The Living God

-- A Living Faith

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# Faith, Reason and Revelation

*“By faith, we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”* -- Hebrews 11:3 [1]

The things that are seen are mere appearances, which point to a deeper unseen reality [2]. In order to know this deeper reality, there must be an uncovering, or revelation of the unseen truths. This revelation is a gift from God, received by faith [3].

In the Old Testament, we are told to search for the hidden treasures of wisdom: *“If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God.”* - Proverbs 2:4,5; and to seek for the deeper levels of understanding: *“The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding.”* - Proverbs 4:7.

Also, the gospel of John makes the distinction between “appearances” and “truth”, when relating witnesses and the truth to which they point. *“The very works that I do testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.”* - John 5:36; *“The scriptures … testify about Me.”* – John 5:39.

Knowledge and wisdom are acquired by rational thought, in conjunction with a trusting acceptance of what is presented to us. We live, at every level of existence, by this combination of reason and faith. Faith is not an alternative to reason, but a necessary partner. It is the trusting and accepting attitude that allows us to sympathetically listen and to hear what the creation says to us, which is to say, listening to the voice of God.

In ordinary life, reason is simply the formation of perceptions and simple concepts - recognizing things and placing them into categories - to serve the practical purposes of daily life. The faith required, at this level, is simply to believe what we see, to trust our senses, and to believe what we have been told by others. This is the natural knowledge and faith by which all people function in this world, at a worldly level. It is a conviction that the world, at its deepest level, is truly “real” [4].

Those who seek a deeper level of understanding, in the realm of science, must be more diligent and sophisticated in their thinking, using higher levels of abstraction and mathematical models. They must also have a deeper faith in the ultimate orderliness and beauty of the natural world, and be open to a highly abstract unseen reality.

This deeper understanding from science reveals that the world of objects that appear to have substance and solidity is in fact best represented by highly abstract mathematical theories. It is a reality far removed from ordinary experience, and often presenting unsolvable paradoxes. Science believes in electrons and quarks, described as uncertain and random entities that cannot be precisely defined nor predicted. Science believes in this unseen and inconceivable reality, because it holds to the faith that all observations must display coherence, harmony, and mathematical “beauty”.

Finally, reaching beyond the objectives of science, there is a universal human compulsion to integrate all human experience, both within ourselves and in the world, into something beautiful and meaningful [5]. We ask the ultimate questions of meaning and purpose, which require a faith in God. More particularly, this quest is fulfilled only by faith in a personal God who is love: the God revealed in Christian scripture. [6]

God has revealed Himself in many ways (Hebrews 1:1-2). *“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”* – Psalm 19:1-2; and the creation reveals His invisible attributes (Romans 1:20). There is also special revelation through the prophets, partly available in written scripture. And, above all, we have the most perfect revelation in Jesus Christ, and His continuing revelation by the Spirit.

Although this knowledge of God is revealed through appearances, through language and conceptual knowledge, the final reality of God surpasses anything that can be seen, or conceptually known, or expressed in words. The meaning of His name, I AM, is generally understood as "I will be what I will be". We can know Him primarily by observing what He does, but He can never be adequately conceptualized or described in language. Attempts to identify Him too closely with such descriptions would be a form of idolatry. The closest that we can come to knowing Him truly is by knowing Jesus Christ as a person (see John 14:8-11). This is an experiential knowledge developed by relationship. Everything else is merely a witness or a pointer. [7]

Why do some believe, and others do not? The atheist does not believe, because he chooses to not ask the deeper questions or to seek the higher goals. He dismisses the notion of ultimate meaning and purpose, and lives life as a game. Romans 1:18-23 says they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. John says the darkness opposes and hates the light (John 1:19-21), because its deeds are evil; and they are unable to see the Father in Jesus because they are not “of God” or “of the truth”, but are rather “of the world” (John 8:47). It is the willful defiance of God, a defiant rejection of anything ultimate, which makes most people blind to God. Sin enslaves them to the vanity of Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 - where there is no purpose and no meaning.

But the one who takes the “leap of faith”, committing to live in earnest, thereby opens his ears to hear the voice of God. *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* - Proverbs 9:10.

In summary, three points can be made about the relation of faith, reason and science:

1. There is no conflict between faith and reason; they necessarily work together
2. There is no conflict between science and theology, in either content or method
3. The primary barrier to Christian faith is not reason but moral will, under the tyranny of sin

Notes for Chapter 1

[1] In Hebrews 11:3, there is a parallelism with the following correspondences:

 Worlds ---- things seen

 Prepared by ---- made

 Word of God ---- things not seen

In Hebrews 11, the “unseen” refers to future eschatological hope.

[2] As seen in Acts 17:22-28, the Greeks apprehended this deeper reality, but without understanding; so they acknowledged an unknown God. Paul declared to them that this God has revealed Himself in Jesus. The intuition that the world we see must be intelligible, meaningful and purposeful, amounts to the conviction of this underlying absolute reality. It is the conviction that the phenomenal is meaningfully related to the noumenal.

The compelling motivation for the arts is to probe the unseen, to bring something of this reality into our awareness. This has the potential of leading us to God, e.g. the use of music in worship, and poetry in prophecy and preaching. But the arts are often misused as a substitute for divine revelation and for God, which is idolatry. This is similarly the motivation for the sciences, which can also lead one either to God, or into idolatry.

 [3] An example of receiving revelation, as a gift of God, is Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:16,17. The alternative is man-made religion (Colossians 2:23), which opposes revelation, and rejects the true God. Cain and Abel are examples of “man-made religion” versus “true religion”. Abel’s sacrifice was better than Cain’s, because it was by faith (Hebrews 11:4).

Karl Barth discussed this distinction between revelation and “religion” in the Church Dogmatics, Sect. 17. This idea is popularly expressed by saying Christianity is “not a religion, but a relationship”. Knowledge of God and reconciliation to God are not by human construction or effort, but by receiving God’s gift of revelation, by faith. Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 points to this grace of God as the means of escaping the vanity and despair of life “under the sun”, to find joy and meaning in life. The humility to receive this grace is like that of a child, by which we enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3).

[4] This ordinary, practical approach is “naïve realism”. The more thoughtful and deliberate approach, to apprehend the “unseen”, has been described as “critical realism”, a position defined and developed by Ben F. Meyer, J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, F. LeRon Shults and Alister McGrath. Critical realism rejects the Enlightenment view that all knowledge can be built upon a foundation laid by human science and reason. But it also avoids post-modern relativism and despair of absolute truth. It asserts both the intelligibility of the world and the fallibility of human knowledge. It is the view that we can acquire true knowledge of an absolute reality, by the grace of God, but the conceptual formulations of that knowledge will always be an imperfect, provisional and partial approximation. We can have a practical confidence in the knowledge given to us, but with the humility to recognize that *“now we see in a mirror dimly… now I know in part…”* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

[5] The deepest level of knowledge, requiring faith to accept God’s revelation, is necessary to attain full personal integrity and harmony with the world. This integrity and harmony, which are necessarily interdependent, constitute the ultimate criterion of truth. We are driven to seek full coherence in both our internal self and in our knowledge of the external, objective reality. Job is a great example of one who passionately contended for and clung to his integrity. The demand for integrity is also grounded in the revelation that “God is One”, and the greatest commandment: “love God with all your heart, soul and mind”.

 In order to attain comprehensive integrity and harmony, the grounding of knowledge must be God-centered (theo-centric), which means it must be Christo-centric, and it must be absolutely dependent upon His grace of revelation. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We must first “believe”, before we can understand (Augustine). This is radically different from the human-centered (humanistic) approach of the enlightenment and modernism, which asserts autonomous reason as the foundation of knowledge.

[6] The primary intent of scripture is to reveal God Himself – that we may know Him. Its purpose is not to teach history according to modern standards of “history”, nor to teach science according to modern ideas of “science”. It accepts the existing knowledge and beliefs of the original authors and recipients, and uses them to convey a knowledge of God. This means that our hermeneutics (methods of study and interpretation) must distinguish the witness from the One witnessed to, and distinguish the locution (what is literally said) from the illocution (the intended meaning and message). It is the illocution that has full authority and is fully trustworthy, that makes the scriptures *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness…”* (2 Timothy 3:16).

We are to use all the historical and literary critical tools available to ascertain the intended theological message, subject to the demands of systematic theological coherence (“rule of faith”). This is possible because of the gift of the Spirit: the one Spirit who inspired the authors and who also indwells those who read and hear. Just as the Spirit enables us to perceive the deeper reality behind all appearances, He enables us to see the authoritative message behind the written word.

Just as there can be no true knowledge of God without His revelation, neither can one grasp any ultimate meaning or purpose to life without revelation (as attested in Ecclesiastes). Therefore, standards of morality and goodness are obtained only by divine revelation, not by human reason. In Luke 18:19, Jesus says we have no human basis for judging Jesus Christ as good. Only the Father has the goodness to make moral judgment. Similarly God contests Job’s presumption to be a “fault-finder” (Job 40:20). And Paul says only God’s judgment counts (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

[7] To quote Athanasius: “It would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name God from his works alone and call him Unoriginate.”

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# Incarnation

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God….And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.…*” - John 1:1,14

The Word (*Logos*) is the creative word by which God speaks all things into existence. It is the word of authoritative decree: *“God said, ‘Let there be light…’ and there was light”.* *Logos* is also associated with Wisdom and the Law (Torah). Proverbs 8:22-31 presents Wisdom as the agent of creation:

 *“Then I was beside Him, as a master workman…” --* Proverbs 8:30a

And in Psalm 119, the Law is the word that establishes the creation:

*“Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.*

*Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations;*

*You established the earth, and it stands.*

*They stand this day according to Your ordinances,*

*For all things are Your servants.”* - Psalm 119:89-91

For the Jews in the early church, *logos* had a meaning similar to the Hebrew word “*dabar”*, which refers to the meaning and purpose of things. Creation by “*dabar*” indicates creation by the intentional, purposive will of God. Wisdom, also, pertains to understanding the meaning and purpose of things. Similarly, the Greeks understood *logos* as the principle by which all things are rationally ordered, like the modern concept of “laws of nature”. And so, the Word is the mind and rationality of God, the meaning and purpose of all things, the will and the means by which God is creating and sustaining all things and leading the world to its intended destiny [1].

And this Word “became flesh.”

How can the Word of the transcendent, eternal God “become” the concrete human flesh of Jesus? What this means is that the Word assumed the flesh of Jesus, and thereby became actualized in his human body. In Jesus Christ there is a perfect union between the Word, as the purpose-driven will of God, and the fully human Jesus, who expressed and manifested that will. In His perfect obedience to the Father, the Son is the perfect revelation of God. God’s will is realized and His truth is revealed in the words He spoke in the flesh, and in the deeds He performed in the flesh [2].

