. Progressive rendering.

It means that God saves first and then teaches. He doesn't wait for perfect understanding before He regenerates a soul. He flashes the firmware first. The application layer catches up later. The covenant precedes the comprehension of the covenant. That's the order. Always.

It means that the path of the righteous really does get brighter. *"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day"* (Proverbs 4:18).

More and more. Step by step. Frame by frame. The resolution increasing until the perfect day arrives and the glass is gone.

And it means that patience with one another is not compromise. It's theology. If God was patient with Peter, and patient with the early church, and patient with the apostles who argued about circumcision for *years* before Acts 15 sorted it out, then patience with a brother who hasn't arrived at your resolution yet is not weakness. It's the imitation of God.

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## **Objections and Answers**

### **“If the apostles were wrong about baptism and the Gentiles, how can we trust their writings?”**

Luke recorded what happened accurately under the Spirit's inspiration. But not everything that early believers *said or thought* reflects complete understanding. Later revelation clarified earlier practices. That's God's method. The rendering increased. The inspiration of the text and the completeness of the apostles' understanding are two different things.

### **“The Dead Sea Scrolls aren't Scripture.”**

Correct. But they demonstrate that sovereign grace theology existed in pre-Christian Judaism. The doctrines of predestination and absolute sovereignty aren't later inventions of Augustine or Calvin. They're the original Hebrew theology. The Pharisees corrupted it with Greek philosophy. The scrolls preserve what the Pharisees tried to destroy.

### **“Progressive revelation sounds like the Bible contradicts itself.”**

It doesn't contradict. It unfolds. A seed doesn't contradict the tree. The tree is what the seed always was, at higher resolution. Acts 2:38 doesn't contradict Galatians 2:16. They're different resolution levels of the same covenant of grace, rendered at different points in the progressive unfolding.

**“If God was patient with the apostles’ incomplete understanding, does that mean we can believe anything?”**

No. It means God teaches His people gradually, and our security doesn't rest on having every doctrine right. It rests on Christ. Paul was clear: there is a true gospel and a false gospel (Galatians 1:6-7). But within the family of those who rest in Christ, there is room for different resolutions. And patience is the godly response to that difference.

# Chapter 10: The Covenant Before the Ceremony

If there's one principle in this book that applies to more domains than any other, it's this one. And it's so simple that once you see it, you'll wonder how you ever missed it.

The invisible precedes the visible. Always. In every domain.

The covenant precedes the ceremony. The substance precedes the formality. The reality precedes the declaration. And in every case where the church, or the culture, or the tradition has gotten confused, it's because they reversed the order. They made the ceremony the cause of the covenant. They made the visible the source of the invisible. And the moment you do that, you've turned the whole system upside down.

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## Marriage

Let me start with marriage, because it's the place where this principle is most obvious and most personal to me.

Angie and I have been together since 1993. We met at Mineral Area College in the fall of that year. She played saxophone. I played trombone. She's the only woman I've ever dated, kissed, or loved. We married in July of 1999, and that wedding was beautiful. But I want to tell you something that might sound strange to some of you.

The covenant was already there long before the wedding.

I knew it the first time I kissed her. The deal was sealed in my mind. Getting married was a foregone conclusion from that moment. I didn't decide it. It happened to me. One kiss, and my brain said, "This is forever." The wedding in 1999 was wonderful. But the real thing had been running for six years.

And Scripture backs this up.

*"And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her."*  
(Genesis 24:67)

No ceremony. No officiant. No license. He brought her into the tent, and she became his wife. The covenant was formed by commitment and union. The ceremony, the ketubah, the witnesses, those developed later as social and legal structures. They were not divine requirements. They were community practices that acknowledged what already existed.

This is not an argument for promiscuity. This is an argument about the *nature* of the covenant. Marriage is formed by mutual commitment and the union of two people becoming one flesh. The wedding is the public declaration of what already exists. The ceremony is for the community. The covenant is for God.

## The One-Flesh Union

*“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”* (Genesis 2:24)

The two shall become *one flesh*. This is the visible rendering of the invisible covenant. The physical union IS the covenant rendered in bodies. Not a reward for the ceremony. Not a privilege earned by signing a license. The substance the ceremony points to.

And Paul, in Ephesians, takes this further than most people are comfortable with:

*“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”* (Ephesians 5:31-32)

Paul calls it a *mystery*. And then he says he’s speaking concerning Christ and the church. The physical union between husband and wife IS the theological statement about Christ and the church. They’re not two different meanings competing. They’re two rendering resolutions of the same thought. The lower resolution: a husband and wife, bodies together, one flesh. The higher resolution: Christ and His bride, fully known, fully loved, the covenant rendered in intimacy.

And the Song of Solomon is the Bible being honest about both resolutions at once. The Song is not allegory OR literal. It’s BOTH. Dual purpose. The physical love between a man and a woman AND the spiritual love between Christ and His church, expressed in the same language, because in the framework, they’re the same thought at different rendering levels.

And the church's embarrassment about the Song of Solomon is the law of Plato, one more time. If the body is lesser than the spirit (Plato), then sex is lesser than worship. But if matter is a rendering of God's thought, then union in the body is the covenant collapsed into flesh. The embarrassment reveals Platonic assumptions hiding in the pews. The Bible isn't ashamed of the body. Plato is.

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## Communion

The same principle applies to the Lord's Supper. The atonement is the substance. His sacrifice purposed in eternity, accomplished on the cross. The bread and wine are the ceremony. A visible rendering of the invisible reality.

*“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.”* (Luke 22:19)

*In remembrance of me.* Remembrance of what was ALREADY finished. Not a sacrament that conveys grace. Not a magical transformation of bread into literal flesh. And not an empty symbol stripped of meaning either. A *rendering*. The substance is Christ. The ceremony points at the substance. The bread doesn't become Christ. It renders Him, the way the physical world renders God's thought.

This eliminates three errors at once. Transubstantiation (Rome) says the bread literally becomes Christ. That's making the ceremony the substance. Memorialism (Zwingli) says the bread is just a reminder. That's emptying the ceremony of any connection to the substance. The framework says the bread *renders* the substance without becoming it or being empty of it.

Same as a picture renders a person without being the person, and without being meaningless.

And the Lord's Supper is participatory, not priestly. "*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Every believer *shews*. No priest required. No institution required. Just believers, together, rendering the covenant in bread and wine.

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## **Justification**

The covenant preceded the ceremony here too. God justified His people from eternity, as we established in Chapter 2. The cross was the rendering. The conversion was the experience. The final judgment will be the public declaration. In every case, the invisible reality came first.

The tradition that says justification happens at the moment of faith has reversed the order. It has made the faith the cause and the justification the effect. But faith doesn't cause justification. Faith *recognizes* justification. Faith is the moment the character in the filmstrip becomes aware of what the Author has always seen. The justification was there before the faith. The covenant was there before the ceremony.

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## **The Canon**

Even the Bible itself follows this pattern. The church councils at Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) didn't *create* the canon. They recognized what was already true. The books of Scripture were functioning as Scripture long before any council met to

discuss them. The early church was reading Paul’s letters and the Gospels as authoritative Scripture decades before any institutional body gave them an official stamp.

The councils were the ceremony. The canon was the covenant. The invisible reality, these books ARE the Word of God, preceded the visible acknowledgment. And any theology that says “without the church, we wouldn’t have the Bible” has reversed the order. Without God, we wouldn’t have the Bible. The church just acknowledged what God had already given.

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## The Universal Pattern

Do you see it? It’s everywhere.

<b>Substance (Invisible)</b>	<b>Formality (Visible)</b>
The covenant	The wedding
The union	The ceremony
The atonement (purposed in eternity)	The bread and wine
Justification	The cross / faith / judgment
The canon	The church council
Regeneration	Baptism
The Spirit	The water
The indwelling	The church membership
The thought	The matter

Every row in that table is the same principle. The invisible came first. The visible followed. The substance preceded the

formality. And every error in the history of the church that involves making the visible the cause of the invisible, baptismal regeneration, sacramental salvation, justification by works, institutional authority, every one of them, is a reversal of this table.

This is operational idealism in action. Not philosophy. Life. Every domain.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“Marriage requires a ceremony. You’re justifying living in sin.”**

Isaac took Rebekah into his tent and she became his wife (Genesis 24:67). No ceremony. No officiant. The covenant precedes the paperwork. I’m not arguing against weddings. Weddings are beautiful. I’m arguing about the *nature* of the covenant. The ceremony didn’t create the marriage. The commitment and union did. The ceremony announced it.

**“If the canon was already true before the councils, why did we need the councils?”**

Same reason we need weddings. Public acknowledgment of what already exists. The ceremony serves the community’s understanding, not God’s reality.

**“The Song of Solomon is allegory about Christ and the church, not about sex.”**

It’s both. Dual purpose. Paul says explicitly: *“This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church”* (Ephesians 5:32). The physical and the spiritual are one thing, not two. The church that can discuss the atonement in graphic

detail (blood, wounds, suffering) but blushes at the Song of Solomon has Platonic priorities, not biblical ones.

**“Making sex theological cheapens the theology.”**

Making sex *separate* from theology cheapens the body. God designed the union. He put it in the canon. He called it a mystery pointing to Christ. If He’s not embarrassed, we shouldn’t be.

# Chapter 11: Every Person Authored

I grew up believing that Adam ruined everything. That he started out righteous, blew it in the garden, and the rest of us got stuck with the bill. Original sin, inherited guilt, federal headship, the whole system built on one man's failure cascading down through the generations like a spiritual disease. And for a long time, I didn't question it, because everyone I read and everyone I trusted told me that's how it worked. Adam sinned. Adam's sin was imputed to you. You were born guilty because of what Adam did. The legal framework was set up before you were born, and you inherited the penalty through no choice of your own.

And I believed it. Until I started asking the one question that nobody seemed to want to answer.

If Adam was perfectly righteous, how did he sin?

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## The Impossibility Problem

This is the crack in the foundation that the entire federal system cannot repair. And it's so simple that once you see it, you can't unsee it.

A perfectly righteous being *cannot* sin. Not “will not.” Cannot. If righteousness is the absence of any inclination toward evil, then a righteous being has no mechanism by which to produce sin. Sin requires a desire to rebel, a turning of the will away from God. But if the will is perfectly aligned with God, it cannot turn. Not because of external restraint, but because of internal nature. Water flows downhill because it's the nature of water to flow downhill. A perfectly righteous being obeys God because it's the nature of a perfectly righteous being to obey God. And just as water doesn't spontaneously flow uphill, a perfectly righteous will doesn't spontaneously rebel.

This is not an argument I invented. This is logic that anyone can follow. If Adam was created perfectly righteous, and perfect righteousness means perfect alignment with God's will, then the fall was impossible. You cannot get rebellion from perfection. You cannot get sin from sinlessness. The output cannot contain something the input did not.

*“Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”*  
(Matthew 7:16-18)

Christ said it Himself. A good tree *cannot* bring forth evil fruit. Cannot. Not “usually doesn't.” Cannot. If Adam was a good tree, perfectly righteous, then he could not have produced the evil fruit of sin. And if he produced sin, he was not a good tree.

The traditional answer to this is the concept of the *posse peccare* - the ability to sin. Adam was righteous, the tradition says, but he had the *ability* to sin. He was mutable. He could go either way. And I understand the appeal of that answer. But it doesn't survive scrutiny. Because if Adam had the ability to sin, then he had a nature that *inclined* toward sin under the right conditions. And a nature that inclines toward sin under any conditions is not perfect righteousness. It's something else. It's a nature that contains the seed of rebellion. And where did that seed come from?

If you say it came from Adam's free will, you've just said that Adam's free will could produce something God didn't put there. And that means something exists in the universe that God did not author. And we've already established in Chapter 1 that *everything* that exists is a thought in the mind of God. There are no exceptions.

So the seed came from God. God created Adam with a nature that was inclined toward sin. The fall didn't *create* Adam's sinful nature. The fall *revealed* it.

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## **Adam Created Sinful**

I know what that sounds like. And I know it's going to offend people who have spent their entire theological lives defending the goodness of God by insisting that God didn't create sin, He only permitted it. But we've already addressed the word *permission* in Chapter 5, and I won't repeat myself here except to say this: if God created Adam knowing he would sin, with a nature capable of sinning, and placed him in circumstances

designed to produce the sin, then God authored the sin. Calling it permission changes nothing about the outcome.

*“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”* (Psalm 51:5)

David doesn’t say, “I was born into a world corrupted by Adam.” He says, “I was *shapen* in iniquity.” Shapen. Formed. Crafted. The language is personal and direct. God shaped David in iniquity. Not because David inherited Adam’s guilt through a federal headship, but because God created David with a sin nature, directly, personally, as a specific thought in His mind.

And here’s where the framework makes this personal instead of abstract. Each person is a thought in the mind of God. Not a member of a class. Not a unit in a federal system. A *thought*. Specific, individual, personal. God didn’t think “humanity” in the abstract and then produce six billion copies. He thought each person individually. Your sin nature is not a generic inheritance from Adam. It is part of the specific thought that is *you*. God authored your nature the way He authored everything else - deliberately, purposefully, and for His glory.

*“The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”* (Proverbs 16:4)

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## **Federal Headship Rejected**

Federal headship is the doctrine that Adam served as the representative head of all humanity. When Adam sinned, his sin was legally *imputed* to everyone he represented. You were born guilty not because of anything you did, but because your representative failed the test. It’s a courtroom metaphor. Adam

was the defendant on behalf of the entire human race, and when he was found guilty, the verdict applied to everyone he represented.

And I reject it.

Not because it isn't clever. It is. Not because it doesn't have a long pedigree. It does. I reject it because it is an *institutional* covenant imposed from outside, and the framework of this book requires *personal* covenants formed from within.

Federal headship treats the relationship between Adam and his descendants as a legal arrangement. Adam was appointed by God as the federal head, and his actions had binding legal consequences for everyone in his headship. But this is a contract, not a covenant. And as we established in Chapter 7, God's covenants are personal promises of love, not legal frameworks negotiated between independent parties.

In the framework of this book, there is no "representative" standing between God and each person. There is only the Author and the character. Each person is a direct, personal thought of God. No intermediary. No legal machinery. No federal head whose actions determine your spiritual status. God creates each soul directly, with its nature, its inclinations, its capacity and its limitations, all authored by His purpose.

Federal headship was invented to solve a problem that doesn't exist in this system. The problem it solves is: how do you explain universal sinfulness without making God the author of each person's sin nature? The answer is: you don't explain it away. You accept it. God creates each person sinful directly. He doesn't need Adam as a middleman to deliver the sinfulness. He is the Author of every soul, and every soul is authored according to His purpose.

*“Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Romans 9:20-21)*

The potter makes each vessel directly. Not through a representative. Not through a federal head. Directly. From the same lump. One to honor, another to dishonor. The vessels don't inherit their status from a prior vessel. They receive it from the Potter's hand.

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## **What Romans 5:12 Actually Says**

Federal theology hangs its hat on Romans 5:12, and it's the first passage anyone will cite in objection to what I've just said. So let me address it directly.

*“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12)*

“By one man sin entered into the world.” This is true. Adam was the first human to sin. Sin *entered* the world through his act. He was the door through which sin became visible in human history. But “entering the world” is not the same as “being imputed to all men.” The verse does not say, “Adam's sin was charged to everyone's account.” It says sin *entered*, and death *passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*.

For that *all have sinned*. Not “for that Adam sinned on their behalf.” All have sinned. Each person sins because each person was created with a nature that sins. Adam was the first domino, but each person's sin nature was authored by God directly in

each soul. Death passed upon all men because all men sin. Not because one man sinned and the rest were charged with his guilt.

And verse 14 makes this even clearer:

*“Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.”* (Romans 5:14)

There are those who did not sin “after the similitude of Adam’s transgression” - that is, they sinned differently than Adam did. Their sin was not a repeat of Adam’s specific act. They didn’t eat forbidden fruit. They sinned in their own ways, according to their own natures, because God authored them with natures that sin. The death still reached them. Not because Adam’s guilt was imputed to them, but because their own sin nature, authored directly by God, produced its own fruit.

The passage is about the *universality* of sin and death, not about the *mechanism* of federal imputation. Paul is explaining that sin and death are universal because all men sin. Adam was first. But the authorship of each person’s sinful nature goes back to the Potter, not to the federal head.

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## **Each Person a Specific Thought**

Here is the beauty buried inside the hard doctrine.

If each person is a specific thought in the mind of God, then you are not an accident. You are not a byproduct of Adam’s failure. You are not a unit in a fallen class, destined for condemnation because a man you never met ate fruit you never

tasted from a tree you never saw. You are a *thought*. God's thought. Specific. Intentional. Authored on purpose.

*"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee."* (Jeremiah 1:5)

God knew Jeremiah before He formed him. Not "foreknew" in the sense of looking ahead in time and seeing what would happen. *Knew*. The way an Author knows his characters before the first chapter is written. The way a mind knows its own thoughts before they're spoken. God thought Jeremiah into existence, personally, directly, with every aspect of his nature authored by divine purpose.

And if that's true of Jeremiah, it's true of you. Your personality, your inclinations, your weaknesses, your capacity for sin, and for the elect, your capacity for grace - all of it was authored. Not inherited from Adam through a legal mechanism. Authored by the hand of God, the Potter who makes each vessel from the lump according to His own purpose.

*"In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."* (Psalm 139:16)

Written. Fashioned. *In thy book*. Every member of your body, every inclination of your soul, authored and recorded before you existed. Not determined by Adam's failure. Determined by God's authorship.

This is the doctrine that federal headship obscures. Federal headship puts Adam between you and God. It says your spiritual condition is determined by what Adam did, and your remedy is determined by what Christ did. Two representatives, two verdicts, and you're the passive recipient of both. But the

framework of this book removes the middleman. You stand before God directly, not as a member of Adam's covenant but as a thought in God's mind. Your sin nature is His authorship. Your redemption, if you're among the elect, is His promise. And no federal head, no institutional covenant, no legal machinery stands between the Author and His thought.

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## **The Comfort in This**

Some will find this terrifying. I understand. The idea that God authored your sin nature, that He made you the way you are on purpose, is not the kind of doctrine you embroider on throw pillows. But I want you to see the other side of it.

If God authored your sin nature, then He wasn't surprised by your worst day. He wasn't caught off guard by the sin you can't stop thinking about. He wasn't disappointed, because disappointment requires unmet expectations, and God has no unmet expectations. He authored the expectation. He authored the failure. And for His elect, He authored the rescue before the failure occurred.

*“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” (2 Timothy 1:9)*

Before the world began. Before Adam. Before the garden. Before the fall. Grace was *given* to the elect in Christ Jesus before any of it happened. Not in response to Adam's sin. Not as a remedy for federal guilt. Before. The grace came first. The authorship of the sin nature, and the authorship of the remedy,

were both present in the same thought. And the remedy was never an afterthought. It was the *point*.

God didn't create you sinful and then scramble to fix it. He created you sinful and *simultaneously* provided the fix, because the sin and the salvation are both chapters in the same story. And the story is His. And it ends in glory for every soul He authored for that purpose.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“If Adam wasn't righteous, the entire federal theology falls apart.”**

Correct. That is exactly the point. Federal theology requires a righteous Adam who fell, because the system needs a representative whose failure can be legally imputed to his descendants. Remove the righteous Adam, and the legal mechanism has nothing to impute. But the mechanism was never necessary. God creates each person with a sin nature directly. He doesn't need Adam as a delivery system. The potter makes each vessel from the lump (Romans 9:21). No federal intermediary required.

**“Romans 5:12 says death passed to all men through Adam.”**

It says sin entered the world through Adam, and death passed upon all men *for that all have sinned*. The universality of sin and death is the point, not the mechanism of federal imputation. Adam was the first to sin in the elect line. All elect humans experience sinning in the likeness of Adam - not because his guilt was charged to their account, but because God

authored each of them with a nature that produces sin. The death is real. The sin is real. The federal machinery is the tradition's addition, not Scripture's.

**“Without federal headship, how do you explain original sin?”**

God creates each person sinful directly. Sin doesn't travel through genes or legal representation. It's authored fresh in each soul for God's sovereign purpose. Psalm 51:5 - “shapen in iniquity.” Shaped. Not inherited. Not imputed. Shaped. By the Potter. Directly.

**“This makes God the author of sin.”**

Yes. And as we established in Chapter 1, Isaiah 45:7 says God creates evil. The phrase “God is not the author of sin” is Plato, not Scripture. God cannot *sin*, because sin is rebellion against God, and God cannot rebel against Himself. But He can and does *create* beings who sin, for His purposes, by His design, according to His plan. The charge of “authoring sin” only stings if you've accepted the law of Plato as a premise. Reject the premise, and the charge evaporates.

**“If everyone is directly authored by God, what role does Adam play?”**

Adam is the first man. The first human to sin. The head of the elect line through which Christ came. He plays a historical role, not a legal one. He is the opening chapter of the human story, not the legal representative whose failure determined everyone else's status. The story runs through him. The guilt does not.

## Chapter 12: The Two Seeds

This is probably the chapter that will cost me the most friendships. I know that going in. And I debated whether to soften it, whether to bury the sharpest edges under qualifications and hedging language, the way most theologians do when they arrive at a doctrine they know the world won't accept. But I've never been good at hedging, and the Scriptures don't hedge either. So I'm going to say it plainly and trust the Author to sort out who can hear it.

Not all human beings are the same.

They are biologically human. They walk, they talk, they eat, they breathe, they bleed the same blood. But spiritually, ontologically, at the level of what they *are* rather than what they *do*, there are two fundamentally different kinds of people on this earth. And this difference was announced before the second generation was born.

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## Genesis 3:15

*“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”* (Genesis 3:15)

Two seeds. Not one seed divided into two camps by their choices. Two *seeds*. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And God is the one who put the enmity between them. He didn’t discover the enmity. He didn’t respond to it. He *put* it there. He authored the division.

And notice the language: *thy seed* and *her seed*. Seed is lineage. Offspring. Descendants. Not metaphorical descendants. Not “people who act like the serpent.” Seed. The same word used of Abraham’s seed, of David’s seed, of Christ as the seed of the woman. When Scripture uses the word seed, it means something real about what those descendants *are*, not just what they do.

Bob Higby used to put it this way, and it’s the clearest statement I’ve ever heard on the subject: the difference between the elect and the reprobate is not a difference of degree. It is a difference of *kind*. “As a rock differs from an apple.” Not two variations of the same thing. Two entirely different things wearing the same biological suit.

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## The Ontological Difference

The elect are created with a sin nature, as we established in Chapter 11. They sin. They rebel. They live for a time in the same darkness as everyone around them. But their sin nature is *temporary firmware*. It was authored by God to run for a

season, and then to be overwritten by regeneration. The elect sinner is a caterpillar in its ugly stage, carrying within it the code for wings it hasn't grown yet. The sin is real. The rebellion is real. But it was never the final state. The Author wrote the ugly chapter knowing the beautiful chapter was coming.

The reprobate are something else entirely. They were not created with a temporary sin nature awaiting redemption. They were created with a permanent sin nature that will never be overwritten. Not because they refuse the overwrite, as though it were offered and declined. Because the overwrite was never written for them. They are fashioned in eternal sin. Devils in human form, incapable of regeneration, because regeneration was never authored for their souls.

And before you recoil from that language, hear it from Christ Himself:

*“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.”* (John 8:44)

“Your father the devil.” Not “you act like the devil.” Not “you are following the devil’s example.” Your *father*. And this was said to the Pharisees - the most religious, most outwardly moral, most doctrinally educated people in Israel. The men who tithed on their garden herbs and kept the Sabbath with obsessive precision. Christ looked at them and said, “You are of your father the devil.”

That is not metaphor. That is ontology. Christ was telling them *what they are*, not just what they do. And it is consistent with Genesis 3:15, where the seed of the serpent is announced as a distinct lineage from the seed of the woman. The Pharisees are the seed of the serpent. They look human. They act religious.

They study Scripture. But they are fundamentally, ontologically, at the level of their spiritual DNA, the children of a different father.

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## **The Image of God**

Here is where it gets sharper still.

The image of God belongs to the elect only.

*“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”* (Genesis 1:26)

Most theologians read “man” in this verse as a universal category - all of humanity, every person ever born, bears the image of God. But in the framework of this book, “man” in Genesis 1:26 refers to elect humanity. The seed of the woman. The people God authored for glory. They bear His image because they are His thoughts, authored to reflect Him, designed from eternity to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

The reprobate bear the image of the serpent. They are the children of their father the devil (John 8:44). They were not authored to reflect God. They were authored to serve God’s purposes in a different way - as vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Romans 9:22), whose existence displays the justice and power of God against the backdrop of His mercy toward the elect.

I know the standard objection: James 3:9 says men are “made after the similitude of God,” and it seems to apply universally. But James is an antilegomenon - one of the disputed books, the weakest self-authenticating book in the

canon, and the one Luther himself called “an epistle of straw.” I hold James as Scripture. But I’m not going to let the weakest book in the canon override the clearest statements of Christ (John 8:44), Paul (Romans 9:21-23), and Moses (Genesis 3:15). When the strongest witnesses say the same thing and the weakest says something that appears to differ, you interpret the weaker in light of the stronger. Not the other way around.

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## Three Groups in the Final Creation

When the story is finished, when the Author writes the last page, there will be three groups of conscious beings in the final creation:

**Elect angels.** Created impeccable. Never sinned. Never could sin. Their firmware was written without the capacity for rebellion. They serve God perfectly because their nature was authored to serve God perfectly. They are the proof that God *can* create a righteous being that doesn’t fall - which is precisely why the argument that Adam was “created righteous but mutable” doesn’t work. God knows how to create beings that don’t sin. He created the elect angels that way. If He wanted Adam to be impeccable, Adam would have been impeccable. Adam fell because God authored him to fall.

**Elect humans.** Created sinful. Redeemed by Christ. Regenerated by the Spirit. Their firmware was overwritten - the sin nature replaced with a new nature, the old code deleted and the new code installed. They sinned for a season because God authored them with a temporary sin nature. And then He called them out of it, gave them new hearts, opened their eyes, and brought them home. The caterpillar got its wings.

**Reprobate.** Created sinful. Never redeemed. Fashioned in eternal sin with corrupt firmware only, no overwrite authored, no redemption purchased, no regeneration planned. They exist to display the justice and wrath of God. They are the darkness against which the light shines brightest. And they are *not* victims. They are not people who could have been saved if only God had chosen them. They are a different seed entirely. A rock does not grieve that it is not an apple. A vessel of dishonor does not have the standing to accuse the Potter of unfairness. It was made for what it was made for.

*“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?”* (Romans 9:22-23)

Vessels of wrath *fitted* to destruction. Not “assigned” to destruction after the fall. Fitted. Made for it. Shaped for it by the Potter. And vessels of mercy *afore prepared* unto glory. Prepared before. The two categories were authored before the first frame of history played.

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## **The “Second Ransom” Rejected**

There is a position held by some who teach the two seeds that says God ransomed the reprobate from the devil. That before the fall, the reprobate somehow belonged to Satan, and God paid a ransom to Satan to retrieve them so they could serve their purpose in history. I reject this entirely.

Christ alone is the ransom. There is no “second ransom.” There is no transaction between God and Satan. Satan is not an

independent party with property rights. Satan is a tool in the hand of God, a created being who does what he was made to do. The reprobate were never Satan's property requiring retrieval. They were always God's creation, authored for His purposes, placed in history according to His plan. The ransom Christ paid was for the elect, and the elect alone. There is no ransom for the reprobate because none was needed and none was given.

*“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”* (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

“A ransom for all” - all the elect. All those given to Christ by the Father. Not all men universally. The context throughout Paul's letters is consistent: Christ died for His people. The sheep. The bride. The elect. The “all” is the “all” of God's chosen, not the “all” of humanity.

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## **Two Curses**

And here is a distinction that most theology misses entirely.

There are two consequences in Scripture, not one. The curse of the law and the condemnation of the gospel. They are not the same thing. They do not have the same weight. And Christ bore only one of them.

**The curse of the law** is the measured penalty for transgression. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10). This curse falls on every person who breaks God's law, which is every person who has ever lived. And for the elect, Christ bore this curse in full.

*“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” (Galatians 3:13)*

Christ was made a curse *for us*. He bore the full weight of the law’s condemnation on behalf of the elect. Every sin, every transgression, every failure to keep the law perfectly - all of it was charged to Christ, and He paid it. The curse of the law has been removed from every person for whom Christ died.

**The condemnation of the gospel** is something different and far heavier. The gospel is good news to the elect. But to the reprobate, the same gospel becomes a death sentence.

*“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)*

The same message. The savour of life unto life for the elect. The savour of death unto death for the reprobate. Same gospel. Different firmware. Different result. And the condemnation that falls on those who reject it is not just the penalty for breaking the law. It is something far heavier.

*“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16)*

*“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:29)*

The condemnation of the gospel is the *sorer* punishment. It exceeds the curse of the law. And it falls on the reprobate - those who were never given the capacity to believe, who were

authored to reject Christ, whose father is the devil. Christ bore the curse of the law for the elect. He did not bear the condemnation of the gospel for anyone, because that condemnation falls on those for whom He did not die.

This distinction matters because it eliminates the confusion about whether Christ's atonement is "sufficient for all but efficient for the elect." No. Christ's atonement is specifically and exclusively for the elect. The curse He bore was the curse of the law. The condemnation of the gospel remains for the reprobate, unbearable, unrelieved, eternal.

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## **This Is Not Manichaeism**

I know the charge is coming. I can hear it forming in the reader's mind. "This is Manichaeism. Two seeds. Two kinds of people. Two spiritual fathers. You've created a cosmic dualism with God on one side and Satan on the other."

No. I haven't. And here is why the charge is not just wrong but *backwards*.

Manichaeism teaches two *independent*, co-equal cosmic powers - one good, one evil - locked in eternal struggle. Two sources. Two authors. Two wills competing for dominance. That is dualism. And it is exactly what this framework rejects.

In this system, there is *one* Author. One God. One sovereign will that creates *everything* - the elect and the reprobate, the angels and the demons, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Satan is not God's rival. Satan is God's tool. The serpent in the garden was placed there by the same God who placed Adam there. The seed of the serpent exists because the

same God who authored the seed of the woman also authored the seed of the serpent. There is no independent evil power. There is only God, who creates both light and darkness, both peace and evil (Isaiah 45:7).

And here is the irony that most theologians miss. *Infralapsarianism* is actually closer to Manichaeism than this system is. Because *infralapsarianism*, with its “permissive will,” implies that evil operates with a degree of independence from God. God *permitted* the fall. God *allowed* sin. God *let* the devil do his work. That language implies an evil force that operates outside of God’s direct authorship - which is exactly what Manichaeism claims. A permissive will creates space for an independent agent. An absolute will eliminates it.

Absolute predestination is the *death* of dualism. One God. One Author. One will. Two seeds created by the same hand for different purposes. Not two powers. One power, displayed in two directions - mercy and justice, love and wrath, vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. All from the same Potter. All from the same lump. All serving the same story.

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## **The Purpose of Reprobation**

And what is that purpose?

*“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?” (Romans 9:22)*

God is *willing to shew His wrath*. Not reluctantly permitting it. Willing. Purposefully. The reprobate exist so that God’s wrath and power are displayed. Without darkness, you cannot see the

light. Without vessels of dishonor, you cannot appreciate the vessels of honor. Without the seed of the serpent, you cannot understand the depth of mercy shown to the seed of the woman.

This is God's glory in absolute impenitence. The reprobate display what God's justice looks like when it is not tempered by mercy. The elect display what God's mercy looks like when justice has been fully satisfied. Together, they reveal the full character of God - not half of it, not the comfortable half, but all of it. Mercy and justice. Love and wrath. Grace and judgment. Both real. Both authored. Both necessary for the full picture.

And the elect, seeing it, fall on their faces. Not because they're better. Not because they earned it. Because the old firmware is still running. And the old firmware *feels* the proximity to darkness. It feels how close the sin is, how strong the pull is, how easily the whole thing could come apart if the new firmware weren't holding. And from inside that experience, the saint looks at the reprobate and *feels* "that could have been me."

Strictly speaking, it couldn't have been. The seeds are different. The elect were never candidates for reprobation. The Potter made the vessel of mercy from eternity, and there was never a moment when that vessel might have been the other kind. I'll say this plainly in Chapter 28, and I mean it.

But the *feeling* is real. And the feeling is a gift. Because a saint who walks around with ontological certainty that he was always safe, who never feels the proximity, who never looks at a broken person and thinks "there but for the grace of God" – that saint is running the theology without the empathy. And theology without empathy is the Pharisee in Luke 18, thanking God he's not like the publican.

“There but for the grace of God go I.” John Bradford said that in the sixteenth century, watching prisoners being led to execution. He was burned at the stake himself a few years later. The sentence is not Scripture, but it is theologically imprecise and spiritually essential. The reality is that the seeds are different. The experience is that grace feels undeserved because the old firmware still remembers what it wanted. And the humility that comes from that feeling is what makes Chapter 30 possible. The saint who feels the proximity extends the widest arms. The saint who knows only the ontology risks the coldest heart.

Hold both. The reality and the experience. The theology and the feeling. That’s what it means to be a consciousness trapped in an animal, marveling at the animal.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“This is Manichaeism - two cosmic powers in eternal struggle.”**

Exactly backwards. Manichaeism teaches two *independent* powers. This system teaches one sovereign God who created both seeds. Satan is not God’s rival. Satan is God’s instrument. The charge of Manichaeism applies more naturally to infralapsarianism, which posits a permissive will that gives evil a degree of operational independence from God. Absolute predestination eliminates dualism by placing everything, including the seed of the serpent, under one Author.

**“John 8:44 is metaphorical. Jesus is saying they ACT like the devil, not that they ARE his children.”**

In a framework where the ontological difference between the seeds is taught from Genesis 3:15 forward, and where the seed of the serpent is a distinct spiritual category announced by God Himself in the garden, “your father the devil” is ontological, not behavioral. Christ is telling the Pharisees *what they are*. And He is consistent with the rest of Scripture: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” From the *beginning*. Not from the moment he chose to follow Satan. From the beginning.

**“The image of God is universal. Genesis 1:26 says ‘man,’ not ‘elect man.’”**

“Man” in Genesis 1:26 refers to elect humanity - the seed of the woman, those authored to bear God’s image and be conformed to the image of His Son. James 3:9 is the standard rebuttal, but James is an antilegomenon, the weakest self-authenticating book in the canon. I hold it as Scripture, but I won’t let the weakest book override the clearest statements of Christ (John 8:44), Paul (Romans 9:21-23), and Moses (Genesis 3:15). Interpret the weaker in light of the stronger. Not the other way around.

**“If the reprobate don’t bear God’s image, why is murder wrong?”**

Genesis 9:6 protects all biological humans because you cannot know who is elect. The wheat and the tares grow together (Matthew 13:30). The command is practical wisdom from a God who knows His people are hidden among the reprobate. You treat every human life as sacred because you cannot read the book of life. Only God can.

**“This is the most offensive chapter in the book.”**

Probably. But Romans 9:22-23 is Scripture. The existence of vessels of wrath fitted to destruction is not my invention. It's Paul's statement under divine inspiration. The offense is not in the explanation. The offense is in the doctrine itself, which has always been offensive. The question is whether it's true. And if it's true, the offense is the reader's problem, not the Author's.

## Chapter 13: Satan Created Evil, Not Fallen

I believed the story for thirty years. The beautiful angel. The highest cherub. The worship leader of heaven who got too proud, rebelled against God, and was cast down like lightning from the sky. I heard it preached. I read it in commentaries. I saw the Milton version and the Sunday school version and the heavy metal album cover version. And I never questioned it, because everyone told it the same way, and the two passages that supposedly proved it, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, seemed clear enough at a glance.

And then I read the context.

One phrase in Isaiah 14:4 destroyed the entire narrative.

*“That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon.”*

Against the king of *Babylon*. Not against Satan. Not against a pre-temporal angelic being. Against the king of Babylon. The prophet is addressing a human ruler, a political tyrant whose arrogance reached to the heavens and whose fall was as

dramatic as his rise. And the moment I saw those four words, the Lucifer myth started to unravel. Because the passage that the entire Christian tradition has used to construct the backstory of Satan is not about Satan at all. It's about Nebuchadnezzar and his dynasty.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me start where we should always start. With the logic.

