How The Christian Church
Got To Where It Is

A Sketch of Historical Theology to 1900

H. Carl Shank
How The Christian Church Got To Where It Is: A Sketch of Historical Theology to 1900

Copyright © 2018 by H. Carl Shank. All rights reserved.

Permission to photocopy any portion of this book for ministry purposes must be obtained from the author. Any photocopy must include copyright credits as stated above.

Most Scripture references are taken from the the ESV Bible, © 2001 by Crossway, a ministry of Good News Publishers. All references used by permission from the publishers. All rights reserved.

Cover design: H. Carl Shank. Background photo montage from historical sites in England and Scotland from a personal history tour in 2017. Historical figures via public domain from bottom right: Saint Augustine of Hippo, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley.


Printed in the United States of America
About the Author

In addition to his M.Div. and Th.M. (systematics) work, H. Carl Shank has been a youth, associate, solo, staff and lead pastor in over forty years of church ministry, pastoring beginning and established congregations in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and New York state. His passion for leadership development has resulted in mentoring numerous pastors, teaching in a number of local Bible institutes as well as serving as an adjunct faculty member of The King’s College, and training InterVarsity leaders on the East Coast. Carl has been regularly sought out for his acknowledged gifts of discernment and wisdom in dealing with church issues. He had been serving as the Executive Pastor of a church in Lancaster, PA, as well as a church health consultant through NCDAmerica. He is recently retired.

Besides numerous seminars and church related articles, his recently published Bible study contributions include *Living Life God’s Way: Reflections from the Psalms, Study Guide and Leader’s Guide*, *Romans: The Glory of God As Seen in the Righteousness of God*, *Jonah: A Reluctant Messenger*, *A Needy People, and God’s Amazing Grace*, *Esther: For Such A Time As This, A Study of God’s Providence*, *Church Warnings! The Seven Churches of Revelation for Today*, *Building For God: Leadership and Life Lessons from Nehemiah*, and *The Pastoral Letters Revisited: Behavior and Belief* available from Lulu Press, Amazon and other booksellers. Carl is married to his wonderful wife, Nancy, and has three grown, married children. He lives in the Marietta, PA area and can be reached for consulting, seminars or leadership and mentoring development at cshanktype@gmail.com

www.carlshankconsulting.com
Table of Contents

Selected Bibliography ................................................................. 7
Foreword ......................................................................................... 9
Who Cares? Why Study Historical Theology ............................. 13
Historical Theology: An Introduction ........................................ 25
The Sweep of History:
   A Broad Overview of Historical Theology ............................ 31
The Triune God:
   The Trinity in Historical Theology .......................................... 43
Christology:
   Jesus Christ in Historical Theology ....................................... 49
Anthropology
   Creation, State and Nature of Man ......................................... 57

Appendix:
Finney’s New Measures: The Controversy and Its Effects ........ 77

Other Titles by the Author
Selected Bibliography


Foreword

In 1984, as part of the extension courses of The King’s College at Albany Bible Institute, in Schenectady, New York, I had the privilege to teach a course on the History of Doctrine, 1650–1900. I was the senior pastor at an Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the city at the time, and on the extension faculty of The King’s College in New York State.

My interest in the history of theology and doctrine came from a practical pastoral question as to why there had historically been so much resistance to evangelical thought and churches in that area. I learned that the particular region in which I was ministering was part of what was called the “burned over” district. It was a vast area in New England and New York that had experienced the Charles Finney revivals of the 1800s. While many so-called converts were added to the churches of the period through “hot seat” evangelistic methods, their children and children’s children resented and resisted such in-your-face evangelism and the evangelical movement in general. They ended up forsaking the church and allowing it to grow old and cold. (See the Appendix on Finney.)

While historians may debate the summary statements above, I was personally told this history by an embittered family in the Amsterdam, NY area, as our church sought to plant a daughter church there. It was, without a doubt, tough going in seeking to establish a local base for an evangelical Presbyterian church in that town.

When I had an opportunity to teach a historical theology course at a local Bible institute, I took on the task of seeking to understand the broader history of the evangelical church through the ages from the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation onward. I learned there is much reason for an aversion to evangelical thought and evangelical churches in New
England. That aversion, I was to learn later, resulted in very few major evangelical churches in New England. Those that were evangelically oriented were usually smaller and fighting for their existence in a region known for Unitarian universalism.