To be a true Christian, one must accept the full humanity of Jesus Christ. Many would be believers have resisted this teaching, but the apostle John says it is essential to the faith:

“*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God…”* – 1 John 4:2-3

Since He was fully human, Jesus’ obedience was a matter of daily decision and submission, throughout His life. This is described in Hebrews as a “learned obedience”:

“*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation…”* - Hebrews 5:8-9

In the life of Jesus, by His perfect faithfulness and purity, the *Logos* was perfectly manifested. It is by His faithful obedience to the *Logos* that the *Logos* became flesh. Jesus Christ is therefore the living image of the living God.

*“God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.”* - Hebrews 1:1-3a

In the New Testament scriptures, we have testimony of eyewitnesses who came to know and to accept Jesus, who recognized who He was. They saw the glory of the Father in Him. They saw the wonderful and awesome revelation of God, a fullness of revelation that no one had ever seen before. It was a revelation of grace and truth (John 1:14).

For us, too, the way to know God is by knowing Jesus; the way to have a relationship with God is in a relationship with Jesus; the way to be God-centered is by being Christ-centered [3]. Jesus Himself stated it clearly:

 “*No one knows the Father except the Son, and any one… to whom the Son makes Him known”* -- Matthew 11:27

It is therefore only by being “in Christ” that we receive God’s salvation and blessing (Ephesians 1:3), and that we can effectually serve Him (John 15:4). It is only in Him that we have life (John 11:25; Galatians 2:20).

The perfect union between God and Man established in Jesus, the unity between the Father and the Son, is the basis by which all who are “in Christ” are reconciled to God (John 17:23). Those who are “in Christ” thereby share and participate in His fellowship and knowledge of the Father. This union is the basis of redemption. It accomplishes a reconciliation that we could never achieve on our own. Only God could establish this redeeming union, and He did so in Jesus Christ.

*“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that* ***God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself****, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”* - 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Notes for Chapter 2

[1] To say that the “Word was God” is to say that everything that can be known about God consists in His will and the actualization of His will: “I will be what I will be”.

[2] We are to have a dynamic understanding of the unity and identity of “God” and “Word”: there is a unity of will and action between the Father and the Son, just as the Trinitarian unity of three “persons” as One God lies in the unified interactivity of the three persons.

[3] Knowledge of God and reconciliation to God are solely through Jesus, by the God-initiated incarnation. It is in Jesus, God-incarnate, that God reveals Himself and that He reconciles us to Himself. Neither knowledge nor reconciliation can be attained by human philosophy or by man-made religion. Nor should we attempt to conceive of the second person of the Trinity (the Word) apart from the human Jesus (*Logos Asarkos*, see note 2 of chapter 3).

It is nevertheless necessary to maintain the absolute freedom of God relative to the creation. He did not need to create, in order to “actualize” Himself. It was rather the reverse: He freely defined Himself, through the man Jesus, in order to fulfill His free intention to create/to reveal/to reconcile. There is thus a paradox, that God’s means of creation was through that which arose out of creation. The eternal pre-existent Son or *Logos*, through whom all things were made, is defined by the man Jesus. This paradox can be resolved by the concept of reverse causality. More particularly, the resurrected Christ is retro-actively the eternal pre-existent Son / Logos, as suggested by Romans 1:4.

This is the basic idea of “Open Theism”: that God interacts with the creation, adapting Himself to creation, allowing Himself to be in some respects defined by creation, but in a manner that does not infringe upon His basic freedom as the loving creator. Accordingly, we can say that the “immanent” trinity is the “economic” trinity, in that the true God in Himself is the living, dynamic God revealed in history, and especially in the man Jesus.

The Son's "fullness of deity" (Col 1:19), which enables Him to reconcile and to save, is not a matter of full equality of attributes nor of equality of order, but rather consists of His perfect representation of God, and in His being granted all authority. His submissive obedience in the hierarchy does not detract from His faithfulness as a true revelation of God, or from His full authority to act as God. By His full delegated executive power and authority, all things are created through Him, and all those given to Him by the Father shall be saved through Him.

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#

# Trinity

The primary teaching about God is that He is One, and there is no other:

*"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the LORD is one.”*-- Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29

But He is also revealed in scripture, especially in the New Testament, as three “persons” – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of the three is distinct, yet they are each spoken of as God. They are therefore a three-in-one Godhead: the Trinity. [1]

“*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*” - Matthew 28:19

“*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*” – 2 Corinthians 13:14

*“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”* – Ephesians 1:17

“*who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood*” - 1 Peter 1:2

**Father and Son**: The second person is the Son, Who is a distinct person begotten from the Father and obedient to the Father.

*“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* – Matthew 26:39

*“We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* – John 1:14

*“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.’”* – John 5:19

*“The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his* work*.”* – John 14:10

*“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”* – 1 Corinthians 8:6

The Son is also one with the Father, dwelling in the Father, and the Father in Him – perfectly representing the Father and exercising the full authority of the Father. He is therefore God. [2]

*“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son.”* – Matthew 11:27

Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* – Matthew 28:18

 *“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”* – John 8:58

 *“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”* – John 5:26-27

*“But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”* – Hebrews 1:2-3

*“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.”* – Colossians 2:9-10

The mutual indwelling between the Son and the Father is the perfect love between them, which entails the perfect obedience of the Son to the Father. The unity does not require “equality”, but is a unity of activity coordinated for one purpose. It is similar to the unity between us and Christ (John 17:21-23), and between husband and wife (Ephesians 5:22-32).

**Holy Spirit:** As the Son is the objective presence of God, in Jesus, so the Holy Spirit is the subjective presence of God, dwelling within us. The subordinate role of the Spirit is similar to that of the Son. He is a distinct person, and He does not speak on His own, but in accordance with what He hears.

*“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears...*” - John 16:13.

*“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”* - Romans 8:26-27

*“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* - Ephesians 4:30

Knowledge of God, liberation and life come only by the agency of the Holy Spirit. He is therefore God, in that He speaks to us and empowers us with the full authority of God. [3]

*“For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”* - 1 Corinthians 2:11

*“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?”* - 1 Corinthians 3:16

*“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.”* - John 14:16

*“You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.”* - Romans 8: 9

*“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”* - Romans 8:11

*“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God”* - Romans 8:14

*“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,”* - Ephesians 3:16

In summary, God’s being is in His activity (I AM), and all His activity is from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.

“*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*” – 2 Corinthians 13:14

Notes for Chapter 3

[1] God’s being is in His activity, and His activity in in His being (Barth), as indicated by the meaning of the divine name Yahweh. This equivalence of “being” and “activity” means that unity in activity constitutes unity of being. Each of the three “persons” is a separate center of activity (Pannenberg), but all three sets of activities are of the one God, belonging to the one God. This understanding is in accordance with that of the Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus). The distinctness of the three persons indicates distinct roles, with consequent distinct positions in the hierarchy, yet working together as one God, for one purpose. The unity of the Godhead can be described also as a mutual indwelling (perichoresis or co-inherence) that pertains to the perfect bond of love.

Due to the separate centers of activity and consciousness, each person acts upon his own knowledge and according to his own separate will, but they are one God by the voluntary submission of the Son and the Spirit to the will of the Father. The fact that the Son and the Spirit each has His own limited knowledge base, with limited foreknowledge, allows God to interact with the creation with authenticity, respecting the autonomy of the creation and the free-will of humanity.

God’s form as Trinity is contingent, for the sake of creation. The one God “became” Triune in order to actualize His love in the works of creation and redemption (new creation). The functions of the Word and the Spirit are relative only to the creation; and the only God known to us, the only God revealed to us, is this economic trinity. Furthermore, it is improper to imagine an alternative “immanent” trinity living in a hypothetical eternity without the creation. As discussed below in note 2, regarding the incarnation, God’s self-determination through the creation defines what He is eternally and in His pre-existence, by virtue of His being unconstrained by the forward-temporal causality of the creation. He is eternally and immanently the God who freely allows Himself to be determined by the events of His creation and especially by the life, death and resurrection of the man Jesus. He freely determines himself to be love, and therefore determines Himself to be Creator, and therefore to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

 [2] Jesus Christ is the objective presence of God in the world, as the perfect fulfillment of the *Logos*. He is thereby the objectified God as Redeemer, and the foundation for our knowledge of God, our reconciliation, salvation and life. What has been revealed is that God is love (pertaining to His relations to the creation), and that we know this love by knowing Jesus Christ. That is the highest and the deepest knowledge of God we can ever aspire to. If we reach for something more, we will obtain something less.

The Son was fully determined and perfected in the resurrection - perhaps the general resurrection - which is retroactively applied to the beginning of time. Jesus became “Son of God” at resurrection / ascension, defining, retroactively, His pre-existent being. This can be seen as essentially equivalent to the teaching that *“He was foreknown before the foundation of the world”* (1 Peter 1:20) and *“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”* (Ephesians 1:4). The pre-existent *Logos* is therefore defined by and participates in the temporality and self-limitations of the incarnate Son of Man. There is no pre-existent *Logos Asarkos* (Word without flesh). See Philippians 2:9 (*God highly exalted Him, and bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name*), Romans 1:4 (*declared to be the Son of God because of the resurrection of the dead*); Acts 2:36 (*God has made Him both Lord and Christ*); Hebrews 2:5 (*You are My Son, today I have begotten You*).

 [3] As the subjective presence of God in the world, the Spirit empowers and reveals non-conceptually, by intuition; He is the animating power of life that liberates from the power of sin and death, and as the Spirit of truth He sets us free from deception. He communicates knowledge of Christ, and hence God, to us. He also establishes the unifying bond between Christ and our subjective self.

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# Creation

The most basic question that one can ask is “Why is there anything at all?” The answer is: God's will.  *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* - Gen 1:1

1. The first observation to make is that creation is from nothing: there was no eternally co-existing matter, energy, space or time. Therefore all things are absolutely dependent on God's totally free will. God created freely, and unconditionally. He is the sole ground of all creation, both for its origination and for its continuing existence. This is the teaching of Genesis 1, which is also confirmed in several other scriptures, as given below.

*“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”* - Job 38:4

*“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host…for He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.”* - Psalm 33:6, 9

*“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”* - John 1:3

*“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”* - Hebrews 11:3

*“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”* - Revelation 4:11 [1]

See also Psalm 148:1-6;Proverbs 8:22-26; Colossians 1:15-16.