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## **The Impossibility Argument**

We established this in Chapter 11, but it bears repeating here because the stakes are higher. A perfectly righteous being *cannot* sin. This is not a limitation imposed on God. It is a logical necessity that flows from the nature of righteousness itself. If a being is perfectly aligned with God's will, there is no mechanism by which that will can produce rebellion. The output cannot contain what the input does not.

In Chapter 11, we applied this to Adam. Adam sinned, therefore Adam was not perfectly righteous. The fall revealed a nature that was already inclined toward sin.

Now apply the same logic to Satan.

If Satan was a perfectly righteous angel who fell, then we have the same impossibility problem we had with Adam, but worse. Because Adam at least had a body, an environment, a physical temptation. The fruit was "good for food, and pleasant to the eyes" (Genesis 3:6). There was a sensory mechanism through which temptation could operate. But Satan, in the traditional narrative, was a disembodied spirit in the direct presence of God. No body. No sensory temptation. No serpent

whispering in his ear. Just pure spirit in the full light of divine glory.

And somehow, from that position, pride arose? From where? If Satan's nature was perfectly righteous, where did the pride come from? If his will was perfectly aligned with God, what turned it? You cannot get pride from humility. You cannot get rebellion from perfection. You cannot get sin from sinlessness. A good tree *cannot* bring forth evil fruit (Matthew 7:18). Christ said so.

The traditional answer is the same answer they give for Adam: free will. Satan had the *freedom* to choose rebellion. But freedom to choose rebellion implies a nature that contains the *capacity* for rebellion. And a nature that contains the capacity for rebellion is not perfect righteousness. It is something less. Something that already has the seed of sin built into it.

So either Satan was created with a nature inclined toward pride and rebellion - in which case he was created evil, which is what I'm arguing - or the traditional narrative has a hole in it that no amount of theological patching can repair.

God created Satan evil. That's the answer. Not fallen. Not corrupted. Not a once-good angel who went wrong. Created evil. On purpose. For a purpose.

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## **Isaiah 14: Read the Context**

Let me walk through the passage that has been used for two thousand years to prove that Satan fell from heaven, and show you what it actually says.

*“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!”* (Isaiah 14:12)

Beautiful verse. Dramatic imagery. And absolutely, unequivocally, about the king of Babylon.

How do I know? Because the prophet told us. Eight verses earlier.

*“That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!”* (Isaiah 14:4)

This is a *proverb against the king of Babylon*. The entire passage from verse 4 through the end of the chapter is an oracle of judgment against a specific political ruler. The “Lucifer” of verse 12 is not a pre-temporal angel. The Hebrew word is *helel*, which means “shining one” or “morning star.” It is a title given to the king of Babylon to describe his brightness, his glory, his position among the nations. And the fall described in the passage is a *political* fall - the collapse of an empire, the humiliation of a tyrant, the descent of a man who said “*I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God*” (v13) and found himself instead “*brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit*” (v15).

And the nations respond:

*“They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?”* (Isaiah 14:16)

Is this the *man*. Not the angel. Not the spirit. The man. The one who made the earth tremble and shook kingdoms. This is political language about a political figure, and the entire

Christian tradition has ripped it out of its context and applied it to a cosmic angelic rebellion that the passage never describes.

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## **Ezekiel 28: Same Problem**

The same error applies to Ezekiel 28, which is the other passage commonly cited as the “fall of Satan.”

*“Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God.”* (Ezekiel 28:12-13)

A lamentation upon the king of *Tyrus*. Tyre. A Phoenician city-state. A human ruler. Not an angel. Not a spirit. A king.

The language about Eden and the precious stones and the anointed cherub is prophetic *imagery* applied to a human ruler to describe his exalted position and catastrophic fall. Prophets do this constantly. They use cosmic language to describe political events. Isaiah calls the fall of Babylon a fall from heaven. Ezekiel calls the king of Tyre a cherub in Eden. This is prophetic hyperbole, the language of divine oracle, not a literal description of a pre-temporal angelic event.

And if you insist on reading Ezekiel 28 as a literal description of Satan, you have to explain why the prophet explicitly says it’s about “the king of Tyrus” in verse 12. The context is right there. The prophet identified his subject. The tradition ignored the identification and substituted its own.

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## The Law of Plato

So where did the story come from? If Isaiah 14 is about Babylon and Ezekiel 28 is about Tyre, how did the church arrive at the narrative of Satan's angelic rebellion?

The answer is the same answer that keeps coming up in this book, and I am going to keep saying it until it sticks: the *law of Plato*.

Plato, in his *Republic*, argued that the divine must never be proposed as the author of evil. This was not a minor point in Plato's system. It was foundational. The gods, in Plato's view, are the source of good and *only* good. If evil exists, it must come from some other source - human free will, the corruption of matter, some force outside the divine that introduces chaos into the cosmos. But the gods themselves are clean. They don't create evil. They don't author wickedness. They are, in Plato's system, permanently and necessarily good.

And Plato *hated* the Hebrew Scriptures. He specifically hated the stories in which God authors evil, causes suffering, sends plagues, hardens hearts, and destroys nations. Those stories violated his philosophical axiom. The Hebrew God was, to Plato, a barbarian deity who failed to meet the standards of rational theology.

Now here is the tragedy. The early church fathers, the Patristics, were educated in Greek philosophy. They read Plato before they read Paul. And they imported Plato's axiom into their theology without realizing what they were doing. Augustine, the most influential theologian in church history, was a Neoplatonist before he was a Christian. And he carried the Platonic assumption about divine goodness directly into his doctrine of God. God cannot author evil. God only creates good.

If evil exists, it must have entered the system through some other door.

And that other door became Satan.

The narrative goes like this: God created everything good. God created angels good. God created Satan good. But Satan, using his free will, chose to rebel. Evil entered the universe not through God's authorship but through Satan's choice. God remains clean. Plato's axiom is preserved. And the Hebrew insistence that God creates evil (Isaiah 45:7) is quietly reinterpreted, softened, or ignored.

This is the origin of the Lucifer myth. It was constructed to protect God from the charge of authoring evil. And it was constructed using two passages ripped from their context and a philosophical axiom borrowed from a pagan who hated the Bible.

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## **Isaiah 45:7**

*"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."* (Isaiah 45:7)

I've cited this verse many times in this book already, and I will cite it many more. Because it is the single most important verse in the Bible for understanding the nature of God's sovereignty, and it is the single most suppressed verse in the history of Christian theology.

The Hebrew word is *ra*. It is the same word used for "evil" throughout the Old Testament. It means wickedness, calamity, disaster, moral evil. It is the word used in Genesis 2:9 for the tree of knowledge of good and *evil*. It is the word used in

Genesis 6:5 for the wickedness of man. It is the same word, carrying the same range of meaning, in every context.

And God says He creates it. Not permits it. Not allows it. Creates it. *“I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.”*

Newer translations have watered this down. The NIV renders *ra* as “disaster.” The ESV renders it as “calamity.” Both translations strip the moral dimension from the word and reduce it to natural catastrophe. And both translations do so not because the Hebrew demands it, but because the translators have absorbed the law of Plato and cannot stomach the idea that God creates moral evil. The KJV, translated before modern squeamishness fully infected the translation committees, gives you the word as it stands: evil.

And the rest of the Old Testament confirms it:

*“Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?”*  
(Amos 3:6)

*“Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?”* (Lamentations 3:38)

*“And the evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.”* (1 Samuel 16:14)

An evil spirit *from the Lord*. Not from Satan. From the Lord. God sent it. God authored it. God deployed it. And the church has spent centuries trying to explain that away, because the law of Plato says God can’t do that.

But He can. And He did. And He said so.

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## God's Holiness and Evil

“But if God creates evil, He's not holy!”

This objection is the law of Plato restated in Christian vocabulary. And it collapses under the weight of what *holiness* actually means.

Holiness means *set apart*. It means God is utterly distinct from His creation, perfectly consistent with His own nature, uncontaminated by anything outside Himself. And His nature includes *sovereignty over all things*. All things. Including evil.

Creating evil for His purposes is not sinning. Sin is rebellion against God. God cannot rebel against Himself. If He creates a being that rebels, that is the creature's sin, authored by God but experienced by the creature. The Author writes a villain. The villain does villainous things. The Author is not villainous for writing the villain. The Author is an author. And the villain serves the story.

God's holiness is not threatened by His authorship of evil any more than Shakespeare's character is threatened by the existence of Iago. The Author stands outside and above the moral categories that apply to the characters. He creates good characters and evil characters, and both serve the story He's telling. The story requires both. The glory requires both. And God, being God, has no obligation to create a universe in which evil doesn't exist. He chose to create this one. With evil in it. On purpose. For His glory.

*“The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”* (Proverbs 16:4)

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## The Church Was Wrong

“But the church has always taught that Satan fell!”

Yes. And the church has been wrong about many things for many centuries.

The Patristic doctrine of the atonement held for over a thousand years that Christ’s death was a *ransom paid to the devil*. That Satan held humanity captive, and God paid the devil off with Christ’s blood. This was the dominant view of the atonement from the early church through the medieval period. And it was wrong. Catastrophically wrong. It made Satan a party to a transaction with God, as if the devil had rights that God needed to satisfy. The penal substitutionary view eventually replaced it, but it took over a millennium.

Augustine’s Platonic assumptions about the nature of evil, that evil is the absence of good rather than a created thing, have never been fully purged from Reformed theology. They survive in the language of “permission,” in the discomfort with Isaiah 45:7, in the insistence that God is “not the author of sin.” All of this is Plato in a Christian suit. And the church has never had the courage to strip it off.

The fact that “the church has always taught it” is not an argument from Scripture. It is an argument from tradition. And tradition, as the Reformers themselves insisted, must be tested against Scripture. When I test the tradition of Satan’s angelic fall against the Scripture, I find Isaiah 14 talking about Babylon, Ezekiel 28 talking about Tyre, and Isaiah 45:7 saying God creates evil. The tradition fails the test.

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## **Demons Created Evil**

And if Satan was created evil, then the demons were created evil too.

Demons are not fallen angels in this framework. They are evil spirits created by God for His purposes. The same logic applies: if a demon was once a righteous angel, then a righteous being produced sin, which is impossible. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. The demons were always evil. They were authored that way. They serve the story the Author is telling.

*“And the evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.”* (1 Samuel 16:14)

From the Lord. Not from a rebel angel who escaped God’s control. From the Lord. Sent by God. Deployed by God. Created by God for the purpose of troubling Saul.

The entire infrastructure of “spiritual warfare” as it’s taught in most churches assumes that demons are rogue agents, escaped prisoners of a cosmic war, running loose in the world doing damage that God is trying to contain. But that’s not what Scripture describes. Scripture describes a God who *sends* evil spirits (1 Samuel 16:14), who *creates* evil (Isaiah 45:7), who *hardens hearts* (Exodus 7:3), who *sends strong delusion* (2 Thessalonians 2:11). The demons are not God’s enemies. They are God’s instruments. They do what they were made to do. And what they were made to do serves the story the Author is telling.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“Isaiah 14 clearly describes Satan’s fall from heaven.”**

Read verse 4. “Thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon.” The prophet identified his subject. The passage describes the fall of a human ruler using cosmic imagery, which is standard prophetic language. Verse 16 confirms it: “Is this the *man* that made the earth to tremble?” Man. Not angel. Not spirit. The Lucifer myth is a tradition built on a decontextualized reading of a passage that the prophet himself identified as being about Babylon.

**“Ezekiel 28 calls the king of Tyre a cherub in Eden. That can’t be a human.”**

Prophets use cosmic imagery for political figures constantly. Isaiah calls Babylon’s fall a fall from heaven. Ezekiel calls the king of Tyre a cherub in Eden. This is the language of prophetic oracle, not literal description. And verse 12 identifies the subject: “take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus.” The identification is in the text. The tradition chose to ignore it.

**“If God creates evil, He’s not holy.”**

Holiness means set apart, perfectly consistent with His own nature. His nature includes sovereignty over all things - including evil. Creating evil for His purposes is not sinning. Sin is rebellion against God. God cannot rebel against Himself. The objection assumes the law of Plato - that deity cannot author evil. But that’s Plato, not Scripture. Isaiah 45:7 says God creates evil. Either Isaiah is wrong or Plato is wrong. I’ll take Isaiah.

**“The church has always taught Satan fell.”**

The church taught the ransom-to-the-devil atonement for over a thousand years. The church taught baptismal regeneration for centuries. The church kept the Bible in Latin so common people couldn’t read it. “The church has always taught it” is an argument from tradition, not an argument from

Scripture. And the Reformation was built on the principle that tradition must yield to Scripture when they conflict. This is one of those conflicts.

**“If Satan was created evil, God is responsible for all the evil Satan does.”**

Yes. God authored Satan’s nature. God placed Satan in the garden. God decreed every act Satan would ever perform. And God said, “I create evil” (Isaiah 45:7). God’s responsibility for evil is not the same as God’s guilt for evil. The Author is responsible for the story. The Author is not guilty of the villain’s crimes. Because the Author stands outside the moral framework that applies to the characters. God creates the rules. He is not subject to them. He is the Potter. The clay has no standing to accuse Him.

## Chapter 14: Every Sin, Same Distance from Grace

I have sat in church buildings where the preacher spent forty-five minutes on one sin and zero minutes on the sin sitting in the pew next to him. I have watched congregations work themselves into righteous fury over sins they would never commit while practicing, daily, sins they would never name. I have seen men who couldn't stop gossiping thunder about sexual immorality. I have seen men who couldn't control their pride deliver sermons about the evils of worldliness. And I have watched the church, over and over, construct a tier list of sins - the really bad ones at the top, the respectable ones at the bottom - and then arrange their self-righteousness accordingly.

And every time I see it, I think of Luke 18.

*“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast,*

*saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.”* (Luke 18:10-14)

The publican went home justified. Not the Pharisee. Not the man with the clean record and the respectable sins. The publican. The man whose sin was visible, whose shame was public, who couldn't even look up. He went home justified because he stood before God as what he was. And the Pharisee went home condemned because he stood before God as what he wasn't.

The tier list is the Pharisee's list. It is the list that says *my* sin is tolerable and *your* sin is abominable. And the cross obliterates it.

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## **We Drink Iniquity Like Water**

*“What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?”* (Job 15:14-16)

Like *water*. Not like poison, which you avoid. Not like medicine, which you take reluctantly. Like water. The most natural thing in the world. You drink it without thinking. You reach for it instinctively. That is what sin is to the human race. Not an occasional lapse. Not a regrettable accident. The default behavior of a nature that was authored to produce it.

And here is the leveling truth that every church needs to hear: if we all drink iniquity like water, then no one's glass is

cleaner than anyone else's. The murderer and the minister are drinking from the same well. The adulterer and the gossip are consuming the same substance. The homosexual and the self-righteous elder are swallowing the same poison. The difference is not in the nature of what they're drinking. The difference is that some of them know it, and some of them don't.

*"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."*  
(Romans 3:23)

All. Not some more than others. Not the really bad sinners at 90% short and the decent churchgoers at 10% short. All have sinned and come short. The distance between any sin and the glory of God is *infinite*. There is no sin that is almost good enough. There is no sin that is close to the line. Every sin, without exception, falls infinitely short of God's glory. And an infinite shortfall is an infinite shortfall, whether you got there by murder or by pride.

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## **The Cross as Equalizer**

If the blood of Christ covers sin, it covers *all* sin equally. Not more blood for the murderer. Not less blood for the respectable sinner. The same blood, the same cross, the same sacrifice, applied to every transgression of every elect person who has ever lived.

*"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7)

All sin. Not all sins except the really offensive ones. Not all sins ranked by severity with different levels of atonement required. All sin. The blood cleanseth from *all*.

And here is what that means for the tier list: the cross destroyed it. At Calvary, every sin that Christ bore was borne equally. There was no hierarchy on the cross. God did not look at some sins and say, “These require extra payment.” The payment was total. The coverage was complete. Every sin of every elect person, from the first to the last, from the mildest to the most horrific, was charged to Christ and paid in full. No remainder. No installment plan. No sliding scale.

Every sin ordained by a sovereign God, and charged to Christ for His elect. The one who stole a candy bar and the one who took a life stand in the same spot before the cross. Not because their sins are morally equivalent in human terms. But because both sins are infinitely distant from the glory of God, and both are infinitely covered by the blood of Christ.

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## **Degrees of Punishment, Not Degrees of Grace**

Now I need to address the obvious objection, because it’s a fair one. Didn’t Jesus say that some would receive *greater* damnation? Didn’t He say it would be more tolerable for Sodom than for Capernaum?

Yes. He did.

*“But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.”* (Matthew 11:24)

There are degrees of temporal punishment. There are degrees of responsibility. There are sins that cause more earthly damage than others. A murder is more destructive than a harsh word. A rape is more devastating than a lie. This is obvious, and I am not denying it.

But degrees of punishment are not degrees of grace. The existence of a hierarchy in temporal consequences does not create a hierarchy in the distance between the sinner and God's mercy. The murderer doesn't need *more* of Christ's blood than the gossip. The blood covers all equally. The murderer may face more severe temporal consequences - imprisonment, execution, the destruction of lives around him. But before the cross, he stands exactly where the gossip stands. Both are sinners who drink iniquity like water. Both are infinitely short of God's glory. Both are covered, if they are elect, by the same blood.

This is the distinction the church consistently misses. They see degrees of punishment and assume degrees of grace. They see a hierarchy of earthly consequences and project it onto the heavenly economy. But the heavenly economy doesn't work that way. Grace is not a sliding scale. It is total or it is nothing. Christ either bore your sin or He didn't. And if He bore it, He bore *all* of it. No sin remaining. No partial coverage. No sin that is harder for Christ to atone for than another.

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## **Abortion**

Let me address two subjects that the church has struggled with, not because these are the only controversial sins, but because they illustrate the principle in the sharpest terms. And I'm going to hold them exactly the way the framework demands: as sins

ordained by God, treated with the same grace as any other sin, and approached with the same theological consistency applied to everything else in this book.

Pro-life. Full stop. No exceptions. Not because of politics. I'm a registered independent, and I think for myself on every issue. Not because of the Republican platform or the pro-life lobby or the Moral Majority or any other institution that has co-opted this position for political gain. Because of the *ontology*.

If everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, and each person is a specific thought He is actively thinking, then ending that life is destroying a thought God is actively thinking.

*“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee.”* (Jeremiah 1:5)

*“In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”* (Psalm 139:16)

Known before formation. Written before existence. Every member fashioned in God's book before a single cell divided. The child in the womb is not a potential person. The child is a *thought*. A specific, personal, authored thought in the mind of God. And destroying that thought is an act of violence against the Author's creation, no less than any other murder.

Even in rape. Even in incest. Even in medical crisis. Because the circumstances that produced the child were predestinated. God doesn't make accidental people. The child conceived in the worst circumstances is still a thought God is thinking. The suffering of the mother is real. The horror of the circumstances is real. And the humanity of the child is real. You don't solve one evil by committing another.

But - and this is where the tier list has to die - I will not demonize the woman.

The woman who has an abortion is a sinner. So is the man who drove her to it. So is the counselor who recommended it. So is the politician who funded it. So is the preacher who thundered about it on Sunday morning while ignoring his own pride for thirty years. Every one of them drinks iniquity like water. And if the woman is elect, if she is among the people God authored for glory, then the sin of abortion is covered by the same blood that covers every other sin. The guilt Christ bore on the cross included that sin. Not because it's small. Because the blood is big enough.

The answer to abortion is not the courthouse. The political pro-life movement has turned this into a legal battle, and I understand why. Laws matter. Justice matters. But the law never saved anyone. Overturning Roe didn't save a single soul. Heartbeat bills don't regenerate hearts. The answer to abortion is the same answer as every other sin in this chapter: Christ. The gospel. Present the truth softly and wait on the Lord.

I would hold a weeping woman who had an abortion and tell her Christ already covered it. Without a single political bumper sticker. Without a single word of condemnation. Because the Pharisee in Luke 18 thanked God that he wasn't like the publican, and the publican went home justified.

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## **Homosexuality**

Sin. Ordained by God. Held with aching compassion and zero stones thrown.

Paul said what he said.

*“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.”*  
(Romans 1:26-27)

*“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.”* (1 Corinthians 6:9)

It is sin. It is an abomination. And I am not going to soften that, because the Scripture doesn't soften it, and I promised in the first chapter of this book that I would follow the Scripture wherever it leads. Even when it leads somewhere uncomfortable.

But here is where absolute predestination demands more honesty than most conservatives can stomach.

The orientation was *ordained*. Not a “choice.” Not a “lifestyle decision.” Not a “rebellion against God's design” in the sense that the person freely chose to rebel. God creates each person with a sin nature according to His sovereign purpose, as we established in Chapter 11. The homosexual's nature was ordained the same way every other person's nature was ordained. God authored the inclination. The person experiences it. The sin is real. And the authorship is God's.

This is too honest for most conservatives. They want to call it a choice because that preserves the idea that the person is responsible and God is not. But we've already dismantled that

assumption in this book. God authors the nature. The creature acts out the nature. The creature is responsible for the act. And God is the Author of the nature. Both are true simultaneously. The pot and the potter. The character and the Author. The sin is real, and the authorship is sovereign.

And here is the other thing the church needs to hear, and it's going to sting: the church that obsesses over homosexuality while ignoring pride is the Pharisee in Luke 18. The preacher who spends forty-five minutes on Romans 1 and zero minutes on Romans 2 has read half the letter. Because Romans 2 turns the spotlight back on the person doing the judging:

*"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."* (Romans 2:1)

"Thou that judgest doest the same things." Not the same specific act. The same *category*. Sin. Rebellion. Drinking iniquity like water. The man who judges the homosexual while nursing his own pride is no closer to God than the man he's judging. They both need the same blood. They both need the same cross. And neither of them can stand before God and say, "At least I'm not as bad as *that*."

As I said in Chapter 12, the sentence "there but for the grace of God go I" is theologically imprecise but spiritually essential. The ontology says the seeds are different and I was never a candidate for reprobation. But the old firmware *feels* the proximity. And the feeling produces the humility that grace demands. The saint who never feels the proximity risks the coldest heart. Grace that produces judgment instead of compassion has missed its own point.

I would sit across the table from a gay man and tell him the truth: it's sin. Paul said what he said. And then I would tell him the rest of the truth: so is my pride, so is my lust, so is my selfishness, and we're both drinking from the same well, and the only thing that saves either of us is a cross we didn't earn and a grace we can't explain.

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## **The Self-Righteousness Problem**

The real danger in the church is not the sins everyone talks about. It's the sin nobody talks about.

*“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”* (Proverbs 16:18)

Pride is the one sin that disguises itself as virtue. Every other sin knows it's a sin. The thief knows he's stealing. The adulterer knows he's sinning. The murderer knows what he's done. But the proud man thinks he's righteous. He mistakes his self-righteousness for holiness and his judgment for discernment. And that's what makes pride the most dangerous sin in the pew - not because it's worse in some cosmic hierarchy, but because it's the one sin that convinces you that you don't have it.

The Pharisees were the proudest men in Israel and the most doctrinally rigorous. They tithed on their garden herbs. They fasted twice a week. They memorized the law and debated its finest points. And Christ called them whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones (Matthew 23:27). Not because their doctrine was wrong. Because their hearts were rotten. Their doctrine was impeccable and their pride was bottomless, and they couldn't see the contradiction because the pride had blinded them to it.

And I've been that man. I've been the sovereign grace Calvinist who was so *right* about the doctrines of grace that I was wrong about everything else. I was right about sovereignty, and I was wrong about love. I was right about predestination, and I was wrong about compassion. I was right that the truth mattered, and I was wrong that my way of holding the truth was the only way that counted. I was, as I said years ago on Pristine Grace, so right that I was *wrong*. And the pride monster was the last sin I noticed, because it was the one wearing a suit and tie and quoting Romans 9.

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## **Ordained Does Not Mean Approved**

One final point, because someone will ask it.

“If God ordained homosexuality and abortion and every other sin, should we not oppose them? Should we just accept everything because God planned it?”

No. And here is why.

God ordained the crucifixion. It was the worst act in human history - the murder of the Son of God by wicked men. And it was the greatest good in human history - the redemption of God's elect. God ordained the act. The men who performed it were still wicked for performing it. Both truths coexist. The ordination does not excuse the actors.

*“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”* (Acts 2:23)

Determinate counsel *and* wicked hands. God ordained it, and the hands were still wicked. Ordination and moral approval

are not the same thing. God ordains sin for His purposes. He does not approve of the sin. He uses the sin. He authors it for a larger story. But the sin, within the story, is still sin. The character who commits murder in the novel is still a murderer, even though the Author wrote the scene.

So we present the truth. We say what the Scripture says. We call sin sin. We hold homosexuality as sin, we hold abortion as sin, we hold pride as sin, we hold self-righteousness as sin. And we present the truth softly. We don't force it. We don't legislate regeneration. We don't mistake the courthouse for the cross. We say what's true, and we wait on the Lord. Because the Author already knows who's going to hear it, and our job is not to change anyone's nature. Our job is to present the truth and let the Spirit do what only the Spirit can do.

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## Objections and Answers

**“Some sins are clearly worse than others. Jesus said Sodom would fare better than Capernaum.”**

Degrees of temporal punishment exist. A murder has more earthly consequences than a lie. But no sin is closer to or further from grace. The murderer doesn't need more of Christ's blood than the gossip. The blood covers all sin equally for the elect. Temporal severity and eternal distance from grace are two different measurements. The church has confused them for centuries.

**“You're being soft on sin by saying it's all the same distance from grace.”**

I'm being hard on self-righteousness. The point isn't that sin doesn't matter. It's that *your* sin doesn't matter less than *their* sin. The church that obsesses over one sin while ignoring its own pride has the bigger problem. And the Pharisee in Luke 18 went home condemned, not the publican.

**“If God ordained homosexuality and abortion, should we not oppose them?”**

We present truth. We don't force it. Ordained doesn't mean approved. God ordained the crucifixion (Acts 2:23) - the worst act in human history - for the greatest good. Ordination and moral approval are not the same thing. We call sin what Scripture calls it, and we leave the results to the Spirit. The courthouse doesn't save. The cross does.

**“You're just trying to make everyone comfortable with their sin.”**

No. I'm trying to make everyone uncomfortable with their *self-righteousness*. The gospel comforts the guilty and disturbs the comfortable. If you've been reading this chapter and thinking, “I'm glad he's finally addressing *those* people's sins,” you've missed the point. This chapter is about you. It's about me. It's about the sin we tolerate in ourselves while pointing fingers at the sins we'd never commit. And it's about a cross that doesn't have a tier list.

**“The Bible says some sins cry out to heaven. Doesn't that make them worse?”**

Sins that cry out to heaven - murder (Genesis 4:10), sodomy (Genesis 18:20), oppression of the poor (Exodus 22:23) - provoke more visible temporal judgment. God responds to them more dramatically in history. But “crying out to heaven” describes God's temporal response, not the sin's eternal weight.

Before the cross, every sin weighs the same: infinite, requiring infinite atonement, which Christ provided in full.

# Chapter 15: Justification from Eternity

I spent years thinking God was angry with me.

Not in the abstract. In the gut. I would lay in bed at night and feel the weight of every failure, every sinful thought, every shortcoming, and I would think - *He sees all of this*. And the theology I was absorbing in my early years didn't help, because even the Calvinists I was reading framed justification as something that happened at the cross, or at conversion, or at the moment of faith. Which meant there was a "before." A window of time when God looked at me and saw what I really was. A window when His wrath rested on me. A window when I was genuinely, actually condemned.

And I believed that for years. Most of the sovereign grace world believes it right now.

But it's wrong. And it's not a minor error. It's one of those errors that sits at the foundation and cracks everything built on top of it. Because if you get the *when* of justification wrong, you get the *nature* of justification wrong. And if you get the nature wrong, you end up with a gospel that isn't actually good news.

You end up with a God who changed His mind about you at some point in history. A God who was angry and then stopped being angry. A God whose disposition toward you depended on an event in time.

The framework doesn't allow that. And Scripture doesn't teach it.

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## **God Never Viewed His People as Condemned**

This is the claim. Let me say it plainly, because it needs to land without qualification.

God *never* viewed His elect as condemned. Not before the cross. Not before their conversion. Not before they were born. Not before the foundation of the world. Never. At no point in the eternal mind of God was there a thought that said, "This person is guilty before Me and I am angry with them." That thought does not exist. It has never existed.

*"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity."* (Psalm 32:2)

Not "will not impute" at some future date. Not "stopped imputing" after the cross. *Imputeth not*. Present tense in the eternal now. David wrote that a thousand years before Christ. And he wrote it because it was already true. The Lord never imputed iniquity to His elect. The sin was always on Christ.

*"He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel."* (Numbers 23:21)

Balaam said this. A pagan prophet, hired to curse Israel, and God put these words in his mouth instead. He hath *not beheld*

iniquity. He hath *not seen* perverseness. Not because Jacob was sinless. Jacob was a liar and a schemer. But God didn't see the sin when He looked at Jacob. He saw the righteousness of Christ, imputed from eternity, covering Jacob before Jacob ever drew breath.

And here is the verse that ties it all together:

*"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."*

(Revelation 13:8)

From the *foundation of the world*. Not at Calvary. Not in 33 AD. From the foundation. The Lamb was slain in the eternal mind of God before He spoke the first word of creation. The cross was a thought before it was an event. The justification was a decree before it was rendered in blood. And in the collapsed thought, in the simultaneous now of God's eternal consciousness, the elect were justified before they sinned, because the payment was made before the debt existed.

This is what it means to say "It is finished."

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## **All Sin Charged to Christ Before the Foundation**

If justification is from eternity, then the sin that justification addresses was also dealt with from eternity. And this is exactly what Scripture teaches.

*"Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."* (1 Peter 1:20)

Christ was foreordained. Not the plan of redemption in the abstract. *Christ* was foreordained. The Person, the sacrifice, the

blood, the obedience, the death, the resurrection - all of it was the decree before any of it was the event. And if the sacrifice was foreordained before the foundation, then the sins it covered were foreordained to be covered before the foundation. The charge was on Christ before the charge existed in time.

*“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.”* (1 Peter 2:24)

He bare our sins. Past tense. Accomplished. Finished. Not “offered to bear” or “made it possible to bear.” He *bare* them. And if you take the eternal perspective, which is the only perspective God has, He was always bearing them. The tree in time was the rendering of what was always true in the mind of God.

This eliminates the entire category of “God was angry with me before I believed.” No. God was never angry with you if you are in Christ. His wrath was never aimed at you. It was aimed at Christ, who stood in your place from eternity. The cross didn’t redirect God’s wrath. The cross *displayed* the wrath that was always on Christ, for you, from the beginning.

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## **“It Is Finished” Means Finished**

*“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”* (John 19:30)

Three words. *It is finished.* Tetelestai. Accomplished. Done. Not “it is begun.” Not “it is offered.” Not “the first part is done and the rest depends on you.” Finished.

And if it is finished, then nothing remains. No additional work. No human contribution. No faith required to *complete* what Christ only *started*. If anything remains after “It is finished,” then it wasn’t finished. And if it wasn’t finished, Christ lied on the cross. That’s the logical consequence of any system that makes salvation contingent on anything after Calvary.

The already/not-yet distinction that theologians love to make is real, but it’s *experiential*, not actual. From God’s perspective, everything about salvation has already occurred. Justification - done from eternity. Regeneration - decreed from eternity, rendered in time. Faith - a gift given at the appointed moment, but decreed from eternity. Glorification - as certain as justification, because it comes from the same decree. The “not yet” is in our experience. The “already” is in God’s mind. And God’s mind is the one that matters.

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## The MCT Ordo Salutis

Every theological system has an order of salvation. The order matters because it reveals what you think the *cause* of salvation is. If you put faith before regeneration, you’ve made the human response the cause. If you put justification after faith, you’ve made justification contingent on a human act. The order reveals the theology, even when the theologian doesn’t realize it.

In Modified Covenant Theology, the order is:

- 1. Eternal Justification.** God never viewed His people as condemned. This is first because it is first. Before anything else, in the timeless mind of God, the elect were righteous in Christ. This is the foundation on which everything else stands.

**2. Regeneration.** The Spirit flashes the firmware. He changes the boot parameters beneath awareness. This happens in time, but *before faith*. The person does not choose to be regenerated. They don't even know it's happening. The Spirit rewrites the deepest layer of the soul, the presuppositions that live below conscious thought, and the person wakes up different without knowing why.

**3. Faith.** The application layer recognizes the firmware flash. Faith is the *experience* of salvation, not the *cause*. It's a gift (Galatians 5:22), not a duty. The regenerate person doesn't manufacture faith. They receive it. And the moment they receive it, they realize what was always true - that Christ is theirs and they are His.

**4. Conversion.** The conscious turning from sin to Christ. The visible expression of the invisible regeneration. The prodigal son getting up and walking home. He didn't become a son by walking home. He walked home because he was already a son.

**5. Continuous Sanctification.** Growth in grace and knowledge. Not progressive holiness, because Christ IS the believer's holiness. Continuous means ongoing. It means the Spirit keeps teaching, keeps revealing, keeps growing the believer in understanding. But the status never changes. They are as holy the day they first believed as the day they die. We'll develop this fully in Chapter 18.

**6. Glorification.** The old firmware removed. The sin nature gone. The higher resolution body. This is the final rendering upgrade, and we'll deal with it in detail later. But for now, note that glorification is as certain as justification, because it comes from the same decree. If God justified you from

eternity, He will glorify you in eternity. The one guarantees the other.

This order is non-negotiable in the framework. Justification *first*, because it's eternal. Regeneration *before* faith, because the firmware must be flashed before the application layer can recognize it. Faith as *gift*, because a dead man can't manufacture belief. Sanctification as *positional*, because Christ doesn't grow in holiness and neither does His righteousness imputed to you. Glorification as *rendering upgrade*, because the final state isn't escape from matter but the restoration of matter at higher resolution.

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## **Adoption: Always a Son**

*“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”* (Ephesians 1:5)

Predestinated unto adoption. Not “adopted at conversion.” Not “adopted when you said the sinner’s prayer.” Predestinated. From eternity.

The elect were always God’s children. The experience of adoption in time - knowing the Father, crying “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15) - is the rendering of what was always true. And the parable of the prodigal son is the most beautiful illustration of this in all of Scripture.

The prodigal was always a son. Even in the pig pen. Even while spending his inheritance on harlots. Even while feeding swine and longing to eat what the pigs were eating. He was his father’s son. He didn’t become a son when he came home. He

came home *because* he was a son. The father didn't adopt him at the door. The father ran to him because he had never stopped being his.

*“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”* (Romans 8:15)

The Spirit of adoption. The Spirit doesn't create the adoption. He reveals it. He is the firmware flash that enables the conscious mind to recognize what was always true - you are a child of God. You always were. The experience is new. The reality is eternal.

*“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”* (Galatians 4:6)

Notice the order. *Because ye are sons*, God sent the Spirit. Not “the Spirit was sent so that you could become sons.” Because you *are* sons. Present tense. Already true. The Spirit was sent to make the already-true thing known.

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## **Preservation of the Saints**

*“Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.”* (Jude 1:1)

Look at the order Jude gives. Sanctified. Preserved. Called. Sanctified *before* called. Preserved *before* called. The sanctification and the preservation preceded the calling. The elect were set apart and kept safe *before* they were effectually called. Before they believed. Before they knew Christ. Before they even existed in time.

This is preservation from eternity, not just preservation after conversion. The “P” in TULIP - the Perseverance of the Saints - doesn’t go far enough. It starts the clock at conversion. But the framework starts the clock at eternity. The elect were preserved in Christ from before the foundation of the world. They were joined to Him in the decree. And that means they could not and would not die before being effectually called. Every aspect of their lives was ordered by God. They were preserved even while ignorant of Him.

And if they were preserved from eternity, they were never in danger. A man who was justified from eternity and preserved from eternity was never at risk of hell. Not for one second. The wrath of God was never aimed at him. The condemnation was never on him. He was always safe. He just didn’t know it yet.