Church growth experts from Fuller Seminary and other institutions in the 1980s would regularly avoid New England, preferring to focus their efforts and expertise on the southern and western parts of the country. I recall one church growth seminar in which I was explaining my woes of seeking to grow a gospel church in northern New York state. The seminar leader’s advice was brief and to the point — “Move!” It was just too hard to establish a significant foothold for the gospel in New England.

The Puritan experiment of a “city on a hill” generally failed in New England, notwithstanding the revivals under Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, MA in the 1700s. Puritan scholars will greatly disagree as to the causes of this failure, but the fact that New England shows strong resistance to biblical, evangelical thought demonstrates and illustrates such widespread failure.

Why all of this happened to the center of historic, old Princeton led evangelical thought and life demands a study of historical theology and its roots from the Protestant Reformation onwards. The following study will be more of a “slice,” or a summary look at what I consider the main streams of historical theology. It will not be a comprehensive study, but I believe it is a generally accurate look into why the church is where she is today, not only in New England but in the rest of our country and world.

Carl Shank
2018

Notes
1. Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1895) has been considered by many as the Father of American Revivalism. Beginning his career as a lawyer, Finney had an encounter with God that transformed his life and called him into Christian ministry. (https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/charles-finney.html). See Appendix for more on Finney.
2. “He adopted the Methodists’ ‘anxious bench:’ he put a pew at the front of the
church, where those who felt a special urgency about their salvation could sit. He prayed in colloquial, common, and ‘vulgar’ language. Most of these New Measures were actually many decades old, but Finney popularized them and was attacked for doing so.” (Ibid)
Who Cares?

Why Study Historical Theology

“The checks and road signs of the past were not taken into consideration, and ancient heresies, long since condemned by the church, are constantly repeated and represented as new discoveries.”

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers . . .”

(Berkhof in History of Christian Doctrines; Titus 1:9, 10 ESV)

I just believe the Bible. In over forty years of pastoral experience and teaching, I cannot recall how often I have heard this sentence. Many use it as a sincere declaration of their faith in God and reliance on the Bible as the Word of God. Some use it as a defense against a modernistic dismissal of the Bible as authoritative. Others use it as a comeback against “theology,” as if theological and historical commentary somehow degrades or runs counter to the literal or printed words of Scripture. A few may use it as an excuse not to give themselves to serious study of the Bible altogether.

What many people often fail to recognize is that we are always doing theology. We are always making theological observations, applications and conclusions from the Bible. “Theology,” very simply is the study of God as He has revealed himself in His Word, the Bible. Theology proper has come to mean a systematic study of the truths of the Bible, or an exploration of those truths in a systematic way. However, everytime we make a comment on a biblical statement or term, we are doing theology.

Saying we “just believe the Bible” means we believe certain truths revealed in the words of Scripture in a way that makes sense to us and in a manner in which we were taught. Thus, Baptists and Presbyterians believe
"baptism" is a biblical truth, but their thoughts and explanations widely differ, even though both would maintain they just believe what the Bible says about baptism.

So, when we say “I just believe the Bible,” we are making a theological statement. Now, it is most likely a partial or only personally informed statement, but a statement about biblical truth nonetheless. But that’s the problem, isn’t it? And that is the issue with which historical theology wrestles. What does the whole Bible say about this or that? Different ages, different writers, different needs, and different stresses within the Church of Jesus Christ all contribute to the study of historical theology.

Numerous writers through the history of the Church have attempted to answer this question. Thus, the collection of theological systems grows. I presently work within the framework of what is called a Wesleyan-Arminian theological system, though I have been trained in and am more comfortable with another system, a Reformed-Calvinistic system with a Presbyterian-covenantal bent. Many of my friends come from a Dispensational system of thought and others from a Pentecostal/Charismatic viewpoint.

Some Christians become bewildered at theological systems, and the various points of view offered by historical theology, and thus the retreat to “I just believe what the Bible says.” We are back at our circular starting point. So, let me make some clarifying and hopefully helpful statements about theological systems and their strengths as well as their limitations as we study historical theology.

No one ultimate system

The first thing we can say about historical theological systems is that no one system has answered the question, “What does the whole Bible say about a subject?” Sorry to my devoted and somewhat fanatic systematic theologian friends. Because we are finite human beings with finite capacities, we do not grasp the whole compass of Scripture about anything!