Since the creation originates from God’s will, it expresses and reveals His attributes (Romans 1:20). This is what we apprehend when we experience the beauty of nature. Its wonderful orderliness, and the way that it resonates with our inner being, are things of beauty. And this beauty is the glory of God. *“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”* - Psalm 19:1

1. The second point to make is that creation has been a continuing development, in addition to the initial beginning. God is intimately involved, sustaining the existence of all things. Creation thus includes the continuing work of providential care. Jesus said that God is still working. *“My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”* - John 5:17. See also Job 38:1 – 39:30 and Matthew 6:25-30.

He is not a clockmaker, who makes the clock, winds it up, and then withdraws. God is rather the ever-present interacting power and foundation for the existence of all that is, and He is the one who continues to bring order out of chaos.

1. The scriptures indicate that there are special roles of each of the persons of the Trinity.

Creation is from the Father’s spoken will, whereby existence originates from nothing. Creation is also through the Son, who establishes order, from the chaos, as the rational and authoritative Word. And creation is by the life-giving Spirit, who provides the impulse for purpose-driven development, the one who empowers and liberates for continuing creativity:

*“the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters”* – Gen 1:2

The Triune God is thus nature’s source of existence, and order, and purpose – creating both from the past (the beginning) and from the future (the end).

*“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God…”* - Revelation 1:8

1. Another important teaching about the creation is that it is truly "other", distinct from God, rather than a part of God. In order to establish this distinctness of the creation from Himself, God granted it the capacity and freedom for self-development and self-determination. Even though the creation is totally dependent on God for its existence, He has given it the freedom to independently determine the specific details of what it will be. It is therefore truly "other" than God, not just a part of God.

The presence of randomness and chaos provides the opportunity for the creation to freely define itself, subject to constraints of orderliness from the Word, and under the gentle guiding influence of the Spirit. The creation of space and time can also be considered as “making room” for the creation - for its diversity and self-determined otherness. He gives the space and the time for the creation to pursue its own development. This is expressed in Genesis 1 as God “letting” the creation act as the co-creator.

*God said, “****Let there be*** *light…****let there be*** *an expanse,…* ***let*** *the waters … be gathered,…* ***let*** *the dry land appear,…* ***let*** *the earth sprout vegetation,…* ***let*** *the waters teem with swarms of living creatures…* ***let*** *the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind.”* - Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 20, 24

God thus “lets go”, relinquishing control, as an act of self-giving love. In this way, creation is a covenant, by which God willingly and lovingly refuses to exercise absolute totalitarian control [2].

1. The goodness of the creation is repeatedly asserted in Genesis 1. When He made light, the dry land, the seas, vegetation, creatures of the seas and of the land, He “saw that it was good.” This means it is suitable for a good purpose. More specifically, it can be regarded as a "temple" suitable as a habitation for mankind, where God can be found. Recent scholarship has noted the extensive similarities between the Genesis 1 description of creation and the procedures for consecrating a temple (John Walton). The creation is the place where we meet God, serve Him and commune with Him. It was made for mankind, defined as the creature that is “in the image of God” [3].

Another point to consider here is the meaning of God’s resting on the seventh day. This doesn't mean that He has no more work (as shown in John 5:17); nor does it mean that the creation has been perfected. It rather means that the creation/temple is ready for habitation, ready for the next phase of working out God’s plan.

Notes for Chapter 4

[1] In the last phrase Revelation 4:11: *“by your will they existed and were created”,* the word for existed means to have being, i.e. indicating absolute dependence for being. Also, the word used for created comes from the root *ktizo*, which means to establish by decree. It is creation, out of nothing, by the authority of spoken command.

[2] The most pressing mysteries of creation pertain to the question of "why", rather than "how", which are resolved in comprehending the personal agency and will of God, not mechanistic laws of nature. There is a universe, something rather than nothing, because of God’s free act of self-giving love. The associated ethical implication and mandate – our end of the creation-covenant - is for us to accept our role as co-creators: to continue with the creative task that He so graciously initiated.

[3] Following are a few examples of the “anthropic principle”, indicating the precise design parameters for the cosmos that had to be achieved in order for there to be intelligent life in the universe.

* If the gravitational force were slightly stronger, stars would burn too rapidly and too unevenly to maintain life-supporting conditions. If the constant were weaker, no heavy elements essential for life would exist.
* If the strong nuclear force were slightly weaker, Hydrogen would be the only element in the universe. If this force were slightly stronger, there would be insufficient hydrogen to support life.
* If the weak nuclear force were slightly larger, heavy elements would be insufficient for life. If it were slightly smaller, there would be insufficient hydrogen for life.
* If the electromagnetic coupling constant were slightly smaller, there would be no atoms. If it were slightly larger, there would be no molecules.
* If the electron to proton mass ratio (1836) were slightly larger or slightly smaller, molecules would not form, and life would be impossible.
* If the rate of expansion of the universe were slightly less, the whole universe would have recollapsed. If the universe were expanding slightly more rapidly, no galaxies would condense. This expansion rate must be fine-tuned to an accuracy of one part in 1055.
* If the mass of the universe were slightly larger, too much deuterium would form, which would cause stars to burn too rapidly to sustain life on any planet. If the mass were slightly less, stars could not produce the heavy elements necessary for life.
* If the universe were less uniform, it would consist only of black holes and empty space. If it were more uniform, galaxies may never have formed.
* If protons were less stable, they would deliver lethal doses of radiation. If the proton were more stable, there would be insufficient matter in the universe for life to be possible.
* Anything other than the precise nuclear energy level for 12C would guarantee insufficient carbon production for life.

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# Man, in God's Image

1. Spirit and soul

*“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”* - Genesis 2:7

*Nephesh* (soul), used in Genesis 2:7, has the basic meaning of throat or gullet, thus indicating need and desire. The nature of *nephesh* is to seek future fulfillment. This is the driving force of living beings. The word is generally used in the Old Testament to indicate any kind of living being, animals as well as human (Genesis 1:20, 24, 30; 9:12, 15, 16; Ezekiel 47:9), and it usually refers to the entire living being, not a separable part.

In reference to the redeemed of the Lord: *“He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul he has filled with what is good.”* - Psalm 107:9. As Augustine had said: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.” [1]

Spirit (*ruah*) refers to the vital creative force – the animating principle of the “soul”: Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4; 34:14f. This too, to some extent, is in all animals, as indicated in Genesis 6:17; 7:15, 22; Ecclesiastes 3:19-21. It is a gift, from God, not arising from the dust of creation. It’s origin and destiny is God, and there are various measures and degrees to which the Spirit is given. All mankind has been given a spirituality exceeding that of other animals; there is an additional gift at baptism; there are special gifts for ministry (1 Corinthians12:7); and Jesus had the Spirit “without measure” (John 3:34). Jesus described the gift of the Spirit as living water: *“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”* - John 4:14. See also John 7:37-39 and 1 John 4:13. The spiritual component of our being is a gift of His Spirit, and from His Spirit, which equips us to fulfill the special calling of what it means to be human.

2. In the image and likeness of God.

*“Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky … and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”* – Genesis 1:26

*“What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.”* - Psalm 8:4-6.

For the Psalmist, this is a cause for praise and wonder. Job, however, considered it a mixed blessing, and complained: “what are human beings, that you make so much of them?” (see Job 7:17-19). He experienced the special attention and status as oppressive.

In Genesis 1:26f and Psalm 8:5f, image (*zelem*) and likeness (*demut*) have no real difference of meaning. The image and likeness pertain to the role of delegated authority and responsibility, representing God in the creation. He gave us the ability and authority to act on His behalf.

The significance is better understood by considering the ancient religious context: the Pharaoh of Egypt was regarded as the living image of God, embodying God’s divine rule. The book of Genesis now assigns this exalted role to all mankind. There are many excellent examples of those who have served God in this role: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. But this destiny is properly and adequately fulfilled only in Jesus Christ. It should be noted that Genesis 1:26f does not say *"****to******be*** *the image"*, but *"****according******to*** *the image"*. It is Jesus Christ who is the perfect image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Col 1:15; Hebrews 1:3), and believers are destined to be transformed into this image (Rom 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18). See also Colossians 3:9ff ; Ephesians 4:24; and Hebrews 2:6-8.

Because Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He bears the image, and vice versa. Because He is the Son of Man, He reigns, as the second Adam. And because He lives in us, we have become the children of God, conforming to His image, and reigning with Him. The unique dignity of mankind is founded on the incarnation. Our full personhood and identity are achieved only in Christ, and only in the end of the age. We therefore know ourselves to be incomplete and imperfect, an unfinished work. This is the hunger of the soul.

Our destiny consists not only in dominion, but above all in fellowship with God. Personhood has to do with relatedness to God, in the same way that the Father, Son and Spirit are mutually inter-related persons, fulfilling Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20-24. This destiny is for a united community, not for isolated individuals. Just as Jesus' being consisted in being for others, for a community, so must it be for us. True relationship to God, by which we fulfill our personal identity according to His image, must be in and through the community of His people. It is not good to be alone.

This destiny also involves moral accountability, as was seen in Job’s complaint. Mankind has a desire to rise above the dust – we have an openness to the future (by the Spirit), and to God, to seek ultimate meaning and purpose. God has enabled us to hear His voice, and to respond, thus distinguishing us as the **praying** and **worshiping** animals. We were made for worship, just as the creation was made for worshipers (prepared as a temple). But, because of this, we are accountable when we turn away and reject His word and His calling (Romans 1:21ff). As is the case for one who wears a uniform, unworthy behavior dishonors the One whom we are supposed to represent. There are moral implications of bearing God’s image.

The creation of mankind, Adam and Eve, in the image and likeness of God, is then primarily a spiritual **calling**,similar to the later calling of Abraham. There was no physical or genetic discontinuity between them and their homo sapiens neighbors and ancestors. In that respect, we are like all animals – created from the dust of the earth. But they were made special by a special spiritual gift and calling. This is what qualified them to serve in accordance with His image, to rule over all creation, as His representative. This is the distinctive dignity, privilege and responsibility of mankind in the image of God.

Notes for Chapter 5

[1] Augustine, “Confessions”, Bk 1, Chapter 1

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# Providence and Free Will

*“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* – Romans 8:28

Two observations can be made about the accomplishment of God’s purpose: its certainty, and its conditions. Regarding certainty, we are assured that God’s overall goal shall be realized. Regarding conditionality, it applies only to a select group: those who love God.

This means that the specific accomplishment of His will for particular individuals depends upon their freely made decisions. He desires the good for all persons, but it shall be realized only in those who freely accept and freely respond. This is because the final “good” that He desires is not just obedience, but the free obedience of love. It is to be an obedience of the heart and mind, exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees (see Matthew 5:20-28).

What is nevertheless certain is that His good purpose is fully realized in the Son.