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## **The Atonement: The Thought Rendered in Blood**

The cross is the eternal decree collapsed into history. We established in Chapter 2 that God sees all frames simultaneously. The decree, the covenant, the cross, the conversion, and the glorification are one thought in the mind of God, rendered across multiple frames of the filmstrip. The cross is one of those frames. Perhaps the most important frame, because it’s the frame where the invisible became visible in the most dramatic way possible.

*“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” (Hebrews 9:12)*

Eternal redemption. Not temporary. Not conditional. Not “possible if you believe.” Eternal. Obtained. Finished. And obtained *by His own blood*. Not by your faith. Not by your works. Not by your decision. By His blood.

Christ didn’t make salvation *possible*. He *accomplished* it. This is the difference between particular redemption and universal atonement. Universal atonement says Christ died for everyone and salvation becomes effective when the sinner believes. Particular redemption says Christ died for the elect only and His death *accomplished* their salvation completely, without remainder, without condition.

And particular redemption is the only view that takes “It is finished” seriously. If Christ died for everyone and most people go to hell, then His death failed for the majority of its intended targets. That’s not a finished work. That’s an attempted work. An atonement that saves everyone it was intended for is more glorious, more effective, and more consistent with a sovereign God than an atonement that merely opens a door most people never walk through.

**Active Obedience.** Christ’s obedience was far more than outward legal compliance with Sinai. He was obedient to the Father’s will in *all* things. Every thought. Every word. Every act. Every moment of thirty-three years. Obedient in the wilderness. Obedient in the garden. Obedient on the cross. Obedient unto death.

*“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”* (Romans 5:19)

By the obedience of one. Not by the death of one only, though the death is central. By the *obedience*. The entire life of

Christ - His perfect submission to the Father, His total conformity to the divine will, His righteous living from cradle to grave - all of it is imputed to His sheep. Not infused, as Rome teaches. Not earned by their faith. Imputed by God's decree. The righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of every believer. And it's a perfect righteousness. Not partial. Not progressive. Perfect and complete, covering every sin from eternity to eternity.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“If we were justified from eternity, why did Christ need to die?”**

The cross didn't create the justification. It *rendered* the justification. In the framework, the invisible precedes the visible. The thought precedes the matter. The decree precedes the event. Justification was the decree. The cross was the event. The cross was necessary because God determined to display His justice and mercy in time, in blood, in history. The decree was always real. But the rendering made it visible to the creatures living inside the filmstrip. Christ's death didn't change anything in the mind of God. It changed everything in the experience of the elect.

**“Ephesians 2:3 says we were ‘by nature children of wrath.’ Doesn't that mean God was angry with the elect before conversion?”**

The elect experienced the *consequences* of being in a fallen world - ignorance of God, bondage to sin, the weight of guilt. For a time, before conversion, they lived under the same temporal conditions as the reprobate. But God's wrath never

actually rested on them. “Children of wrath” describes temporal experience, not eternal standing. The same way the prodigal son was in the pig pen - really there, really suffering, really miserable - but never ceased being a son.

**“This eliminates the need for the cross.”**

It does the opposite. It *elevates* the cross. If the cross was the moment God decided to justify His people, then the cross was a reaction, a response, a contingency plan. But if justification was eternal and the cross was the rendering of that eternal decree, then the cross was planned before the foundation of the world, embedded in the deepest thought of God, and everything in history was moving toward it. That’s not elimination. That’s exaltation.

**“Limited atonement makes God stingy.”**

Let me put this as plainly as I can. An atonement that was intended for everyone and saves only some is a *failure*. An atonement that was intended for the elect and saves every single one of them is a *success*. Which one glorifies Christ more? The one that tried and failed? Or the one that aimed and accomplished?

Particular redemption doesn’t make God stingy. It makes Christ effectual. Every drop of His blood accomplished exactly what it was intended to accomplish. No waste. No failure. No people for whom Christ died who end up in hell anyway. He laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:15). And every sheep is accounted for.

Stingy is a God who tries to save everyone and can’t. Sovereign is a God who saves exactly who He intended to save. And *that* is good news.

## Chapter 16: The Firmware - How God Teaches His People

I used to think the Holy Spirit worked primarily through feelings. That He moved on the heart, stirred the emotions, created an inner warmth, a conviction, a tug - something you couldn't quite name but knew was real. And I wasn't alone in thinking this. Most of the Christian world, from Pentecostals to Reformed, talks about the Spirit in experiential, emotional, mystical terms. "I felt the Spirit moving." "The Spirit impressed on my heart." "I sensed the Lord leading me."

And I'm not going to say those experiences aren't real. They are. But they're not the *primary* work of the Spirit. They're the byproduct. The side effect. The downstream result of something much more precise and much more important than a feeling.

The Holy Spirit's primary work is *epistemological*. He teaches. He reveals. He informs. He gives *knowledge*.

And once you see this, the entire doctrine of the Spirit's work snaps into focus in a way that the mystical framework never provides. Because the mystical framework can't tell you what the Spirit is actually *doing*. It can only tell you what it *feels like*.

But the epistemological framework tells you exactly what He's doing - He's changing what you know. And in changing what you know, He changes everything else.

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## **The Mind Is the Target**

*“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* (Romans 12:2)

The renewing of your *mind*. Not the warming of your heart. Not the stirring of your emotions. Not the tingling of your spine. Your *mind*. Paul says the transformation happens through the mind. The mind is the target. The mind is where the Spirit does His work.

And this makes sense in the framework. If reality is information in God's mind, and if the human mind is what makes us unique among all physical creatures (as we'll develop in the next chapter), then the Spirit's work on the human mind is the Author editing the character's code. He's not decorating the interface. He's rewriting the source.

*“For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 2:16)

We have the *mind* of Christ. Not the feelings of Christ. Not the vibes of Christ. The mind. Paul is talking about a transfer of information. The Spirit gives the believer the capacity to think as Christ thinks, to see as Christ sees, to know as Christ knows - not exhaustively, not perfectly in this life, but truly. The direction of travel is toward the mind of Christ. And the vehicle is knowledge.

What does the Spirit reveal? Propositional truth. Knowledge of sin - that you are a sinner and cannot save yourself. Knowledge of God's attributes - that He is sovereign, holy, just, and merciful. Knowledge of Christ - that He is the Son of God who accomplished salvation for His people. Knowledge of the Gospel - that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again, and that this is *for you*.

Every one of those is a proposition. A claim. A piece of information. The Spirit doesn't give contentless experiences. He gives content. And the content transforms.

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## **Regeneration: The Firmware Flash**

Now we come to the core metaphor of this chapter, and it's a metaphor I've been building toward since the beginning of this book.

Regeneration is the firmware flash. The Spirit changes the boot parameters beneath awareness.

Let me explain what I mean by that, because the language is from computers but the reality is from Scripture. And it's not a cute analogy. It's the most precise description I know of for what the Spirit actually does when He regenerates a human soul.

Every computer has layers. The hardware is the physical machine - the circuits, the chips, the screen. The firmware is the deepest layer of software, the instructions that run before the operating system loads, the code that tells the machine what it is and how to behave at the most basic level. The operating system sits on top of the firmware and manages the day-to-day

operations. And the application layer - the programs you actually interact with, the browser, the email client, the word processor - sits on top of the operating system.

The human soul has the same architecture. The hardware is the brain - neurons, synapses, the amygdala, the prefrontal cortex. The firmware is what I'm calling the boot parameters - the deepest presuppositions of the soul, the assumptions that live beneath conscious awareness and determine how everything above them operates. The operating system is the subconscious mind, processing information constantly without the conscious mind's awareness. And the application layer is the conscious mind - the thinking, reasoning, deciding part that you identify as "you."

When the Spirit regenerates a person, He doesn't work at the application layer. He doesn't give you a new argument you haven't heard before. He doesn't provide evidence that finally tips the scale. He doesn't appeal to your reason and wait for you to make a decision. He goes *deeper*. He goes to the firmware. He changes the boot parameters. He rewrites the presuppositions that determine how you process everything.

And you don't know it's happening.

That's the critical point. Firmware flashes happen beneath awareness. The application layer doesn't see the firmware being rewritten. It only experiences the *results*. One day you looked at the cross and saw foolishness. The next day you looked at the cross and saw glory. Nothing changed in the argument. Nothing changed in the evidence. Nothing changed at the application layer. What changed was underneath - the firmware, the boot parameters, the presuppositions that determine what the application layer does with the information it receives.

*“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13)*

Both to *will* and to *do*. The willing is firmware - the deep desire, the direction of the soul, the presupposition that Christ is desirable. The doing is application - the conscious choices that flow from the new will. God works in *both* layers. He doesn't just change your actions. He changes your wants. He changes what you love. He changes the boot parameters, and the application follows.

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## **The Spirit Prepares Before Faith**

Here is something that most theology misses entirely, and it's one of the most pastorally important things in this book.

The Spirit prepares His people their entire lives before they actually believe. The firmware flash of regeneration doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens at the end of a lifelong preparation that the Spirit has been conducting since birth.

Every experience. Every conversation. Every book. Every failure. Every moment of conviction. Every time the truth brushed past you and something inside stirred, even though you didn't know what it was. The Spirit was loading data. He was preparing the ground. He was arranging the grammar, to use the classical education language we'll develop at the end of this chapter.

I look back at my own life and I can see it. Years before I believed the sovereign grace of God, the Spirit was arranging circumstances, placing people in my path, giving me experiences that would make the truth make sense when it

finally arrived. I didn't recognize it at the time. I couldn't. The firmware hadn't been flashed yet. But the Spirit was working underneath, loading data, filing away truths, preparing the subconscious for the moment when He would change the boot parameters and everything would click.

And this means that the Spirit's work is *not* limited to the moment of conversion. Conversion is the visible event. But the invisible work started long before. The elect are being prepared their whole lives. Even when they're running from God. Even when they're in the pig pen. The Spirit is at work underneath, and He doesn't fail.

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## **Only the Spirit Has Root Access**

In a computer, root access means you can change anything. You can rewrite the firmware. You can alter the operating system. You can modify any file, any setting, any parameter. Root access is total control of the machine.

Only the Holy Spirit has root access to the human soul.

No argument has it. No preacher has it. No book has it. No evidence has it. No amount of logic, rhetoric, or persuasion can change the firmware. All of those things operate at the application layer. They present information to the conscious mind. And the conscious mind processes that information *according to its boot parameters*.

This is why apologetics doesn't produce faith. Not because the arguments are bad. Some of them are excellent. But the arguments operate at the application layer, and the firmware determines what the application layer does with them. A

regenerate person hears the gospel and believes, because the firmware was flashed. An unregenerate person hears the same gospel and rejects it, because the firmware wasn't flashed. Same argument. Same evidence. Same words. Different firmware. Different result.

*“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14)*

The natural man *cannot* receive them. Not “will not” as a choice. *Cannot*. The boot parameters don't allow it. The firmware is set to “foolishness.” And no application-layer argument can change firmware-level settings. Only the Spirit can do that. Only the Spirit has root access.

This is the most freeing truth in all of evangelism. You are not responsible for changing anyone's mind. You can't. It's not your job and it's not in your power. Your job is to present the truth. The Spirit's job is to flash the firmware. And He always does it for His elect, at the appointed time, through the means He has ordained.

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## **What Faith IS**

I need to say this carefully, because this is the point where most of the theological world gets off the bus.

Faith is not a duty. Faith is not a condition. Faith is not a human contribution to salvation. Faith is not the one thing God requires of you before He'll save you.

Faith is the application layer becoming aware that the firmware has been flashed.

That's it. Faith is the *experience* of salvation, not the *cause*. It's the conscious mind waking up to what the Spirit already did in the subconscious. It's the moment the prodigal son realizes he's still a son. He didn't make himself a son by realizing it. The realization came *because* he was a son. The faith came *because* the Spirit regenerated him. Not the other way around.

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.”* (Galatians 5:22)

Faith is listed as a *fruit* of the Spirit. A fruit. Not a duty. Not a condition. Not a work. A fruit - something that grows from a root, naturally, inevitably, without straining. The root is the Spirit. The fruit is faith. And fruit doesn't produce the root. The root produces the fruit.

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”* (Ephesians 2:8)

The gift of God. Not your contribution. Not your side of the bargain. The *gift*. And if faith is a gift, then faith is given, not generated. If faith is given, then God gives it to whom He wills. And if God gives it to whom He wills, then faith is sovereign, not free.

And the regenerate individual doesn't just receive intellectual assent to historical facts. “Jesus died and rose again” - even the devils believe that (James 2:19). Saving faith is something else entirely. The Spirit testifies to the conscience that the Gospel promises are *for you*. That Christ's blood covers *your* sin. That the righteousness is imputed to *you*. That you are a child of God, not in the abstract, but personally, specifically, inescapably. And that personal assurance - that “Abba, Father”

moment - is what separates saving faith from mere intellectual agreement. The regenerate person doesn't just believe the gospel is true. They jump for joy because the gospel is true *for them*.

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## **The Trivium: Education as Rendering**

There's a connection here that I didn't see until my son Cole was deep into his classical education, and then later into his philosophy degree at Marshall. But once I saw it, I couldn't unsee it.

The classical Trivium - grammar, logic, rhetoric - mirrors the architecture the Spirit uses to regenerate.

**Grammar** is the loading of data. Raw information. Facts. Vocabulary. The building blocks. In education, you learn the names, the dates, the rules, the definitions. In the Spirit's work, He loads truth progressively - through Scripture, through sermons, through conversations, through experiences. He fills the warehouse.

**Logic** is the finding of patterns. Connections. Analysis. How the data relates to itself. In education, you learn to think - to identify contradiction, to build arguments, to see how one fact connects to another. In the Spirit's work, He connects the truths He's been loading - the law reveals sin, sin reveals need, need reveals Christ, Christ reveals grace. The patterns emerge.

**Rhetoric** is the building of output. Expression. Persuasion. The data and the patterns produce something. In education, you learn to speak and write - to take what you know and what you've analyzed and produce something new. In the Spirit's

work, rhetoric is faith. Faith is the output. The grammar was loaded, the logic connected it, and the rhetoric produced the response: “I believe. This is for me. Christ is mine.”

The same architecture the Spirit uses to regenerate is the architecture used to educate a mind. Classical education mirrors divine pedagogy. And it’s not a coincidence. It’s design. The Author who designed the soul also designed the method of teaching the soul. Grammar, logic, rhetoric - it’s His pattern. We didn’t invent it. We discovered it.

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## **Objections and Answers**

### **“You’re reducing the Spirit’s work to information transfer.”**

Not reducing. Clarifying. The Spirit gives *information*: knowledge of sin, knowledge of Christ, knowledge of the Gospel. He doesn’t give contentless feelings. Romans 12:2 says transformation comes through the renewing of the *mind*. First Corinthians 2:16 says we have the *mind* of Christ. The mind is the target. The feelings are real, but they follow the information. They don’t precede it. The Spirit isn’t a warm fuzzy. He’s the Author rewriting the code.

### **“If no argument produces faith, why preach?”**

Because preaching is the means God uses. The argument at the application layer doesn’t change the firmware. But the Spirit uses the argument as the *occasion* to flash the firmware. We preach because God told us to. He handles the results. The preacher plants and waters. God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). And He always gives the increase for His

elect. Every single time. The means are real means. They just aren't the efficient cause. The Spirit is.

**“The ‘boot parameters’ language is from computers, not theology.”**

The language is new. The reality isn't. Presuppositions have always been recognized. Van Til called them “basic commitments.” Gordon Clark called them “first principles.” Every presuppositionalist knows that your deepest assumptions determine how you process everything above them. Boot parameters is just the honest name for what the Reformed world has always acknowledged - your foundational presuppositions were not chosen by you. They were installed. By the Author. And only the Author has the access to change them.

## Chapter 17: Thinking About Thinking

I've been a programmer since I was ten years old. And one of the things you learn early when you study computer architecture is that every system has layers, and the layers don't all do the same thing. The hardware does one thing. The firmware does another. The operating system does another. And the applications running on top do something else entirely. And the user - the person sitting at the keyboard - only ever interacts with the top layer. The applications. The interface. Everything underneath is invisible to them. They click a button and something happens, and they have no idea how many layers were involved in making that click work.

The human soul has the same architecture. And understanding the layers is, I believe, the key to understanding what makes human beings unique among all physical creatures, and how the mind of man relates to the image of God. Because the capacity to think about thinking, the application layer, is what separates humans from animals. And the image of God, as we established in Chapter 12, is something deeper still.

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## The Four-Layer Model

Let me lay out the layers, because everything in this chapter and the next several chapters depends on understanding them.

**Layer 1: Hardware - The Brain.** This is the physical organ. Neurons, synapses, neurotransmitters, the limbic system, the amygdala, the prefrontal cortex, the brainstem. Every human being and every higher animal has hardware. It's biological. It's material. It's the machine God designed to run the software of the soul. The hardware processes electrical signals, manages the body, and provides the physical substrate on which everything else operates. But the hardware doesn't think. It computes. There's a difference, and the difference is everything.

**Layer 2: Firmware - The Boot Parameters.** This is the deepest layer of the soul's software. It's what we discussed in the previous chapter - the presuppositions that live beneath conscious awareness. The firmware is where the *old man* and the *new man* reside. In the unregenerate, the firmware runs one set of boot parameters: the self is ultimate, God is either absent or irrelevant, sin is natural, and the soul curves inward. In the regenerate, the Spirit has flashed new firmware: Christ is Lord, grace is real, the self is dethroned, and the soul curves outward toward God. Both the old firmware and the new firmware can be running simultaneously in the believer, which is why Paul says "*the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh*" (Galatians 5:17). Two firmware sets, competing for control of the operating system.

**Layer 3: Operating System - The Subconscious Mind.** The subconscious is the workhorse of the soul. It

processes the vast majority of information without the conscious mind ever knowing. It runs pattern recognition. It manages habits. It generates emotional responses. It takes the boot parameters from the firmware layer and translates them into impulses, inclinations, feelings, and gut reactions that bubble up to the surface. The subconscious is not the image of God - animals have sophisticated subconscious processing too. A dog feels fear, loyalty, excitement, grief. The subconscious is the operating system, and it runs on whatever firmware is installed.

**Layer 4: Application - The Conscious Mind.** This is the prefrontal cortex in action. This is reason, reflection, self-awareness, moral judgment, abstract thought, the capacity to plan for the future and learn from the past. And most importantly, this is *thinking about thinking*. The ability to examine your own thoughts. The ability to ask *why* you feel what you feel, *why* you believe what you believe, *why* you want what you want. This is what sets human beings apart from every other creature in the physical world. Every human has it, elect and reprobate alike. But as we'll see later in this chapter, the application layer and the image of God are not the same thing.

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## **Feelings Are Pre-Propositional Information**

Here is something I wish every Christian understood, and it would save years of confusion about the relationship between feelings and faith.

Feelings are not opposed to thinking. Feelings are *pre-propositional information*. They are thoughts before they have words.

The amygdala fires in 12 milliseconds. The prefrontal cortex takes 500 milliseconds. That's not a flaw. That's engineering. God designed the system so that feelings arrive *before* thoughts. Always. By design. You feel the danger before you think "that's dangerous." You feel the grief before you think "I've lost something." You feel the joy before you think "this is good."

And this means feelings are *information*. They're not irrational noise to be suppressed. They're data coming up from the firmware through the operating system, arriving at the application layer 488 milliseconds before the application layer can put words to them. The feeling is the signal. The thought is the interpretation of the signal. And good theology means learning to interpret the signals accurately, not learning to ignore them.

The church has been terrible at this. The Reformed world especially. "Don't trust your feelings." "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9). "Faith is not a feeling." And all of that is partially true - you shouldn't let uninterpreted feelings drive your theology. But the solution isn't to suppress the feelings. The solution is to understand where they come from and what they're telling you.

In the four-layer model, feelings come up through three channels:

**Channel 1: Old firmware through the OS.** The flesh. The old man. The boot parameters that say "self first, God later, sin now." These produce feelings of lust, envy, pride, anger, self-

pity. They bubble up from the old firmware, through the subconscious, and arrive at the conscious mind as desires and impulses. The application layer didn't generate them. The firmware did.

**Channel 2: New firmware through the OS.** The Spirit. The new man. The boot parameters that say "Christ is Lord, grace is real, others matter." These produce feelings of conviction, gratitude, love, peace, the desire for holiness, the ache to know God better. They bubble up from the new firmware, through the subconscious, and arrive at the conscious mind as yearnings and convictions. The application layer didn't generate these either. The firmware did.

**Channel 3: The Spirit's hardware interrupt.** This is the direct intervention. The tug on the leash. The moment when the Spirit bypasses the normal channels and speaks directly to the conscious mind. Not through feelings first. Not through the subconscious. A direct impression on the application layer that says "stop" or "go" or "pay attention." This is rare. This is not the normal mode of operation. But it's real, and every believer who has walked with God long enough knows what it feels like - that sudden, clear, unmistakable sense that God is speaking *now*.

Understanding these three channels is the difference between wisdom and confusion. When a feeling arrives at the conscious mind, the mature believer doesn't ask "should I trust this?" They ask "which channel did this come from?" If it came from the old firmware, it needs to be recognized and resisted. If it came from the new firmware, it needs to be recognized and followed. If it came from the Spirit's direct intervention, it needs to be recognized and obeyed immediately. Same feeling-type experience. Three different sources. Three different responses.

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## The Application Layer: What Makes Humans Unique

Animals have hardware - sophisticated biological brains that process information and manage their bodies. Animals have firmware - instincts, drives, dispositions that were installed by the Author and determine their behavior at the deepest level. Animals have an operating system - a subconscious that processes vast amounts of information, generates emotional responses, and manages complex social behavior. A dog loves its owner. An elephant grieves its dead. A crow solves puzzles. These are real experiences at the firmware and OS layers.

But animals do not have an application layer. *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth”* (Genesis 1:26). As we established in Chapter 12, the “man” in this verse is elect man, not humanity universally. But the *dominion* described here requires the application layer, and all humans have that. Dominion requires reflection. Dominion requires thinking about thinking. Animals feel but they can’t *reflect on* their feelings. A dog feels fear but cannot ask “why am I afraid?” A dog feels loyalty but cannot examine the nature of loyalty. A dog has experiences but cannot construct a theory of experience. Animals live inside their firmware and operating system. They don’t stand above it and examine it.

Humans do. Humans can think about thinking. Humans can examine their own presuppositions. Humans can ask “why do I believe what I believe?” Humans can build frameworks that

explain their own existence. Humans can write systematic theologies. Humans can do what I'm doing right now - building a multi-layered model of the mind and using it to examine the nature of the mind that built it. The application layer is what makes human beings unique among all physical creatures. Every human being has it. Elect and reprobate alike. Nietzsche could think about thinking. So could Pharaoh.

But the application layer is not the image of God.

I need to say that clearly because it would be easy to confuse the two. The capacity for metacognition - for self-reflection, for reason, for abstract thought - is biological. It comes with the hardware. Every human being who has ever lived has a prefrontal cortex and the capacity to reflect on their own existence. That is not what Scripture means by the image of God.

As we established in Chapter 12, the image of God belongs to the elect. Not because of something that happens to them at a point in time, not because the Spirit flashes the firmware and suddenly the image appears. The image belongs to the elect because the Author *authored them to bear it*. From eternity. Before the first frame of history played. The elect were written as thoughts in the mind of God that reflect Him. The reprobate were written as thoughts that serve a different purpose. Both have the application layer. Both can reason, reflect, and philosophize. But only one was authored to mirror the Author.

*“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son”* (Romans 8:29). Conformed to the image. Predestinated. From eternity. The four-layer model describes the *machine*. The image of God describes *whose likeness the machine was authored to bear*. Two

different categories entirely. And confusing them is the mistake most theology makes when it says every human being bears the image of God because every human being can think. Thinking is the hardware and the application layer. The image is the authorship.

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## **Psychology in the Framework**

Secular psychology is materialist. It assumes the brain produces the mind. It assumes that consciousness is an emergent property of neurons firing in certain patterns. It assumes that if you map the hardware thoroughly enough, you'll understand the software. And it assumes that the software can be fixed by adjusting the hardware - the right medication, the right therapy, the right neural pathway retraining.

The framework says the opposite. *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Romans 12:2). The mind is the target. Not the brain. The mind. Mind precedes brain. The brain is hardware God designed. The mind is the application layer running on firmware installed by the Author. The brain doesn't produce consciousness any more than a television produces the signal it displays. The brain *receives* consciousness. The brain *expresses* consciousness. But the source of consciousness is not the machine. The source is the Author who designed the machine and authored the information it processes.

And this means regeneration does what therapy can't.

Therapy operates at the application layer. Cognitive behavioral therapy, for example, is debugging the application. It teaches the conscious mind to identify distorted thoughts,

challenge them, and replace them with healthier patterns. And it works - at the application layer. It can change how you *cope* with your boot parameters. It can change how the conscious mind *responds* to what the firmware sends up through the operating system. It can teach better habits, healthier responses, and more accurate interpretations of the signals.

But therapy can't change the firmware.

Only the Spirit can change the firmware. "*For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?*" (Romans 11:34). Only the One who designed the mind has root access to change it. Therapy is the mechanic. Regeneration is the manufacturer recalling the product and installing a new chipset. The mechanic can keep the car running. He can fix the transmission and change the oil and replace the brakes. But he can't redesign the engine while it's running. The Manufacturer can.

**But psychology is not useless.** I want to be very clear about this, because some Christians take the sovereignty of God and use it as an excuse to dismiss everything secular science discovers. That's lazy. And it's ungrateful. Neuroscience is studying God's engineering. When a neuroscientist maps the amygdala, they're studying what God built. When a psychologist identifies the stages of grief, they're describing a process God authored. When a therapist teaches a patient to manage anxiety, they're helping a person steward the hardware God gave them.

Psychology describes real phenomena. It just can't explain *why* they exist or *what they're for* without the Author. Psychology without God is like studying a computer without knowing it has a programmer. You can map every circuit, trace

every connection, catalog every function. And you'll still miss the fundamental fact that someone *authored* the system.

So don't stop going to the mechanic because God made the car. Understand the machine. Study the hardware. Use the tools that help at the application layer. But don't confuse the mechanic with the Manufacturer. And don't confuse coping with regeneration. They're two different things, operating at two different layers, with two very different outcomes.

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## Objections and Answers

**“The feelings framework is psychology, not theology.”**

The amygdala firing in 12 milliseconds is a fact about the hardware God designed. The prefrontal cortex taking 500 milliseconds is a fact about the hardware God designed. Understanding God's engineering is not importing psychology into theology. It's letting theology explain what psychology has observed. Neuroscience describes the machine. Theology explains the Designer.

**“You're anti-psychology.”**

I'm anti-materialist-psychology. I'm not against understanding how the mind works. I'm against the assumption that chemistry explains consciousness. The brain is hardware God designed. Studying it is studying His engineering. But the hardware didn't author itself. And any psychology that starts with “the brain produces the mind” has the architecture backwards.

**“If therapy can't change the firmware, is it worthless?”**

No. Therapy can help at the application layer. Reframing, coping, understanding patterns, managing anxiety, processing trauma - all real, all valuable, all legitimate uses of the tools available at the application layer. But therapy can't do what only the Spirit can do. Therapy can teach you to live more wisely with your boot parameters. Regeneration changes them. Both are real. Both have value. They just operate at different layers.

**“If only the Spirit can change the firmware, should Christians avoid therapy?”**

No. Don't stop going to the mechanic because God made the car. The mechanic helps you steward the machine. The Manufacturer designed it. Understanding the machine, maintaining it, and getting skilled help when it malfunctions - that's wisdom, not faithlessness. But don't look to the mechanic for what only the Manufacturer can provide.

## **Chapter 18: Sanctification - Positional, Not Progressive**

I need to confess something before I make the argument in this chapter. Because what I'm about to say goes against what nearly every systematic theology in the history of the church has taught, and I don't want anyone to think I arrived here lightly.

I spent years believing in progressive sanctification. I taught it. I assumed it. I never questioned it. The idea that Christians gradually become more holy over time, that they climb an invisible ladder of moral improvement, that they measurably sin less in year ten than they did in year one - it was just part of the furniture. Everyone I read taught it. The Puritans taught it. The Reformed confessions teach it. Even the sovereign grace world that rejects almost everything else from the mainstream still holds to progressive sanctification as though it were carved in granite.

And then I actually looked at my own life. And I looked at the lives of the men and women I've known who have been walking with Christ for decades. And what I saw didn't match the doctrine.

I didn't see people becoming progressively more holy. I saw people who loved Christ more than they used to, who understood grace better than they used to, who were more tender and more patient and more broken before God than they were when they started. But *holier*? In the sense of sinning less? In the sense of being incrementally more righteous before God? No. I saw men and women who were deeply aware of their sin - *more* aware than they were at the beginning. Not less. More. The longer they walked with Christ, the more clearly they saw how deep the corruption went. And that is the opposite of what progressive sanctification predicts.

The framework explains why.

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## **Set Apart from Before the Foundation**

*“Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.”* (Jude 1:1)

There's that verse again. We used it in the last chapter for preservation. But look at the first word after the address: *sanctified*. Sanctified by God the Father. Before preserved. Before called. The sanctification happened first.

And when did it happen? From before the foundation of the world.

*“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”* (Ephesians 1:4)

He chose us *that we should be holy*. Not “that we should become holy gradually over time.” That we *should be* holy. The

holiness was determined in the choosing. The choosing was before the foundation. The sanctification is as eternal as the election.

*“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”* (Hebrews 10:14)

*Perfected for ever.* Not “placed on a trajectory toward perfection.” Not “given the tools to progress toward holiness.” *Perfected.* Past tense. Complete. Done. For ever. The sanctified are already perfect in God’s sight. Not because of anything they did. Because of one offering. One sacrifice. One act of obedience that accomplished everything.

And this is the critical point. Sanctification, like justification, is *positional* in the mind of God. God set His people apart from before the foundation of the world. Their holiness is Christ’s holiness, imputed to them. Their perfection is Christ’s perfection, credited to their account. And that position never changes. It never fluctuates. It never improves. It never diminishes. It is as fixed as the decree that established it.

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## **Christ IS the Sanctification**

*“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”* (1 Corinthians 1:30)

Read that slowly. Christ is made unto us *sanctification*. Not “the helper toward sanctification.” Not “the power behind sanctification.” Not “the model for sanctification.” Christ *is* the sanctification. Your holiness is not something you produce. It’s something you *have*, because you have Christ. And if Christ is

your sanctification, then you are as sanctified right now as you will ever be. Because Christ doesn't get more holy. His righteousness doesn't improve. His sacrifice doesn't become more effective over time. He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (Hebrews 13:8). And if He is your sanctification, your sanctification is as unchanging as He is.

This is the difference between *positional* sanctification and *progressive* sanctification. Positional sanctification says your holiness is fixed in Christ. You are set apart. Done. The decree is eternal and the status is permanent. Progressive sanctification says your holiness is developing, growing, improving over time as you cooperate with the Spirit and practice obedience. One says your status is complete. The other says your status is under construction.

The framework can only support the positional view. And here's why.

If everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, and if God's thoughts are eternal and unchanging, then His thought about your holiness is eternal and unchanging. He didn't think "somewhat holy" about you in 2005 and "more holy" about you in 2025. He thought "*holy in Christ*" about you from before the foundation. That thought doesn't develop. It doesn't mature. It doesn't progress. It was complete when it was thought, and it was thought from eternity.

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## **Continuous, Not Progressive**

Here is where the terminology matters, and I want to be very precise.

I am not saying Christians don't grow. They do. I am not saying the Spirit doesn't work in believers over time. He does. I am not saying there's no difference between a new believer and someone who has walked with Christ for fifty years. There is a difference, and it's real and it matters.

But the difference is in *knowledge*, not in *status*. The difference is in *understanding*, not in *holiness*. The difference is in the resolution of the rendering, not in the substance of the decree.

*“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”* (2 Peter 3:18)

Grow in *grace and knowledge*. Not grow in holiness. Not grow in righteousness. Grow in grace - in the understanding and experience of grace. Grow in knowledge - in what you know about Christ, about the Gospel, about the depths of God's mercy.

This is what I call *continuous* sanctification, and the distinction from *progressive* sanctification is not just semantic. It's theological.

Progressive sanctification says the believer becomes *more holy* over time. The status changes. The person is holier in year ten than in year one. The sin decreases. The righteousness increases. The trajectory is upward.

Continuous sanctification says the believer grows in *knowledge and experience* of the holiness they already have in Christ. The status doesn't change. The understanding deepens. The believer in year ten knows more about Christ, understands grace more deeply, and recognizes sin more clearly than in year one. But they are not more holy. They are more *aware*. And the increased awareness often produces the illusion of decreased

holiness - because the more you see of God's perfection, the more you see of your own corruption. The mature believer doesn't sin less. They *see* more.

Paul knew this:

*"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."* (1 Timothy 1:15)

Paul wrote this near the end of his life. Near the end. After decades of apostleship. After missionary journeys and churches planted and epistles written. And he says "of whom I *am* chief." Present tense. Not "was." Not "used to be." *Am*. The most mature apostle in the history of the church, at the end of his career, calling himself the chief of sinners. In the present tense.

That's not progressive sanctification. That's a man who has grown so deeply in the knowledge of Christ that he sees his own sin more clearly than ever before. His status in Christ hadn't changed. His awareness of the gap between himself and Christ had deepened. And the deepening awareness is what produced the confession. "I *am* chief." Not less sinful. More aware.

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## **Good Works Flow from the Spirit**

If sanctification is positional and not progressive, and if Christians don't become incrementally more righteous over time, then what about good works? Why do Christians do good things at all?

Because the Spirit moves them. Not because they're becoming holier. Because the Spirit, working through the new firmware, produces desires and inclinations that express

themselves in love, patience, kindness, service, generosity, and all the other fruits that the world sees as “good works.”

*“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”* (Philippians 2:13)

God works in you to *will* and to *do*. The willing is firmware - the deep desire. The doing is application - the visible act. Both come from God. Neither comes from the believer’s independent effort to become more holy.

And this means good works are *evidence* of regeneration, not *instruments* of sanctification. A tree that has been planted by the Lord produces fruit. Not because the tree is trying to become more tree-like. Because it IS a tree, and trees produce fruit. That’s what they do. The fruit doesn’t make the tree. The tree makes the fruit.

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (Ephesians 2:10)

Created unto good works. *Before ordained*. The good works were part of the decree. God didn’t leave the behavior up to you and hope for the best. He ordained the works just as He ordained the salvation. The entire package - justification, regeneration, faith, sanctification, good works, glorification - was thought as one thought. One decree. One plan. And the good works that flow from the Spirit’s influence are as much a part of the decree as the cross itself.

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## The Danger of Progressive Sanctification

I want to name the danger, because it's not academic. It's pastoral. And it does real damage in real people's lives.

Progressive sanctification, carried to its logical conclusion, produces either pride or despair. Always. Without exception.

If you believe you're supposed to become more holy over time, you will either succeed (in your own estimation) or you will fail. If you succeed, you will become proud. You will look at your moral improvement and credit it to your discipline, your faithfulness, your cooperation with the Spirit. And the pride will be invisible to you, because it will be dressed in spiritual language. "God has really worked in my life." Translation: "Look how far I've come."

And if you fail - if the sin doesn't decrease, if the struggles persist, if you find yourself at year thirty dealing with the same temptations as year one - you will despair. You will conclude that something is wrong with you. That you're not trying hard enough. That the Spirit isn't working in you. That maybe you're not really saved. And the despair will be invisible to the people around you, because you'll keep performing the external behaviors that look like progress while dying on the inside.

Progressive sanctification produces Pharisees and broken people. Pride in those who think they're succeeding. Despair in those who know they're not. And both responses miss the Gospel entirely. Because the Gospel says your holiness is *Christ*. Not your improvement. Not your track record. Not your upward trajectory. Christ. And Christ is finished.

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## Objections and Answers

**“Hebrews 12:14 says ‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.’ Isn’t that a command to pursue holiness?”**

Yes. But pursuing holiness means pursuing *the knowledge of Christ*, not pursuing incremental moral improvement. To “follow after holiness” is to chase the One who IS your holiness. It’s to grow in grace and knowledge. It’s to seek Christ, to know Christ, to treasure Christ. And the result of that pursuit is not that you become more holy in status. The result is that you become more *aware* of the holiness you already have - and more aware of how desperately you need it.