This does not necessarily mean what we do grasp is untrue. It is rather unfinished. The Psalmist reminds us of the expansiveness of God’s
revealed Word in Psalm 119:96 – “To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless.” That is why, for instance, the Westminster Standards, as they are called, are “secondary” standards, secondary to the Scriptures. People make mistakes, ignore parts of the Word of God, or just don’t follow through with the whole Bible. While technology has made the whole Bible more accessible, it is still fallible human beings accessing that technology.

On the other hand, it could very well be that our system is defective and does not accurately represent what the Bible has to say. Clearly, theological errors have invaded the church since the Apostle Paul’s day (cf. Acts 20:28–31; 1 Corinthians 15:12ff; Galatians). Even in the pages of Scripture we are presented with historical theology of the period. That is why the Church early on made such statements as the Apostles’ Creed (3rd – 4th centuries AD), the Nicene Creed (AD 325 & 381), and the Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451). These statements of fairly universally agreed upon faith and theology grounded the Church in the truths of Scripture over against heresy, misinformation and miscommunication. Of course, later statements of faith and practice would follow.

It would seem that the two major powerhouses of theology, Calvinism and Arminianism, are at times given ultimate status. In his book, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist*, Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell argue that

The reality is that Calvinists no less than Arminians rely on controversial philosophical judgments and assumptions. When this is not understood, contested philosophical judgments are sometimes passed off as simple biblical truth. But the less aware we are of our philosophical assumptions, the more they control our thinking. We need to be aware of the philosophical issues as well as the biblical issues, and sorting them out from each other requires our careful effort.

I have personally learned much from the different theological systems and the journey of historical theology from my friends. I have been humbled to learn that my views of a particular passage or word were inaccurate or incomplete. I have experienced an openness to God and his
Word in a way that my chosen system was unable to lead me. And, after forty three years of active, professional ministry, I am much less ready to say my system has all the truth. Hopefully, I am growing and learning more from God the Holy Spirit daily as I search the Scriptures and continually revise my theological musings. No one system has all the truth. There is no one ultimate system.

**Systems tend to divide not unite**
The classic comeback from the Roman Catholic Church against Protestantism is that this one great division within the Church of Jesus Christ has led to a whole succession of divisions. There must, therefore, be something wrong, something inherently dangerous and evil with Protestantism. Several hundred Protestant denominations and thousands of churches of varying theological stripes dot the global landscape today.9

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, a converted physician who became a theologian, wrote in 1969 that many of the divisions within Protestantism were sinful.10 The idea of a national church along with certain national characteristics of those centuries helped create theological divisions. Scottish Presbyterians wanted more precision in their theological definitions than their English counterparts. The European political situation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries pitted Luther against the Anabaptists.

There was trouble defining what was “essential” from what was “nonessential” in a theological review of the Bible. At the Colloquy of Marlburg in 1509 Luther destroyed any hope for theological unity by taking a piece of chalk and writing, “This is my body, not represents it” on the table of discussion. The system called transubstantiation ruined any hope for church unity.

Lloyd Jones said that for real unity we need to avoid both ends of a spectrum—the extreme of “unrestricted laxity” versus the extreme of “egotistical rigor.” Historical theology shows how systems become legalistically binding documents. What is the “irreducible minimum” of the Christian faith? That is the question and issue of historical theology.
**Systems are not ends**
Theological systems are not ends in and of themselves. This should be clear from the study of historical theology. This follows from what has been said above, but needs to be emphasized here. I retreated from one denominational affiliation in my career because the important discussions centered around the theological systems of belief, not the Scriptures. It is very easy to become so enamored with a theological system that it becomes the standard around which all statements about a Bible truth are analyzed or tried.

This is not unnatural or evil, however. Men and women have labored long and hard over making their theological system right and proper. They have invested years, sometimes centuries in their denominations, seeking to reach what the whole Bible has to say about this or that. They have given honest effort, hours and hours of prayer, and countless days of discussions with colleagues over theological assertions. These are not tempests in a teacup, but rather very serious debates about eternal truths. The problem is when the system becomes all encompassing and all important.