*“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren”* -- Romans 8:29.

What God has fully determined is this fulfillment in His Son, and thereby for everyone who shall be in the Son. What is not fully predetermined is precisely which individuals shall in fact be “in the Son”. That depends upon the free-will decisions of each individual.

How is it that we can be truly free when confronted by the will of almighty God? God does not force compliance, but rather leads us by the persuasive influence of the Spirit. God exercises power by empowerment, through the Spirit. And His persuasion by the Spirit preserves our freedom, because it consists in the revelation of truth. Truth makes us free. Truth draws us towards personal integrity, to be true to ourselves, which is the essence of freedom [1].

The effectiveness of His persuasion is that it is a confrontation that forces decision. We are free to decide either for or against God, but not free to maintain neutrality. The Law, delivered by Moses, called for decision: *“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”* – Deuteronomy 30:19. A similar appeal was later made by Elijah: *“How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”* – 1 Kings 18:21. The life and teachings of Jesus, as presented in the gospels, especially called for decision. *“He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”* – John 12:48. People were compelled to make decisions about Him, but they were still free in the choices they made.

A second question, is how can we be free from the laws of nature? It has been proven, as a matter of mathematical logic, that there is no such thing as a complete, closed system [2]. This means that any scientific model of the universe must be open to interactions from a higher level. It is also evident from quantum mechanics, and from chaos theory, that many physical events are totally random, not explainable or fully determined by prior physical conditions and natural laws. Science now recognizes that the world is not a deterministic machine. Both logic and science confirm that the world can be subject to forces outside the realm of scientific explanations. The effectual spiritual agency of God and man in the physical world is therefore fully compatible with contemporary science [3].

Another question often raised is how can we be truly free if God already knows, in advance, the results of all our “free” decisions? One point to make is that logically, God’s foreknowledge of our decisions is fully compatible with our freedom in making those decisions. [4] Secondly, the authenticity of our relationship with God is protected by the fact that the Son has a restricted foreknowledge – He does not know all that the Father knows.

*“To sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”* - Matthew 20:23

 *“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* – Matthew 24:36

Jesus’ limited foreknowledge enables us to genuinely unite with Him. As the Son walks with us into the future, He usually knows no more than we do about what decisions we will make. His relation to the Father - walking by faith, not by sight - is the same as our walk, so that we can genuinely unite with Him in this walk. If He had foreknowledge of our free decisions, and we knew that He had such foreknowledge, it would present a serious barrier to our dwelling in Christ and Him in us. But He has graciously removed that barrier. [5]

Walking by faith, not by sight, means that life consists in knowing God, rather in knowing “things”. It depends upon our relationship with God, and that relationship, knowing Him, develops and grows as one continues in the walk of faith. This is how Jesus walked, and it is how we are to walk, in Him. He shares our venture into the future, by faith.

Our freedom does not, however, pose a threat to God's sovereignty. In spite of mankind's rebellion, the fulfillment of God's purpose is ensured by the inherent self-destructiveness of sin -- the fact that alienation from God cuts the sinner off from the only source of life. People are free to choose evil, but in so doing, they choose death. Our freedom is thus compatible with a strong view of God's sovereignty: His plan and purpose are not at risk. But it is costly. His will is frequently opposed and thwarted, which is a cause for pain and grief for Him, and He has paid the highest possible price to redeem us from sin. But because of final judgment against evil, His overall purpose shall be fulfilled in the end. And this fulfillment is both assured and known, absolutely.

In summary, it is because God is three-in-one that He interacts with the creation, and with us, as a living God, to accomplish His purpose without compromising our freedom and our identity. The Father knows all things – past, present and future – by which we can have full assurance in our eternal hope. The Son walks with us as one of us, sharing our human limitations, so that we can genuinely unite with Him, and through Him be reconciled to the Father, by faith. And the Spirit reveals to us the truth that is Jesus Christ: the truth that compels decision, while preserving freedom, and an empowerment that liberates us from the past and from the forces of nature. It is thus that God is sovereign, mankind is free, and our destiny as the “image of God” can be fulfilled.



Notes for Chapter 6

[1] Freedom is the autonomous power of creative self-determination. No set of efficient causes is sufficient to determine a “free” decision. The human spirit transcends the tyranny of physical efficient cause, and is furthermore not subjected to coercion from God. This is “contra-causal” freedom, in that the decisive cause is the free agent himself, as a spiritual self. This may be considered as the essence of personhood (see e.g. A. Plantinga, “The Nature of Necessity”).

[2] Godel's Incompleteness Theorems (see Torrance)

[3] From the perspective of theology, Pannenberg spoke of the “essential indeterminateness” of nature - that the contingent events in the world are “acts of God from whose future they spring” (Pannenberg, TKG). This higher, spiritual realm operates holistically over space-time, and can serve as the source of final cause (as per Michael Polanyi’s emergent levels of reality). This would be the source of free agency operating upon the creation, as a "downward" causation. It is also the explanation for foreknowledge. The spiritual realm interacts holistically with the space-time continuum, thus providing a pathway for a kind of reverse causality. This can be the mechanism by which the future can be revealed to the present, or can be an effectual final cause. Ted Peters refers to this as a retroactive ontology, by which God leads and persuades us to create a future that corresponds to the actual future He presents to us. This is a development from Pannenberg’s eschatological theology of prolepsis and what he claimed as the “causal priority of the future” (see Russell).

[4] It is evident from scripture that God knows the future, from eternity, and He can therefore reveal and manifest it temporally in the present (i.e. foreknowledge and prolepsis). It is the position of theological fatalism (and of process/open theology) that such foreknowledge is logically incompatible with free will. However, on the basis of modal logic, it can be shown that this is not the case. The principal point is that the truth of a contingent fact does not make that fact a necessity. To confuse actuality with necessity is a modal fallacy. Therefore, as a matter of logic, foreknowledge does not violate free will. This is essentially the distinction that Boethius made between conditional necessity (established by God’s foreknowledge) and simple necessity (which would preclude free will).

 The second, more difficult, question is how God can know the future -- the ontological issues pertaining to the nature of time and eternity and causality. One claim that is often made is that the future does not exist, and therefore is not knowable. This argument is based on a particular model of time, known as the A-theory (per McTaggart), also referred to as “flowing time". This model asserts that only the present is real, and changes in the present reality are subjectively experienced as a flow of time, passing through the present reality. The A-theory time model is considered by many to be more compatible with free will, and is intuitively consistent with ordinary experience. William Lane Craig favors the A-theory, in that it regards the transient and dynamic “becoming” process as an objective reality. But the A-theory is not consistent with special or general relativity, according to which there is no such thing as a universal "present”.

 An alternative model is known as the B-theory, or the block universe. According to this model, all past and future events are real. This is the model usually assumed by scientists, as it is consistent with special relativity. All events are considered to exist objectively in a space-time continuum, and passage through time is a subjective experience.

 It is often claimed that the B-theory time model is deterministic, excluding free will. It would seem, however, that this claim is another instance of the modal fallacy. All events are both real and contingent, and nothing in the entire universe of events is "necessary". All events are caused by free agency, by God and/or by His creatures. This seems to be the concept that Boethius had regarding time: that God sees all time as an eternal “present”, and therefore knows it as a conditional necessity, thereby preserving free will. C.S. Lewis held essentially the same view.

 Craig believes that the B-theory obscures the significance of present becoming. That may be the case for a closed reductionist system that some envision. But a B-theory system that is open to the spiritual layer of reality (see below) is thereby open to the final-cause revelation and influence from God, which provides the liberating empowerment to genuinely create the future (see Ted Peters). With the proper application of modal logic, the reality and actuality of the future does not in any way detract from the real objective significance of the present for freely creating the future.

 Another approach for reconciling free-will and foreknowledge is the concept of “middle knowledge”. This idea was introduced by Molina, and William Lane Craig, for example, views it favorably as a potential solution. According to this hypothesis, God knows, logically prior to creation, all possible free-will decisions (counter-factuals) that would be consequent to any set of pre-conditions. He thus created the universe to provide the pre-conditions that would ensure the desired “free” decisions. This is a way that He can know (conceptually) a future that does not yet exist (according to the A-theory) -- a future yet to be “freely” chosen. It is also a way to establish sovereignty.

 There are two problems with middle knowledge. First, if God knows the free-will decisions that would ensue from a particular set of antecedent circumstances, then those decisions are necessarily determined by the antecedents. There is hence no freedom. The person may be free to defy God’s particular will, but he is not free from the antecedent efficient causes. Therefore, middle knowledge does not make us free.

 Secondly, the orders of infinity involved in knowing all possible contingencies may entail logical fallacies. Even though we speak of God as “infinite”, one must be careful about piling on assertions about infinities of infinities that might in the end amount to nonsense. This “middle knowledge” may be such a case.

 Another observation about middle knowledge is that it would seem to entail Leibniz's proposition that this is the best of all possible worlds. That is an hypothesis that just doesn’t sit well with most people. It doesn't pass the "laugh test” (as Voltaire has shown).

 Another issue that arises when discussing God's perceptive knowledge of the future, is the notion that God does this from a position of timeless eternity. This concept, however, leads one to view God as immutable, isolated from the creation. Craig believes that the only alternative is a temporal God, and that we are left with a paradox of affirming God as both eternal and temporal. However, there is a third alternative concept of God's eternity: that in His holistic transcendence of space-time, the eternal God is not “timeless”, but His eternity encompasses and embraces temporality — an infinity that includes the finite. This is an understanding of eternity first introduced by Plotinus and Boethius, rediscovered by Barth, and further developed by Pannenberg (see Peters). God thus dynamically interacts with the creation, but without being subject to it or dependent upon it. His essence is unchanging, but His relational properties are responsive to His creatures. He is the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not the immutable deity of Aristotle. This is a form of open theism that preserves the full sovereign freedom of God, without threatening human free will.

[5] If God seeks to influence us by persuasion, but knows at the time that the persuasion will fail, that it is futile, then it is not authentic interaction. It is a futile game. On the other hand, if He knows that His persuasion will succeed, then He engages in the interaction with the attitude and motive of ensuring that His will is accomplished. This effectively means that He is diminishing the opportunities for self-determination, and that He is taking back the responsibility of dominion that He had granted to mankind. It is no longer persuasion, but manipulation. Such foreknowledge does not logically infringe upon free will, nor is it precluded by the “non-existence” of the future, that some would postulate. But it is precluded, insofar as He interacts with us, because it is contrary to the empowerment that He has bestowed upon us.

 The resolution proposed here is that all interactions with nature and with mankind are through the *Logos*, the Son, Who is not granted a foreknowledge of such contingencies. Complete and perfect foreknowledge is possessed only by the Father. But the Son, Who interacts with us, as one of us, has emptied Himself of such knowledge, in order to respect our autonomy and to honor the creation-covenant of empowerment.