**“If sanctification isn’t progressive, why bother with good works?”**

Because the Spirit moves you. Because a heart that knows grace doesn’t need a law to compel it. Because when you understand what Christ has done, the response is love, not obligation. And honestly, the question itself reveals the problem. “Why be good if I don’t have to?” is the question of a person who sees good works as a burden to be avoided rather than a joy to be expressed. The regenerate person doesn’t ask “why bother.” The regenerate person asks “how can I not?”

**“Great theologians taught progressive sanctification.”**

Great theologians also taught baptismal regeneration. Great theologians also taught the law of Plato - that God cannot be the author of evil. Great theologians also taught paedobaptism, and a hundred other things that don’t survive scrutiny. The length of a tradition does not establish its truth. Scripture establishes

truth. And Scripture says Christ IS your sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30), that by one offering He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14), and that Paul called himself the chief of sinners at the end of his career (1 Timothy 1:15). The tradition says you should be getting better. Paul says he was getting more aware of how bad it was. I'll take Paul.

## Chapter 19: The Gospel - Proclamation, Not Offer

I remember the first time someone told me I was supposed to “offer” the gospel to people. I was in my early twenties, fresh into sovereign grace, still figuring out how the pieces fit together. And a well-meaning brother explained evangelism to me like this: “We offer salvation to the lost. We present the gospel and invite them to accept Christ. And then God uses our offer as the means to save the elect.”

And something about it didn’t sit right. Not the part about preaching - that was fine. Not the part about God using means - I already believed that. The thing that stuck in my craw was the word *offer*. Because an offer implies something incomplete. An offer means “here’s something available if you want it.” An offer means the transaction isn’t finished. An offer means there’s a condition the other party has to meet before the deal closes.

And the gospel isn’t that. The gospel has never been that. The gospel is the announcement that the deal is *already closed*. The transaction is *finished*. The work is *done*. Christ didn’t open a door and hope people walk through it. He saved His people.

Past tense. Accomplished. And the gospel is the proclamation of that accomplished fact.

This distinction - proclamation versus offer - is not a minor point of emphasis. It's the difference between a finished gospel and an unfinished one. And everything in the framework demands the finished version.

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## Salvation Is a Past Event

*“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”* (2 Timothy 1:9)

Who *hath saved* us. Past tense. Done. Not “is saving.” Not “will save if we believe.” *Hath saved*. Paul uses the past tense because salvation is an accomplished fact. It happened. It was finished at the cross - or more accurately, it was finished in the eternal decree and *rendered* at the cross. But either way, by the time Paul writes to Timothy, the saving is done. The only thing remaining is the *proclamation* of what was done.

*“It is finished.”* (John 19:30)

We keep coming back to these three words because they're the hinge of everything. If it is finished, nothing remains. If nothing remains, there is no condition for the sinner to meet. If there is no condition, then faith is not a condition. If faith is not a condition, then the gospel is not an offer contingent on faith. The gospel is the announcement that Christ accomplished everything, for everyone He intended to save, without remainder.

And this is what the early church preached. Not “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Not “If you’ll just accept Jesus into your heart.” Not “Christ died for you and now it’s your turn to respond.” The early church preached *facts*. Christ died. Christ was buried. Christ rose. Christ accomplished redemption. Christ is Lord.

*“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand.”* (1 Corinthians 15:1)

*I declare.* Not “I offer.” Not “I propose.” Not “I invite you to consider.” Paul *declares*. He announces. He proclaims. The gospel is a declaration of accomplished reality, not a sales pitch requiring a response.

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## **Faith Is a Gift, Not a Duty**

Here is where the theological world splits, and I need to be direct about where the framework lands.

Faith is not a human duty. Faith is not something God requires of the sinner before He will save them. Faith is not the sinner’s contribution to the transaction. Faith is a *gift* from God, given sovereignly to the elect, at the appointed time, through the means He has ordained.

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Grace. Through faith. Gift of God. Not of yourselves. Not of works. Lest any man should boast.

If faith were a duty - something the sinner must do before God will save them - then faith would be a work. A condition. A contribution. And the man who believed would have something to boast about that the man who didn't believe doesn't have. "I believed and you didn't. I met the condition and you failed." That's boasting. And Paul says the entire structure was designed to eliminate boasting. Which means faith cannot be a condition. It must be a gift.

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." (Galatians 5:22)*

Faith is a fruit of the Spirit. A *fruit*. Produced by the Spirit. Not produced by the sinner. Not mustered up by human willpower. Not generated by a decision in the back pew during an altar call. Produced by the Spirit in the soul He regenerated, at the time He appointed, through the means He ordained. The fruit doesn't produce the root. The root produces the fruit.

And if faith is a gift, then the gospel is not a conditional offer. You don't offer someone a gift and then require them to earn it. You don't hold out a present and say "this is yours if you meet my conditions." A gift is given. A gift is received. The giving is sovereign. The receiving is enabled by the Giver. And the whole thing, from start to finish, is grace.

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## **"Human Responsibility" and Salvation**

Now let me say something that will get me in trouble with nearly every camp in the theological world, including most of the sovereign grace world.

The phrase “human responsibility” concerning salvation is *nowhere* in Scripture. Search for it. Look for it. Find me the verse that says “man is responsible to believe the gospel.” It’s not there. The concept has been imported into theology from philosophy, not from Scripture. And it has done enormous damage.

Here is the distinction that matters: men are *accountable* but not *responsible*.

Accountable means answerable. It means you will give an account for what you did. It means God has the right to judge and the sinner will stand before Him and answer for their disobedience. Accountability is real. It’s all over Scripture. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess. The wicked will be judged for their wickedness.

Responsible means obligated. It means you have a duty to fulfill, and if you fail, the failure is yours. And when people say “human responsibility” in the context of salvation, what they mean is that the sinner has a *duty* to believe the gospel, and if they fail to believe, the failure is theirs.

But that makes no sense in the framework. And it makes no sense in Scripture.

A reprobate man cannot be *duty-bound* to savingly believe something that isn’t true for him. Christ did not die for the reprobate. The gospel promises are not for the reprobate. Can you bind a man to believe something that isn’t true? Can you hold him responsible for failing to believe that the sky is green when the sky is blue? The reprobate man who hears the gospel and rejects it is not failing a duty. He is acting according to his nature. He is doing exactly what an unregenerate person does with foolishness - he dismisses it (1 Corinthians 2:14). And he is

*accountable* for his sin, for his disobedience, for his rebellion against God. But he is not *responsible* for believing a promise that was never made to him.

This distinction matters because the “human responsibility” framework is the back door through which Arminianism sneaks into Calvinism. “God is sovereign in salvation, BUT man is responsible to believe.” That “but” is doing all the heavy lifting. It smuggles human contribution back into the system. It makes faith a condition. And once faith is a condition, the gospel is an offer again, and we’re back to the unfinished work.

The framework doesn’t have a “but.” God is sovereign in salvation. Period. Full stop. No “but.” The elect are saved because God decreed it, Christ accomplished it, and the Spirit applied it. The reprobate are lost because God decreed it, Christ did not die for them, and the Spirit did not regenerate them. And both - the salvation and the damnation - are entirely God’s work. The sinner contributes nothing to either.

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## **No Common Grace**

Now for the claim that gets me labeled a hyper-calvinist. And I wear the label gladly, because the label is wrong and the theology is right.

There is no common grace. God does not love the reprobate. He does not extend grace to the non-elect. The provision He gives to the wicked - rain, food, health, life itself - is not grace. It is common *bounty*. Providence. The sustaining of the creation for the sake of the elect who live in it. But it is not love. It is not grace. And calling it grace profanes the word.

*“When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.”* (Psalm 92:7)

Read that again slowly. The wicked flourish. They prosper. They have health and wealth and long life. And the Psalmist tells you why: *it is that they shall be destroyed for ever*. The prosperity of the wicked is not God’s kindness to them. It is the accumulation of their judgment. Every day of provision is another day of building wrath. Every sunrise is another log on the fire. The rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45) - but the rain that falls on the unjust is not love. It is the sustaining of a vessel fitted for destruction (Romans 9:22) until the day of its destruction.

Common grace, as the theological world uses the term, says God has a general love for all humanity. That He gives good gifts to the reprobate out of love. That His provision to the wicked is an expression of kindness and mercy, even though it doesn’t save.

But this profanes the love of God. The love of God is specific. It is particular. It is covenantal. Christ is the *bridegroom*. The church is the *bride*. The relationship between Christ and His people is the most intimate relationship Scripture describes. And you don’t call the courtesy a man shows to a stranger on the street “love” in the same breath as you describe the love he has for his wife. The categories are different. The relationships are different. The words should be different.

When Phil Johnson wrote his response to [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org) - labeling it “hyper-Calvinism of the most virulent kind” - one of his chief complaints was our denial of common grace. He said we were making God unloving and the gospel unproclamable.

But the opposite is true. Making God's love universal makes it meaningless. A love that applies to everyone equally, that extends the same affection to Judas as to John, that "loves" the vessels of wrath with the same love it "loves" the vessels of mercy - that's not love. That's indifference wearing a mask.

Particular love is *real* love. A husband who loves his wife with the same intensity and specificity as he loves every other woman on earth doesn't love his wife at all. But a husband who reserves his deepest, most intimate, most sacrificial love for his bride - that man loves. And Christ reserved His blood for His bride. He didn't spill it generically and hope for the best. He poured it out for His sheep (John 10:15). His elect. His people. His wife.

And calling the provision to the reprobate "grace" is like calling the courtesy a man shows to a stranger "marital love." The categories are different. And confusing them dishonors the bride.

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## **How Then Do We Preach?**

If the gospel is proclamation and not offer, if faith is a gift and not a duty, if there is no common grace and God doesn't love the reprobate - then how do we preach? What do we say? Who do we say it to?

We preach to everyone. Indiscriminately. Without qualification. Without knowing who is elect and who is not.

But the *content* of what we preach is different from what the mainstream teaches.

We do not say: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” We don’t know that. It might not be true for the person standing in front of us. The person standing in front of us might be a vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction, for whom Christ did not die. We can’t see the decree. We don’t know who is who.

We say: “Christ *has saved* His people. He accomplished redemption on the cross. He died for His sheep, and He didn’t lose a single one. And if you are one of His, the Spirit will give you the faith to believe it.”

That’s the gospel. Not a conditional offer. A declaration of accomplished fact. We announce what Christ *did*. The Spirit applies it to whom He will. We plant. We water. God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

And this is actually *more* honest than the mainstream approach. The mainstream approach tells every person in the room that God loves them. That’s a claim you can’t verify. The proclamation approach tells every person in the room what Christ accomplished. That’s a historical fact. One approach might be a lie (if the person is reprobate, God doesn’t love them). The other approach is always the truth (Christ did accomplish salvation for His people). Which one is more honest?

We preach the facts. We proclaim the accomplishment. We announce the good news. And the Spirit takes the announcement and uses it as the occasion to flash the firmware of the elect sitting in the room. We don’t need to know who they are. God does. And He’s never missed one.

## Objections and Answers

**“2 Corinthians 5:20 says ‘we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.’ Isn’t that an offer?”**

Read the context. Paul is writing to the saints at Corinth. *To the saints*. He’s not addressing unregenerate men on a street corner. He’s exhorting *believers* to live in the reconciliation they already have. “Be reconciled” doesn’t mean “get saved.” It means “live in the reality of what’s already true.” This is Paul telling Christians to stop acting like orphans and start acting like sons. The reconciliation is accomplished. He’s urging them to walk in it.

**“If God doesn’t love the reprobate, how can you preach to everyone?”**

Because we don’t know who is elect. The wheat and the tares grow together. The gospel is proclaimed indiscriminately - the same message, to all people, in all places. But the message is not “God loves you.” The message is “Christ has saved His people.” And the Spirit sorts out who is who. We preach to everyone because God commands it. We don’t need universal love as the motivation. Obedience to the command is the motivation. And the content of the message is true regardless of who hears it.

**“If faith is not a duty, sinners aren’t responsible for unbelief.”**

Sinners are *accountable* for disobedience. They are answerable to God for their rebellion, their sin, their rejection of His lordship. But they cannot be *duty-bound* to savingly believe something that isn’t true for them. A reprobate man cannot be responsible for failing to trust in a Savior who didn’t die for him. That would be like holding a man responsible for not cashing a

check that was never written to him. The check exists. It's real. It was written to the elect. But it's not his check. And you can't condemn him for not cashing it.

The reprobate are condemned for their sin. For their disobedience. For their rebellion against the God they know exists (Romans 1:20). Not for failing to believe a gospel that was never intended for them.

**“No common grace? God doesn't love the reprobate at all?”**

*“When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.” (Psalm 92:7)*

Every day of the wicked man's life is another day of accumulating judgment. Every meal he eats, every breath he takes, every sunrise he sees - it's not love. It's the rope getting longer. God's provision to the reprobate is common bounty - the sustaining of the creation for the sake of the elect who live in it. The stage must be maintained for the story to continue. But the maintenance of the stage is not love for the stagehands who will be fired when the show is over. It's love for the play. And the play is about the elect.

Calling this “grace” is like calling the oxygen in a courtroom “love for the defendant.” The building has air conditioning because the building needs air conditioning. The defendant breathes the same air as the judge. But nobody calls that grace. It's infrastructure. And the infrastructure exists for the court, not for the condemned.

## **Chapter 20: Christ Is the Rule, Not the Law**

I used to preach the law to Christians. I did it for years. And I did it because I thought I was helping them. I thought if I could just get them to see the standard, to feel the weight of God's holiness, to understand how far short they fell, it would motivate them to live better. To try harder. To be more disciplined, more obedient, more serious about their walk.

And it worked, in a sense. It produced guilt. It produced effort. It produced the kind of grim, teeth-clenched religion where every failure felt like a betrayal and every Sunday was a fresh opportunity to recommit to doing better this week. It was exhausting. And it was exactly what the Pharisees were selling in the first century, repackaged in a sovereign grace wrapper.

I was pointing believers to the law. And every time I did, I was taking their eyes off Christ.

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## Dead to the Law

This is one of the hardest things for religious people to hear, and I'm going to say it as plainly as I can.

The believer is dead to *all* the law. Not just the ceremonial law. Not just the civil law. Not just the sacrificial system. *All* of it. The moral law included. The Ten Commandments included. Every requirement, every standard, every “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” that was written on stone tablets and delivered at Sinai - the believer is dead to it. Completely. Finally. Irreversibly.

*“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”* (Romans 7:4)

Dead to the law. By the body of Christ. Not partially dead. Not dead to some parts and alive to others. Dead. And the purpose of being dead to the law is stated right there in the verse: *that ye should be married to another*. You can't be married to two husbands. You can't serve Christ and serve the law at the same time. The law was the old husband. Christ is the new one. And the old husband died when Christ died. The marriage is over.

*“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”* (Romans 10:4)

The *end* of the law. Not the modifier of the law. Not the reinterpreter of the law. Not the one who softened the law's demands so we could keep up with them. The *end*. Christ brought the law to its conclusion. He fulfilled every requirement, met every standard, satisfied every demand, and

then said “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). And when He said it, He meant it.

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## **The Purpose of the Law**

If the believer is dead to the law, what was the law for in the first place? This is where most people’s theology breaks down, because they’ve been taught that the law is God’s eternal moral standard for all people in all ages. And if that were true, you couldn’t be dead to it. You’d always be under it. It would be as permanent and binding as gravity.

But Paul says something very different about the law’s purpose.

*“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.”* (Galatians 3:19)

The law was *added*. Added to what? Added to the covenant of grace that was already running, as we established in Chapter 8. And it was added for a specific, temporary purpose: *because of transgressions*. Not to stop transgressions. To *increase* them. To shine a light on sin so bright that the sinner would have no escape except Christ.

*“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”* (Romans 5:20)

The law entered *that the offence might abound*. Read that again. The law didn’t come to decrease sin. It came to *increase* it. The law was a curse. Paul says so explicitly.

*“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.”* (Galatians 3:13)

A curse. And he goes further:

*“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”* (Galatians 3:24)

The law was a schoolmaster. A tutor. A temporary institution with one job: drive the elect to Christ by showing them they couldn't keep it. That's it. That's the whole purpose. The law was never meant to be the believer's rule for living. It was meant to be the thing that broke them so they'd run to someone who could keep it for them.

And once the schoolmaster has done its job, the student graduates. *“But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster”* (Galatians 3:25). The job is finished. The law accomplished its purpose. The believer moves on to Christ.

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## **Christ Is the Rule**

So if the law isn't the believer's rule for living, what is?

Christ.

*“The love of Christ constraineth us.”* (2 Corinthians 5:14)

The motivation for the Christian life is not legislation. It's love. The believer doesn't look at a set of commandments written on stone and grit their teeth to obey. They look at a Person who loved them unto death, and they are *constrained* by that love. The Greek word there, *sunecho*, means to be hemmed in, pressed from every side, held in a grip you can't escape. The love of Christ doesn't suggest obedience. It *produces* it. From the inside out.

This is where the framework meets ethics. In the language of this book, the law is materialism applied to ethics. It takes the visible, the written code, the external standard, and imposes it from the outside. You read the rule. You try to keep the rule. You fail. You feel guilty. You try again. The entire mechanism is external. It's the visible trying to produce the invisible.

Grace is idealism applied to ethics. The invisible, the indwelling Spirit, the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart, produces the visible, a life of love. The movement goes the right direction. From the inside out. From the firmware to the application layer. From the Spirit to the life.

*“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”* (Romans 8:2)

There are two laws in that verse. The law of sin and death is the Mosaic law, the curse, the schoolmaster. The law of the Spirit of life is Christ Himself, living in the believer through the Spirit. And the second has made the believer *free* from the first. Not bound by both. Free from one. Bound to the other.

And the difference matters enormously, because the law of the Spirit doesn't work like the law of Moses. Moses says “do this.” The Spirit says “I am doing this *in* you.” Moses demands. The Spirit produces. Moses condemns failure. The Spirit covers it. Moses is a mirror. The Spirit is a surgeon.

*“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”* (Romans 8:3-4)

The law *could not do* what needed to be done. It was weak through the flesh. Not weak in itself, but weak in its ability to

produce righteousness in fallen people. The standard was perfect. The subjects were dead. And you can write the most beautiful set of rules the world has ever seen, and if the people you hand them to are spiritually dead, the rules will only produce condemnation. That's all the law ever did. That's all the law ever *can* do.

But what the law could not do, God did. By sending His Son. By the Spirit. By the new covenant written on the heart, not on stone. And the righteousness of the law is *fulfilled in us* - not by us. In us. By the Spirit. The law's demands are met, but they're met by someone else, living in us, producing the fruit we could never produce on our own.

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## **Pointing Believers to the Law Takes Their Eyes Off Christ**

This is where the rubber meets the road, and this is where I lost friends over the years.

If a believer is struggling with sin, the worst thing you can do is point them to the law. Because the law has no power to fix the problem. The law can identify the sin. The law can condemn the sinner. But the law cannot heal, restore, empower, or change anyone. It was never designed to.

When you point a struggling believer to the Ten Commandments, you are doing exactly what the Galatian Judaizers were doing. You are taking someone who has been set free in Christ and putting them back under the very thing Christ freed them from.

*“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1)*

Paul calls the law a *yoke of bondage*. And he says *stand fast* in liberty. Don't go back. Don't let anyone drag you back. The liberty is the point. Christ died to produce it. And anyone who puts the believer back under the law, even with good intentions, even with Bible verses, even with tears in their eyes, is undoing what Christ accomplished.

Point the struggling believer to *Christ*. Tell them about His love. Tell them about His finished work. Tell them about the Spirit who dwells in them and is working in them even when they can't feel it. Tell them the Father sees them in Christ, not in their failure. Tell them they are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). Tell them nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

That's what changes a person. Not the law. Christ.

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## **The Three Divisions of the Law**

I want to address something that I hear constantly from people who disagree with this chapter. They'll say, "We agree that the ceremonial law is fulfilled. And the civil law was for Israel. But the moral law - the Ten Commandments - is eternal and binding."

This is the standard Reformed position, and it's wrong.

Paul never divides the law into three categories. That's a theological construction imposed on the text, not derived from it. When Paul says the believer is dead to the law, he doesn't add

“except the moral part.” When he says Christ is the end of the law, he doesn’t footnote “the ceremonial and civil portions.” When he says the law was a schoolmaster that we’re no longer under, he doesn’t exempt the Decalogue.

*“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”* (Romans 6:14)

Not under the law. Under grace. And Paul’s argument in Romans 7 makes this even clearer:

*“For I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”* (Romans 7:7)

“Thou shalt not covet” is the tenth commandment. It’s in the Decalogue. It’s the *moral* law, by anyone’s reckoning. And Paul uses it as his example of the law that produced sin in him. The very commandment that Reformed theology says is eternal and binding is the commandment Paul uses to illustrate why the believer needs to be dead to the law.

Christ fulfilled *all* of it. Not just the types and shadows. Not just the dietary laws and the sacrificial system. All of it. Every jot and tittle (Matthew 5:18). And what Christ fulfilled, the believer is free from. Completely. That doesn’t mean the law was bad. It means the law finished its job. The schoolmaster taught the lesson. The student graduated.

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## Objections and Answers

**“If believers aren’t under the law, what stops them from sinning?”**

The Holy Spirit. The law never stopped *anyone* from sinning. Paul tells you this directly: *“The law entered, that the*

*offence might abound*” (Romans 5:20). The law *increased* sin. It didn’t decrease it. The law was powerless to produce righteousness in fallen people. The Spirit does what the law never could. *“The love of Christ constraineth us”* (2 Corinthians 5:14). The constraint isn’t a written code imposed from outside. It’s a living Person working from inside. And the Person is far more effective than the code ever was.

**“The moral law is eternal and binding on all people.”**

Christ fulfilled *all* of it. The believer is dead to the law by the body of Christ (Romans 7:4). When Christ died, the law’s claim on the believer died with Him. The law has no authority over a dead man. *“For he that is dead is freed from sin”* (Romans 6:7). And *“ye are not under the law, but under grace”* (Romans 6:14). You can’t be under an eternal, binding law and simultaneously dead to it and free from it. Paul says you’re dead to it and free from it. I’ll take Paul over the Westminster Confession.

**“This is antinomianism.”**

Let me tell you what real antinomianism looks like. Real antinomians lower God’s law to a standard they think they can keep. They say, “God’s law is reasonable. God’s demands are attainable. If you just try hard enough and surrender enough and commit enough, you can meet the standard.” *That* is lowering the law. *That* is anti-law, because it replaces God’s actual standard with a watered-down version humans can manage.

God’s standard is *perfection*. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Only Christ met it. Only Christ could meet it. And resting in His

perfect obedience isn't lawlessness. It's the only honest response to a law that demands what no human being has ever been able to give. The man who says "I am dead to the law because Christ fulfilled it for me" has the *highest* view of the law - because he acknowledges it demanded perfection, and he knows he couldn't deliver it.

**“Without the law as a guide, how do believers know right from wrong?”**

By the Spirit. *“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you”* (1 John 2:27). The Spirit who dwells in the believer is the same God who wrote the law. He doesn't need the written code to teach His people. He writes it on their hearts directly. *“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts”* (Hebrews 8:10). The new covenant doesn't use the old mechanism. The rules are the same. The delivery system is entirely different.

## **Chapter 21: Liberty - Believe in Jesus and Do as You Please**

If I had to determine whether I was a Christian based on my works, I'd have to conclude I am not a Christian.

And I mean that. Not as false humility. Not as a devotional cliché designed to sound pious while secretly trusting that my life is actually pretty good. I mean it as a plain statement of fact. If the test is my behavior, my thought life, my consistency, my follow-through on every good intention I've ever had - I fail. Spectacularly. Regularly. And not in the vague, generic sense where someone says "we're all sinners" while mentally exempting themselves from the really bad stuff. I know what's in my head. I know what's in my heart. And if that's the evidence, the verdict is guilty.

But the verdict was already delivered. And it was "not guilty." Before the foundation of the world. Before I drew my first breath or committed my first sin or even existed as a conscious being. The Father looked at me in Christ and saw perfection. Not my perfection. Christ's. And that hasn't

changed. Not because I've gotten better. Because *He* finished the work.

And that means the kingdom of God is a party, not a burden.

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## **The Party**

I've been to churches where everyone looked miserable. Where the Sunday morning faces were tight and grim and the worship was more like a funeral march than a celebration. Where people dragged themselves to the altar week after week to recommit to the same failures they recommitted to last week. Where the sermons were a list of things you should be doing better, and the application was always "try harder," and the atmosphere was heavy with the kind of religious exhaustion that no amount of coffee can fix.

And then I read the New Testament.

*"The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."* (Romans 14:17)

Righteousness. Peace. Joy. In the Holy Ghost. Not righteousness achieved by human effort. Not peace that depends on your spiritual performance. Not joy that only shows up when you've had a good week. Righteousness imputed. Peace that surpasses understanding. Joy that exists regardless of circumstances because it's rooted in a Person who doesn't change.

*"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."* (Galatians 5:1)

Liberty. Freedom. Christ *made* us free. Past tense. Accomplished. And Paul says *stand fast* in it. Don't let anyone take it from you. Don't let anyone put you back in chains. The yoke of bondage is the law, the regulations, the man-made requirements, the endless religious treadmill of "do more, try harder, be better." Christ broke that yoke. He didn't loosen it. He broke it.

And what He left in its place is liberty.

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## **The Spirit Writes the Commandments**

Here is what liberty looks like in practice.

The old covenant took commandments and carved them on stone. External. Impersonal. One size fits all. The same ten commandments for every person in the nation, regardless of their heart condition. And the result was predictable: external conformity at best, outright rebellion at worst, and a whole lot of hypocrisy in between.

The new covenant takes those same commandments and writes them on the heart.

*"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."* (Jeremiah 31:33)

In the language of this book, the old covenant was law as *software* - external code running on unregenerate hardware. It didn't work because the hardware couldn't execute it. The new covenant is law as *firmware* - the Spirit flashes the code directly into the heart, beneath the conscious level, and the behavior

follows naturally. The outside-in approach failed because dead hardware can't run living software. The inside-out approach works because the Spirit changes the hardware first.

And a Spirit-changed heart is irresistibly moved toward obedience. Not by compulsion. Not by threat. By *desire*. The believer obeys because they *want* to. The firmware aligns the desires with God's will, and the application layer follows. This is what Paul means when he writes:

*"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."* (Philippians 2:13)

To *will* - that's the firmware. The desire. The inclination. To *do* - that's the application layer. The behavior. The visible life. And both are God's work. Not yours. He produces the wanting and the doing. You experience it. You participate in it. But the engine is His.

This isn't license. License says "I can do whatever I want because there are no consequences." Liberty says "I *want* to please God, because the Spirit who changed my heart aligned my wants with His." The distinction is everything. License removes the standard. Liberty changes the heart so the standard is met from the inside. The behavior might look the same from the outside - both the licensed man and the liberated man might avoid the same sins - but the mechanism is entirely different. One avoids sin out of indifference. The other avoids sin out of love. And the second mechanism is the only one that actually works.

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## Rebuke the Imposers

Paul doesn't just teach liberty. He *defends* it with force.

*"If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law."*

(Galatians 5:18)

And then he turns on anyone who tries to put believers back under regulations:

*"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"*

(Galatians 4:9)

Weak and beggarly elements. That's what Paul calls the law when it's imposed on believers. And notice his incredulity - *how* do you turn back? After knowing God? After being known by Him? After the Spirit has set you free - you want to go *back* to the cage?

And he doesn't stop there:

*"I would they were even cut off which trouble you."*

(Galatians 5:12)

That is as sharp as Paul ever gets. He says he wishes the Judaizers would go castrate themselves. The man who wrote the love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 has zero patience for people who take the liberty of Christ and replace it with human regulations.

Because the gospel is at stake. When you impose rules on believers that the gospel doesn't demand, you are adding to the finished work of Christ. You are saying what He did wasn't enough. You are telling a free person they need to earn what was given to them. And that is a different gospel. Paul calls it exactly that:

*“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.” (Galatians 1:6)*

Another gospel. Not the gospel modified. Not the gospel with a few extra requirements. *Another* gospel. And Paul pronounces an anathema on anyone who preaches it - *“let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:8). Twice, in consecutive verses, he says it. Because the stakes are that high.

So when someone tells you that you need to keep the Sabbath to be a faithful Christian, rebuke them. When someone tells you that you need to tithe or God will curse your finances, rebuke them. When someone tells you that you need to dress a certain way, vote a certain way, educate your children a certain way, attend a certain number of services per week, abstain from alcohol, observe Lent, fast on Fridays, or any other human regulation not demanded by the gospel - rebuke them. Not because those things are inherently wrong. Some of them are fine. But the moment they become *requirements*, the moment they become conditions of faithfulness, the moment they are imposed on the conscience of a free believer - they become the yoke of bondage that Christ died to break.

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## **Assurance**

If liberty is the atmosphere of the Christian life, assurance is the foundation.

And assurance comes by grace through faith. Not by works. Not by performance. Not by the evidence of your changed life. Because if assurance rested on the evidence of your life, you'd never have it. I know I wouldn't.

Here's the honest version: if I had to look at my behavior to determine whether the Spirit lives in me, the evidence would be ambiguous on a good day and damning on a bad one. I lose my temper. I entertain thoughts I shouldn't. I neglect things I know I should do. I procrastinate on obedience the same way I procrastinate on everything else. And if the test of my Christianity is the consistent, visible fruit of a transformed life, then the fruit is spotty enough to make the case shaky.

But assurance doesn't rest on my fruit. It rests on Christ's finished work.

*"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."* (Philippians 1:6)

*He* began the work. *He* will finish it. My confidence is in His performance, not mine. My assurance is in His righteousness imputed to me, not in my righteousness produced by me. And the moment you move the foundation of assurance from Christ's work to your own, you have destroyed it. Because no honest person can look at their own works and conclude with confidence that they belong to God.

*"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Not of works. Not even partially. Not "saved by grace but assured by works." Saved by grace. Assured by grace. Sustained by grace. From beginning to end, it's His work. And the proper response to that isn't complacency. It's worship. It's the kind of deep, settled gratitude that makes you *want* to live well - not because you have to, but because you love the One who did everything for you.

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## Prayer Under Sovereignty

I want to end this chapter by addressing something that many people raise when they hear about absolute predestination: “If God ordained everything, what’s the point of prayer?”

And I understand the question. If the script is written. If every frame of the filmstrip is already set. If God sees the whole thing simultaneously and nothing you pray will change what He’s already decreed - then why pray? Why bother? It’s a reasonable question from the application layer.

But it’s the wrong question.

Prayer is part of the script. God ordained both the prayer and the answer. He doesn’t need the prayer to know what you need. Jesus said so:

*“Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”* (Matthew 6:8)

He already knows. So why ask? Because the asking is the communion. And the communion is the point.

Prayer isn’t changing God’s mind. It’s participating in the story He’s writing. The character prays because the Author wrote the prayer into the script. And the joy of the prayer is real - the character’s experience is genuine, even though the Author sees the whole filmstrip at once. You don’t stop talking to your spouse just because you can predict what they’ll say. The conversation IS the relationship. The exchange IS the intimacy.

*“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all*

*understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 4:6-7)

Paul doesn't say “make your requests known to God so He'll change His plans.” He says make your requests known, and *peace* will follow. The peace doesn't come because God adjusted the decree. The peace comes because you talked to your Father. Because you poured out your heart to someone who loves you and who already had the answer before you asked the question. The prayer is the means God uses to bring you into the experience of His sovereignty. Not to alter it. To rest in it.

He already knows. You pray anyway. Because the prayer is the communion, and the communion is the point.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“Do as you please' is dangerous - people will abuse it.”**

If someone's heart is unchanged by the Spirit, no amount of law will make them godly. The law never produced a single righteous person. It was weak through the flesh (Romans 8:3). So the law isn't the solution to abuse. If someone's heart *is* changed by the Spirit, they will please God naturally - because their pleasure and God's pleasure align. The question “what stops them from sinning?” always reveals more about the asker's theology than about the person they're asking about. If you think the only thing between a believer and rampant sin is a set of rules, you have a very low view of the Spirit's power.

**“Assurance can't be separated from obedience - James says faith without works is dead.”**

This is the objection that always reaches for the antilegomenon. James 2:17 is the most weaponized verse in every system that wants to smuggle human contribution back into the assurance of salvation. And as we'll develop more fully in Chapter 26, James is the weakest self-authenticating book in the canon, the one Luther called "an epistle of straw," and the one most consistently used to override the clearest statements of the homologoumena. Paul says, repeatedly, across multiple letters, in the clearest possible language, that justification is by faith apart from works (Romans 4:5). That the righteousness of Christ is imputed, not earned. That your works are filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). You don't use James to override Romans. You use Romans to interpret James. And when you do, "faith without works is dead" becomes a description of what false profession looks like from the outside, not a condition placed on the believer's assurance. Your assurance rests on Christ's work, not yours. If you look at your works for assurance, you'll despair. Assurance comes from looking at Christ, not at yourself.

**"Prayer under sovereignty is just fatalism dressed up."**

Fatalism says "nothing matters, so do nothing." Sovereignty says "everything matters, because the Author wrote it all." The character in the novel who talks to the Author isn't engaging in a meaningless exercise. The conversation is part of the story. God ordained the prayer AND the answer AND the relationship that grows through the praying. Fatalism removes meaning. Sovereignty infuses it. The pray-er knows that God didn't need the prayer. But God wanted the communion. And so did the pray-er. That's not fatalism. That's love.

**"You said 'believe in Jesus and do as you please' - Augustine said it first."**

He did. “Love God and do what you will.” And Augustine was right about that one, even if he got other things wrong. The principle is simple: if you truly love God, your will is aligned with His. What you please to do is what He pleases for you to do. Not perfectly - not in this life. But the trajectory is His. The desire is His. The engine that drives the obedience is love, not legislation. And a person driven by love will always outperform a person driven by law. Because love doesn’t get tired. Law always does.

## **Chapter 22: The Sign Is the Spirit, Not the Water**

I wrote an article on Modified Covenant Theology for [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org) around 2004. I was twenty-nine years old. And in that article, I made a claim that I didn't fully understand the implications of at the time. I said that Colossians 2:11-12 was about Spirit baptism, not water baptism. That the circumcision "made without hands" was the circumcision of the heart. And that the sign of the New Covenant wasn't water. It was the Spirit.

I wrote it more than two decades before the unified field theory had a name. And now, sitting here in my fifties, building this framework one chapter at a time, I find that my younger self was right. Not because I was particularly brilliant in my late twenties. Because the text says what it says. And I was stubborn enough to let it say it.

This chapter is about the most contested ordinance in the history of the church. And I'm going to make both sides angry. Which, at this point in the book, should surprise no one.

## The Sign of the Covenant

Every covenant has a sign. The Abrahamic covenant had circumcision. The Mosaic covenant had the Sabbath. The Noahic covenant had the rainbow. And the question that has divided the church for two thousand years is this: what is the sign of the New Covenant?

The paedobaptists say water baptism replaced circumcision. They baptize infants because circumcision was applied to infants, and the sign transferred. The Baptists say water baptism is the sign, but it should only be applied to believers - people who have professed faith. Both camps agree that water is the sign. They just disagree about who gets it and when.

I disagree with both of them. And I disagree on the same grounds that this entire book has been built on: the invisible precedes the visible. The substance precedes the formality. The covenant precedes the ceremony.

The sign of the New Covenant is the Holy Spirit. Not the water.

*“And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.”* (Deuteronomy 30:6)

Circumcision of the *heart*. This is the real circumcision. This is what physical circumcision always pointed to. The cutting away of the flesh was never the substance. It was the sign pointing to the substance. And the substance was always the Spirit's work in the inner man.

*“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew,*

*which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”* (Romans 2:28-29)

Paul could not be clearer. Real circumcision is *of the heart, in the spirit*. Not in the flesh. Not in the letter. Not in the outward sign. The real Jew is the one circumcised *inwardly*. The real sign of the covenant is the invisible work of the Spirit, not the visible application of water.

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## **Colossians 2:11-12 - Spirit, Not Water**

Here is the passage that everyone fights about, and I want to walk through it carefully because both camps get it wrong.