**Systems help provide theological coherence**
Our theological musings and inspections are at best partial and incomplete. Theological systems seek to give a systemic view of Scriptural truth and a systematized, coherent view of truth. They attempt to piece together biblical truths in a carefully organized way. As Wayne Grudem points out about his systematic theology:

This organization also provides one sort of check against inaccurate analysis of individual topics, for it means that all other doctrines that are treated can be compared with each topic for consistency in methodology and absence of contradictions in the relationships between the doctrines.11

Thus, balanced consideration of complementary teachings are given by good theological systems, such as Christ’s deity with his humanity or man’s responsibility with God’s sovereignty.
Coherence also provides more detailed analysis, a more complete picture of a biblical subject and hopefully gives a more accurate picture of truth. Coherence should give more clarity to a subject. While many Bible believers feel the Bible is clear to them on this or that subject, this is internal, subjective clarity. The problem is that internal clarity is not necessarily external clarity. What is obvious to one believer may not be so obvious or clear to another believer. Thus, for example, the “days” of Genesis 1 are “clearly” 24-hour periods of time for one believer, while another Christian sees them as geological ages or spans of time. A good theological system addresses these “clarity” issues in a more complete way than most individual believers can.

**Systems help fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20)**

I am indebted to Wayne Grudem again for this salient point on which I will elaborate a bit. One of the emphases of the early Anabaptists was their adherence to “following Jesus.” They felt that their Reformation brethren were confusing the words and actions of Jesus and those who wished to follow him with theological trappings which had little to do with New Testament revelation. They wanted a New Testament church made up of mature, tested and tried, born again believers. Many of them gave their lives to the flames because of this belief system.

Jesus commanded us to “make disciples” of all nations “teaching them to observe all I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). “All I have commanded you” includes, as Grudem points out, the interpretation and application of Jesus’ life and teaching as well as the Letters or Epistles of the Apostles, since they were given by the “command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37; John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Thess. 4:15; 2 Peter 3:2; Rev. 1:1-3).

But the Anabaptists failed to recognize that “all I have commanded you” must include the Old Testament writings since Jesus and the Apostles freely used and referred to them as God’s Word (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). The Great Commission, rather than just a call to evangelize people so they make a decision for Christ, is a call to disciple and teach people the whole Bible. A good theological system helps accomplish this task.
**Systems deliver us from Christian “babyitis”**

Theological systems help Christians committed to the Bible as God's sufficient and clear Word eradicate wrong ideas about a myriad of subjects as well as grow in decision making and maturity. Theological systems challenge both our preconceived ideas about God and his truth as well as learned errors from others.

With all the available Bible-tainted media in today’s information rich age, we need good theological systems to help us distinguish truth from error. Old heresies continually pop up in new forms. An understanding of biblical and historical theology, helps us see these teachings for what they are—heretical formulations.

In a very practical way, this question about “what does the whole Bible say about a subject,” guides us in finding out about husband-wife relationships, raising children, living for Christ at work and school, and even spending money. Grudem well says, “In every area of inquiry certain theological principles will come to bear, and those who have learned well the theological teachings of the Bible will be much better able to make decisions that are pleasing to God.”

**Why study historical theology?**

Why study the history of doctrine? J. G. Vos in his article, “The Use and Abuse of Church History,” gives three important reasons to do so. We can unduly romanticize the past. We can give it an ideal quality or character that it does not have nor deserve. Some overzealous Baptist historians, noting the historical gaps in their denominational development, defended their heritage this way: “If you see a white horse entering a dark forest, and then see a white horse emerge from that forest, you can be sure it is the same horse.”

The Waldenses were sometimes championed for their fiercely held “priesthood of all believers,” over against the prevailing Roman Catholic system of the period. However, their view of justification by faith alone was not fully realized or held until the Protestant Reformation. They may have been faithful witnesses of Christ in a dark period of church history, but they were less than ideal markers of correct theology.
The Anabaptists, or the “radical Reformers,” as they have been called, professed faithful New Testament Christianity, but discarded Paul and his writings in favor of the sayings of Jesus. Noted as harbingers of a “peace theology,” some Anabaptists were, however, quite warlike and raised armies for their defense.

The second reason why we should accurately study the history of doctrine is the problem of absolutizing of the past, seizing upon one period of time as normative and ideal for all future times. Luther and the Protestant Reformers were brave souls in their time, yet their admixture of church and state led to mass persecutions of those who did not agree with town fathers. Vos puts it this way — *ecclesia reformata reformanda est* — “The church having been reformed is to be further reformed.”