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# The Fall

*“The Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.”* – Genesis 2:8

“Eden” – means “fruitful”, “well-watered”. (See Genesis 13:10; Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35); and a garden, with fruit trees, is a sanctuary for service (worship) to God (e.g. Ezekiel 28:12-19; 31:3, 8, 9, 16). The imagery and symbolism is similar to that of prior Mesopotamian and Sumerian myths. In these traditions, it generally represents a man being given a special status and privileged fellowship with God, and a special commission of service to God.

Zechariah 14:8 and Ezekiel 47:1,7-9, 12 refer to living (life-giving) waters from Jerusalem and the temple, and trees along the river. The Pishon and Gihon rivers (Genesis 2:11-14) are probably the dry ancient river beds that empty into the Persian Gulf near the Tigris and Euphrates, visible in LandSat images. This places the garden near the city of Ur, where Abraham’s family came from.

From 15,000 B.C to 6,000 B.C. there was a drastic reduction of rainfall in that region. But at about 6,000 to 5,000 BC, the rains returned (the Neolithic Wet Phase), and it was at that time and place that agriculture was invented, and flourished (see Genesis 2:5). There were subsequent confrontations between these settled farmers and surrounding nomads and hunter-gatherers, and in later times, the Sumerians developed the mythical story of the people being expelled from a paradise-garden due to their unfaithfulness to God. The writer of Genesis 2 used the symbolism and imagery of this story to present the spiritual truth about the origins of mankind: his original innocence, in communion with God, and how we later became alienated from God. It is an explanation of the spiritual relationship between God and man, presented in a literary form that the original recipients could easily understand.

Just as the entire creation, as described in Genesis chapter 1, is designed and ordered as a kind of temple, a place where God dwells and where mankind can meet God and fellowship with Him, the garden should be seen as the central sanctuary, the holiest place, in the center of the temple. And the man placed there to “tend the garden” is a priest, serving God as the mediator between God and the world, fulfilling his role as the “image of God”. The significance of a temple, as communion with God, can be seen in references to the “House of the Lord” in the Psalms (Psalm 23:6; 27:4; 65:4; 69:9; 84:10; 91:1,2; 92:12-14).

The process of creation, as described in Genesis 1, is the establishment of order, overcoming the natural forces of chaos. The garden is the fullest expression of such order. This garden is not a field of crops, nor a vegetable garden, but is rather a carefully manicured ornamental garden, meant to be a thing of beauty and order. This is similar to the way a temple, and particularly Solomon’s temple, is described. To “tend” such a garden, or to serve in a temple, is to symbolically work with God in establishing and maintaining order, opposing the forces of chaos. This is the role of mankind as co-creator, according to the image of God.

This original state of mankind, figuratively “in the garden”, was a child-like innocent communion with God. Mankind was able to hear the voice of God, and simply obeyed, without deliberation or hesitation. Psychologically, mankind was distinct from other animals in language, in the capacity for conceptual thinking, and in his contact with God by hearing His voice (by the Spirit). But he shared the innocence of other animals in that he did not possess self-awareness or self-consciousness. Of all the gifts and capacities potentially available to man, this is the one that was not yet appropriated and exercised: the fruit from the tree of “knowledge of good and evil”.

*“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”* – Genesis 23:16-17

The serpent, representing nature’s forces of chaos, tempted Eve to take from this fruit.

*“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”* – Genesis 3:4-6

The consequences were that their eyes were opened, they became ashamed, they hid from God, and they tried to deny responsibility. Furthermore, God said: *“the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil”* – Genesis 3:22. This was not just an arbitrary “obedience test”, and the knowledge was much more than a simple experiential knowledge of the evil of disobedience. All of these consequences are best understood as the consequences of self-awareness. It establishes the self as a judge of good and evil, continually observing the self and casting judgment. The inner voice of God is replaced with our own self-created inner voice, thus making us to be “like God”. It was motivated by a prideful ambition to be like God, combined with a mistrust of God (i.e. weakness of faith). When mankind attained this capacity, and when it is attained by each individual child ever since, a new vista of creative freedom opens up. It is a thrilling empowerment, but it also brings crushing responsibilities. We are thrust into a position of power and responsibility for which we are unqualified and unprepared.

So this knowledge, self-awareness, leads to self-condemnation, and reactive self-defenses consisting of willful sins, including deception and hostility towards others. The eventual outcome is an overall bondage to sin and alienation from God and from all creation. Mankind became self-centered instead of God-centered, and thereby alienated from our source of life. This disqualified them from the high calling of priesthood according to His image, and they were therefore cast out of the garden, and forbidden access to the tree of life.

Paul speaks of the consequences for all mankind: *“through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men”* – Romans 5:18. By self-awareness, sin entered the world, and this self-awareness is passed on, culturally, to all generations. This self-awareness is not in itself a sin, but it opens the possibility for willful sin, which none can resist. Therefore *“death spread to all men, because all sinned”* - Romans 5:12 [1]. Following Genesis 3, the central theme of all scriptures is God’s work of redemption, to deliver us from this condemnation.

Notes for Chapter 7

 [1] This would seem to correspond to Kierkegaard’s concept of anxiety. It is a qualitative leap into the life of human spirituality, involving various degrees of God-awareness, and therefore accountability to God. The ensuing internal struggles of self-defense vs. self-condemnation constitute the despair of Kierkegaard and the corresponding sinfulness as described in scripture.

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# Atonement

Some Key verses regarding atonement are:

*“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement” –* Leviticus 17:11

*“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”* – Luke 22:20

*“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lies.” – Hebrews 2:14-15*

*“We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” –* Hebrews 10:10

The words atonement, expiation and propitiation are various translations used for the same Hebrew word (*kippur*) and the same corresponding Greek word (*hilasmos*). The Hebrew *kippur* pertains to covering sin, by providing a substitute. It is the word for the “cover”, or “mercy seat” of the ark of the covenant, which was the place where atonement was made. The Greek *hilasmos* has the original meaning of an offering to appease the gods, to gain their favor. In the Christian faith, it is the work that God does to and for us, that we can have peace with God. The English word for this is “propitiation”. But the full meaning of *kippur* and *hilasmos* also includes “expiation” (removal of sin), “redemption” (paying a ransom to deliver us from bondage) and “reconciliation” (making peace with God). In English, “atonement” is derived from “at one”, and thus refers to reconciliation, by making amends. In Spanish, the usual translation is “expiacion”, which emphasizes the removal of guilt [1].

The Old Testament background for atonement includes the blood covenant – making a covenant by offering blood from a sacrifice. The covenant with Abraham was established by a sacrificial ritual described in Genesis 15:7-21. The power behind the covenant comes from the blood, which represents life (Leviticus 17:11): the life of the sacrificial victim, given as a substitute, for atonement [2]. Similarly, the covenant established through Moses was inaugurated by sprinkling the people with the blood of a sacrifice (Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:18-20).

On the Day of Atonement, as described in Leviticus 16:5-22, the high priest laid hands on a goat (the “scapegoat”), thus transferring sins to the goat, which was then released into the wilderness to carry the sins away. This symbolizes the removal of sin, or expiation. Another goat was sacrificed, and its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled upon the “mercy seat” of the ark of the covenant. This application of blood to the ark means that the life of the sacrificed animal is given, each year, to renew the covenant. Drinking the blood was strictly prohibited (Leviticus 17:10-14), because it belongs to God, to make atonement. It was not a life that could be taken into the person offering the sacrifice.

All the Old Covenant sacrifices teach the necessity of blood, both for removing sin (forgiveness) and for establishing the covenant (reconciliation). It is necessary to judge and destroy sin, by offering a substitute life, in order to be reconciled to God. But these animal sacrifices were only signs, or witnesses, to teach what would later become a reality. The only truly effective sacrifice is Jesus Christ, crucified. The animals were types or pledges of what was yet to come, like checks yet to be cleared. See Hebrews 9:11-14; 10:4-10. [3]

Death is necessary to make room for the new creation, the resurrection. The seed must die in order to bear fruit (John 12:24-25). Everything sinful and corrupt must be destroyed, so that the new life can remain, for eternity. So each and every one of us must die. And the only hope for life after death is by the life of Christ in us: union with Him in the resurrection. It was therefore also necessary that Jesus should die. As Paul said that we must die with Him in order to rise with Him (Philippians 3:10-11), so it was with Jesus: He had to die with us in order to rise with us. To illustrate this, Jesus was baptized, to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). God thus renders judgment against Sin and Death, in the body of Christ. The ordinances against us, which condemned us, were thereby nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:13-15).

The Old Covenant, then, has been made obsolete by the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13). Jeremiah prophesied: *“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah…I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”* – Jeremiah 31:31, 33. Under the New Covenant, the righteousness of God becomes internalized within His people. In accordance with this, Jesus taught that we must “drink His blood” (John 6:53-56). This is shockingly new, something strictly forbidden under the Old Covenant. It means we must receive His life into our own hearts and souls. His blood thereby totally fulfills all that had been represented by animal sacrifices. *“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world.”* – 1 John 2:2.

This contrast between the old and new covenants is also described in Romans chapters 7 and 8. In particular: *“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh****, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit****….You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.* ***If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is alive because of righteousness.”*** – Romans 8:3-4, 9-10. We “drink His blood”, we receive the indwelling Spirit, and Christ and His righteousness dwells within us (Galatians 2:20).

There is thus a mutual exchange of His death because of our sins, and our life because of His righteousness. This is known as the Great Exchange: *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* - 2 Corinthians 5:21. The practical impact, as to how we should live, is found in the 1st letter of Peter. We should live a life of obedience and holiness (1 Peter 1:13-16), *“knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold … but with precious blood, as a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”* – 1 Peter 1:18-19

Notes for Chapter 8

[1] There are also two Hebrew words used in the Old Testament for “redemption”:

*Padah* – redeem, ransom, refers to deliverance out of bondage into liberty

*Gaal* – redeem, refers to redemption out of slavery or bankruptcy by a kinsman

In the New Testament, Paul emphasizes “justification” (from the verb *dikaioo*), which refers to the legal and familial status that enables relationship: righteousness relative to the law and freedom from bondage to the law.

 [2] Abraham’s covenant sacrifice also draws upon the tradition of a blood oath: swearing that if I violate this covenant, then my blood will be shed in like manner (as in the oath: “so may God do to me, and more…”; e.g. in 2 Kings 6:31; Ruth 1:17).