*“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”*

(Colossians 2:11-12)

The paedobaptists read this and say, “See? Baptism replaces circumcision.” The Baptists read this and say, “See? Baptism is the New Covenant sign for believers.” Both assume the baptism in verse 12 is water baptism.

But look at verse 11 again. *“Circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.”* Made *without hands*. What does that phrase mean in Scripture? It means not done by human beings. Not a physical act. Not something administered by a priest or a pastor or a father. It is the Spirit’s work, accomplished without human participation.

The circumcision Paul is describing is the circumcision of the heart. The Spirit's regenerating work. The old nature cut away. The body of the sins of the flesh put off. And this circumcision is *made without hands* - meaning it isn't something anyone does to you. It's something God does *in* you.

And the baptism in verse 12 is the same kind. You are *buried with him in baptism*. This is Spirit baptism. The believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Paul is describing a spiritual reality, not a water ceremony. The whole passage is about what God does invisibly, without human hands, by the operation of His power. It's about the real circumcision and the real baptism - both of which are works of the Spirit.

Water didn't replace circumcision. The Spirit did. The sign of the New Covenant is the indwelling Holy Spirit, circumcising the heart, baptizing the believer into Christ's death and resurrection, producing the new life from the inside out. And the water ceremony is a visible rendering of that invisible reality - valuable, commanded, meaningful - but it is not the sign itself. The sign is the Spirit.

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## **Baptismal Regeneration - The Error This Framework Exists to Refute**

I need to say this as directly as I can.

Baptismal regeneration - the doctrine that water baptism is the means by which a person is regenerated, saved, or brought into the covenant - is the *exact* error that this entire framework exists to refute. It is materialism applied to salvation. It is the

visible producing the invisible. It is the ceremony creating the covenant. It is the formality generating the substance. It is everything this book has argued against from the first page.

If everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, and the invisible precedes the visible, and the substance precedes the formality, then making water the cause of spiritual life is a reversal of the entire order of reality. You are saying that the physical act produces the spiritual change. That the water makes the regeneration happen. That the visible creates the invisible.

And every system that has ever taught this - Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Churches of Christ, Lutheranism in its traditional form - has made the same foundational mistake. They have looked at the ceremony and said, "This IS the covenant." When in fact the covenant was already there. The Spirit was already at work. The regeneration had already happened, or it hadn't. And the water didn't change the equation either way.

The thief on the cross settles this for good.

*"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23:43)

No baptism. No ceremony. No water. No church. No pastor. No confession of faith before a congregation. No membership vote. No catechism. A dying criminal, nailed to a cross, looking at Jesus and saying, *"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom"* (Luke 23:42). And Jesus looked at him and said *today*. Today you'll be with me. Today. Not after you get baptized. Not after you join a church. Not after you complete a class. Today.

If water baptism is necessary for salvation, the thief on the cross is in hell. And if the thief on the cross is in heaven without water, then water is not necessary. It really is that simple. The sign of his covenant membership was the Spirit who gave him faith in the middle of a crucifixion. That was the circumcision of his heart. That was his baptism into Christ's death. That was the sign. Not water. The Spirit.

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## **Water Baptism - Its Proper Place**

I want to be careful here, because I don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater - no pun intended.

Water baptism is commanded. The apostles practiced it. Jesus Himself was baptized. And I believe every Christian should be baptized in water as a public declaration of their faith in Christ. It is a beautiful ordinance. It is a visible rendering of the invisible reality - death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. And I'm not arguing against it.

What I'm arguing against is making it *more* than it is.

Water baptism is a general command, not a covenantal sign with sanctions. There is no passage in the New Testament that prescribes a penalty for failing to be baptized in water. There is no passage that says the unbaptized believer is outside the covenant. There is no passage that says water baptism is what brings you into the body of Christ. The silence on sanctions is significant. Compare it to circumcision under the Abrahamic covenant: "*And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant*" (Genesis 17:14). There's a sanction. There's a penalty. There's a consequence for non-

compliance. Water baptism has nothing equivalent. Because it's not the covenantal sign. The Spirit is.

And because it's not the covenantal sign, the *mode* of water baptism is a matter of conscience.

I know this will frustrate both camps. The Baptists insist on immersion as the only valid mode because *baptizo* means to immerse. The paedobaptists practice sprinkling or pouring because they connect it to Old Testament purification rites. And both camps have been fighting about this for five hundred years.

But here is what I notice: there is no clear, undisputed, unanimously agreed-upon form of water administration in the New Testament. Not one. The mode has been debated since the early church. And that itself is significant. If water baptism were the covenantal sign - the thing that marks you as belonging to God - you would expect God to be crystal clear about how to administer it. He was crystal clear about circumcision. He was crystal clear about the Passover. He was crystal clear about the sacrifices. But the mode of water baptism? Ambiguous. Debated. Unclear. For two thousand years.

And that ambiguity is the tell. God didn't make the mode clear because the mode isn't the point. The water isn't the sign. The Spirit is. And the Spirit's mode of operation is unmistakable - He regenerates the heart, produces faith, indwells the believer, and seals them for the day of redemption. No ambiguity. No debate about the mode. No confusion about whether it happened. The Spirit's work is self-authenticating in a way that water administration never has been.

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## **Bob Higby's Work**

I want to acknowledge a debt here. Bob Higby wrote a four-part study on baptism that I published on [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org), and it shaped my thinking profoundly. Higby walked through the New Testament passages on baptism with a precision that most commentators lack, and he demonstrated, text by text, that the baptism Paul describes in the epistles is overwhelmingly Spirit baptism, not water.

Higby's work is available on the site for anyone who wants to go deeper into the exegesis. I commend it to you. What I'm doing in this chapter is placing his conclusions within the larger framework of this book - showing that the same principle that governs marriage, justification, the canon, and communion also governs baptism. The invisible precedes the visible. The substance precedes the formality. The Spirit precedes the water.

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## **The Early Church and Water**

One last observation that I think matters.

The early church baptized in water. The apostles baptized in water. Jesus commanded it. And I've already said I believe Christians should practice it. But the early church also did a lot of things that we need to understand in context.

As I argued in Chapter 8, the apostles didn't have it all figured out. They were running old software on new firmware. They went to the temple. They observed Jewish ceremonies. They debated whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised. They practiced water baptism because they were Jews emerging from a world of visible signs and ritual washings, and the Spirit was

patient with their transition from the old covenant patterns to the full implications of the new.

This doesn't mean water baptism is wrong. It means it was part of the progressive rendering. The early church was at a resolution where visible signs still carried enormous weight - because they were still close enough to the old covenant that the visible-to-invisible pattern was the only one they knew. As the resolution increased, as Paul's theology matured, the emphasis shifted from the water to the Spirit. From the outward to the inward. From the sign to the thing signified.

And that's where we should be. Not abandoning water baptism. Not despising it. But understanding what it is and what it isn't. It is a beautiful ordinance commanded by Christ. It is not the sign of the New Covenant. The sign is the Spirit. The water points to the Spirit. And the Spirit is the substance.

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## Objections and Answers

**“Colossians 2:11-12 teaches that baptism replaces circumcision.”**

Read it again. *“Circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.”* Without hands. That's Spirit, not water. The circumcision Paul describes is the circumcision of the heart - the old nature removed by God's direct action, not by any human ceremony. And the baptism in the next verse is the same spiritual reality: burial and resurrection with Christ by the operation of God. Both the circumcision and the baptism in this passage are *made without hands*. Both are the Spirit's work. Both paedobaptists and Baptists assume verse 12 is about water. Both are wrong.

**“The apostles baptized in water - aren’t we supposed to follow their example?”**

Yes, and I believe Christians should be baptized in water. But the command is *general*, not *covenantal*. There are no sanctions for failure. There’s no prescribed mode that the entire church agrees on. And the *meaning* of baptism - the thing the water points to - is the Spirit’s work. The water is the rendering. The Spirit is the substance. Follow the apostles’ example. Be baptized. But don’t confuse the ceremony with the covenant.

**“Without baptism, how do you join a church?”**

Church membership is a formality. You’re in the body of Christ by regeneration, not by water or church vote. The thief on the cross was in the body of Christ with no baptism, no church membership, no pastor, no congregation, and no formality of any kind. He was in the body because the Spirit put him there. And that’s how every believer enters - through the invisible work of God, not through the visible procedures of men.

**“If the mode doesn’t matter, you’re undermining the symbolism.”**

The symbolism matters. But the symbolism points to the Spirit’s work, not to itself. If immersion best captures the picture of death, burial, and resurrection - wonderful. If sprinkling captures the picture of purification and cleansing - wonderful. The picture is meaningful either way because it points to something real. But the reality it points to is the same regardless of the mode. And fighting about the mode while agreeing about the reality is exactly the kind of ceremony-over-covenant thinking this book has been refuting since Chapter 9.

**“This was in your MCT article from 2004. Have you changed anything?”**

Not a single word of the core argument. The sign is the Spirit, not the water. Colossians 2:11-12 is about Spirit baptism, not water. Baptismal regeneration is materialism applied to salvation. I said it in my late twenties and I'm saying it now. The only thing that's changed is that now I have more than two decades of framework to explain *why* it's true. The principle was there the whole time. The vocabulary caught up.

## **Chapter 23: The Church - Participatory, Not Institutional**

I have attended church my entire adult life and I have never found one that got everything right. Not one. And I've been to a lot of them. Southern Baptist as a kid. Charismatic in my twenties. New Covenant Theology Reformed in my thirties. Sovereign grace congregations founded by men I admired for the past fifteen years. And at every single one, I found the same thing: truth mixed with error, held by imperfect people, in imperfect structures, under imperfect leadership.

And I kept going. Because churches are hospitals for sick people. And I'm a patient too.

But I want to tell you something about the hospital that might surprise you. The building, the staff hierarchy, the organizational chart, the one-man-up-front-everyone-else-sit-down model that you've been attending your whole life - none of that is in the Bible. The church as you know it is largely a

human invention. And it's an invention that has done enormous damage to the very body it was supposed to serve.

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## **The One-Man Pulpit**

Here is the standard model of church in America. One man stands at the front. He preaches for thirty to sixty minutes. Everyone else sits quietly and listens. Maybe they take notes. Maybe they nod along. Maybe they mentally check out after the first ten minutes. But the flow is entirely one-directional. One man speaks. Everyone else receives.

This model is not in the New Testament.

*“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”* (1 Corinthians 14:26)

*Every one of you.* Not one of you. Every one. When the Corinthian church gathered, the expectation was participation. Multiple people contributed. One had a psalm. Another had a doctrine. Another had a revelation. The meeting was a body in motion, not an audience at a lecture. And Paul doesn't correct this model. He endorses it. He says *let all things be done unto edifying* - keep it orderly, keep it constructive, but the participation itself is the design.

This is the ecclesiology that Darryl Erkel articulated and that I have held for twenty-six years. It's called participatory ecclesiology. And once you see it in the text, you can't unsee it.

The one-man pulpit developed gradually over the centuries as the church adopted institutional structures borrowed from

Roman government and Greek philosophy. The bishop became a position of authority rather than a function of service. The pastor became a professional rather than a gifted brother among equals. The congregation became an audience rather than a body. And by the time the Reformation happened, the one-man pulpit was so entrenched that even the Reformers never questioned it. Luther changed the theology but kept the structure. Calvin changed the doctrines but kept the hierarchy. And here we are, five hundred years later, with a model of church that looks more like a Roman senate hearing than a first-century house church.

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## **Everyone Participates**

The New Testament model is radically different from what most Christians have experienced.

*“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 12:12)

The church is a *body*. Not a body with one mouth and a hundred ears. A body with many members, each functioning, each contributing, each necessary. The eye doesn’t say to the hand, “I have no need of thee” (1 Corinthians 12:21). And the mouth doesn’t say to the rest of the body, “Sit down and listen to me for forty-five minutes while you contribute nothing.”

In the participatory model, teaching happens in conversation. Prophecy is tested by the group. Songs are shared by individuals. Questions are asked out loud. Disagreements are worked through face to face. The brother who has a burden shares it. The sister who has a word of encouragement speaks it.

The elder who has wisdom contributes it alongside, not above, the rest of the body.

And yes, I said sister. In a participatory model, women participate. They pray. They share. They encourage. They contribute. What they don't do is exercise teaching authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12), which we'll address in the next chapter. But participation is not the same as authority. And the one-man pulpit has flattened both into a single thing, so that "participation" and "preaching" have become synonymous. They shouldn't be.

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## **Church Membership Is a Formality**

I'm going to be blunt here because I've held my tongue on this for years and I'm writing a book now, so I might as well say it.

Church membership, as practiced in most churches, is a bunch of baloney.

There. I said it.

You fill out a card. You attend a class. Someone reads your name from the front. The congregation votes. And now you're a "member." Of what? Of an organization that has a constitution, bylaws, a bank account, and a tax exemption. And none of that has anything to do with your actual membership in the body of Christ.

You are in the body of Christ by regeneration. The Spirit placed you there. No card. No vote. No class. No human being's approval was required. *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body"* (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit baptized you in.

Not the church. Not the pastor. Not the membership committee.  
The Spirit.

And the thief on the cross - again - was in the body of Christ without being a member of anything. No church. No baptism. No membership. No pastor. Just the Spirit's work and the Lord's word: "*To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*" (Luke 23:43).

Now, I'm not saying that formal church structures are evil. They serve practical purposes. Someone needs to manage the building. Someone needs to handle the finances. Someone needs to coordinate the meetings. Organizational structure has its place. But the moment the structure becomes the *thing* - the moment someone says "you can't take communion because you're not a member" or "you can't participate because you haven't been officially received" - they've made the institution the gatekeeper of something God didn't give them authority to gate-keep.

The institutions of man are flawed. Those five words contain my entire worldview, and they apply to the church as much as they apply to government, business, or any other human organization. The church is the body of Christ. The *institution* of the church is a human structure built around the body. And the structure should serve the body, not replace it.

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## **Titles and Hierarchy**

*"But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren."* (Matthew 23:8)

All ye are *brethren*. Not some of you are brethren and some of you are reverends and some of you are doctors and some of you are bishops. All of you. Brethren. Brothers. Equals before Christ. Different gifts, different functions, different levels of maturity and experience. But no hierarchy of spiritual authority that elevates one believer above another by virtue of title.

*“Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.”* (Matthew 23:10)

Jesus says don't call anyone master. Don't use honorific titles that elevate one person above the rest. The whole concept of a “senior pastor” or a “reverend” or a “bishop” as a hierarchical office is exactly what Christ told His disciples *not* to do. Leadership in the church is by spiritual gift and example, not by institutional appointment.

Peter understood this:

*“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”* (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Peter calls himself *also an elder*. Not the chief elder. Not the pope. Not the head of the hierarchy. An elder *among* the other elders. And he says the way to lead is by *example*, not by *lording over*. Not by institutional authority. Not by positional power. By being the kind of person others want to follow because the Spirit's work is visible in your life.

## Two Churches, One Patient

I attend both 13th Street Baptist Church and Hurricane Road Grace Church in Ashland, Kentucky. I belong to neither.

Some people think that's uncommitted. Some think it's arrogant. Some think I'm hedging my bets or playing both sides. And I understand why it looks that way from the outside.

But here's what it looks like from the inside. Both churches have truth. Both churches have error. 13th Street is where Henry Mahan pastored, the man whose preaching shaped my theology more than anyone else's. But the church that followed Mahan has problems - I was removed from the preaching rotation without a word, accused of believing things I don't believe, and treated as suspect for attending Hurricane Road. Hurricane Road has faithful preaching and a warmth that I love. But they have their own blind spots, their own errors, their own humanity.

And I can see both clearly because I'm not invested in either institution. I'm invested in the people. I'm invested in Christ. And I can sit in both congregations and hear truth, filter error, love the brethren, and be loved in return, without pretending that either building has the whole picture.

Churches are hospitals. Both of these hospitals treat real diseases with real medicine. Both of them occasionally prescribe the wrong dosage. And I'm a patient in both, getting what I need, knowing that the Great Physician isn't confined to either building.

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## The Body Functions Without a Hierarchy

I want to address the concern that many people have when they hear about participatory ecclesiology: won't it be chaos?

Paul anticipated this:

*“Let all things be done decently and in order.”* (1 Corinthians 14:40)

This verse is often quoted in defense of institutional structure. But look at the context. Paul says this at the *end* of a chapter about participatory worship. He's just described a meeting where multiple people speak, where tongues are interpreted, where prophecy is tested, where everyone contributes. And *that* is the context for “decently and in order.” Order doesn't require a hierarchy. Order requires the Spirit's guidance and mutual submission.

The early church in Acts met in homes. They broke bread together. They shared their possessions. They taught and were taught. They prayed. And they did it without buildings, without budgets, without boards of deacons, without constitutions, and without a senior pastor. And the gospel spread faster in that first century than it has in any century since.

The institutional model didn't produce the spread of the gospel. The Spirit did. Through ordinary believers, participating in a body where everyone mattered and no one was elevated above the rest. The institution came later. And it brought with it all the problems that institutions always bring - power struggles, politics, control, and the substitution of structure for substance.

I'm not naive about this. I know that house churches can have problems too. Where two or three are gathered, there's politics. But the answer isn't to build a bigger institution. The

answer is to trust the Spirit to do what He promised to do: guide His people into all truth, through the body functioning as a body.

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## Objections and Answers

**“Hebrews 13:17 says ‘obey them that have the rule over you.’”**

Yes, it does. And the word translated “rule” is *hegeomai*, which means to lead, to go before, to guide. It doesn’t mean to command, to legislate, or to exercise institutional authority. In a participatory model, there are leaders. Elders. Gifted men who have the Spirit’s anointing to teach, exhort, and guide. They lead by spiritual gift and by example (1 Peter 5:3). They don’t lead by hierarchical authority or institutional title. The passage is about recognizing and following spiritual leadership, not about submitting to an organizational flowchart.

**“Without a pastor and formal structure, churches descend into chaos.”**

The church in 1 Corinthians 14 had order without a one-man pulpit. Paul gives detailed instructions for how a participatory meeting should work - speak in turn, let others judge, let women ask their husbands at home, let all things be done decently and in order. None of those instructions require a senior pastor. They require maturity, mutual submission, and the Spirit’s guidance. The assumption that chaos is the default without institutional control says more about your view of the Spirit’s power than about the structure of the church.

**“You attend two churches - isn’t that uncommitted?”**

Or it’s the only honest option when both churches have truth and both have error. I don’t pretend either one has the complete picture. I love the people in both. I hear Christ preached in both. And I see clearly in both because I’m not defending either institution - I’m just listening for the truth and filtering the rest. If that’s uncommitted, then commitment requires pretending a flawed institution is perfect. And I won’t do that. Because the institutions of man are flawed. All of them. And the church that admits it has the best chance of getting closer to the truth.

**“What about accountability? Without membership, who holds you accountable?”**

The Spirit holds me accountable. And the brethren I walk with hold me accountable through relationship, not through institutional authority. Accountability doesn’t require a membership roll. It requires love, honesty, and the willingness to speak truth to one another. I have that in both churches and outside of both churches. Accountability is relational, not organizational. And reducing it to a membership card cheapens it.

**“The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15) - you’re undermining the church.”**

I’m not undermining the church. I’m undermining the *institution* that has claimed to be the church. The church IS the body of Christ - every regenerate believer on earth. That church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The local institutions where believers gather are expressions of that body, valuable and important, but they are not the body itself. The body existed before any of them were organized. The body will exist after all

of them are gone. Confusing the institution with the body is the same error as confusing the ceremony with the covenant. The substance is bigger than the structure.

# Chapter 24: Women in Ministry - Paul Said What He Said

I want to start this chapter with two admissions. The first is that I hold a position on this topic that will make me unpopular with almost everyone. The second is that I hold it without smugness, without superiority, and without the slightest desire to lord it over anyone - male or female.

I am complementarian. I believe Paul's command in 1 Timothy 2:12 is binding. Not cultural. Not contextual. Not limited to the church at Ephesus or the peculiarities of first-century Roman society. Binding. Universal. Grounded in creation, not in culture.

And I also believe that the pulpit as it currently exists shouldn't exist in its current form for *anyone*. Which means that the way most churches frame this debate is wrong before the first word is spoken.

Let me explain.

## Paul's Command

*“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”* (1 Timothy 2:12)

That's the verse. And it says what it says. Paul doesn't permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man in the context of the church. And before anyone objects that this was cultural, that Paul was addressing a specific situation in Ephesus, that the women in that particular church were causing problems and this was a temporary corrective - read the next verse.

*“For Adam was first formed, then Eve.”* (1 Timothy 2:13)

Paul grounds the command in the *order of creation*. Not in culture. Not in the social dynamics of first-century Ephesus. Not in the education level of women at the time. Not in any temporal, situational, or contextual factor. He goes all the way back to Genesis. Adam was first formed, then Eve. The order of creation establishes the principle. And the principle is that teaching and authority in the church belong to men.

This is not a popular position. Egalitarians hate it because it limits women. Complementarians who hold it often hold it badly - with a rigidity and a condescension that makes the position look like misogyny rather than theology. And the secular world looks at it and sees nothing but patriarchal oppression.

But I hold it because Paul said it. And Paul grounded it in creation. And I don't get to overrule Paul because the culture has moved on. The culture has moved on from a lot of things Paul said. That doesn't make Paul wrong. It makes the culture wrong.

## **But the Pulpit Shouldn't Exist**

And here is where it gets complicated. Because I've just spent an entire chapter arguing that the one-man pulpit is unbiblical. That the participatory model in 1 Corinthians 14 is the New Testament pattern. That the institutional hierarchy of pastor-over-congregation is a human invention, not a biblical mandate. And now I'm saying women shouldn't stand at the front of a thing I don't think should exist.

Fair point. So let me thread the needle.

The principle Paul establishes is not about a pulpit. It's about *teaching and authority*. Those are the two things - teaching and authority over men - that Paul restricts to men. And in a participatory model, where there is no pulpit, where nobody stands at the front, where the body functions as a body with everyone contributing - the question shifts.

It shifts from "can a woman preach from the pulpit?" to "what does teaching and authority look like when nobody stands at the front?"

And the answer is that teaching and authority still exist in a participatory setting. When a man stands up in a house church and opens the Scriptures and explains what they mean and applies them to the lives of the believers in the room - he is teaching. When a man exercises spiritual leadership by guiding the direction of the meeting, correcting error, and establishing doctrine - he is exercising authority. These functions exist whether there's a pulpit or not.

And Paul says those functions belong to men. Not because men are smarter. Not because men are more spiritual. Not because women are less capable. Because God established an

order in creation, and Paul points to that order as the basis for the principle. I didn't design the order. I don't fully understand the order. But I accept it because the apostle who wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else said it was so and grounded it in Genesis.

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## **Women in the Participatory Model**

But here's what the participatory model does that the institutional model can't: it makes room for women to participate without violating Paul's principle.

In the one-man pulpit model, participation and teaching authority are the same thing. If you speak from the front, you're exercising authority. Period. So women are either allowed to do everything (egalitarian) or nothing (hardline complementarian). There's no middle ground because the structure doesn't allow one.

In the participatory model, the structure creates natural space. A woman can share a psalm. A woman can offer a word of encouragement. A woman can pray. A woman can ask a question. A woman can tell the body what God has done in her life. A woman can exercise her spiritual gifts - mercy, hospitality, exhortation, helps, giving - without exercising *teaching authority* over men. Because in a body where everyone speaks, not every act of speaking is an act of teaching authority.

This is closer to what the early church actually looked like. Priscilla helped teach Apollos (Acts 18:26). The daughters of Philip prophesied (Acts 21:9). Women were involved. They participated. They served. They spoke. But the authoritative teaching and the governance - the elder function - was restricted

to men. And the two things coexisted without contradiction in a model where the body functioned as a body.

The modern debate has been warped by the modern structure. When you have a one-man pulpit, the question becomes binary: can a woman stand behind it or not? But the New Testament never imagined a one-man pulpit. The New Testament imagined a body. And in a body, there's room for every member to function according to their gift, within the order that God established.

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## **Incorrect Practice Doesn't Damn**

And now I need to say something that will make some of my complementarian friends uncomfortable.

A woman who teaches men in a church is wrong about her role. But she is not lost. Incorrect practice doesn't damn, any more than incorrect doctrine damns. If a woman confesses Christ, rests in His finished work, and has been regenerated by the Spirit - she is saved. She may be wrong about her role in the body. She may be exercising a function that Paul says belongs to men. And I would lovingly, gently disagree with her about that. But I would not for one moment question her salvation.

Because if I'm honest, I'm wrong about things too. I'm sure there are positions in this book that I've gotten wrong. I don't know which ones yet - if I did, I'd fix them. But I know with certainty that I don't have perfect theology. Nobody does. And if God's grace covers my doctrinal errors, it covers hers. If God's grace covers my practical errors, it covers hers. If God's grace covers the man who baptizes infants when he shouldn't, and the man who uses grape juice instead of wine, and the man who

observes the Sabbath on Sunday instead of Saturday - then God's grace covers the woman who teaches when Paul said not to.

This is the same principle we established in the chapters on liberty and on the covenant: God's standard is perfection. Only Christ met it. Everyone else falls short in different places. And the beauty of the finished work is that the falling short was already paid for. The woman who teaches isn't sinning against a law that will condemn her. She's living in error that grace has already covered. Same as me. Same as you. Same as everyone in every church in the history of the world.

I hold the principle and extend the grace simultaneously. Because that's what the gospel does.

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## **The Debate Generates More Heat Than Light**

I want to step back for a moment and make an observation about this entire topic.

The women-in-ministry debate has consumed an enormous amount of the church's energy over the past fifty years. Egalitarians have made it a justice issue - equal rights, equal access, equal opportunity. Complementarians have made it a control issue - drawing lines, guarding pulpits, enforcing boundaries. And both sides have generated far more heat than light.

The egalitarians look at Paul's command and see oppression. They see centuries of men using Scripture to silence women, to limit their gifts, to keep them subordinate. And they're not

entirely wrong about the history. The church *has* used this passage to oppress women. Men *have* weaponized it. The history is real and it's ugly.

But the answer to misuse isn't dismissal. The answer to men behaving badly with a true principle isn't to throw out the principle. It's to hold the principle correctly. And holding it correctly means holding it the way Paul held it - with the gravity of creation order and the tenderness of a man who honored women as co-laborers in the gospel.

*"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea."* (Romans 16:1)

Paul calls Phebe a servant - *diakonos* - of the church. He commends her by name. He tells the Romans to receive her. He honored women. He worked alongside them. He valued their gifts. And he also said they shouldn't teach or have authority over men. He held both things at the same time because they don't contradict each other. Honoring women and maintaining creation order are not in tension. They're in harmony.

The complementarians, for their part, often hold the principle without the grace. They enforce the rule with the kind of rigid severity that makes it look like they enjoy the restriction. They guard the pulpit like bouncers at a club instead of brothers in a body. And the result is a version of complementarianism that looks more like male insecurity than theological conviction.

I want nothing to do with either extreme. I look at Paul. I accept what he said. I accept why he said it. I extend grace to those who disagree. And I move on to what matters more. Because in the sweep of this entire book, the question of who teaches in the church is important, but it's not the main thing.

Christ is the main thing. And I'd rather spend my energy pointing people to Him than policing who gets to stand where.

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## Objections and Answers

### **“Paul was speaking culturally - it doesn't apply today.”**

Paul grounded the command in the order of creation, not in culture. “*Adam was first formed, then Eve*” (1 Timothy 2:13). That's not a cultural observation. That's an ontological statement about the order in which God made human beings. You can't dismiss it as cultural without dismissing the creation account itself. And if Paul was wrong about creation order, you have a bigger problem than women in ministry.

### **“If the pulpit shouldn't exist, the question is moot.”**

Partly. If there's no pulpit, there's no pulpit to fight about. But the *principle* that Paul establishes - teaching and authority in the church belong to men - doesn't require a pulpit to apply. It applies wherever teaching and authority happen. In a house church, in a Bible study, in any setting where the body gathers and the Word is taught with authority. The structure changes. The principle doesn't.

### **“You're being inconsistent - extending grace on doctrine but not on practice.”**

I'm extending grace on both. I said explicitly that a woman who teaches isn't lost. Incorrect practice doesn't damn. Grace covers. That is *exactly* the same grace I extend to the man who holds incorrect doctrine. The principle is clear. The consequences of violating the principle are not eternal

damnation. They're error. And error is what grace was designed for.

**“Galatians 3:28 says there is ‘neither male nor female’ in Christ.”**

Paul is talking about *salvation*, not about *church order*. There is neither male nor female *in Christ* - meaning both men and women are equally justified, equally accepted, equally loved, equally saved. But equal standing before God doesn't mean identical function in the body. The eye and the hand are equal members of the body, but they don't do the same thing. Galatians 3:28 is about soteriological equality, not functional interchangeability.

**“You talk about tenderness being the highest strength. Women carry it naturally. Doesn't restricting them from teaching waste that gift?”**

It would, if teaching from a pulpit were the only way to serve. It isn't. In a participatory body, the gifts of mercy, encouragement, hospitality, exhortation, prayer, wisdom, and care are exercised constantly, by everyone, in real time. A woman who carries tenderness naturally can exercise that gift in a thousand ways without standing behind a pulpit that shouldn't exist in the first place. The restriction is narrow: authoritative teaching and governance. The freedom is wide: everything else. And “everything else” is where most of the actual ministry happens anyway.

# **Chapter 25:**

## **Presuppositionalism - All Reasoning Is Circular**

I used to think I could argue someone into the kingdom.

I was good at it, too. Or at least I thought I was. I could dismantle an Arminian's position in fifteen minutes. I could corner a materialist with the problem of consciousness. I could cite chapter and verse until the other person ran out of answers, and I would walk away from those conversations thinking I had *won* something. That the truth had advanced. That I had done my part.

And then I would watch the person go right back to believing exactly what they believed before the conversation started. Every time. Without exception. I could win the argument and lose the person, and the score never changed. Not once.

It took me most of my adult life to understand why.

The reason nobody changed their mind is that the argument was never operating at the level where minds get changed. I was working at the surface. The real architecture was underneath, in

a layer neither of us could see during the conversation, and no amount of logic applied to the surface was going to touch what lived beneath it.

That layer has a name. The theologians call it presuppositions. The philosophers call it first principles. In the framework of this book, I call them boot parameters. And understanding what they are, where they live, and who has the authority to change them is the difference between apologetics that clears the ground and apologetics that pretends it can plant the seed.

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## **Boot Parameters**

Every computer, when you turn it on, runs a set of instructions before you ever see the screen. The BIOS loads. The firmware initializes. The operating system boots. And by the time the user sees the desktop and starts clicking around, a thousand decisions have already been made underneath - which hardware to use, which drivers to load, which services to start. The user doesn't choose any of it. The user isn't even aware most of it happened. But everything the user does from that point forward is *constrained by* and *dependent on* those invisible decisions that were made before the screen lit up.

Your mind works the same way.

Before you ever reason about God, before you ever evaluate an argument, before you form your first conscious opinion about anything, a set of presuppositions has already loaded. These are the deepest assumptions your mind operates from - assumptions about what counts as evidence, what counts as logic, what counts as real, what counts as true. You didn't

choose them. You're mostly not aware of them. But every thought you think, every argument you evaluate, every conclusion you reach is running *on top of* those presuppositions. They are the firmware underneath your reasoning. And your reasoning cannot inspect its own firmware any more than a program can rewrite the BIOS while it's running on it.

This is not a metaphor I invented to make a theological point. This is how the mind actually works, and it maps perfectly to what Scripture has been saying for two thousand years.

*"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."* (Proverbs 23:7)

The heart thinks *before* the head reasons. The presuppositions live in the heart - not the physical organ, but the seat of a person's deepest commitments, the place beneath the conscious mind where the boot parameters are installed. And as a man thinketh in his *heart*, so is he. Not as he reasons. Not as he concludes. As he *thinketh in his heart*. The heart sets the parameters. The head runs the applications. And the applications can never override the parameters they're running on.

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## No Neutral Ground

Here is where this gets uncomfortable for the person who thinks they're being reasonable and objective.

There is no neutral ground.

Every human being who has ever lived reasons *from* presuppositions, not *toward* them. The atheist does not arrive

at materialism by following the evidence wherever it leads. The atheist *starts* with the presupposition that the material world is all there is, and then interprets every piece of evidence through that lens. The evidence doesn't produce the conclusion. The presupposition filters the evidence so that the conclusion is the only one visible.

And the Christian does the same thing. The Christian starts with the presupposition that God exists, that He is sovereign, that He authored reality, and that His Word is true. And the Christian interprets every piece of evidence through that lens. The evidence is the same evidence. The world is the same world. The difference is in the firmware, not in the data.

This is the single most important insight in all of apologetics, and most Christians have never heard it. They've been told that Christianity is the *conclusion* of a neutral investigation. That if you just look at the evidence honestly, you'll arrive at God. That the resurrection can be proved by historical argument. That the existence of God can be demonstrated by philosophical reasoning. And there's a sense in which all of that is true - but not the sense most people mean it in.

The evidence *is* there. The arguments *are* valid. But they are valid *within the Christian presuppositional framework*. To the person operating from materialist boot parameters, the same evidence produces a different conclusion. The materialist looks at the resurrection and sees a legend that grew over time. The materialist looks at the fine-tuning of the universe and sees a multiverse. The materialist looks at consciousness and sees an emergent property of chemistry. The data didn't change. The firmware changed.

And here is the devastating part: the materialist thinks he's being neutral. He thinks his framework is the default. He thinks that materialism isn't a presupposition at all - it's just *how things are*. He calls his starting point "science" or "reason" or "evidence," and he calls the Christian's starting point "faith" - as if faith were the departure from neutrality and his position were the baseline.

But it's not. Materialism is a presupposition. The belief that the physical world is all there is, that only empirically verifiable claims count as knowledge, that consciousness is reducible to chemistry - these are *starting assumptions*, not conclusions. They cannot be proved from within the materialist system without using the materialist system to validate itself. That's circular reasoning. And the materialist is guilty of the same circularity he accuses the Christian of.

*"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."* (Psalm 14:1)

In his *heart*. Not in his head. The denial of God is a heart commitment, a boot parameter, a presupposition installed at the firmware level. It's not the conclusion of careful reasoning. It's the starting point that makes the reasoning look careful.

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## The Honest Question

So if both worldviews are circular - if the Christian presupposes God and reasons from that, and the materialist presupposes matter and reasons from that - then neither can be *proved* from outside its own system. And that sounds like a stalemate. That sounds like nobody can know anything. That sounds like we're

stuck in competing narratives with no way to adjudicate between them.

But that's not what it means at all.

The question was never "which can be proved?" The question is: *which presupposition accounts for more of reality?*

And this is where the materialist's system collapses.

The materialist has to account for consciousness. He can't. If the brain is nothing more than chemistry - atoms and molecules following the laws of physics - then every thought you have is just a chemical reaction. Including the thought "materialism is true." And if that thought is just a chemical reaction, then it wasn't arrived at by reasoning. It was produced by chemistry. And chemistry doesn't *reason*. Chemistry doesn't arrive at *truth*. Chemistry just reacts. There is no mechanism in a materialist universe by which undirected chemical processes can produce *reliable* thoughts about the nature of reality. The materialist uses his mind to argue that the mind is nothing more than chemistry - and in doing so, he saws off the branch he's sitting on.

The Christian presupposition accounts for consciousness. If reality is information in the mind of God, as Chapter 1 established, then consciousness is not emergent - it's fundamental. Mind precedes matter. The ability to think, to reason, to grasp truth, is a gift from the Mind that authored reality. Reason works because it was designed to work. Logic is reliable because it was authored by a logical God. The intelligibility of the universe is not an accident - it's a feature of a universe that was *thought* into existence.

The materialist has to account for morality. He can't. If there is no God, then there is no objective standard of right and

wrong. There are only chemical preferences. And you can call those preferences “morality” if you want, but they have no binding authority. They’re just feelings produced by neurons that don’t know they’re neurons. The materialist lives as though some things are genuinely right and genuinely wrong, but his system provides no foundation for that conviction. He borrowed it from the Christian framework and forgot where it came from.

The materialist has to account for the intelligibility of the universe. He can’t. Why does mathematics work? Why do the laws of physics hold from one moment to the next? Why is the universe comprehensible to the human mind at all? If the universe is the product of random, undirected processes, there is no reason to expect it to be orderly, predictable, or understandable. The materialist assumes order and then investigates it - but his system cannot explain *why* there is order to investigate.

The materialist has to account for information. He can’t. DNA is authored code. Functional, specified information does not arise from random processes. A programmer since age ten knows what authored information looks like. And the genetic code looks authored. Not because I need it to for my theology. Because it does.

The Christian presupposition accounts for all of this. Consciousness, reason, morality, order, information, beauty, love, the intelligibility of the universe - all of it is explained by a sovereign Mind that authored reality with purpose. The system is coherent. The system is complete. And the system predicts its own rejection.

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## The System Predicts Its Own Rejection

This is where most people accuse presuppositionalism of being unfalsifiable. And I want to address that head-on, because it's the sharpest version of the objection.

The accusation goes like this: "Your system says that anyone who disagrees with you is just operating from wrong presuppositions. So there's no possible evidence that could disprove your system. It's unfalsifiable. It's not a real argument - it's a tautology."

And here is my answer.

*"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* (1 Corinthians 2:14)

The natural man - the person operating from unregenerate boot parameters - does not receive the things of the Spirit. They are *foolishness* to him. Not just unpersuasive. Not just unlikely. *Foolishness*. And the reason is not that the evidence is bad. The reason is that the evidence is *spiritually discerned*, and the natural man does not have the spiritual capacity to discern it.

This is not an ad hoc defense. This is not something Christians made up after the fact to explain why people don't believe. This was written two thousand years ago, before presuppositional apologetics had a name. Paul predicted exactly what happens when you present the gospel to a natural mind: the natural mind calls it foolishness. And the prediction has been confirmed in every generation since.

Now, is that unfalsifiable? In one sense, yes - from *within the materialist system*, you can't falsify it, because the

materialist system doesn't have the categories to evaluate it. But that's not a weakness. That's the *point*. The materialist's demand for falsifiability is itself a presupposition - the presupposition that only empirically testable claims count as knowledge. But that claim isn't empirically testable. It's a philosophical commitment. A boot parameter. And the materialist is using his own circular system to demand that the Christian's system submit to his criteria - criteria the materialist's own system can't justify.

The system doesn't claim to be falsifiable by materialist criteria. It claims to be *self-authenticating* by its own criteria. And so does materialism. The difference is that the Christian system accounts for why the materialist rejects it. The materialist system cannot account for why the Christian accepts it - except by calling the Christian irrational, which is itself a presupposition about what counts as rational.

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## **The Firmware and the Application Layer**

And here is where everything connects back to the framework of this book.

If faith is a gift of the Spirit, as Galatians 5:22 says, and if regeneration precedes faith, as Chapter 16 established, then no argument can *produce* faith. Arguments operate at the application layer. They deal with evidence, logic, propositions, counterarguments - all surface-level operations. But faith is a firmware event. It happens beneath the application layer, in the boot parameters, where the Spirit operates and the conscious mind cannot reach.

*“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”* (Philippians 2:13)

“To will” - that’s the firmware. The *willing* is changed before the *doing*. God works in the subconscious before the conscious mind acts. The Spirit flashes the firmware - installs new boot parameters, new presuppositions, a new heart orientation - and *then* the application layer starts producing different output. The believer doesn’t reason his way to God. The believer’s boot parameters get changed, and then the reasoning follows.

This means apologetics has a real but limited role. Apologetics cannot change anyone’s boot parameters. Only the Spirit can do that. But apologetics can do two things that matter.

First, apologetics can *expose* the other person’s presuppositions. Most people have never examined their own boot parameters. They think their assumptions are just “how things are.” The presuppositionalist can show them that their system is circular too, that their starting points are assumptions, not conclusions, and that their system can’t account for the very tools it uses to argue - reason, morality, consciousness, order. That exposure is valuable. It doesn’t save anyone. But it strips away the illusion of neutrality. It removes the comfortable fiction that the materialist is standing on solid ground while the Christian is standing on faith. Both are standing on faith. Only one admits it.

Second, apologetics can *present the truth*. The Spirit uses means. He uses the preaching of the gospel, the presentation of truth, the proclamation of Christ crucified and risen. The Spirit doesn’t operate in a vacuum. He works through the Word, through testimony, through argument. The apologist provides

the material that the Spirit uses. We can't flash the firmware. But we can provide the data that the Spirit loads when He does.

*“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17)

Faith comes by hearing. The hearing is the means. The Spirit is the cause. The apologist provides the hearing. The Spirit produces the faith. We clear the ground. He plants the seed.

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## **Not Invented in a Library**

I should tell you how I came to this position, because it wasn't through reading Van Til or Bahnsen. I didn't learn presuppositionalism from a textbook. I learned it from decades of arguing with people and watching every argument fail to change a single mind.

I came to it the same way I came to everything else in this book - through Scripture and lived experience. I watched intelligent people reject overwhelming evidence. I watched brilliant minds dismiss arguments they couldn't answer. I watched people who were clearly losing the debate walk away more entrenched than before. And the pattern was so consistent, so universal, that I eventually had to ask: why? Why does evidence not work? Why does logic not work? Why can I win every point and change no one?

And Paul already had the answer. The natural man *receiveth not*. Not “has not yet been shown enough evidence.” Not “needs a better argument.” *Receiveth not*. The capacity is absent. The firmware doesn't support the application. And no upgrade to the application layer is going to fix a firmware problem.

After I arrived at this position from Scripture and experience, I discovered that Cornelius Van Til and Greg Bahnsen had built an entire apologetic method on the same foundation. They called it presuppositionalism. They articulated it with far more philosophical rigor than I ever will. And I am grateful for their work, because it gave me vocabulary for what I already knew.

But I want to be clear: I didn't arrive here because Van Til convinced me. I arrived here because 1 Corinthians 2:14 is true, and I watched it play out in every conversation for as long as I've been a believer.

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## **The Implications**

If all reasoning is circular, then the honest person admits it. He doesn't pretend his starting point is neutral. He doesn't call his presuppositions "science" and the other person's presuppositions "faith." He names his boot parameters and takes responsibility for them.

If only the Spirit can change boot parameters, then humility is the only posture for the apologist. You are not the hero of the conversation. You are not going to save anyone with your clever arguments. You present truth. You expose false assumptions. You clear the ground. And you wait on the Lord. Because the Lord is the only one with root access, and root access is what this problem requires.

If the system predicts its own rejection, then the Christian is not surprised or threatened when people call the gospel foolishness. Paul told you they would. The rejection is not evidence against the system. The rejection is *predicted* by the

system. And a system that accurately predicts the behavior of those who reject it is a system that accounts for reality better than the alternative.

And if the Christian presupposition accounts for consciousness, reason, morality, order, information, beauty, and the intelligibility of the universe - while the materialist presupposition cannot account for any of them without borrowing from the Christian framework - then the honest mind knows which boot parameters produce a coherent rendering of the world.

The honest mind. That's the key phrase. Because honesty itself is a presupposition. The willingness to examine your own starting points, to admit your reasoning is circular, to hold your system accountable to the world it claims to describe - that willingness is not produced by argument. It's produced by the Spirit. Which means the whole system loops back to the beginning, back to the sovereignty of God, back to the Author who writes both the questions and the answers, both the seekers and the scoffers, both the firmware and the flash.

*"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."* (John 6:44)

The drawing is the firmware flash. The coming is the application layer responding. And between the two, there is nothing you or I or the cleverest argument in the world can provide.

We clear the ground. The Spirit plants the seed. And every argument we've ever won was just the ground being cleared for something we couldn't do ourselves.

## Objections and Answers

**“If all reasoning is circular, you can’t prove Christianity is true.”**

Correct. No worldview can be proved from outside its own system. The materialist can’t prove materialism without using materialist assumptions. The rationalist can’t prove rationalism without using rationalist assumptions. The empiricist can’t prove empiricism without making an empirical claim. Every system validates itself by its own criteria. The question was never “which can be proved?” The question is “which presupposition accounts for more of reality?” The Christian presupposition accounts for consciousness, reason, morality, order, information, beauty, and the intelligibility of the universe. The materialist presupposition can’t explain why undirected chemistry produces reliable truth. One system is coherent. The other borrows from the one it rejects.

**“Presuppositionalism is intellectual arrogance - you won’t even engage with evidence.”**

We engage with all the evidence. Every scrap of it. We just interpret it through presuppositions - which is exactly what every other person on the planet does. The presuppositionalist is not the one who refuses to engage with evidence. The presuppositionalist is the one who is *honest* about the fact that evidence is always interpreted through a framework. The classical apologist who claims to follow “the evidence wherever it leads” is the one being dishonest - because the evidence doesn’t lead anywhere by itself. Evidence is inert. Interpretation does the leading. And interpretation runs on presuppositions.

**“If only the Spirit can change boot parameters, apologetics is useless.”**

Apologetics is not useless. Apologetics is *limited*. The Spirit uses means. He uses the preaching of the Word, the testimony of believers, the presentation of truth. The apologist provides the occasion that the Spirit uses to flash the firmware. We can't produce faith. But we can present truth, and truth is what the Spirit works through. The farmer who plants the seed doesn't make it grow. But the seed has to be planted. We clear the ground, we plant the seed, and God gives the increase. The farmer isn't useless. He's just not God.

**“This makes Christianity unfalsifiable.”**

Christianity is not falsifiable by materialist criteria. Neither is materialism falsifiable by Christian criteria. Both systems are internally self-validating. The charge of “unfalsifiable” is itself a presupposition - the assumption that only claims falsifiable by empirical testing count as knowledge. But that claim is not itself empirically testable. It's a philosophical commitment. A boot parameter. The materialist is demanding that the Christian's system submit to a criterion that the materialist's own system can't justify. The honest response is not to submit to a rigged standard. It's to point out that the standard is rigged.

**“You're just saying 'you have to believe to understand,' which is circular.”**

Yes. And the materialist is saying “you have to accept empiricism to evaluate claims,” which is also circular. Every epistemology is circular at the foundation. The question is whether the circle accounts for reality. Ours does. Theirs doesn't. The difference is not in the circularity - it's in the comprehensiveness.

## Chapter 26: The Canon - Self-Authenticating Scripture

I have a confession to make, and it's one most people who believe the Bible would never say out loud.

Not all 66 books hit me the same way.

Some of them - Romans, Genesis, John, Isaiah, the Psalms - when I read them, the words land in my chest before my brain finishes processing the sentence. The authority is *there*. It's not something I decided. It's something I *felt*, the way you feel the heat of a fire before anyone tells you the fire is hot. The self-authentication is immediate, powerful, and requires no institutional validation to confirm it.

And then there are three books that don't do that. Not in the same way. Not with the same force. And I think honesty about that matters more than pretending otherwise.

Most believers won't say this. They treat the canon like a flat surface - every book at the same volume, every verse carrying equal weight, the whole thing sealed and uniform as though sixty-six documents written across two thousand years by

dozens of authors in multiple languages and genres all speak with exactly the same clarity on exactly the same level. And anyone who questions that uniformity is accused of undermining the Bible.

But I'm not undermining anything. I'm telling you what I actually experience when I read it. And I think Martin Luther was right to do the same thing - and I think his willingness to do it is the reason the Reformation happened.

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## **The Covenant Before the Ceremony**

We've already established the principle. Chapter 9 built the whole case. The invisible precedes the visible. The substance precedes the formality. The covenant precedes the ceremony.

The canon is no exception.

The church councils at Hippo in 393 AD and Carthage in 397 AD did not *create* the Bible. They didn't sit in a room and decide which books were Scripture and which were not. They *recognized* what was already true. The early church had been reading Paul's letters as authoritative decades before any council met. The Gospels were circulating and being treated as Scripture while the apostles were still alive. The books of the Old Testament had been received and recognized by the Jewish community long before any Christian council weighed in on anything.

The canon was functioning as Scripture before the institution acknowledged it. The covenant was already there. The ceremony came later.

And this matters, because one of the most common attacks on the authority of the Bible is the claim that the church *gave us* the Bible. Rome says it explicitly: the Catholic Church, through its councils, determined which books belong in the canon. And therefore, they argue, the authority of Scripture depends on the authority of the church. The Bible is Scripture because the church says so.

That has the order backwards. The church recognized what was already true. The councils at Hippo and Carthage did not bestow authority on the books. They acknowledged the authority the books already had. The same way a wedding acknowledges a covenant that already exists between the two people standing at the altar. The ceremony is for the community's benefit. The covenant is between the parties - or in this case, between God and His Word.

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* (2 Timothy 3:16)

Given by inspiration of God. Not “declared authoritative by the councils of the fourth century.” Given. By God. The authority is intrinsic to the text because the Author is God. And no human institution has the power to add or remove authority that God has already invested.

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## **Self-Authenticating**

So if the Bible's authority doesn't come from the church, where does it come from?

From itself. From its own nature. From the same source that every truth ultimately comes from - the mind of God.

The Bible is self-authenticating. It proves itself by what it is, by what it says, by how it says it, and by the cumulative weight of a revelation that spans two millennia, dozens of authors, multiple continents, three languages, and every genre from legal code to love poetry to apocalyptic vision - and *holds together*. Not as a committee product. Not as an edited anthology. As a single story told by a single Mind through multiple instruments across multiple centuries, arriving at a coherent destination that none of the individual authors could have planned.

Consider the prophecy of Christ. Genesis 3:15 announces the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head. Thousands of years before the cross. Isaiah 53 describes a suffering servant who is "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities" - seven hundred years before it happened. Psalm 22 describes the crucifixion in detail - "they pierced my hands and my feet" - a thousand years before crucifixion was even invented as a method of execution. Daniel 9 provides a timeline that points to the exact generation. Micah 5:2 names the town: Bethlehem. Zechariah 11:12 names the price: thirty pieces of silver.

And then it all happens. To one person. In one generation. In the exact place, at the exact price, in the exact manner described centuries before.

The arc of prophecy and fulfillment across two thousand years is too elaborate, too precise, and too interconnected to be a hoax. A conspiracy requires conspirators, and the authors of Isaiah, Daniel, Micah, and Zechariah were dead for centuries before the events they described took place. You can't conspire

with a dead man. You can't coordinate a fraud across seven hundred years. And you certainly can't arrange for the Roman Empire to invent a method of execution that matches a psalm written a millennium earlier.

This is not blind faith. This is a trust that *sees*. Faith in the self-authentication of Scripture is not faith against the evidence. It's faith *because of* the evidence - evidence that the text itself provides, evidence that only a single Author controlling the entire narrative across all of human history could produce.

*"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Moved by the Holy Ghost. The human authors were instruments. The real Author is God. And the text authenticates itself because the Author authenticates Himself through it.

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## **Homologoumena and Antilegomena**

Now here is where I need to be more honest than most people are comfortable with, and I take my cue from Martin Luther, who was willing to say what the church of his day would not.

Not all 66 books self-authenticate at the same volume.

The early church recognized this. They had a classification for it. The *homologoumena* were the undisputed books - the ones everyone agreed were Scripture from the beginning. Romans. Genesis. John. Isaiah. The Psalms. These books announce themselves. They land with authority the moment you read them. The self-authentication is immediate and

overwhelming. You don't need a council to tell you Romans is the Word of God. Romans tells you.

The *antilegomena* were the disputed books - the ones some churches accepted and others questioned. These are the books that self-authenticate less clearly. Not falsely. Not without value. But with less force, less immediacy, less of that unmistakable quality that makes the homologoumena impossible to dismiss.

And Luther, whose courage gave us the Reformation, was willing to name what he saw. He called the Epistle of James "an epistle of straw" compared to the great books of the New Testament. He questioned the Revelation of John. He was not afraid to say, out loud, that some books spoke with a clearer voice than others.

And he was right to say it. Not because James doesn't belong in the Bible. It does. I hold it. I preach from it. But Luther recovered justification by faith alone *precisely because* he was willing to say what others wouldn't about the relative force of different books. If Luther had treated James and Romans as speaking with exactly the same clarity on exactly the same topic, justification by faith alone would still be buried under works-based theology. Honesty about the canon is how the Reformation happened.

Let me name three books that I hold in an open hand rather than a closed fist, and I want to be specific about why.

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## James

James is the strongest book in the conditionalist's arsenal. Every works-based system in the history of Christianity has planted its flag in James 2.

*“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”*  
(James 2:17)

“Faith without works is dead.” There it is. The verse that has been weaponized by every system that wants to smuggle human contribution back into salvation. Rome uses it. The Arminians use it. The lordship salvation advocates use it. The conditional time salvationists use it. Whenever someone wants to condition the assurance of salvation on something the believer *does*, James 2 is where they go.

And the tension with the rest of the New Testament is real. Paul says in Romans 4:5, *“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”* Paul says *worketh not*. James says faith without works is dead. These are not saying the same thing. And the traditional answer - that Paul is talking about justification before God and James is talking about justification before men - is plausible. But it requires interpretive work. It requires harmonization. It doesn't jump off the page the way Romans does.

I don't reject James. I hold it. But I hold it the way you hold a book that has been mishandled by others for centuries - carefully, with awareness of how it's been used, and with the firm conviction that the less clear does not override the more clear.

Which brings me to the load-bearing hermeneutical principle of this chapter.

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## The Hermeneutical Principle

The homologoumena interpret the antilegomena. Not the other way around.

You don't use James to override Romans. You use Romans to interpret James.

The clearest revelation controls the less clear. The books that self-authenticate with the most force set the interpretive framework for the books that self-authenticate with less force. And this isn't a trick to dismiss inconvenient passages. This is basic hermeneutics. It's how you read any collection of documents - you let the clearest statement on a subject govern your interpretation of the less clear statements on the same subject.

If Paul says, repeatedly, across multiple letters, in the clearest possible language, that justification is by faith apart from works - and then James says faith without works is dead - you have two options. You can use James to *override* Paul, which means the less clear overrides the more clear. Or you can use Paul to *interpret* James, which means the more clear governs the less clear.

I choose the second option. And Luther chose the same. And the Reformation was built on that choice.

This principle is not just academic. It was applied in Chapter 12 of this book, when James 3:9 - "*men, which are made after the similitude of God*" - was cited as an objection to the

framework's position that the image of God belongs only to the elect. And I noted there that the strongest counterargument to that framework comes from the antilegomenon. From the book in the canon that self-authenticates least clearly and has been most weaponized by works-based systems. Using the weakest book to override a framework derived from the homologoumena - Romans 9, Genesis 3:15, John 8:44 - is poor hermeneutics. The clearest revelation controls the less clear. And the less clear must be read *in light of* the more clear, not the other way around.

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## **Esther**

Esther is the only book in the canon that never mentions God. Not once. Not by name, not by title, not by implication that uses the word. The providence is there - the timing of Mordecai's discovery of the assassination plot, Esther's placement in the palace, Haman's downfall at the exact moment of his greatest triumph - all of it screams divine orchestration. But the explicit authorship that is present everywhere else in Scripture is absent.

I hold Esther. The story is beautiful, and the providence is undeniable to anyone with eyes to see it. But I'm honest that it self-authenticates differently than Isaiah or Romans. The voice is quieter. The Author is working behind the scenes rather than standing at the front of the stage. Some books shout the name of God. Esther whispers His providence without saying His name.

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## Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes reads like materialism from the inside.

*“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

“Under the sun” - that phrase repeats throughout the book, and it’s doing more work than most people realize. Everything the Preacher observes is “under the sun” - which is to say, *from within the rendering*. He’s looking at life from inside the filmstrip, without the Author’s perspective, and reporting what it looks like from there. And from there, it looks like vanity. Meaninglessness. Chasing after wind.

And he’s *right*, from that vantage point. If you look at life from within the material rendering and refuse to look above it, everything is vanity. The wise man dies like the fool. The rich man loses his wealth. The laborer’s toil profits him nothing. Ecclesiastes is what life looks like when you can only see the frames and not the filmmaker.

The answer to Ecclesiastes is the rest of Scripture. The rest of the canon supplies the vantage point that Ecclesiastes deliberately withholds. And the fact that God included a book in the canon that honestly describes what life looks like *without* the divine perspective is itself a kind of self-authentication - because it means the Bible is willing to let the darkest reading of existence stand alongside the brightest, trusting that the totality will speak the truth.

But it sits uneasily. I won’t pretend it doesn’t. And I think the honest reader recognizes that Ecclesiastes self-authenticates less forcefully than the Psalms or Isaiah - not because it’s false, but because its voice is deliberately lower, deliberately darker,

deliberately incomplete. It's the one book in the canon that sounds like the other side of the argument.

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## **All Three Held**

Let me be absolutely clear about what I am and am not saying.

I am not saying James, Esther, and Ecclesiastes should be removed from the canon. I hold all 66 books. I preach from all of them. I read them, study them, and derive truth from them.

What I am saying is that not every book speaks at the same volume, and pretending otherwise is institutional obedience, not honest reading.

Luther knew this. He said it. And because he said it, the church was forced to reckon with what it had been hiding behind the flat uniformity of the canon - that justification by faith alone was being obscured by a refusal to acknowledge that Romans speaks more clearly on the subject than James.

This is campless even in the canon. I am neither in the camp that treats all 66 books as speaking with identical clarity and force, nor in the camp that removes books from the canon entirely. I understand why some men remove James to protect the gospel, and I respect their instinct. But I hold all 66. I just hold some with a closed fist and others with an open hand. Some shout. Some whisper. And the honest reader can tell the difference.

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## Why the Bible Is Rejected

If the Bible is self-authenticating, why do so many people reject it?

Because the problem is not in the evidence. The problem is in the firmware.

*“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14)*

We covered this in the last chapter, and it applies here with full force. The natural man - the person operating from unregenerate boot parameters - looks at the self-authenticating Scripture and sees a book. An old book. A collection of ancient writings from a primitive culture that believed in miracles. The self-authentication is *there*, in the text, as real as fire. But the natural man can't feel the heat. His firmware doesn't have the drivers installed to process the signal.

This is why the debate about the Bible never ends and never progresses. The evidence doesn't change. The prophecies are still there. The coherence is still there. The moral authority is still there. The historical reliability is still there. But the person evaluating the evidence is evaluating it with firmware that cannot process spiritual data. And no amount of additional evidence will solve a firmware problem. You don't fix a driver issue by adding more data. You fix it by installing the driver.

And only the Spirit installs the driver. Only the Spirit has root access to the boot parameters. We present the truth. We point to the prophecies. We lay out the coherence. We clear the

ground. And then we wait. Because the ground-clearing is our job. The firmware flash is His.

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## **A Trust That Sees**

I want to end this chapter with something personal.

I have had seasons of doubt. Seasons where I looked at the Bible and thought, “What if this is just a book?” Seasons where the self-authentication felt dim and the evidence felt thin and the whole thing looked like it might be an elaborate human construction.

And every time - every single time - the doubt came when I was looking at something *other* than the Scriptures. When I was reading the critics. When I was listening to the skeptics. When I was consumed with other things and the Bible was sitting on the shelf. The doubt never came while I was *in* the text. It came when I was *away* from it.

And when I came back, when I opened it again, when I sat down with Romans or Isaiah or John or the Psalms, the fire was still there. The authority was still there. The self-authentication was still there, as strong as it ever was, waiting for me to come close enough to feel the heat again.

That’s not blind trust. That’s a trust that *sees*. A trust built on more than two decades of reading the same book and finding it more coherent, more profound, more sufficient, and more true every single time I return to it. A trust built on prophecies fulfilled, on promises kept, on a story that spans two thousand years and arrives at a single Person, a Person who *is* the Word

made flesh, the sentence from Chapter 1 collapsed into a body and hung on a tree.

The Bible proves itself. Not to everyone - because the firmware determines what the application layer can process. But to those whose boot parameters have been flashed by the Spirit, the self-authentication of Scripture is as real as the sun.

*“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”* (Psalm 119:130)

The entrance of His words. Not the council’s declaration. Not the institution’s stamp. The *words themselves*. They give light. They give understanding. They authenticate themselves by doing what only God’s Word can do - changing the person who reads them from the inside out.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“Without the church councils, we wouldn’t have the Bible.”**

We wouldn’t have the public *recognition* of the Bible. The canon was already functioning as Scripture before Hippo and Carthage met. Paul’s letters were being read in churches and treated as authoritative while Paul was still alive. The Gospels were circulating as Scripture within the first century. The councils didn’t bestow authority. They acknowledged authority that was already there. Same as a wedding doesn’t create the covenant - it acknowledges the covenant that already exists. Same principle. Same chapter. Same framework.

**“Admitting antilegomena undermines biblical authority.”**

Luther admitted the same thing, and Luther recovered justification by faith alone. Honesty about the relative force of self-authentication is not dismissal. It's hermeneutical maturity. Pretending all 66 books speak with identical clarity on every subject is not a high view of Scripture. It's a refusal to read carefully. A high view of Scripture includes a willingness to let the clearest books govern the interpretation of the less clear - which requires admitting the distinction exists.

**“If the Bible is self-authenticating but many people reject it, the self-authentication has failed.”**

The sun is self-luminous, but a blind man can't see it. The failure is not in the sun. It's in the eyes. First Corinthians 2:14 addresses this directly - the natural man *cannot* know the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned. The self-authentication is real and present. The capacity to receive it depends on the firmware. The Spirit opens the eyes. The Word provides the light. The rejection of the light by those whose eyes are closed does not diminish the light.

**“You're just dismissing James because it's inconvenient for your theology.”**

I hold James. I preach from James. I derive truth from James. But I am honest that it self-authenticates less clearly than Romans, and I refuse to let the less clear override the more clear. That's not dismissal - that's hermeneutics. Every serious student of Scripture makes interpretive decisions about which passages govern the interpretation of other passages. The question is whether you do it honestly or pretend you don't do it at all.

**“Luther was wrong to call James ‘an epistle of straw.’”**

Maybe. That's a strong phrase, and I might not have used it. But Luther recovered the central doctrine of the Christian faith - justification by faith alone - precisely because he was willing to say what the institution of his day would not say about the relative force of different books. If Luther had treated James and Romans as equals on the subject of justification, the Reformation would not have happened. The *courage* to be honest about the canon is the same courage that broke Rome's monopoly on the gospel. Honesty about Scripture is not the enemy of reverence for Scripture. It's the condition of it.

**“If James is the weakest book in the canon, why not just remove it?”**

I need to be honest here. I have friends who reject James entirely. Good men. Men who love justification by faith and see how James has been weaponized by every works-based system in the history of Christianity. And I understand their position, because I was there at one point. I saw the damage James 2 does in the hands of conditionalists and lordship salvation men, and I thought the cleanest solution was to cut the book. Just remove the problem.

But I came back from that position, and here's why. Not because those men are wrong to protect the gospel. They're right to protect it. Their hermeneutic is a gospel hermeneutic, and I share it. If James truly contradicted justification by faith alone, removing it would be the honest thing to do. I see their point. I respect it. I just landed somewhere different.

And here is something that needs to be said plainly, because nobody wants to say it. We all determine the canon for ourselves. Every single one of us. The man who holds 66 books determined that 66 is the right number. The Catholic who holds

73 determined that the deuterocanonicals belong. The man who rejects James determined that 65 is sufficient. The man who says “I just believe what the church says” determined that the church is a reliable authority on the question. There is no position on the canon that doesn’t involve a personal judgment. The question is not *whether* you make a canonical decision. The question is *on what basis* you make it.

I make mine on self-authentication. I read James. I hear the Spirit in it, even when I wish the conditionalists hadn’t gotten their hands on it. It self-authenticates to me, even if it does so less clearly than Romans. And that’s enough. I hold it. I rank it. I don’t remove it. That’s what “the clear interprets the unclear” means. It means *rank*, not *remove*.

**“The hermeneutical principle ‘the clear interprets the unclear’ is subjective - who decides what’s clear?”**

The Spirit, through the text. The self-authentication is not a vote. It’s an experience of the text itself. Romans does not require an institutional committee to declare it authoritative - it *is* authoritative, and every regenerate reader recognizes it. The clarity of the homologoumena is not assigned by men. It is intrinsic to the text and recognized by those whose firmware can process it. This is circular - and I acknowledged in the last chapter that all epistemology is. The question is whether the circle accounts for reality. And a canon in which the clearest books govern the less clear produces better theology than a canon in which every verse is treated as equally dispositive.

# Chapter 27: The Revelation - Amillennial, Partial Preterist, Historicist

I hold this chapter with more open hands than anything else in the book.

That's an unusual way to start a chapter on eschatology, because eschatology is the one domain where everyone seems to have absolute certainty. The dispensationalists have their charts. The postmillennialists have their optimism. The premillennialists have their timelines and their rebuilt temples and their seven-year tribulations and their rapture indexes. Everyone has a system. Everyone is sure. And I'm going to tell you what I believe and then I'm going to tell you that I hold it more loosely than I hold justification from eternity or the two seeds or the authorship of evil. Because God *deliberately* obscured apocalyptic literature. He wrote Revelation in a genre designed to conceal as much as it reveals. And the man who reads a deliberately obscured text and comes away with absolute

certainty about every detail has mistaken his confidence for comprehension.

I've watched men build entire ministries on prophecy charts. I've watched them calculate dates. I've watched them read every headline through the lens of their eschatological system and declare that *this* war, *this* treaty, *this* political figure is the fulfillment of *that* verse. And they've been wrong every single time. Not wrong about the *nature* of the last things. Wrong about the *timing*. Wrong about the *specifics*. Wrong about the details they were most sure about. And they never seem to learn, because the next headline produces the next confident interpretation, and the cycle repeats.

I'm not going to do that. I'm going to tell you what the framework derives about the nature of the end. And I'm going to hold the timing and the details with open hands, because the Author wrote this chapter of His story in a genre that doesn't yield to human certainty.

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## **The Kingdom Is Spiritual, Not Physical**

This is the starting point, and it comes directly from the framework. The invisible is more real than the visible. The substance precedes the formality. The covenant precedes the ceremony. In *every* domain we've examined in this book, the invisible reality is the real one, and the physical expression is the rendering of that reality.

Why would eschatology be different?

*“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that*

*I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” (John 18:36)*

My kingdom is *not of this world*. Christ said it plainly. He said it to Pilate, who was looking for a political threat, and Christ told him there isn't one. Not because Christ doesn't have a kingdom. He does. But because His kingdom is invisible. Spiritual. Real in the way that everything invisible in this book has been real - more real than the physical rendering, not less.

*“Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21)*

Within you. Not in a rebuilt temple. Not in a thousand-year geopolitical reign. Not on a throne in Jerusalem with nations sending ambassadors. *Within you*. The kingdom is the regenerated heart. The kingdom is the new firmware. The kingdom is Christ reigning in His people right now, this moment, in every believer across the globe.

And this is the amillennial position. Not that there is no millennium. But that the millennium is the present age. Christ is reigning *now*. He has been reigning since His ascension. The kingdom was inaugurated at the cross, not at some future date on a prophecy chart. And the millennium - the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 - is a symbolic number describing the entire period between Christ's first and second comings.

*“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”*  
(Matthew 28:18)

All power. Given. Past tense. Not “all power will be given to me when I return.” All power is given unto me *now*. In heaven AND in earth. Christ is not waiting to reign. He is reigning. The kingdom is not future. The kingdom is present. And if the invisible is more real than the visible, then the fact that you

can't see the kingdom doesn't mean it isn't *here*. It means you're looking at the rendering instead of the thought.

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## **Partial Preterism - What Was Fulfilled in AD 70**

Much of the New Testament's apocalyptic language was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. And I need to be precise here, because full preterism says *everything* was fulfilled in AD 70, including the second coming and the resurrection, and I reject that completely. Christ will return bodily. The resurrection is future. The final judgment is future. Those things are not accomplished.

But the Olivet Discourse - Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21 - is largely about the destruction of the temple, not the end of the world. And Jesus said so explicitly.

*"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."* (Matthew 24:34)

*This generation.* Not a future generation two thousand years later. The generation standing in front of Jesus. And within forty years, the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, leveled the temple, and scattered the Jewish nation. The abomination of desolation. The fleeing to the mountains. The tribulation. The signs in the heavens. All of it happened in AD 70, to the generation Jesus was speaking to.

The early church understood this. It's only the modern church, saturated in dispensational futurism, that reads Matthew 24 as if it's entirely about the twenty-first century. Jesus was answering a specific question from His disciples:

*“When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”* (Matthew 24:3). And He answered both questions. The destruction of the temple was near. The end of the world was distant. The discourse weaves both together, and the interpreter’s job is to distinguish between the near fulfillment and the far.

Most of Revelation’s early chapters - the seven churches, the seals, the trumpets - correspond to events that have already occurred. The persecution under Rome. The fall of Jerusalem. The spread of the early church. The conflicts and heresies of the first centuries. This is not a novel interpretation. This is what the church believed for most of its history.

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## **Historicism - The Original Reformed Framework**

And here is the piece that modern evangelicalism has almost entirely forgotten.

The historicist interpretation of Revelation holds that the book is a map of church history unfolding across the centuries. The seals, the trumpets, the beasts, the plagues - they correspond to real historical events and movements. Not to a seven-year tribulation at the end of time. Not to a rebuilt temple in the twenty-first century. To *history*. To the story that has been unfolding since the first century.

*“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”* (Matthew 11:12)

The kingdom has been under assault since it was announced. That's not a future event. That's church history. This was the *original* Reformed eschatological framework. Luther identified the papacy with the antichrist. Calvin held a historicist reading. Knox held it. The Westminster divines held it. Wycliffe, Huss, Tyndale - every major Reformer read Revelation as a map of the church's ongoing struggle. The identification of the beast with Rome and the papacy wasn't a fringe position. It was *the* position. For fifteen hundred years.

And then John Nelson Darby came along in the 1830s, invented dispensationalism, split history into seven ages, divided God's program for Israel from God's program for the church, and introduced the pretribulation rapture. And within two hundred years, his system completely replaced the one that had stood for a millennium and a half. The Scofield Reference Bible popularized it. Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* made it a bestseller. The *Left Behind* novels made it pop culture. And now most evangelicals think dispensational premillennialism is *the* biblical position and they've never even heard of historicism.

The novelty isn't amillennialism. The novelty is dispensationalism. The charts are new. The rebuilt temple is new. The pretribulation rapture is new. The distinction between Israel and the church as two separate programs of God is new. All of it came from Darby, not from Scripture, and the church that adopted it wholesale did so because the system was exciting and the books sold well. Not because the Reformers missed something that a Plymouth Brethren preacher in the 1830s finally discovered.

I hold the historicist position because it fits the framework. The Author is still writing the story. Revelation maps the

ongoing narrative. The seals have been opening across centuries. The trumpets have been sounding across centuries. The beasts have risen and fallen across centuries. And reading Revelation requires the same pattern recognition across history that the Author built into every other domain of this book. The invisible precedes the visible. The plan precedes the execution. And the story is still unfolding, page by page, because the Author hasn't written "The End" yet.

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## **Why Not Premillennialism?**

Premillennialism, especially in its dispensational form, is the eschatological system I grew up with. And I reject it for the same reason I reject every other system in this book that puts the visible before the invisible, the ceremony before the covenant, the institutional before the personal.

Dispensational premillennialism requires a physical kingdom. A literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, sitting on a physical throne in physical Jerusalem, governing physical nations with physical laws. It requires a rebuilt temple with reinstated animal sacrifices. It requires a distinction between Israel and the church as two separate peoples of God with two separate destinies.

And every one of those requirements puts the visible before the invisible. The physical throne before the spiritual reign. The rebuilt temple before the indwelling Spirit. The geopolitical nation before the covenant people. It's the same error this book has been attacking since Chapter 1, applied to eschatology. The kingdom is *not* of this world. The kingdom is within you. The

covenant precedes the ceremony, and the spiritual kingdom precedes any physical expression of it.

And the prophecy charts. The timelines. The date calculations. The newspaper exegesis. The entire infrastructure of dispensational eschatology has more in common with institutional formality than with personal covenant. It turns the book of Revelation into a puzzle to be solved rather than a story to be lived. And it has produced more false predictions and more embarrassed prophets than any other system in the history of the church.