[3] Abraham’s offering of Isaac as a sacrifice is also a type, pointing to the sacrifice of Jesus offered by the heavenly Father. Abraham’s love for his only son, in this ordeal, helps us to comprehend the love of the heavenly Father for His only begotten Son, even as He sent Him to the cross.

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# Prayer and Miracles

Four key points will be made here regarding prayer: 1) the importance of prayer, 2) the proper attitude in prayer, 3) the proper priorities, and 4) what expectations we should hold.

The Importance of Prayer:

We were created to serve as the image of God, which involves a special relationship that can only be sustained by prayer. To fulfill this, we must truly know God, and give priority to His purposes. During His ministry on earth, Jesus demonstrated the importance of prayer for Him: *“Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.”* – Luke 5:16. If we don't receive, it is because we don't ask (James 4:2). Even though God knows all our needs, He waits for us to ask, respecting the authority that he has delegated to us. God’s work is a partnership with us that cannot function without prayer.

Jesus also taught persistence, in the parables of a reluctant friend (Luke 11:5-8) and an unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). Especially during spiritual “dry spells”, times when we don’t feel the presence of God, we must continue in prayer, by faith, assured that God is still here. His love is steadfast, whether we “feel” it or not. The Psalms provide several prayers (e.g. Psalm 10; 13; 22; 42; 102) that give expression to such emotional low points, while clinging to the Lord in faith. *“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and by night, but I have no rest. Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.”* – Psalm 22:1-3

The Proper Attitude:

The proper attitude is based on knowing who God is, and who we are. First, we know that He is love, so that we can have the boldness of total openness and honesty before Him. We cannot hide, and there is no reason to try to hide. *“Since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus…let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith….”* – Hebrews 10:19, 22. *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”* – Psalm 51:17.

Secondly, we are to have the humility and the trusting dependency of a little child (Psalm 131).

*“I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me.”* – Psalm 131:2. *“Cease striving and know that I am God.”* - Psalm 46:10. As illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14), God hears the prayers of honest confession: *“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”.*

Another point about attitude is that we live in a society afflicted with a sense of entitlement; this should have no place in the church or in prayer. To the contrary, we must have the mind of Christ, who emptied and humbled Himself (Philippians 2:3-8).

The Proper Priorities:

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13) is an outline that sets the proper priorities of requests:

1. For His name to be hallowed (glorified)
2. For His kingdom to come
3. For His will to be done on earth
4. For provision of daily bread (an allotment, as it was with manna)
5. For forgiveness (as we have forgiven others)
6. For deliverance from temptation and the evil one

Our physical and material well-being don’t even make the list. As with soldiers in an army, the mission is the primary concern, and secondly what is needed to effectively serve that mission (necessities of life, and spiritual well-being). This is God’s perspective on priorities, and one of the most valuable purposes of prayer is to orient ourselves into His perspective.

Expectations:

Several scriptures make sweeping promises about God hearing and answering our prayers. But a careful examination of all scripture reveals important conditions and constraints. It is the prayer of faith that is heard (Matthew 21:21-22; James 5:13-18), where faith is a faith in the wisdom and the love of God, not a belief that He will always give us precisely what we ask. He hears the prayers that are “in His name” (John 14:12-14), which means requests that are in agreement with the desires of Christ. Motives are crucial: *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”* - James 4:3. Another constraint is that God never infringes upon a person’s free will. The Spirit persuades, by confronting people with truth; but He never manipulates or forces compliance.

Many things people routinely ask for are routinely not given. Jesus said, for example, that His disciples will suffer, and have tribulation (John 16:33); and He deliberately would not ask that they “be taken out of the world” (John 17:14-16). Christians must not expect to have any material or physical privileges relative to non-believers in the world. To the contrary, Jesus said we will have more suffering and persecution (John 15:18-20). We should still pray for people to be delivered from the evils of illness or suffering, but in only the rarest of cases will there be any truly “miraculous” supernatural intervention to grant precisely what we ask for. [1]

Sometimes God’s answer is to redeem the suffering - He will use it to accomplish a greater good, so that they will not have suffered or died in vain. Jesus asked for His cup to be removed, if possible. But He had the wisdom and faith to allow God’s will to prevail. God similarly causes the sufferings of all His people to work together for good (Romans 8:28) [2]. The Spirit intercedes when we don't know what to ask for (Romans 8:26-27), or don't ask for quite the right things. Paul prayed for physical healing, but God’s answer was to provide spiritual growth (humility) instead (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul's prayers for his Jewish kinsmen resulted instead in salvation for Gentiles (Romans 9-11). After feeding the 5000, Jesus had a large following, for a short time, of people who wanted to be fed. But Jesus said no (John 6:26-27). Miracles are called “miracles” precisely because they are so rare. They are called “signs” in the gospel of John, because their primary purpose was to illustrate His teachings, not to eliminate all hunger and disease.

It is abundantly clear in scripture that the real work of the kingdom is accomplished through His people, at the prompting of the Spirit, through “natural” means. And this work of the Spirit is in response to our prayers. Knowing this, those who seek first His kingdom will be driven to pray: *“Your kingdom come, Your will be done”.*

Notes for Chapter 9

[1] One can generally expect that when prayers for miraculous healing or deliverance are answered, it is for the sake of the kingdom: for the special witness that it can provide, in itself, and perhaps for a special calling and ministry for the one who is rescued. This is attested by the conviction of most recipients of such miracles that they have a special opportunity and calling, that they were delivered for a purpose. It is also consistent with Paul’s musings as to whether it would be better for him to remain on earth a while longer, or go to be with the Lord (Philippians 1:21-24). The rationale for remaining here for a few more years would not be for his own benefit, but for the sake of continued ministry.

[2] Regarding the potential benefits of suffering, see Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4; Job 42. It is a confrontation with the harsh reality of chaos and evil, that either drives a person towards God, or drives him away, depending upon his freely chosen response.

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# The Problem of Evil

I. What is Evil?

Evil is whatever opposes the good; and its sources fall into two categories: 1) the chaos and randomness of nature, and 2) human sin [1]. The “problem” with evil, is why a perfectly good and all-powerful God allows it.

One difficulty is that all people are victims, indiscriminately. *“I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability;* ***for time and chance overtake them all****.”* – Ecclesiastes 9:11. Regarding two events that people thought were judgments from God (Luke 13:1-5), Jesus pointed out that those victims were no more sinful than anyone else. When asked about the man born blind, which the disciples assumed was a result of sin, Jesus said: *“It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents”* - John 9:3. There is a similar indiscriminate distribution of blessings: *“He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”* – Matthew 5:45.

Job suffered greatly, and pleaded with God for an answer, for understanding. His friends insisted that he must have sinned, and that it was a just punishment from God. Job contended, however, that he did nothing deserving of such punishment. But he still thought that it must be a judgment from God. After a lengthy struggle in prayer, God answered Job in a series of visions, where God is shown to be the One who is all-wise and all-knowing, caring deeply for all creatures, providing all that is good and necessary to sustain life. (Job 38 – 41). We find the same teaching from Jesus: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from you Father.”* – Matthew 10:29. So, God knows, and He cares.

The answer then is to trust in God’s wisdom and providence. There are many times that His ways are an unsearchable mystery. So we live by faith, and what we usually need is not a better understanding of the plan, but a deeper knowledge of our God, in whom we trust.

II. Why God permits evil

It can be said, as a general principle, accepted by faith, that God permits evil for the sake of achieving a greater good. More particularly, God grants autonomy and free will, as essential to the ultimate good of a developing creation and the establishment of the new creation. The self-determining creativity and development in nature requires an element of randomness and chaos, and is accomplished through cycles of destruction and new construction, cycles of life and death, in a fiercely competitive struggle. Death and destruction of individuals, and even the extinction of entire species, has been the necessary driving force for the development of life. The existence of deadly viruses, birth defects, and purposeless pain, are examples where the randomness and chaos have unintended evil consequences. But in all these cases, we are to accept that the greater good is found in the totality of the fully developed universe, which more than makes up for the sufferings of individuals.

A part of this system is the free-will of humanity, which makes sin possible, but is also the only way to make a loving fellowship with God possible. The individual sufferings of victims of sin are out-weighed by the greater good to be realized in the fellowship of the kingdom. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-25) teaches that justice in the future life makes up for present suffering.

One aspect of the “greater good” is the delegation of authority and dominion to humanity. God’s creative work, of producing order out of chaos, is through the Son, Who is the Son of Man. And God’s redemptive work, to overcome sin, is by the death and resurrection of Christ, and through all those who belong to Christ, participating in His death and resurrection. This partnership with humanity restricts God’s opportunities for direct intervention.

There is also a delegation of authority and empowerment to angels; and both humanity, and some of the angels, have fallen. We are therefore in the midst of a great spiritual warfare. An angel sent to answer Daniel’s prayer (Daniel l0:10-14) explained that he had been detained in a battle, until Michael came to his assistance. Paul wrote: *“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* – Ephesians 6:12. And the apostle John revealed that the sufferings and persecution of the church under Rome were consequences of the warfare between spiritual powers (Revelation 12:7-9,17; 13:1-2,7).

So the remaining question is why God does not bring an immediate end to this war? Why does He allow it to continue for so long?

III. God’s plan to overcome sin and evil.

In this phase of God’s plan, the mission is salvation, not judgment. It is the way of the cross, for the church, just as it was for Christ. *“I did not come to judge the word, but to save the world.”* – John 12:47. Our rules of engagement are to oppose sin and evil by practicing self-sacrificial love. *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* – Romans 12:21. God’s providence, including miraculous intervention, is directed toward supporting this mission, not to substituting a strategy of force, nor to providing relief from tribulation. [2]

In Revelation 6:9-11, the souls of martyred saints ask the question: how long? The answer is that they must wait until their number is complete. Similarly, Peter wrote: *“The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”* – 2 Peter 3:9. Consider also the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30).

God ultimately shall destroy all evil, but His ordained plan, which is slow, painful and costly, is the only way to establish the kingdom in its full and complete glory. It is the path towards the greatest good, and it is worth it: *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* - Romans 8:18.

It is still a mystery that blessings are the fruit of suffering, and life is the fruit of death. It is the same mystery that is found in the foolishness and the scandal of the cross. In the end, the answer for us, as it was for Job, lies in a faith in the unsearchable wisdom of God: *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”* – Romans 11:33

Notes for Chapter 10

 [1] Evil also has two kinds of consequences: the negative suffering of deprivation, and the positive suffering of pain. Pain is the physical and emotional defensive reaction to a threat, like an immune response, which is often worse than what it is defending against, and is often ineffectual, i.e. gratuitous, because of the chaotic imperfections of nature.

[2] Even the destructive judgment against Satan and the demons is delayed until the end of the age. When Jesus cast out demons, He did not destroy them. They departed and continued to work mischief elsewhere.

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# Religious Violence

“Religious violence” refers to violence in the name of God, with the intent of serving His purpose. This pertains to any kind of harm or abuse - physical, emotional and spiritual – any disregard for the integrity and dignity of a person who bears the image of God.[1]

1. In the Old Testament

The Old Testament is filled with violence: both judgments from God, and violence by God’s chosen people, acting under His direction. How can this be compatible with the God who is also the heavenly Father of Jesus?

First, God has always been active in history to execute judgment against evil, at the appropriate times - for example, the great flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Such judgments were all justifiable acts of righteousness, motivated by His love (see Romans 1:18). God’s wrath is a response to human sin – a response that is demanded by His love.

Secondly, God established a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would have a special relationship with God, and would become a blessing to all nations - a nation that would produce the Messiah. They were a people defined and sustained by the law and the institution of a theocratic civil government, which had to be protected from outside evil influences. Any breach of covenant was a threat to their identity and survival, so there were harsh penalties against violations of the Law (Leviticus 20:9-16,27). Similarly, there were extreme sanctions against their enemies (Joshua 6:17-21; 1 Samuel 15:3), to protect from future corruption (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). It was the only way to preserve their identity as God's people [2]. Later, during the Babylonian exile, there was a development in the prophetic teachings to emphasize greater respect for individuals (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:1-9), and prophecies that would prepare them for the coming Messiah.

1. In the New Testament

In the New Testament we find the arrival of the Prince of peace and the kingdom of peace (Isaiah 9:6-7). The kingdom is in our midst, and it is “not of this world”. When Jesus was questioned by Pilate, He answered: *“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”* – John 18:36. In accordance with this, when Peter had tried to defend Him during the arrest, Jesus said: *“Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword”* – Matthew 26:52. This is significantly different from the old covenant, where Israel had been a kingdom of the world.

Also, the new covenant establishes a higher moral standard. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: *"You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye, for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person… You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”* – Matthew 5:38-39, 43-44. This righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Israel, as a nation of the world and of the law, enforced a superficial compliance that was often only a grudging lip-service. But the people of the new covenant walk according to the Spirit, with a freely chosen faith and obedience from the heart. The former relies upon the sword (violence). The latter relies on the power of the gospel and the Spirit of truth.

Also, under the new covenant, we are not called upon to defend ourselves from other nations or peoples. Our enemies are not flesh and blood, but spiritual powers, and our defender is the Holy Spirit. The emphasis now is to reach out to every tribe and nation, that they may all be reconciled to God. This mission requires the church to not be a kingdom of this world. All persons are to be regarded as individuals, whom God loves, and whom God wishes to save. Our mission is not for judgment, nor for defense, but for salvation. In line with this, Paul said: *“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone…be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge…Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* – Romans 12:17-21

In summary, there is no place for violence in the Christian faith, because of:

1. The nature of true righteousness – from the heart, not under compulsion
2. The nature of the kingdom – not of this world (not by political force)
3. Our mission – salvation, not judgment
4. Church History

Many times in history, Christians have committed great violence in God’s name. The fault has been disregard for the three principles stated above. In the early history of the Catholic church, there was a movement toward legalistic righteousness: enforcement of obedience by compulsion, rather than by the Spirit. Secondly, the alliance with political power, instituted by Constantine, made it more like a kingdom of this world, relying on "the sword". And, as a worldly kingdom, it considered execution of judgment to be part of its mission. These were the errors that led to the Crusades, inquisitions, and religious wars against Protestants.

Islam developed mainly as a reaction against the corruption and the violence of the Roman Catholic church of the 7th century. The Koran teaches the establishment of a kingdom "of the world", a civil government that would enforce the laws of the Koran, with a clear mission of judgment against "infidels". *“Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies of Allah and your enemies…”* – Koran 8:60. Muslims who take this seriously find warrant to use violence to establish their kingdom and their righteousness. Muslims in the U.S., heavily influenced by our Christian culture, often give liberal and “peaceful” interpretations of the Koran. But Muslims of other cultures, who attend more strictly to the literal teachings, find ample justification to pursue their mission by any means, including violence.

4. Application for today’s church

If there is one “religious” belief that can be identified as the source of all religious violence, it is the false belief that righteousness can be established by the sword. The Christian faith clearly opposes such teaching. Instead, we must hold to the following:

* Do not enforce obedience, within the church, by violent (worldly) means
* Do not try to establish righteousness in the world through political power
* Do not try to execute judgment against others; we are here to save, not to judge

The way to prevail against violence is to “pray for those who persecute you”, and to practice the way of the cross, which is “the power and wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Notes for Chapter 11

[1] Robert McAfee Brown offers the broad definition of violence as anything that “violates the personhood” of another.

[2] There is a corporate attitude in the Torah and the Former Prophets (Joshua, judges, Samuel and Kings), regarding individuals as agents of their nation or tribe. It is the mentality of warfare, where everyone is regarded as a soldier, and the violence is not between individuals but between armies and nations. This violence involves an element of terrorism, in that warfare employs intimidation, creating fear among the enemy, and breaking their will. These examples and teachings can be considered as tutorial, as was the Law: a necessary stage of development.

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# Individualism and Community

The Christian scriptures teach a balanced valuation of the individual and the community. We are created as separate persons, with individual integrity. But it is not good to be alone.

Value of Individuals. The Bible teaches individual responsibility: for making free choices, and bearing the consequences. Individual belief, repentance and baptism are decisive for one’s destiny, not genetic connection to a family or citizenship in a nation (Romans 9:8). And within a community, each individual has responsibilities *(“if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat”* – 2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Also, the value and dignity of each individual person is affirmed, for example in the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son. And our eternal hope, the bodily resurrection, preserves personal identity and integrity. This is unlike Eastern religions that teach a loss of identity by being dissolved into the One Spirit.

Value of the Community. Nevertheless, our hope is fulfilled only within community, and we presently experience God's grace only in the fellowship of community. We cannot have a proper relationship with God solely as individuals; it must be through the community of the church. True worship must include communal worship, and we cannot be one with Christ without also being one with His people, His body, His bride.

We owe our salvation and our spiritual birth to the church, which has transmitted and proclaimed the gospel, in word and in deed. We similarly owe our continued spiritual life and growth to the church, since God provides for us primarily through the ministries and gifts of others in the church. These relationships in the church must be mutual: we serve one another, regarding others’ interests as more important than our own. *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* - Acts 20:35. Manifestations of the Spirit are given to each one for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). And our eternal reward is in the community of the kingdom, the Holy City, the Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:1-4, 9-11), each person’s fulfillment depending upon the realized destiny of all (Hebrews 11:39-40).

C. S. Lewis, in “Mere Christianity”, made the following observations about the diversity of individuals and the organic unity of the group:

“Christianity thinks of human individuals not as mere members of a group or items in a list, but as organs in a body—different from one another and each contributing what no other could. When you find yourself wanting to turn your children, or pupils, or even your neighbors, into people exactly like yourself, remember that God probably never meant them to be that. You and they are different organs, intended to do different things.

On the other hand, when you are tempted not to bother about someone else’s troubles because they are “no business of yours,” remember that though he is different from you he is part of the same organism as you. If you forget that he belongs to the same organism as yourself you will become an Individualist. If you forget that he is a different organ from you, if you want to suppress differences and make people all alike, you will become a Totalitarian. But a Christian must not be either a Totalitarian or an Individualist.”

Metaphors. Many metaphors are used to describe the relation and balance between the individual and the community. Some important examples are the following:

* Family: Individual persons are to be committed to one another and interdependent, sharing burdens, as is done in a family. Jesus taught that our obligations to brothers and sisters in Christ are greater than to our genetic families outside of Christ (Matthew 10:37; 12:46-50). We are not to be transients, but we are to make a home with our family, with a commitment that is for better or for worse. Also, a family is not of our own choosing, but we are called, adopted, into the family.
* Body: We are individual members of a living, organic body, with each member dependent upon all the others, and supporting all the others (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). We are to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into the one body.
* Vine: Each branch must be connected to the others, and hence to the root, to be a part of the vine. *“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.”* - John 15:4
* Temple: We are stones, built upon one another, supporting one another, forming a temple for the Spirit. *“You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood”* – 1 Peter 2:5

Examples of Community.

Old Testament law had special provisions of caring for one another, yet preserving private property and the responsibilities of individuals:

1. Gleaning (Leviticus 19:9-10)

2. Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-13)

There was to be a balance between each one being responsible for oneself, and assuming some responsibility for others. Also, the blessings of the covenant are for those who belong to the covenant community, but the status of “belonging” depended upon an individual’s faithfulness to the covenant. This is analogous to abiding in Christ, in the New Covenant.

Fellowship (*koinonia*) in the New Testament church:

1. A communal economy was originally practiced in Jerusalem (Acts 4:32-35), but this was practical only on a short-term basis, and was probably driven by the expectation of Christ’s immediate return. It should not be regarded as an example to be literally followed by future generations, as is clear from the remainder of the New Testament. However, it provides an excellent example of mutual love and generosity.

2. Sharing meals, especially the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:42)

3. Offerings -- Acts 4:36-37; Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

4. Hospitality: This assumes private property, but that our property and resources are made available to others as needed (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9).

*“So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”* – Romans 12:5

Notes for Chapter 12

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# Final Judgment

We look to God’s final judgment to set all things right, so that justice will at last prevail. However, the traditional Christian doctrine of judgment - that all the unsaved will be subjected to everlasting torment - is troubling, to say the least. It is a teaching that is hard to reconcile with a loving God. An alternative interpretation, presented here, is that the souls of the unsaved do not endure forever, but are totally and permanently destroyed.

The original-language words translated as “hell” are the Greek words “*hades*” and “*Gehenna*”. Hades, corresponding to the Hebrew *sheol*, is the place of the dead, or “grave”. It is not a place of punishment, but is rather the place where all of the dead go, both the righteous and the unrighteous. *"God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave [sheol]”* - Psalm 49:15. *"I will ransom them (God’s people) from the power of the grave [sheol]; I will redeem them from death.”* - Hosea 13:14, indicating the equivalence of “sheol” and “death”. The Jewish concept of *sheol* is a place of no activity (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10).

Gehenna refers to the "valley of Hinnom”: a dump outside of Jerusalem, where people burned their garbage, and where the bodies of those who died in sin were thrown to be incinerated. Jesus referred to this as a metaphorical place where God *“is able to destroy both soul and body”* - Matthew 10:28. This is the place of punishment of the unrighteous.