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## **Why Not Postmillennialism?**

Postmillennialism teaches that the gospel will triumph progressively in history, that the world will get better and better, that Christian influence will spread until virtually the whole earth is Christianized, and that *then* Christ will return to a world that has already been won.

And I hold it with more sympathy than premillennialism, because at least it takes the *present* kingdom seriously. But it doesn't match reality. And it doesn't match the posture of this book, which is "*present the truth softly and wait on the Lord.*"

*"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."* (2 Timothy 3:1)

The world is not getting better. The gospel is not progressively winning. The gates of hell are not falling one by one in an orderly march toward global Christianization. The world is doing what the world has always done - some souls are

being called, others are hardening, and the Author is writing a story that includes *both* simultaneously.

Postmillennialism is triumphalist, and triumphalism is a kind of pride. It assumes we can *see* the direction of history by looking at the rendering. But we can't. Only the Author sees the filmstrip from above. The character in the story can't tell whether the plotline is rising or falling by looking at the current page. And the posture of a character who trusts the Author isn't triumphalism. It's faithfulness. Quiet, steady, soft-spoken faithfulness. Present the truth. Wait on the Lord. He knows the ending. We don't.

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## **AI and the Final Chapter**

I need to be transparent about something. What follows is speculation. Clearly labeled, clearly identified as my own observation, not a derivation from the framework. The framework derives the *nature* of the last things. This section speculates about a possible *mechanism*.

For all of recorded history, every "beast" - every totalitarian system, every empire, every surveillance state - has been limited by human bandwidth. The Roman Empire couldn't monitor every citizen because there weren't enough soldiers. The Soviet Union couldn't surveil every conversation because there weren't enough KGB agents. Even the most oppressive regimes in history had cracks, because the humans running the systems couldn't process the volume of information required for total control.

AI removes that limit.

For the first time in the history of the world, it is *technically feasible* to monitor every transaction, every conversation, every movement, every thought expressed digitally, in real time, without human bottlenecks. One system could mark every person. One algorithm could approve or deny every purchase. One network could identify every dissenter. Not because it's happening now. But because the technical infrastructure *exists* for the first time in human history.

*“And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*  
(Revelation 13:17)

For nineteen centuries, that verse was incomprehensible. How could any system control every transaction? Now it's not only comprehensible - it's technically trivial. A central digital currency, a biometric identifier, a social credit system, an AI-driven approval network. The technology exists. The implementation is a policy decision, not an engineering challenge.

I'm not saying AI *is* the beast. I'm not saying we're in the final chapter. I'm not building a prophecy chart with AI at the center. That would be doing exactly what I criticized the dispensationalists for doing. But I am observing that the historicist framework, which reads Revelation as a map of church history unfolding across centuries, has arrived at a point in history where one of the most specific and puzzling descriptions in the text - total economic control - is technically feasible for the first time. And the mechanism that makes it feasible is artificial intelligence.

That's not a prophecy. It's an observation. And the observation is worth noting, even with open hands, even with

uncertainty, even with the full acknowledgment that I might be wrong about the significance.

The Author is still writing. And the ink on the current page looks different than the ink on any page that came before.

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## **The Lens, Not the Calendar**

Here is what the framework *does* derive about eschatology, distinct from timing and details.

The invisible is more real than the visible. This means the kingdom is spiritual before it is physical. The reign of Christ is real even though you can't see it. The victory is accomplished even though the battle appears ongoing. Everything we've established in twenty-five chapters about the relationship between the invisible and the visible applies here.

The Author is writing the story. This means history is not random, not cyclical, and not meaningless. It is *going* somewhere. The filmstrip has a last frame. And the Author, who sees every frame simultaneously, is moving the narrative toward a conclusion that we can't see from inside the rendering but that is as certain as every other decree.

The three groups will be resolved. The elect angels. The elect humans. The reprobate. All three groups that we identified in Chapter 12 will be brought to their final state. The next two chapters address what that final state looks like. But the eschatological framework establishes that the resolution is coming, that it was planned before the first frame played, and that nothing in history is accidental or meaningless.

*“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”* (Matthew 24:36)

And the framework predicts its own limits. It can derive what the last things *are*. It cannot derive *when* they occur. And that’s not a flaw. That’s the Author deliberately obscuring the timeline because the point was never the calendar. The point was the Person.

Christ reigns now. Christ will return bodily. The dead will be raised. The three groups will be resolved. And the Author who planned every frame will bring every frame to its appointed conclusion.

Beyond that, I hold it with open hands. And I think that’s where the Author wanted His readers to stand.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“Premillennialism has dominated evangelicalism for two hundred years.”**

And historicism dominated for fifteen hundred years before that. Luther held it. Calvin held it. Knox held it. The Westminster divines held it. Dispensational futurism was invented by John Nelson Darby in the 1830s and popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible. The *novelty* is premillennialism, not amillennialism. If longevity is the argument, historicism wins by a millennium.

**“Why include eschatology if you hold it with open hands?”**

Because the framework has something to say about the *nature* of the last things even if the *timing* remains obscured. It

derives what heaven and hell are. It derives how the three groups resolve. It derives the relationship between the present kingdom and the final state. Open hands about timing doesn't mean silence about nature. The next two chapters demonstrate what the framework can derive without a prophecy chart.

**“AI and eschatology is speculation.”**

It is. I said so before I made the observation and I'm saying it again now. But the observation itself - that total economic surveillance and control is technically feasible for the first time in history, and that the mechanism is artificial intelligence - is not speculation. That's fact. The speculative part is the connection to Revelation 13. And I hold that connection with the same open hands I hold the rest of eschatology. But I'd rather observe it honestly and hold it loosely than ignore it entirely and pretend the technical landscape doesn't matter.

**“If Christ is reigning now, why is the world such a mess?”**

Because the kingdom is invisible, and you're looking at the rendering. The world has always been a mess. It was a mess in the first century when Christ said “My kingdom is not of this world.” The mess is the story. The kingdom is the thought behind the story. And the Author who reigns over the mess is the same Author who wrote the mess into the script for His purposes. The world doesn't have to look redeemed for the kingdom to be real. The covenant doesn't have to look like a ceremony to be a covenant.

**“Historicism is dead. Nobody holds it anymore.”**

Correction: nobody in *American evangelicalism* holds it anymore, because American evangelicalism was captured by dispensationalism. The position that Luther, Calvin, and the

Westminster divines held for centuries didn't stop being true because the twentieth century stopped believing it. Popularity is not an argument. If it were, the freewillers would be right about everything.

# Chapter 28: Heaven and Hell

## Are the Same Reality

I used to think of heaven and hell as two separate places. One up, one down. One bright, one dark. One where God lives and one where God doesn't. And that picture was comforting in its simplicity, because it meant the saved people would be *here* and the damned people would be *there*, and the two would never meet, and the suffering would be far enough away that you didn't have to think about it.

But then I read Revelation 14:10 and the whole picture collapsed.

*“The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 14:10)

In the *presence* of the holy angels. In the *presence* of the Lamb. Not away from. Not separated from. Not in a distant location where God's light doesn't reach. *In the presence*. The torment happens in proximity to God, not in distance from

Him. And once I saw that, I couldn't unsee it. And the framework started building something I never expected.

Heaven and hell are not two places. They are the same reality experienced through different firmware.

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## The Re-Rendering

Everything we've built in this book leads here. The physical world is a rendering of God's thought. The invisible is more real than the visible. The current rendering operates under constraints - what Chapter 3 called the rendering engine. It renders information into matter, thoughts into experience, the eternal into the temporal. And it does so with limitations. We see through a glass darkly. We process reality at low resolution. The rendering engine, for now, is constrained.

But Scripture promises a new rendering.

*"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."* (Revelation 21:1)

A new heaven and a new earth. Not a different place. A new *rendering* of the same reality. God's thought doesn't change - He doesn't throw away the old creation and start over with a different thought. He upgrades the rendering engine. The same information, rendered at full resolution. The same thought, without the constraints.

And when the rendering engine upgrades, every conscious being in the creation will experience the new reality. Every being. Not just the saved. Not just the elect. Every creature that exists as a thought in the mind of God will experience the new

rendering, because God doesn't stop thinking thoughts. The reprobate don't cease to exist. They can't. They are thoughts in the mind of God, and God doesn't forget. He doesn't discard. He doesn't annihilate. The thought persists. But the rendering upgrades.

And this is where the two seeds, the three groups, and the firmware determine everything.

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## **Same Reality, Different Firmware**

In Chapter 12, we established that there are three groups in the final creation. Elect angels, created impeccable, with firmware that was never corrupted. Elect humans, created sinful, redeemed by Christ, regenerated by the Spirit - their old firmware overwritten with new code. And the reprobate, created sinful, never redeemed, the old firmware the only firmware they have ever had or ever will have.

Now think about what happens when the rendering engine upgrades to full resolution.

The elect angels experience the new rendering through impeccable firmware. They always have. Nothing changes for them except that the rendering gets more glorious. The constraints are removed, and what was always true becomes more visible than ever. Glory upon glory.

The elect humans experience the new rendering through new firmware - the new man, the regenerated nature, the code that was installed at the new birth. The old firmware is gone. The sin nature is removed. For the first time, the elect human processes reality without interference, without corruption,

without the old code competing for control. What Paul called “the body of this death” is shed, and what remains is pure signal. New firmware at full resolution. That is heaven.

The reprobate experience the new rendering through old firmware - the sin nature, the corruption, the only code they have ever run. And here is the critical point: *the old firmware was never designed to process reality at full resolution*. It was designed for the constrained rendering. For the low-resolution, darkened-glass, temporal experience of this present age. And in this age, the old firmware functions. It produces misery and sin and rebellion, but it *functions* within the rendering constraints.

Remove the constraints, and the old firmware doesn't function anymore. It crashes. Not in the sense of ceasing to exist, but in the sense of experiencing reality it was never built to handle. Like running software written for a small screen on an infinite display. Every flaw is exposed. Every bug is visible. Every corruption is rendered in excruciating detail. Not because God is adding punishment from outside. Because the firmware is the punishment when the resolution increases.

The fire is God's presence experienced through corrupted firmware. Hell is not distance from God. Hell is proximity to God without the firmware to process Him. The same sun that melts wax hardens clay. Same sun. Different material.

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## **The Fire IS His Presence**

Let me drive this home, because it contradicts what most people have been taught.

The common teaching is that hell is separation from God. That the damned are sent *away* from God's presence into outer darkness, and the punishment is the absence of God. And 2 Thessalonians 1:9 is the verse they cite:

*"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."* (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

"From the presence of the Lord." And the assumption is that "from" means "away from." Sent away. Removed. Banished to a place where God isn't. But the Greek word *apo* can mean "proceeding from" just as easily as it can mean "away from." The destruction *proceeds from* the presence of the Lord. It comes *from* Him, not *away from* Him. The fire originates in His presence. The wrath proceeds from His glory.

And Revelation 14:10 is explicit. There is no ambiguity. The torment happens *in the presence* of the holy angels and *in the presence* of the Lamb. Not away from the Lamb. In the Lamb's presence. If Revelation 14:10 says the torment is in God's presence and 2 Thessalonians 1:9 seems to say it's away from God's presence, the clearer verse interprets the less clear. And Revelation 14:10 could not be clearer. The fire and brimstone and the Lamb are in the same room.

This fits the framework perfectly. If reality is a thought in the mind of God, then nothing exists outside of God's thought. There is no location that is "away from" God. There is no space that God does not fill. *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there"* (Psalm 139:7-8). Even in *hell*, God is there. The psalmist already knew what the framework derives: there is no

escape from God's presence because there is nothing outside of God's thought.

Hell is not the absence of God. Hell is the fullness of God experienced by those who have no capacity to receive Him. The fire is not *instead of* God. The fire *is* God, to those whose firmware cannot process Him as anything else.

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## The Saints Reign

And here is the part that makes people uncomfortable.

*“And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”* (Revelation 5:10)

*“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”* (Revelation 20:6)

*“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?”* (1 Corinthians 6:2-3)

The saints reign. Over the earth. With Christ. Judging the world. Judging angels. This is not metaphor. This is the final arrangement. In the re-rendered creation, the elect humans, clothed in new firmware, will reign with Christ over the vessels of wrath in the same reality. Not from a distance. Not in a separate location. In the *same* creation. The same rendering. Different positions within it.

And every knee will bow.

*“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And*

*that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:10-11)*

Every knee. Not willingly. Not in worship. But undeniably. At full resolution, there is no room for denial. The rendering makes the truth unavoidable. Every tongue confesses. Every knee bows. Not because the heart has changed - the old firmware doesn't change. But because the resolution is so high that the reality of Christ's lordship is impossible to ignore. It is compulsory acknowledgment, not willing worship. The saint falls on his face in joy. The reprobate falls on his face in subjection. Same floor. Same Lord. Different firmware.

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## **The Curse and the Condemnation**

And here is how the framework resolves a tension that has divided the church for centuries: is hell eternal conscious torment, or is it destruction? Is it everlasting punishment, or does it end?

Both. And the resolution is in the distinction between the curse of the law and the condemnation of the gospel.

We introduced them in Chapter 12, and now they reach their full expression. They are not the same. They do not have the same weight. And they do not have the same duration.

**The curse of the law** is the measured, proportional penalty for transgression. It corresponds to deeds. It has limits.

*“Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.” (Revelation 18:6)*

“According to her works.” “Double.” This is measured. Proportional. It can be quantified. The curse of the law falls on every person who breaks God’s law, and for the elect, Christ bore it fully. For the reprobate, it falls on them directly. And because it is measured, because it corresponds to deeds, it has a terminus. It runs its course. When the payment matches the debt, the curse of the law is exhausted.

*“Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”* (Matthew 5:26)

“Till thou hast paid.” Not “for eternity with no end.” Until the payment is complete. The curse of the law is real, it is painful, it is just. But it has an end. And the “destruction” passages in Scripture - the passages that sound like annihilation, like an ending, like a cessation of punishment - correspond to the measured curse completing its work.

**The condemnation of the gospel** is different. It is not measured. It is not proportional. It is eternal. The same gospel that is the savour of life unto life for the elect is the savour of death unto death for the reprobate (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). And that condemnation exceeds the curse of the law.

*“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”* (Daniel 12:2)

Shame. Contempt. *Everlasting*. Not torment. Not fire. Not active punishment. Shame and contempt. This is not the measured penalty for specific sins. This is the permanent state of being known for what you are, forever, under authority you cannot escape.

Think about what this means in firmware terms. The old firmware at full resolution produces *exposure*. Every hidden thing made visible. Every corruption displayed. Every rebellion laid bare. Not necessarily pain in the sense of active torture, but awareness. Total, permanent, inescapable awareness of the grace you cannot receive. The saints shining in glory around you. The Lamb on the throne above you. And you, fully known, fully exposed, fully under authority, with firmware that can never process any of it as anything other than what it is: the permanent display of what you are.

The “destruction” passages describe the measured curse of the law completing. The active torment runs its course. The debt is paid. The “eternal” passages describe the condemnation that remains. Shame. Contempt. Subjection. Awareness without capacity. Knowledge without reception. Proximity without communion.

Both true. No contradiction. The traditional debate between eternal conscious torment and annihilationism is a false dilemma. It’s both. Measured torment that ends, followed by eternal conscious *experience* of subjection and exposure. Not torture without end. But awareness without end. And in the economy of the framework, that is arguably worse. Because the torture at least implies engagement. The eternal state is simply *being known for what you are, forever*.

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## **Both Vessels Necessary**

*“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches*

*of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?” (Romans 9:22-23)*

Both vessels are necessary. Both display something about God that the other could not. The vessels of mercy display God’s grace and love. The vessels of wrath display God’s justice and power. And both are needed for the full display of God’s glory. Mercy is only visible *because* wrath is visible. Grace is only comprehensible *against the backdrop* of judgment. Light only means something because darkness exists.

This is not cruelty. This is authorship. The Author writes both characters because the story requires both. The hero is only heroic because the villain exists. The rescue is only meaningful because the danger was real. And in the final rendering, when the full story is told at full resolution, both vessels contribute to the display that the Author intended from the beginning.

The saints don’t look at the reprobate and think, *“It could have been me.”* It couldn’t have been. The seeds are different. The elect human was never a candidate for reprobation. The reprobate was never a candidate for election. They are different thoughts in the mind of God, authored for different purposes, carrying different firmware, destined for different experiences within the same reality. And the response of the saints to the judgment of the wicked is not somber reflection. It is praise.

*“And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said,*

*Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.”* (Revelation 19:1-3)

Alleluia. The saints say Alleluia over the judgment. Not because they are cruel. Because they are righteous. Because the new firmware processes judgment as justice, not as tragedy. Because the imprecatory Psalms - the Psalms that call down wrath on the enemies of God - are appropriate in the mouths of people who share God’s perspective on sin. There is no overlap between the seeds. There is no “it could have been me.” There is only the full display of God’s glory in both directions: mercy to the vessels of mercy, justice to the vessels of wrath. And the Alleluia is the appropriate response to both.

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## **What the Framework Cannot Derive**

And here is where honesty requires me to stop.

The framework derives the *nature* of heaven and hell. Same reality. Different firmware. Full resolution rendering. Three groups resolved. Curse and condemnation distinguished. Saints reigning. Reprobates subjected. All of this follows from the principles we’ve established across twenty-seven chapters.

But the framework cannot derive the *experiential content* of the reign. What it *feels* like to reign with Christ in a body of glory. What it is to see the Lamb face to face through new firmware. What the saints actually *do* in the new creation. The framework predicts its own limits here, and it does so honestly.

*“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Eye hath not seen. Ear hath not heard. Neither have entered into the heart of man. The experiential content of the final state exceeds the capacity of the current firmware to process. We can derive the *structure* - what the final creation looks like in theological terms. But we cannot derive the *experience* - what it feels like to live there. The current rendering engine cannot preview the next rendering engine's output. And any preacher who claims to know what heaven *feels* like is selling you a rendering of his imagination, not a revelation from Scripture.

The framework predicts its own limits. That's not a flaw. That's a feature. The system that claims to explain everything explains nothing well. The system that acknowledges what it cannot reach is honest about the boundary between derivation and speculation. And the boundary here is clear: the nature of the final state is derivable. The experience of the final state is not. And that's exactly what Scripture says.

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## Objections and Answers

**“Hell is separation from God - 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says so.”**

The Greek word *apo* in that verse can mean “proceeding from” just as naturally as “away from.” And Revelation 14:10 is explicit: the torment happens *in the presence* of the Lamb. If you have two verses and one is ambiguous and one is not, the unambiguous verse controls the interpretation. Revelation 14:10 is not ambiguous. Hell is in God's presence, not away from it.

**“Saints reigning over the damned sounds cruel.”**

To the old firmware, it does. But the seeds are different. The saints don't look at the reprobate and see people who could have been them. They see vessels of wrath that were authored for a different purpose. And their response - recorded in Revelation 19:1-4 - is not sorrow. It is Alleluia. Triumphant praise for righteous judgment. The imprecatory Psalms are the voice of people who share God's perspective on justice. If that sounds cruel, the problem isn't with the framework. The problem is that the old firmware is still running.

**“The framework can't describe what the reign looks like. So how do you know it exists?”**

Because Scripture says it does. Revelation 5:10. Revelation 20:6. 1 Corinthians 6:2-3. The saints reign. That is revealed. What I can't derive is the *experiential content* - what the reign feels like, what the saints do, what glory looks like from the inside. “*Eye hath not seen*” (1 Corinthians 2:9). The framework predicts its own limits. That's honesty, not weakness. Any eschatological system that claims to know what heaven *feels* like is speculating beyond the text.

**“Eternal shame without eternal torment isn't really hell.”**

Being fully known for what you are, forever, in the presence of a glory you can never participate in - that is worse than fire. Fire implies engagement. Shame implies exposure. The eternal state isn't a reduced punishment. It's the permanent condition of old firmware at full resolution: total awareness, total subjection, total inability to receive the grace that is visible everywhere. That isn't a lighter sentence. That's the heaviest sentence the framework can derive.

## Chapter 29: The Higher Resolution Rendering

I need to confess something before I start this chapter. For most of my life, I thought the resurrection body was a miracle. Something God *added* to the human body. Something supernatural layered on top of the natural. As if Jesus walked out of the tomb and God had bolted on a set of supernatural abilities - the ability to walk through walls, the ability to appear and disappear, the ability to ascend into the sky - like upgrades to a base model. Resurrection body 2.0. More features. Better specs.

And I was wrong. Not about the resurrection. About what the resurrection *is*. The resurrection body isn't God adding things to the human body. It's God *stopping subtracting*. The miraculous properties of the resurrection body aren't additions. They're what happens when the rendering constraints are removed. The old rendering engine was limiting the body. The new one stops limiting it. And what's left is what was always there.

## The Prototype

Christ's resurrection body is the prototype. The first one off the line. The model that every other resurrection body will match. And it has four properties that tell us everything we need to know about the higher resolution rendering.

### **It is physical.**

This is the first thing. And it is the most important thing. Because every Gnostic instinct in us wants to make the resurrection body less physical, not more. We want to spiritualize it. We want to say the body was transcendent, ethereal, ghostly. And Jesus goes out of His way to demonstrate the opposite.

*“And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.”* (Luke 24:41-43)

He ate fish. Broiled fish and honeycomb. After the resurrection. A spirit doesn't eat. A ghost doesn't chew. Jesus ate because He had a real body with real physicality that could process real food. He wasn't demonstrating something symbolic. He was demonstrating something biological. The resurrection body eats. It digests. It is *more* physical than what came before, not less.

And Thomas.

*“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.”* (John 20:27)

Reach hither thy finger. Thrust it into my side. This is a physical body with physical wounds that a physical hand can

touch. The nail prints are still there. The spear wound is still there. The body carries the marks of the crucifixion in the resurrection. Not because the body is incomplete or broken. Because the marks are part of the information. They are part of who Jesus is. The wounds are the signature of the covenant, rendered in flesh, carried into eternity. The body doesn't shed the cross. The body *wears* the cross, permanently, as proof of what was accomplished.

**It is unconstrained.**

*“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.”* (John 20:19)

The doors were shut. And Jesus stood in the midst. He didn't knock. He didn't open the door. He was simply *there*. And if you're tempted to say this means the body is immaterial, remember what we just established. He ate fish. Thomas touched Him. The body is physical. But it walks through locked doors. Which means locked doors are a rendering constraint, not a feature of reality. In the old rendering, walls are barriers. In the higher resolution rendering, walls are not barriers. The wall didn't change. The body's relationship to the wall changed. The constraint was removed.

*“And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.”* (Luke 24:31)

He vanished. Disappeared. Was present and then was not present. Again, not because the body is immaterial. Because locality - being stuck in one place - is a rendering constraint. The old rendering engine says you can only be in one location at a time. The new rendering engine doesn't impose that

constraint. Jesus can appear, be present, eat fish, teach, and then vanish. Not because He's flickering in and out of existence. Because He's operating at a resolution where the rules that bind our bodies don't bind His.

And He ascended.

*“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.”*  
(Acts 1:9)

Gravity is a rendering constraint. The old rendering engine says bodies fall. The higher resolution rendering doesn't impose that rule. Jesus ascended because the constraint that holds us down was removed. The same body that ate fish rose into the sky. Physical *and* unconstrained. Not one or the other. Both.

**It is recognizable but different.**

And here is the detail that means the most to me.

*“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.”* (John 20:15-16)

Mary stood at the empty tomb, weeping, and she didn't recognize Jesus. She thought He was the gardener. She looked right at Him and didn't know who He was. And then He said her name. *Mary*. One word. And she recognized Him instantly. Not by His face. By His *voice*. The higher resolution body looked different enough that a woman who loved Him didn't recognize Him by sight. But the voice was the same. The signature was the same. The *person* was the same.

And on the road to Emmaus.

*“And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.”*  
(Luke 24:15-16)

They walked with Him for miles. They talked with Him. They reasoned with Him. And they didn't recognize Him. For miles. Until the moment He broke bread.

*“And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.”* (Luke 24:30-31)

Their eyes were opened. Note that carefully. The text doesn't say Jesus changed. The text says their *eyes* were opened. The change was in their perception, not in His appearance. His rendering was already at higher resolution. Their firmware needed a moment to adjust. They recognized Him in the breaking of bread - a gesture, a habit, a signature of who He was. Not the surface. The signature.

This is what the higher resolution rendering preserves. Not the surface appearance. Not the exact arrangement of features. The *person*. The voice. The habits. The way He breaks bread. The way He says your name. The higher resolution rendering doesn't make you *less* you. It makes you *more* you. It strips away the rendering constraints that were limiting the expression of who you are, and what's left is the clearest, most faithful rendering of the original thought that God ever expressed.

Mary recognized Him by His voice. The Emmaus disciples recognized Him in the breaking of bread. The higher resolution body preserves the *signature*, not the surface.

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## What the Resurrection IS

Now let me say what this is in the language of the framework.

The resurrection is not a miracle in the traditional sense of God intervening from outside to do something the system can't do on its own. The resurrection is God upgrading the rendering engine to be more faithful to the original thought. The current rendering engine limits. It constrains. It takes the infinite thought that is a person and renders it into a body that gets tired, gets sick, ages, and dies. Not because the thought is limited. Because the rendering engine is limited. The thought has always been more than the body could express.

The resurrection body is what happens when the rendering engine stops limiting. The “miraculous” properties - walking through walls, appearing and disappearing, ascending, being unconstrained by gravity and locality - are not additions. They are what was *always* true about the thought, now expressed without constraint. The old rendering engine was subtracting from the thought. The new rendering engine stops subtracting. And what's left is the full thought, rendered faithfully, at the resolution the Author always intended.

*“It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”* (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)

Look at the pairs. Corruption and incorruption. Dishonor and glory. Weakness and power. Natural and spiritual. Every pair is the same information at two different rendering resolutions. The thought doesn't change. The rendering

changes. Corruption isn't something that was *added* to the body after the fall. Corruption is a rendering constraint that will be *removed* at the resurrection. Weakness isn't a property of the person. Weakness is a property of the rendering engine. Remove the constraint, and what was always there - incorruption, glory, power - becomes visible.

“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” And here is where people get confused, because they read “spiritual body” and think “immaterial body.” But that is not what Paul is saying. A “spiritual body” is a body animated and governed by the Spirit. The “natural body” is animated by the soul - the *psyche*, the natural life, the old firmware. The “spiritual body” is animated by the Spirit - the *pneuma*, the new firmware, the power of God Himself. Same body. Different operating system. The body doesn't become less physical. It becomes less *constrained*. The Spirit doesn't make the body immaterial. The Spirit makes the body *free*.

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## Not Gnosticism

And I need to address this directly, because someone will read this chapter and say I'm teaching Gnosticism. That I'm saying the physical is bad and the spiritual is good. That I'm saying we escape the body into some higher spiritual reality.

I'm saying the exact opposite.

Gnosticism taught that matter is evil, that the body is a prison, that the goal of salvation is to escape the physical and ascend to the spiritual. The Gnostics despised the body. They called it corrupt, shameful, a trap for the divine spark.

The framework of this book says matter gets *upgraded*. The rendering *improves*. The body doesn't go away. The body gets *better*. Jesus after the resurrection is MORE embodied, not less. He eats fish. He is touched. He carries wounds. He is physical in ways that make the disciples uncomfortable - they think they're seeing a ghost, and He corrects them by eating in front of them.

*“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”* (Luke 24:39)

A spirit hath not flesh and bones. Handle me and see. This is the anti-Gnostic statement of all time. The resurrection body is flesh and bones. Touchable. Handleable. Physical. The disciples wanted to spiritualize it, and Jesus said no. Touch me. I'm real. I'm more real than I was before.

The higher resolution rendering is more physical, not less. It is more embodied, not less. The Gnostic escape from matter is the opposite of the resurrection. The resurrection doesn't free you from the body. It frees the body from its *constraints*. The caterpillar doesn't escape the body. The caterpillar *becomes* the butterfly. Same creature. New form. More beautiful. More capable. More alive.

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## **No Marriage in Heaven**

*“For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”* (Matthew 22:30)

And most people read this verse with grief. As if Christ is telling them they'll lose the most intimate relationship they've

ever known. As if heaven means giving up the person you love most. As if “no marriage” means *less* connection, not more.

But the framework says otherwise.

Marriage is a rendering. Marriage is the visible expression of an invisible reality. And the invisible reality is the union between Christ and His church. Paul says this explicitly in Ephesians 5:31-32: “*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*”

Marriage is the *shadow*. The union between Christ and His people is the *substance*. In the old rendering, we need the shadow. We need the visible picture. We need the physical union of husband and wife to preview the spiritual union that we can't yet fully experience. Marriage is the low-resolution rendering of a high-resolution reality.

In the higher resolution rendering, the shadow is unnecessary. Not because the reality it pointed to is gone. Because the reality it pointed to has *arrived*. The fullness of communion with Christ, the total intimacy of being fully known and fully loved, the unmediated presence of the Bridegroom with the bride - all of this is present at full resolution. And against that reality, the shadow is no longer needed. Not because it was taken away. Because it was *fulfilled*.

“No marriage in heaven” doesn't mean we lose our relationships. It means we lose the *form* our relationships currently take, because we gain something so much larger that the old form can't contain it. Every intimate connection that marriage previewed - the knowing, the being known, the vulnerability, the comfort, the joy of another person's presence -

becomes permanent, universal, and unmediated. Not between two people in a covenant. Between every soul in the body of Christ. What marriage gave us in part, the resurrection gives us in full.

This is not loss. This is upgrade. The child who mourns losing her bicycle when she learns to fly has not lost anything worth keeping.

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## **The Author's Thought at Full Resolution**

Let me bring it together.

Every person is a thought in the mind of God. The current physical body is the rendering of that thought at limited resolution. The rendering engine constrains the thought - adds corruption, weakness, dishonor, mortality, gravity, locality, all the limitations of the old rendering. And for a time, the thought experiences itself through those constraints.

The resurrection is the Author upgrading the rendering engine. Not to change the thought. To render the thought more faithfully. What was always true about the person - the *real* person, the thought in God's mind - becomes visible for the first time. The constraints fall away. The body becomes what it was always meant to be. Not something different. Something *truer*.

And the higher resolution rendering is MORE real, not less. More physical, not less. More embodied, not less. Jesus ate fish. Thomas touched His wounds. Mary heard His voice. The Emmaus disciples recognized His gesture. The signature persists. The person persists. The constraints are what disappear.

The Gnostics got it backwards. They thought the body was the problem. The body was never the problem. The rendering engine was the problem. And the Author is upgrading the engine.

*“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* (Philippians 3:20-21)

Fashioned like unto *His* glorious body. The prototype. The model. The same resurrection body that ate fish and walked through walls and carried nail prints and spoke Mary’s name. That body is the template. And every elect human, every vessel of mercy, every thought in the mind of God who was redeemed by Christ and regenerated by the Spirit, will be rendered at the same resolution.

The thought will finally match the rendering. And the rendering will finally match the thought.

And what that will *feel* like, the framework cannot say. Because eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

But the Author knows. He’s always known. Because we were always the thought. And the thought was always this.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“The resurrection body walks through walls. That’s not really physical.”**

Jesus ate fish. Thomas touched His wounds. He had flesh and bones and said so out loud: “*A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*” (Luke 24:39). The body is MORE physical, not less. Walking through walls isn’t a lack of physicality. It’s the removal of a rendering constraint. Walls-as-barriers was a property of the old rendering engine, not a property of reality. When the engine upgrades, the constraint is gone. The wall is still there. The body simply isn’t bound by it anymore.

**“No marriage in heaven’ means we lose our relationships.”**

We lose the *shadow*. The substance remains, and it’s bigger. Marriage is the low-resolution rendering of the union between Christ and His people. In the higher resolution rendering, the substance arrives and the shadow is no longer needed. Every intimate connection that marriage previewed - the knowing, the being known, the vulnerability, the joy - becomes permanent, universal, and unmediated. Not between two people in a covenant. Between every soul in the body of Christ. You don’t lose what marriage gave you. You get more of it, from every direction, forever.

**“This sounds like the Gnostics escaping the physical into the spiritual.”**

It’s the opposite. The Gnostics said matter is evil and the body is a prison. The framework says matter gets *upgraded*. The rendering *improves*. Jesus ate fish after the resurrection. The higher resolution is more embodied, not less. The Gnostic wants to escape the body. The Christian gets a *better* body. The caterpillar doesn’t escape the cocoon into nothingness. The caterpillar becomes the butterfly. Same creature. More alive.

**“If the ‘miraculous’ properties are just the removal of constraints, are miracles during Jesus’ earthly ministry the same thing?”**

Yes. Every miracle Jesus performed was a preview of the higher resolution rendering. Walking on water - gravity constraints removed. Healing the sick - corruption constraints removed. Raising the dead - mortality constraints removed. The miracles weren’t additions to the system. They were glimpses of what the system looks like without the constraints. The Author briefly ran the rendering engine at a higher resolution, inside the low-resolution world, to show what the final product will be. Every miracle is a trailer for the resurrection.

**“You say the framework predicts its own limits about what the resurrection feels like. But can’t we imagine it?”**

You can imagine. But your imagination runs on old firmware. *“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man”* (1 Corinthians 2:9). The experiential content of the higher resolution rendering exceeds what the current firmware can process. It’s like asking a character in a two-dimensional drawing to imagine three dimensions. The character can gesture at it. The character can use metaphors. But the character cannot *experience* it from inside the drawing. The upgrade has to happen before the experience is available. And it will. The Author has already written the page where the rendering changes. We just haven’t turned to it yet.

## **Chapter 30: Enough for Me - Grace Is Bigger Than Our Tribe**

I need to confess something before I earn the right to say any of this.

For most of my life as a believer, I was the man with the sharpest sword and the coldest eyes in the sovereign grace world. If you were an Arminian, I had you pegged before you finished your first sentence. Freewiller. Unbeliever. Lost. Done. It didn't matter what you said about Christ. It didn't matter if you wept over your sin or showed every evidence of love for the Lord and His people. If your theology was wrong on the sovereignty of God in salvation, I could dismantle your position in five minutes flat. I knew the arguments cold. I could quote the Scriptures, lay out the logical implications, and drive the point home until there was nothing left to say. And when my opponent had no answer, I felt *good* about it. I thought I was defending the Gospel. I thought I was contending for the faith.

But what I was really doing, at least in part, was feeding the pride monster. I was so right, that I was *wrong*. And I didn't even see it.

I've been called a compromiser more times than I can count. I've been called an arch-heretic of the first order. I've been called an unbeliever by people who claim to believe in sovereign grace. I've had men I considered friends preach against me from pulpits without ever picking up the phone. And the show must go on. Because none of that changed the truth. And none of it stopped me from following the truth wherever it led. Even when it led somewhere I didn't want to go.

And it led me here. To the last chapter of the hardest book I've ever written. After twenty-nine chapters of the sharpest theology I know how to hold, the last word is love. Not despite the theology. *Because* of it.

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## **The Sharpest Doctrine Produces the Widest Arms**

You have read this book. You know what it says.

It says reality is a thought in the mind of God. It says the decrees are supralapsarian, that God ordained everything from the end to the beginning, that permission is sovereignty with plausible deniability. It says God creates evil. It says the elect and the reprobate are two different seeds, ontologically distinct, a rock and an apple in the same biological suit. It says the image of God belongs to the elect only. It says the reprobate are devils in human form. It says there is no federal headship, no common grace, no offer of the Gospel to the non-elect. It says the law is

entirely finished. It says baptismal regeneration is a lie, and both paedobaptist and Baptist mandates are condemned. It says heaven and hell are the same reality experienced through different firmware.

That is the hardest set of doctrines anyone has put in print in a very long time. And I believe every word of it. I have defended every word of it. I have shown you the Scriptures, the logic, and the lived experience that produced it. And I have not softened a single edge.

And now I am going to tell you that if someone comes to me confessing Christ and resting in Him alone for salvation, I call them brother. Regardless of what theological label they wear. Even if they call themselves an Arminian. Even if they sit in a Catholic pew. Even if they raise their hands in a Pentecostal worship service. Even if they belong to a Methodist church or a Lutheran congregation or a denomination whose official confession I would take apart point by point.