The traditional view regards hell (*Gehenna*) as a place of everlasting torment. This can be traced to the influence of Geek philosophy, which taught the immortality of the soul. If a soul cannot die, then it's punishment must be an everlasting torment. The alternative view, "conditional immortality”, is based on scriptural teaching that there can be no life except by the active presence of God. Outside of Him, there can be no continuation of life. *“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”* - Colossians 1:17. *“He…upholds all things by the word of His power.”* - Hebrews 1:3. *“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself”* - John 5:26 [1]. We should conclude that our souls are not intrinsically eternal. Those who are cast out from God’s presence must die. They cannot survive without *“the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality …”* - 1 Timothy 6:16. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). *“Their end is destruction”* - Philippians 3:19. *“The wicked will be no more.”* - Psalm 37:10

Consider now those scriptures that speak of eternal punishment. In Mark 9:47-48, Jesus refers to the destiny of the wicked as a place where the fire is not quenched, and the worm does not die. On the face of it, this appears “eternal”. However, this is a quote from Isaiah 66:24, where it refers not to souls, but to physical corpses. *“Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched…”*. So the original usage does not mean that the fire and the worms are literally “eternal”, but rather that they will continue their work of destruction until that work is complete, and the resulting destruction will be permanent, with no recovery [2].

Other scriptures refer to outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 and Luke 13:27-28). In Luke 13:28, the weeping and gnashing of teeth occur *“when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out.”* They suffer torment when they experience the full weight of their guilt, and see that they are being cast out, but there is no indication that it will continue forever.

Paul’s writings speak of destruction (1 Thessalonians 5:3 and Philippians 3:19), and eternal destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:9). To say that the destruction is “eternal” is simply to say that it has eternal, irreversible consequences. Peter gives a similar teaching in 2 Peter 3:7-13, saying that all things will be destroyed by burning, with no mention of torment.

Two passages in Revelation have been interpreted by some to teach “eternal torment”. Revelation 14:9-11 says that those who worship the beast *“will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night …”.* And Revelation 20:10 says that the devil, the beast and the false prophet *“will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* This is followed by Revelation 20:14-15 *“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. … And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”* Notice that in the last passage “death and Hades” were thrown into the lake of fire. This indicates the metaphorical nature of the “lake of fire”, and it shows that the metaphor must pertain to destruction rather than torment.

The remaining issue is the interpretation of Revelation 14:9-11; 20:10, which says: *“the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night”*. Consider similar statements elsewhere in scripture. Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah *“are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire”*. That fire itself was not eternal, but its consequences were. Especially relevant is Isaiah 34:9-10, pertaining to Edom: *“Its streams will be turned into pitch, and its loose earth into brimstone, and its land will become burning pitch. It will not be quenched night or day; its smoke will go up forever. From generation to generation it will be desolate; none will pass through it forever and ever.”* Subsequent verses (11-15) describe the place as desolate and uninhabited, not a place of continuing fire and torment. This is the basis for Revelation 14:9-1; 20:10, as well as for Revelation 19:3, which says of Babylon (i.e. Rome): *“Her smoke rises up forever and ever”*. This means the burning will not cease until it achieves total destruction. As noted previously (Luke 13:28), the torment is in knowing what they have done, and what they have lost.

Our eternal destiny is a new Heaven and Earth, where all things are summed up in Christ and handed over to the Father (Ephesians 1:9-10; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). This would be incompatible with maintaining a place of everlasting torment. It rather requires that all rebellious souls and spirits be destroyed, which is exactly what the scriptures teach. This is the eternal purpose worthy of a loving God.

*“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away…I am making all things new.”* – Revelation 21:4-5

Notes for Chapter 13

[1] See also John 6:57 -- *“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me”*

[2] It was also prophesied that the fires of Jerusalem “shall not be quenched” (Jeremiah 17:27)

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#  Eternal Reward

1. The Kingdom -- The eternal destiny for God’s people is first of all referred to as the Kingdom of God (or “kingdom of heaven”). Old Testament prophecies describe this as a kingdom of peace (Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:6-9), where the Messiah (son of David and “Son of Man”) will reign forever (Isaiah 9:2-7; Daniel 7:13-14). They will be fed and tended by the good shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23-30; 37:24-28). In the Gospels, John the Baptist announced that the kingdom is at hand (Matthew 3:2), which was Jesus’ primary message in the first phase of His ministry (Matthew 4:17, 23; Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20). The kingdom was advancing forcefully, and many were seizing the kingdom (Matthew 11:12; Luke 16:16).

But initial entry into the kingdom is not all that is required. Jesus also taught that one must be ready for His return and be faithful unto the end, as in the parables of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) and the servant stewards (Matthew 24:42-51; 25:14-29). The reward is for those who endure (Luke 21:19; Romans 2:7; Hebrews 10:36-39; 2 Peter 1:5-11) and for “those who overcome” (Revelation 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). Paul said you must *“run in such a way that you may win.”* (1 Corinthians 9:24).

In the interim, between Jesus’ first coming and His return, His people are conditionally in the kingdom, and the kingdom is active in this world, with power. But we are still engaged in a war against the forces of this world and this age. The kingdom is present, but its power and glory are not yet fully manifested. Many of Jesus’ parables illustrate this point of its “hiddenness”, and the long delay before the final victory (Matthew 13:3-23, 24-30, 31-32, 33). There are real kingdom blessings in this present age, but they are in the midst of suffering and persecution. These blessings are presented in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), where they are described as partly present in this age, and partly awaiting fulfillment in the “age to come”, conditioned upon one’s present life and character.

The triumphant kingdom will be revealed in its full glory only in “the age to come”, when Jesus returns. The power of God operating in this present age is actually the power of the age to come: the future invading the present, the new creation invading the old. Paul spoke of the future age as follows: *“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* – Philippians 3:14. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;**in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” -* 2 Timothy 4:7-8.  ***“****For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,**looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” -* Titus 2:11-13

2. The interim period, between Jesus’ 1st and 2nd comings, is referred to as “the Last Days”. It is a time of the outpouring of the Spirit, reconciling people to God from all tribes and nations. *“This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘and it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind…”* Acts 2:16-17 (Joel 2:28-32). And in these last days, we have life in the Spirit: *“Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life”* - John 5:24.

But these last days are also a time of warfare and tribulation: ***“****but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.”* - 1 Peter 4:13. Before the end, the “Man of Lawlessness” appears (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12), and the “Antichrist” (1 John 2:18-24). The beast (Rome) wages war against the saints (Revelation 11:3, 7, 11-12; 13:7). Satan is bound for “1000 years” so that the church can accomplish its mission; but he is also “released” to wage war (Revelation 20:1-10). The steady advance of the gospel mission, and the warfare, and the persecution and tribulations, are all concurrently taking place in these “last days”. [2] It is a time when this world is “passing away”: *“The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”* - 1 John 2:17. *“The form of this world is passing away.”* - 1 Corinthians 7: 31. *“Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”* – 2 Corinthians 4:16.

4. The intervention of God in history – for judgment and salvation – is known as “the Day of the Lord”. In the New Testament, it is also referred to as Jesus’ coming (*parousia*) [1]. It has application both to historical events in this age, and to the final judgment at the end of the age. In the Mt. of Olives discourse, Jesus’ disciples asked: *“what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”* - Matthew 24:3. The answer, given in Matthew 24:4-44, pertained both to the historical destruction of the Jerusalem temple, and to His coming at the end of the age. The main points are: 1) there will be wars and rumors of war, and great lawlessness and tribulation, but those are just the beginning birth pangs; they do not indicate “the end”. 2) The gospel must first be preached to the entire world. 3) Do not believe false reports of His return, because when He returns it will be clearly seen by all, as lightning flashing from east to west. 4) *“This generation will not pass away until all these things take place”*, indicating that there were partial historical fulfillments during the first century. 5) *“Of that day and hour no one knows”,* referring to the end of the age. It will come when least expected, like a thief; therefore, be always alert and ready (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4).

5. Our hope is in the Resurrection: *“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day… I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”* - John 6:39-40. In order to save our souls, our mortal, corrupted bodies must be destroyed, and we must receive incorruptible “spiritual” bodies. Paul taught the necessity to be clothed with this new body (2 Corinthians 5:1-10), and that this resurrection is to occur at the end of the age (1 Corinthians 15:12-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

6. Alongside the new resurrection bodies, there shall also be a New Creation (new Heavens and Earth). The new creation has begun in these last days, in our spiritual life: *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”* - 2 Corinthians 5:17. But it must be followed up by both the resurrection and a totally new heaven and earth. This had been prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 60:19-21; 65:17-23), is mentioned by Paul (Romans 8:19-22) and Peter (2 Peter 3:10-13), and is most fully described in Revelation chapters 21 and 22.

*“I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”* – Revelation 21:1-6

It is then that we shall see *“the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth”* (Ephesians 1:10), and that He will *“hand over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power…so that God may be all in all”* (1 Corinthians 15:24, 28).



Notes for Chapter 14

[1] The word *parousia* means physical presence, arrival. It was used in secular Greek especially regarding the arrival of a royal or official personage. In the New Testament, it is used 24 times: 6 times for individuals, 1 time for “the lawless one” (2 Thessalonians 2:9), 1 time for “day of God “ (2 Peter 3:12), and 16 times for the 2nd coming of Christ:

Matthew 24:3 – “what will be the sign of Your **coming**…”

Matthew 24: 27 – “as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the **coming** of the Son of Man be.”

Matthew 24:30 – they will see “the Son of Man **coming** on the clouds …”

Matthew 24: 37, 39 – “For the **coming** of the Son of Man will be like the days of Noah” “so will the **coming** of the Son of Man be.” -- i.e. when unexpected, with people unprepared.

1 Cor 15:23 – “Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His **coming**”.

1 Thess 2:19 – The Thessalonians will be Paul’s hope, joy and crown of exultation “in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His **coming**”

1 Thess 3:13 – That He would “establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”

1 Thess 4:15 – “we who are alive and remain until the **coming** of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

1 Thess 5:23 – May you “be preserved complete, without blame at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Thess 2:1 -- “With regard to the **coming** of our Lord…”

2 Thess 2:8 – “…bring to an end by the appearance of His **coming**”

James 5:7-8 – Be patient, for “the **coming** of the Lord is near”.

2 Peter 1:16 – “…we made known to you the power and **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ”

2 Peter 3:4 – “…where is the promise of His **coming**?”

1 John 2:28 -- that “we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His **coming**.”

[2] The interpretation presented here – that the millennium extends from the first coming to the second coming (resurrection) - is usually referred to as “amillennialism”, or “inaugurated millennialism” (Beale). Furthermore, that the binding and loosing of Satan are not two successive time periods, but occur cyclically, in relative degrees, throughout history.

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