I am not saying those institutions are true representations of the Gospel. Most of them are not. I am saying that God's elect are *scattered*. They are scattered across every camp, every denomination, every tradition, every continent. The Spirit blows where He wills, and He has never once asked an institution's permission before regenerating a soul. There are elect in churches whose doctrinal statements would make me cringe. And there are reprobate in churches whose confessions are flawless. The institution does not save. Christ saves. And Christ has His people everywhere.

And I need you to understand: that is not a contradiction. That is not a departure from anything I've written in this book. It is the *conclusion* of everything I've written in this book. The

sharpest doctrine produces the widest arms. And if you can't see how, you haven't followed the logic to where it leads.

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## The Hinge

Here is the argument. And it turns on a single sentence. A sentence I arrived at slowly, over years, through the painful process of watching the sovereign grace world eat itself alive while the people I had dismissed as theological enemies were producing the fruit of the Spirit in ways that put me to shame.

The sentence is this: *if correct doctrine does not save, then incorrect doctrine does not necessarily damn.*

Let me say it again, because it is the hinge of everything that follows. If correct doctrine does not save you, then incorrect doctrine does not necessarily damn you. Christ saves. Christ alone. Not your theology *about* Christ. Christ Himself.

Now, every sovereign grace believer I know would affirm the first half of that sentence. Of course correct doctrine doesn't save. We preach that. We write articles about it. We warn people not to trust in their knowledge. I wrote about it years ago in "Your Knowledge Won't Save You," where I opened with John 5:39 and told the sovereign grace world that the Pharisees thought their knowledge of the Scriptures *was* eternal life, and that some of us were making the same mistake. I believed every word of it then. I still do.

But here is where we have to be honest about where that belief leads. Because if correct doctrine doesn't save, if your understanding of unconditional election and limited atonement and irresistible grace is not what purchased your redemption,

then incorrect doctrine cannot be what forfeits it. Christ's blood is what saves. Christ's righteousness is what justifies. Christ's substitutionary death is what satisfies the wrath of God. And none of those things depend on your ability to articulate how they work.

*"It is finished."* (John 19:30)

Finished. Not mostly finished. Not finished pending your correct doctrinal formulation. Not finished contingent on your ability to explain the five points. *Finished*. And if it is finished, then it is finished for every soul Christ died for, regardless of whether that soul can pass a theology exam.

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## **Sovereignty Taken to Its Logical End**

Now I need to make something very clear, because some of you are already composing your response before you've finished reading. What I am about to say is not a departure from sovereign grace theology. It is sovereign grace theology. It is the same thing I have argued for twenty-nine chapters, followed all the way to where it leads. And where it leads is a place that makes a lot of sovereign grace people very uncomfortable. But I didn't invent the logic. I just stopped fighting it.

If salvation is entirely the work of Christ, from beginning to end, with no contribution from man whatsoever, then what saves a person is not their understanding of how salvation works. What saves a person is Christ. His blood. His righteousness. His death. His resurrection. The work was accomplished before any of us drew our first breath. And if the work is His and not ours, then a person can be saved by Christ while still being confused about *how* Christ saves. That is not a

contradiction. That is sovereignty. God does not need your theological precision to accomplish His purposes in a soul.

I have argued in this book that salvation is entirely monergistic. That God does it all. That man contributes nothing. That the elect are regenerated by the sovereign act of the Spirit, not by their own decision, their own will, or their own theological understanding. I have insisted on this. I have driven it into the ground. And now I am going to follow it to its conclusion.

If God does it all, then God does it all. Including the part where He saves people who don't yet understand how He saves them. Including the part where He regenerates a soul that is still using the wrong theological vocabulary. Including the part where He opens eyes that are still wearing the wrong doctrinal prescription. The Spirit blows where He wills (John 3:8). Not where our doctrinal statements permit Him to blow.

Think about the thief on the cross.

*“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:42-43)

What did that man know about the doctrines of grace? What did he know about unconditional election, or limited atonement, or irresistible grace, or the perseverance of the saints? He knew *nothing* about those things. He had no systematic theology. He had no confession of faith. He had no doctrinal exam to pass. He had Christ. And Christ said, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

That was enough. Christ was enough.

And the Philippian jailer. “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30-31). Paul and Silas did not say, “First, affirm that God from eternity past has unconditionally chosen certain ones unto salvation, that Christ died for the elect only, that faith is God’s sovereign gift imparted by the Holy Spirit when He regenerates the individual, and that the atonement is particular and effectual.” They did not say that. They said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” And the man was saved.

Was all of that Calvinistic doctrine *true*? Every word. I believe it all. But Paul did not make it a condition of saving faith. And neither does Scripture anywhere else. There is a difference between the doctrines that *describe* how God saves and what a person must believe to *be* saved. The doctrines of sovereign grace describe the mechanics of salvation with beautiful precision. They are true. They are precious. They magnify the glory of God. But they are not the *object* of saving faith. Christ is.

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## The Test

So here is the question I now ask. And it is the only question that matters.

Who are you resting in?

Not “can you articulate unconditional election?” Not “do you understand the logical order of the decrees?” Not “can you explain the difference between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism?” I have spent twenty-nine chapters on those

things, and I believe they are true and important and worth every word. But they are not the test.

The test is: who are you resting in? What is your hope? Where is your confidence? And if someone says to me, “Christ alone, His righteousness alone, not my own,” that is enough for me. I call them brother. I embrace them. And I leave the rest to the Lord.

*“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.”* (Romans 14:4)

The man you are judging does not belong to you. He belongs to God. And God is able to make him stand. Not you. Not your doctrinal examination. God.

And John wrote, *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”* (1 John 3:14). Notice what John says the evidence of passing from death unto life is. It is not doctrinal precision. It is not your ability to articulate the five points. It is love. Love for the brethren. And if love is the evidence of life, then a lack of love is the evidence of death. I would encourage every man who has ever written off a fellow confessor of Christ as an unbeliever over a doctrinal disagreement to sit with that verse for a long while and let it do its work.

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## **What I See Now**

I used to be the guy who drew a hard line. And I drew it because the logic was clean. Too clean. Clean logic has a way of making

you feel *righteous* when what you really are is *cold*. I could win every argument. I could expose every error. I could dismantle every Arminian in every forum and chat room on the internet. And I was *miserable*. Because there is no joy in being the doctrine police. There is no peace in spending your life making sure everyone around you has their theology exactly right before you will acknowledge them as a brother in Christ.

The Pharisees won every argument too. They had the Scriptures memorized. They had the law down cold. And they couldn't see the Messiah standing right in front of them.

And the more I sat with that, the more I had to reckon with something I'd been avoiding. If the fruit of the Spirit is the evidence of the Spirit's work, and I was seeing that fruit in people whose theology I disagreed with, what did that mean? Was I really prepared to look at someone who was resting in Christ, who loved the Lord, who showed kindness and humility and gentleness and the marks of the Spirit's work, and tell them they were an unbeliever because they couldn't articulate the doctrine of unconditional election?

I wasn't. Not anymore.

Because here is what I saw. The sharpest theological minds I knew, men who could run circles around any Arminian in a debate, were producing *rotten fruit*. Cruelty. Arrogance. Slander. Division. They could quote John Gill and Augustus Toplady all day long but couldn't sit across from a hurting person and just listen. They turned sovereign grace into a club to beat people with instead of a comfort to rest in. And some of the people I had dismissed as freewillers, people whose theology I would have torn apart in a heartbeat, were producing the fruit of the Spirit in ways that shamed me.

*“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”* (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

Nothing. All your knowledge, all your correct theology, all your ability to defend the faith. Without love, it amounts to *nothing*. Paul said it. Not me.

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## **The Confusion, Not the Rebellion**

Now, I want to be very precise about what I mean, because there is a distinction here that matters.

Even Ron Hanko, writing from the Protestant Reformed tradition, acknowledged in “Can Arminians Be Saved?” that a person who *truly and consistently* believes they are saved by their own willing and running cannot be saved. He was right. A hardened, consistent freewill who insists that God cannot save without human permission, who genuinely believes that man’s will is the deciding factor in salvation, who has thought through the implications of that position and embraces them, that person has dethroned God and enthroned man. That is a different gospel. I have not moved on that.

But Hanko also wrote this: “Nevertheless, many people inconsistently confess both grace and works. They ascribe their salvation wholly to God’s grace, and yet speak of having chosen Christ, of having free will. . . Usually this is the fault of the teaching they have received.” And he was right about that too. Most people who call themselves Arminians don’t actually

*believe* what consistent Arminianism teaches. They use freewill language because that is the language they were raised with, not because they have thought through the implications. They say “I chose Christ” and then in the very next breath thank God for saving them as though the whole thing was His doing. And in their *hearts*, it was. They just don’t have the vocabulary yet.

I have watched this happen more times than I can count. Someone will use every wrong phrase in the book. They will say “I accepted Christ” and “God gave me a free will” and “I made a decision.” And my trained sovereign grace ears will bristle at every syllable. But then you sit down with them. You actually *talk* to them. You ask them what they actually believe. And they will tell you, “It’s all Him. I didn’t deserve any of it. He saved me. I can’t explain it. He just did.” And they mean it. They are describing their experience of regeneration in the only language they have ever been taught. They are confused, not rebellious.

And it is our job to be patient with them. Not to write them off.

In Joshua 22, the tribes of Israel nearly went to war with the children of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh over an altar they built in Gilead. The rest of Israel saw it and assumed it was idolatry. They were furious. They were ready to fight their own brethren over it. And in their minds, they were righteous. They had seen the consequences of idolatry. They knew what was at stake. But when they finally stopped and *asked* their brethren what the altar was for, they found out it wasn’t idolatrous at all. It was a memorial. A witness between them and their children that they too belonged to the Lord. They had misjudged the heart of their brethren. And they nearly went to

battle over something that could have been cleared up by talking.

How many times have we done this in the sovereign grace world? How many times have we heard someone use the wrong phrase, seen them hold the wrong position on some secondary matter, and immediately marched into battle without ever sitting down to ask them what they actually believe?

I know I have. And it grieves me.

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## **Christ Saves Through the Cracks**

Here is the truth that the entire system of this book demands, if you follow it honestly.

Christ saves through the cracks in bad theology just as easily as He saves through the front door of good theology. He is sovereign over all of it.

If I have argued anything in this book, I have argued that God is sovereign over *everything*. That nothing happens outside His will. That nothing catches Him off guard. That He authors every frame of the story, including the frames where His children hold confused and incomplete theology. And if that is true, then Christ's blood does not become less effectual because the person it was shed for cannot explain the five points of Calvinism. The blood works. The righteousness is imputed. The Spirit regenerates. And He does all of it without consulting our doctrinal statements.

Frank Tate put it beautifully in "Doctrine vs. Saving Faith." He wrote, "Doctrine knows that all men are sinful. Saving faith believes that *I* am the sinner, the chief of sinners. Doctrine

knows that Christ died for sinners. Saving faith believes that the only way the sin of a sinner like me could be forgiven is if Christ died for *me*.” Do you see what he is saying? Doctrine is about propositions. Saving faith is about *personal trust*. A person can have genuine, personal, saving trust in Christ while still being confused about the propositions that describe how that trust came to be. The trust is what matters. The trust is the evidence of the Spirit’s work. Not the theological vocabulary.

Don Fortner said it plainly: “You don’t get to Christ by doctrine. You get to doctrine by Christ. Saving knowledge is not what you know, but *who*.”

And Spurgeon saw it too. His argument in “Are You Truly an Arminian?” was that the Arminian is usually woefully *inconsistent*. He may call himself a freewiller, but when he gets on his knees to pray, he prays like a Calvinist. He doesn’t thank God for his own free will. He thanks God for saving him. Spurgeon called Arminian theology heresy, and I agree with him on that. But he did not write off every Arminian as unregenerate. He was hard on the *doctrine* and patient with the *people*. And for that, he still gathers criticism from the heresy hunters to this day.

*“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”* (1 Corinthians 4:7)

That verse should humble every sovereign grace believer into silence when it comes to pronouncing judgment on another man’s soul. What do you have that was not given? What truth do you hold that you arrived at by your own strength? None of it. All of it is a gift. And if it is all a gift, then the man who has

not received the *same* gift as you is not your enemy. He is someone the Lord has not yet taught. Or someone the Lord is teaching differently. Or someone the Lord is teaching slowly. And who are you to rush the work of God?

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## **Why This Is the Point of the Whole Book**

I told you in the prologue that after holding the hardest theology I know how to hold, the last word is love. And I meant it. This chapter is not an afterthought. It is not a softening at the end to make the hard stuff go down easier. This chapter is the *point*.

Because here is what I have learned in more than two decades of writing theology. The man who holds the hardest positions should be the man who extends the most grace. And the reason is not complicated. If salvation is entirely Christ's work, with no contribution from man, then the man who truly believes that has no reason to hold anyone's theology against them. Not their bad theology. Not their confused theology. Not their inherited-from-a-false-religious-environment theology. Because *none of it* is a condition of salvation. Christ is the condition. Christ did it. Christ finished it. Christ paid for it. And Christ applies it by His Spirit to whom He pleases, when He pleases, in whatever state of doctrinal confusion He finds them in.

That is not a soft position. That is the hardest position in this book. Because it requires you to let go of the one thing sovereign grace people hold tightest: the right to decide who is in and who is out.

You are not the gatekeeper to heaven. Neither am I. "*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man*

*which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:11). I do not know what is in another man’s heart. I do not know the work that the Spirit is doing in someone’s life that I cannot see. I know what I have been shown. And I know that I did not deserve to be shown any of it.

God was patient with me when my theology was a mess. God was patient with me when I was a freewillier who didn’t know any better. God was patient with me when I was a puffed up Calvinist who thought his knowledge made him righteous. And God is patient with me now, as I continue to grow and learn and shed the things that don’t belong. If God can be that patient with me, who am I to be impatient with someone else?

*“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”* (Romans 2:4)

If I am going to err, and I will err, because I am a man and I do not have perfect knowledge, then let it be love. Let it be on the side of embracing someone who confesses Christ rather than shutting the door on them because their vocabulary doesn’t match mine. A loveless guard at the gospel gate is the greater wound. That is what I believe now. And I believe it because sovereign grace *demand*s it.

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## **The Song That Says It Better**

I wrote a song about all of this. It’s called “Enough for Me.” And the chorus says it better than this whole chapter does:

*If you're resting in Christ alone, not in something you've done or shown, then brother, that's enough for me.*

That is where I have landed. And I am at peace with it. Not because I have compromised. Not because I have gone soft. But because I followed the doctrine I have preached for most of my adult life all the way to where it leads. And where it leads is a table wide enough for everyone who trusts Christ, whether they can articulate the mechanics or not.

*“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”* (John 13:35)

Not by your ability to win arguments. Not by your doctrinal precision. Not by how many Arminians you have refuted. By your *love*.

And sovereign grace, real sovereign grace, the kind that says God does it all and man does nothing, that kind of grace should produce more love than any other theology on earth. Because the man who truly believes God does it all has nothing left to hold over anyone. He can only look at every other confessor of Christ and say, “If God saved me through the mess of my own ignorance, He can save you through yours.”

*“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”* (1 John 4:7-8)

Grace is bigger than our tribe. And love is the thing that stays.

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## **Objections and Answers**

**“You’ve compromised the Gospel.”**

I have followed it to its conclusion. The Gospel is that Christ saves His people by His work alone. If that is true, then conditioning salvation on correct *knowledge* of His work is the same error as conditioning salvation on correct *behavior*. You have swapped one human condition for another. The Arminian says you must choose correctly. The knowledge-Calvinist says you must *understand* correctly. Both are adding a human condition to what Christ accomplished alone. I am the one who has removed the human condition. You are the one who has kept it.

**“You’re saying doctrine doesn’t matter.”**

I am saying doctrine matters *deeply*. The doctrines of grace are the truth. God is sovereign over salvation. Christ died for the elect. Faith is a gift, not a work. Regeneration precedes belief. The atonement is particular and effectual. I have written twenty-nine chapters defending these things. I still preach them. I still publish them. But the doctrines of grace describe *how* God saves. They are not the *object* of saving faith. Christ is the object. A person can trust the right Savior while having incomplete understanding of the mechanics of that salvation. That is not a compromise of doctrine. That is a recognition that doctrine and saving faith, while related, are not the same thing.

**“If Arminians can be saved, why preach sovereign grace at all?”**

Because it is *true*. And the truth glorifies God. And knowing the truth produces deeper joy, stronger assurance, and greater worship. The doctrines of grace are not a ticket to heaven. They are the richest possible *experience* of the heaven you are already going to. You preach them because they are true and because they magnify the glory of God, not because they are the entry

requirement. A man who has never tasted Burgundy can still enjoy wine. But the man who has tasted it knows what wine was *meant* to taste like. Sovereign grace is the Burgundy of theology. Preach it because it is glorious. Not because it is the gate.

**“You’re being soft.”**

I was hard for most of my life as a believer. It produced rotten fruit. The sharpest theological minds I knew were the cruelest people I knew. Men who could articulate every point of TULIP with pinpoint precision and whose lives were marked by arrogance, slander, and division. And some of the sweetest believers I have ever met, people whose love for Christ was palpable and whose humility made me jealous, couldn’t tell you what the word “predestination” means. *“By their fruit ye shall know them”* (Matthew 7:20). You tell me which group looked more like Christ. I already know my answer. And I spent most of my life on the wrong side of it.

**“Ron Hanks said consistent Arminians can’t be saved.”**

And I agree with him. A person who *truly and consistently* believes God cannot save without human permission, who has thought through the implications of that position and embraces them, has denied the heart of the Gospel. But most Arminians are not that person. Most have never thought through the implications. Most are using language they inherited from bad teaching. Most, when you sit down and actually talk to them, will tell you it is all Christ, all His doing, all of grace. They just do not have the words. And it is the height of arrogance to damn someone because they lack a vocabulary that God has not yet given them.

**“This is the most dangerous chapter in the book.”**

No. Chapter 12, “The Two Seeds,” is the most dangerous chapter in this book. The chapter that says the reprobate are devils in human form, that the image of God belongs to the elect only, that the seeds are ontologically different. *That* is dangerous. This chapter is the most *loving* chapter in this book. And the fact that love feels dangerous to some sovereign grace ears is exactly the problem this chapter addresses. When love looks like compromise to you, the problem is not the love. The problem is the lens.

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## **The Last Word**

I started this book with a sentence. Everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, sustained by His will, authored by His purpose, and held together by personal covenants of love.

I end with love. Not because I am softer than I used to be. But because the sentence *demand*s it. If everything is held together by personal covenants of love, then love is the final word. Not doctrine. Not precision. Not the ability to articulate the mechanics of salvation. Love.

The hardest system in print. The widest arms.

*“If I’m gonna err, let it be love.”*

That is sovereign grace taken all the way home.

## Epilogue: The Sentence Again

We started with a sentence. And after thirty chapters and every hard doctrine I know how to hold, we end with the same one.

*“Everything that exists is a thought in the mind of God, sustained by His will, authored by His purpose, and held together by personal covenants of love.”*

That is the system. One sentence. Every domain. Zero contradictions. The field is Christ.

I applied it to creation, and it produced idealism without pantheism. I applied it to the decrees, and it produced supralapsarianism without apology. I applied it to the people of God, and it produced the two seeds without flinching. I applied it to the covenants, and it produced personal promises instead of legal contracts. I applied it to justification, and it produced eternity past, not a courtroom moment. I applied it to the law, and it was finished. I applied it to the church, and the institution crumbled but the body stood. I applied it to the end, and heaven and hell were the same reality rendered through

different firmware. I applied it to the last chapter, and the sharpest doctrine produced the widest arms.

One sentence. And it held.

I did not build this system. I noticed it. The connections were already there in the Scriptures, written by an Author who sees every frame of the story at once. I just traced the lines. And when I stepped back and looked at the whole thing, I saw that it was one thought. Not a collection of doctrines bolted together by a man at a desk. One thought, in the mind of God, expressing itself in every direction at once.

We are just God's eternal thoughts collapsed in a moment in time.

That is not a cold proposition. It is the warmest truth I know. Because if you are a thought in the mind of God, then you were never an accident. You were never a surprise. You were never a problem to be solved or a contingency to be managed. You were *intended*. Thought before you were born. Known before the first frame of history played. Loved in the only way that matters, by a God who does not change His mind because He authored His mind before time began.

And if I have learned anything in more than two decades of building this framework, in the late nights and the arguments and the losses, it is this: the truth does not need me to protect it. It does not need my sharp edges or my debate skills or my ability to dismantle an opponent. It needs to be said. Clearly. Without apology. And then it needs to be *left* with the Lord, who is sovereign over who hears it and who doesn't.

I will present the truth softly and wait on the Lord.

That is the posture. Not loud. Not combative. Not tribal. Soft. Patient. And then wait. Because the Author knows who is

going to read this book. He knew before I wrote the first word. He knows who will accept it and who will throw it across the room. He knows who will be changed by it and who will use it against me. And He authored all of that too.

I am at peace with it.

To Him Be the Glory Forever and Ever!!!

Grace and Peace, Brandan

# Appendix A: Modified Covenant Theology - The 13 Distinctives

The following chart compares four major covenant systems across the distinctives that define Modified Covenant Theology. MCT was articulated around 2004 and named by Brandan Kraft. The theological raw material came largely from Bob Higby and from Scripture. The framework was stress-tested against Dr. Richard Bacon and defended against Phil Johnson.

#	Distinctive	Covenant Theology (CT)	Dispensationalism (DT)	New Covenant Theology (NCT)	Modified Covenant Theology (MCT)
1	<b>Order of Decrees</b>	Infralapsarian (most)	Varies	Varies	Supralapsarian – the ON true supralapsarian system. C

#	Distinctive	Covenant Theology (CT)	Dispensationalism (DT)	New Covenant Theology (NCT)	Modified Covenant Theology (MCT)
					decreed events from end to the beginning
2	<b>Justification</b>	At the cross or at faith	At faith	At faith	From eternal God NEW viewed Hebrew people as condemned
3	<b>Sanctification</b>	Progressive	Progressive	Progressive	Positional Continual Christ IS sanctification No progress holiness.
4	<b>The Law</b>	Moral law binding (third use)	Law ended for church age	Law ended (varies)	ALL law Christ is end of the law for righteousness The believer is dead to ALL law.
5	<b>Liberty</b>	Regulated by moral law	Free from Mosaic law	Free from Mosaic law	“Believe in Jesus and you please the Spirit” The Spirit writes the commandments on the heart

#	Distinctive	Covenant Theology (CT)	Dispensationalism (DT)	New Covenant Theology (NCT)	Modified Covenant Theology (MCT)
					Rebuke imposers
6	<b>Federal Headship</b>	Adam as legal representative	Adam as head of humanity	Rejected (varies)	Rejected creates e person s directly. intermed No legal machine
7	<b>Adam's Nature</b>	Created righteous, fell	Created righteous, fell	Created righteous, fell	Created s not right The fall revealed nature al inclined sin.
8	<b>Satan's Origin</b>	Created righteous, fell	Created righteous, fell	Created righteous, fell	Created d not fallen Isaiah 14 about Ba not Satan Ezekiel 2 about Ty
9	<b>The Two Seeds</b>	Not emphasized	Israel vs. church	Not emphasized	Ontologi different = seed of woman. Reproba seed of the serpent. different

#	Distinctive	Covenant Theology (CT)	Dispensationalism (DT)	New Covenant Theology (NCT)	Modified Covenant Theology (MCT)
					rock from apple.
10	<b>The Gospel</b>	Offered to all	Offered to all	Proclaimed	Proclaimed offered. Is a gift, not duty. No "human responsibility" concerning salvation
11	<b>Common Grace</b>	Affirmed	Affirmed	Varies	Denied. No provision for reprobate common grace. Can grace be Christ's bride
12	<b>Covenant of Redemption</b>	Affirmed	Not emphasized	Not emphasized	Affirmed three persons the Trinitarian covenant the salvation the elect the foundation
13	<b>Progressive Revelation</b>	Progressive administration of one covenant	Progressive dispensations	New replaces old	Progressive REVELATION not progressive covenant

#	Distinctive	Covenant Theology (CT)	Dispensationalism (DT)	New Covenant Theology (NCT)	Modified Covenant Theology (MCT)
					always p The reso increas

## The Core Distinction

CT says you're a member of a covenant class. MCT says you're a specific, personal thought of God – an eternal promise made to YOU, not to a category you belong to.

Every other system requires a legal mechanism between God and His people. MCT says the mechanism IS the promise. And a promise from a timeless God to a thought in His own mind doesn't need a courtroom. It just needs love.

# Appendix B:

## Infralapsarianism vs. Supralapsarianism - Selection vs. Election

This comparison is derived from Bob Higby’s definitive study on [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org). The table maps every major distinction between the two positions.

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Category	Infralapsarianism (Selection)	Supralapsarianism (Election)
<b>Direction of Planning</b>	Left to right (beginning to end). God creates, then reacts to the fall.	Right to left (end to beginning). God starts with the destination and plans backward.
<b>The Fall</b>	Permitted. God allowed Adam to fall.	Authored. God ordained the fall for the purpose of redemption.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Infralapsarianism (Selection)</b>	<b>Supralapsarianism (Election)</b>
<b>Election</b>	God selects from a fallen mass. Chooses some, passes over others.	God elects from eternity. The end was the starting point of the plan.
<b>The Decree Order</b>	1. Create. 2. Permit fall. 3. Elect some to salvation. 4. Provide redemption.	1. Glorify Christ and His people. 2. Provide redemption. 3. Ordain the fall. 4. Create.
<b>Evil</b>	Permitted by God. God allows but does not author evil.	Authored by God. "I make peace, and create evil" (Isaiah 45:7).
<b>God's Sovereignty</b>	Sovereign over salvation, but evil operates with a degree of independence ("permission").	Sovereign over ALL things. Nothing operates independently. Permission is sovereignty with plausible deniability.
<b>Adam</b>	Created righteous. Fell by free will.	Created sinful. The fall revealed a nature already inclined toward sin.
<b>Satan</b>	Created righteous. Fell by pride.	Created evil. Never righteous. Isaiah 14 is about Babylon.
<b>The Cross</b>	God's response to the fall. Remedy for a problem.	God's purpose from eternity. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the

Category	Infralapsarianism (Selection)	Supralapsarianism (Election)
		world (Revelation 13:8).
<b>The Reprobate</b>	Passed over. Could have been saved but weren't chosen.	Authored for a different purpose. Never candidates for salvation. Vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Romans 9:22).
<b>Equal Ultimacy</b>	Denied. Election is active, reprobation is passive (preterition).	Affirmed. Both election and reprobation are positive decrees of equal ultimacy.
<b>Gordon Clark's Principle</b>	Not applied.	"The logical order of any plan is the exact reverse of its temporal execution." The first step in planning is the end to be achieved.

## The Key Insight

Infralapsarianism is really *selection*, not *election*. It says God looked at a fallen mass and selected some for salvation. But selection implies a pool of candidates who already exist. Election implies a decree that precedes the candidates. God didn't choose from a group. He authored the group according to the choice. The end came first. The means followed.

See Bob Higby, “Infralapsarianism vs. Supralapsarianism: Selection vs. Election” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org)), and Gordon Clark, “Supralapsarianism” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org)).

# **Appendix C: The Dead Sea Scrolls - Grace Gems and the Teacher of Righteousness**

## **The Discovery**

In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd discovered clay jars in caves near Qumran, along the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Inside the jars were scrolls that had been hidden for over two thousand years. The scrolls contained biblical manuscripts, sectarian rules, hymns, and theological writings from a Jewish community that existed from roughly the second century BC to the first century AD.

The community was led by a figure known only as the Teacher of Righteousness. We don't know his real name. We know that he taught the sovereign grace of God, that his followers fled into the desert to escape the Pharisees, and that his writings were sealed in caves and forgotten for two millennia.

## The Theology

The theological content of the Qumran scrolls is explicitly predestinarian. The following excerpts are from the Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns) and the Community Rule:

*“I know by Your understanding that it is not by human strength . . . a man’s way is not in himself, nor is a person able to determine his step. But I know that in Your hand is the inclination of every spirit . . . and all his works You have determined before ever You created him.”*

*“You alone have created the righteous one, and from the womb You established him to give heed to Your covenant at the appointed time of grace . . . But the wicked You created for the time of Your wrath, and from the womb You set them apart for the day of slaughter.”*

These texts teach:

- **Absolute sovereignty** over every person’s way and works.
- **Two seeds** created differently from the womb – the righteous established for grace, the wicked created for wrath.
- **Predestination before creation** – “before ever You created him.”
- **No human contribution** – “not by human strength.”

This is the same theology presented in this book. Not because we borrowed from the scrolls. Because both derive from the same Scriptures.

## **The Suppression**

Modern scholars have largely dismissed the predestinarian theology of the scrolls. The emphasis in Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship has been on the archaeology, the textual variants, the community's practices, and the historical context. The *theology* – the explicit, unambiguous predestinarianism – is routinely downplayed, recontextualized, or ignored.

The Pharisees of the first century suppressed this theology with political power. The scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries suppress it with academic indifference. The method changed. The result is the same.

## **The Significance**

The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate that sovereign grace theology is not a later invention of Augustine, Calvin, or the Reformers. It is the *original* Hebrew theology. The predestinarianism that the church attributes to Calvin in the sixteenth century was already present in Jewish nonconformist communities two centuries before Christ. The Pharisees corrupted it with Greek philosophy. The scrolls preserve what the Pharisees tried to destroy.

This matters because it places the framework of this book in a historical lineage that stretches far beyond the Reformation. The Teacher of Righteousness, Luther, Toplady, Gill, Higby, and this book are all standing in the same stream. Different

centuries. Same truth. Same suppression. Same Author behind it all.

## **Further Reading**

- Bob Higby, “Grace Gems from the Dead Sea Scrolls” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org))
- Bob Higby, “Dead Sea Scroll Evidence” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org))
- Brandan Kraft, “Grace Gems from the Dead Sea Scrolls” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org))

# Appendix D: The Feelings Architecture

This appendix summarizes the four-layer model of the mind developed in Chapters 16 and 17, and the neuroscience mapping that supports it.

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## The Four-Layer Model

Layer	What It Is	Brain Structure	Function
<b>Hardware</b>	The brain itself	Neurons, synapses, physical organ	Same for every human. Computes, doesn't think.
<b>Firmware</b>	Boot parameters / presuppositions	Amygdala, deep limbic conditioning	Two chips: old man (flesh) + new man (Spirit). Compete for

Layer	What It Is	Brain Structure	Function
			control of the OS.
<b>OS</b>	The subconscious processing engine	Limbic system (hippocampus, hypothalamus, insula)	Runs on whichever firmware is dominant. Generates feelings.
<b>Application</b>	The conscious mind	Prefrontal cortex	Propositional, linguistic, inspectable. Thinking about thinking.

## How Feelings Work

1. **Input arrives** (experience, event, thought)
2. **Firmware processes it** (old chip or new chip, competing)
3. **OS generates a feeling** (raw signal, no words)
4. **Feeling sent up to the application layer** (pre-verbal, felt, non-propositional)
5. **Conscious mind interprets** (assigns a label, a cause, a meaning)
6. **Interpretation becomes a thought** (propositional, linguistic)

**The critical insight:** Step 5 is where most people go wrong. The feeling is real. The story the conscious mind tells about the

feeling might be completely off. “I feel guilty, therefore I sinned” – no. The guilt may be old firmware processing pleasure as danger. The signal is real. The interpretation may be fiction.

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## Three Channels to the Conscious Mind

**Channel 1: Old firmware through the OS.** The flesh. The old man. Produces feelings of lust, envy, pride, anger, self-pity. Bubbles up from the old firmware, through the subconscious, arriving at the conscious mind as desires and impulses.

**Channel 2: New firmware through the OS.** The Spirit. The new man. Produces feelings of conviction, gratitude, love, peace, the desire for holiness. Bubbles up from the new firmware, through the subconscious, arriving at the conscious mind as yearnings and convictions.

**Channel 3: The Spirit’s hardware interrupt.** Direct intervention. Bypasses the normal channels. A direct impression on the application layer that says “stop” or “go” or “pay attention.” Rare. Not the normal mode. But real, and every believer who has walked with God long enough knows what it feels like.

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## The Discernment Question

For any given feeling: **which channel sent this?**

- Old firmware? Recognize and resist.
- New firmware? Recognize and follow.

- Hardware interrupt from the Spirit? Recognize and obey immediately.

Same feeling-type experience. Three different sources. Three different responses. This discernment is the difference between wisdom and confusion.

## The Neuroscience Mapping

Brain Structure	Role	Layer
<b>Amygdala</b>	Threat, fear, emotional salience. 12ms response time.	Firmware
<b>Hippocampus</b>	Emotional memory, pattern matching.	Firmware/OS
<b>Hypothalamus</b>	Autonomic responses (fight/flight, arousal).	OS
<b>Insula</b>	Reads body state, creates conscious experience of feeling.	OS -> Application bridge
<b>Anterior cingulate cortex</b>	Conflict detection (two firmware chips sending different signals).	OS -> Application bridge
<b>Prefrontal cortex</b>	Conscious reasoning, interpretation, labeling. 500ms response time.	Application

**Key fact:** The firmware (amygdala) fires in 12 milliseconds. The application layer (prefrontal cortex) takes 500 milliseconds.

Feelings arrive before thoughts. Always. By design. God put the firmware below the reasoning on purpose. This is engineering, not a flaw.

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## **The Theological Connection**

Feelings are God's eternal thoughts collapsed into electrical signals in the brain. The chain:

God thinks -> information -> quantum bits -> electrical signals -> firmware fires -> feeling arrives -> conscious mind interprets -> builds theology about God thinking.

The invisible (the feeling) precedes the visible (the interpretation). Substance over formality, all the way down to the neuron.

# Appendix E: The Phil Johnson Exchange

## Context

In January 2005, Phil Johnson, executive director of Grace to You and the right-hand man of John MacArthur, published a series of articles on his blog identifying what he called “hyper-Calvinism.” He created a public list of websites he considered to represent the worst of this tendency.

Pristine Grace was on the list.

Johnson wrote that [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org) was “*hyper-Calvinism of the most virulent kind*” and that the site was “*doing more to befoul and degrade the doctrines of grace than practically any other Web site*” he had seen. He described me as “*naturally drawn to radical ideas.*”

He wrote all of this without ever contacting me. Without a phone call. Without an email. Without a single conversation.

## The Response

I was twenty-nine years old. I had no seminary degree. I had no denominational backing. I had a website I built myself, a set of convictions I had built from Scripture, and a framework I had been developing with Bob Higby for several years.

I sat down and wrote a point-by-point response titled “Hyper-Calvinism is the Truth!” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org)). The response was civil, thorough, and direct. It addressed every one of Johnson’s accusations, defended the positions he attacked, and challenged him to engage with the arguments rather than the labels.

Johnson never responded.

## The Positions Defended

The article defended:

1. **The denial of common grace.** God’s provision to the reprobate is common bounty, not grace. Calling it grace profanes Christ’s love for His bride.
2. **The denial of the “well-meant offer” of the gospel.** The gospel is proclamation, not offer. Christ accomplished salvation. The preacher announces what was done. There is no offer contingent on human response.
3. **The denial of human duty/responsibility to savingly believe.** Men are accountable (answerable) but not responsible (duty-bound) to believe. A reprobate cannot be duty-bound to believe a gospel that was not intended for him.

4. **The identification of Pristine Grace theology as sovereign grace, not hyper-Calvinism.** The label “hyper-Calvinist” is used by mainstream Calvinists to distance themselves from positions they find socially unacceptable but cannot refute from Scripture.

## **The Significance**

This exchange marks the moment when the framework that would become this book was publicly attacked by one of the most visible figures in Reformed Christianity. I was twenty-nine, with no credentials and no backing. I answered every accusation from Scripture. And Johnson’s refusal to engage with the response was itself a vindication. He had no answer. And in more than two decades since, neither has anyone else.

The full article is available on [pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org).

See also: “Modified Covenant Theology” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org)), which laid out the full MCT framework publicly for the first time, and “Confession of a Hyper-Calvinist” ([pristinegrace.org](http://pristinegrace.org)), written in November 2004.

# Appendix F: Scripture Index

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV). References are listed by book, chapter, and verse, with the chapter(s) of this book where each passage appears.

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