Then there is the disdain of the past, a prideful and noted trashing of past church councils and creeds and discussions. The theologian Bernard Ramm prefers being “a-historical.”¹⁸ The philosopher, Hegel, unfortunately once said that “we learn from history that we learn nothing from history.”¹⁹ A very common objection is “no creed but Christ.” The problem is, however, what Christ? How do we understand the union of divine and human in the Jesus of the Bible? Is this Jesus merely the supreme ethical teacher whose incarnation divested himself of divinity? Or is Jesus fully God but not quite fully man? The early Church Councils were brought together to discuss and give a biblical route through the various teachings about Jesus that cropped up in the first centuries of the organized Church. I met a pastor who told me that the Bible is not written for systematic theological discussions, but is only an expanded story. Such reasoning, I believe, dishonors God and his providential workings in the history of his Church.

Certain major theological problems have cropped up in church history, such as the nature of the Trinity, the understanding of the Person of Christ, how a person is justified before God and so forth. Some Church Fathers, some of whom have long been condemned, are cited by modern writers today as verification of long held truth. And so, the modern writer and speaker, Rob Bell in his book, *Love Wins*, makes rash and selective historical theological comments to somehow prove that the God of
love will “win” in the end, and that all people will finally be saved. Bell selectively uses, and many say misuses, historical theology to buttress a point of view denied by the majority of orthodox writers through the centuries. He claims the likes of Origen, Basil, Augustine and even Martin Luther, yet miserably fails to place their comments within their own historical and theological milieu. This is careless theology.²⁰

There is a very practical need for historical theology. The Reformer Melancthon penned the Augsburg Confession of Faith (1530) because Philip V needed to bring Lutherans and Catholics together to battle the invading Turks. Later, the Formula of Concord (1580) was drafted to formalize and systematize theological insights. The Westminster Confession of Faith was the document our Puritan forefathers brought over on the Mayflower to delineate what the “city of God” should look like in the new world. The Bible was read through the eyes of historical needs and stresses. Our study of historical theology thus helps us understand why we are where we are in church life and thought.

We read in the Psalms a recapitulation of ancient history to enforce current spiritual truths. The history of Israel in their wilderness wanderings is recited by God to them in Psalm 78 for them to remember and repent of current day defections from him. Stephen in his defense recites a condensed history of Israel and then makes this application — “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” (Acts 7:51–53)

As stewards of God, we are under a mandate to investigate the meaning of history, under the searchlight of Scripture alone. The truth of the sovereignty of God makes historical study and research meaningful and important. C. Gregg Singer writes:

The historian who believes in the biblical view of history proceeds on the assumption that God so rules in the minds
and hearts of man that in their political, economic, and social decisions and acts they create a meaningful pattern of events and that this pattern derives its meaning and purpose from the fact that ultimately the sovereign God establishes the cause and effect relationship between them.\textsuperscript{21}

This book supports a presuppositional point of view of history and historical theology. To say that history and historical theology simply record what has happened without a person’s subjective views entering into the discussion is a myth of neutrality that cannot be sustained. For the non-Christian, history has no ultimate meaning or direction. In fact, some will say it is a cyclical series of events that have no ultimate beginning or end. In this regard, the idealist is reduced to examining his own ideas of history, while the empiricist examines a meaningless collection of random facts. History is further reduced to a statistical analysis of separate, disparate facts that collectively might or might not demonstrate a pattern of thought. We maintain that history is moving in a God-ordained direction toward a known historical end or goal.

**Self Reflection & Discussion**

1. What does the claim, “I just believe the Bible,” mean to you? How much of your background and training are involved in that statement?
2. Where are you on the theological spectrum, as best as you know? Why are you there?
3. Have you ever read any book or articles on historical theology? If so, what were they?
4. What does the study of “history” involve for you?

**Notes**

1. Technically, “theology” comes from the Greek words for “God” (\textit{theos}) and “word” (\textit{logos}). It is thus the “science or study of God.” Augustine said theology was the “rational discussion respecting the deity.” Later theologians like Louis Berkhof noted that theology was the “systematized knowledge of God in his various relations to the universe . . . Theology is the effect upon which the divine revelation, embodied in Scripture, produces in the sphere of systematic theology. Theology is the fruit of the reflection of the church on the truth revealed in the Word of God.” (Louis Berkhof,
2. Wesleyan-Arminianism is a theological movement fusing together the teachings of John Wesley (1703-1791) and Arminianism from the Remonstrance movement which was rejected at the Synod of Dort (1618-19). Essentially, Arminianism sees God’s election and judgment as conditioned upon the faith response given by the supposed free will of humans, Christ’s atonement as sufficient for all but efficacious only for those who choose to believe, God’s grace can be resisted and according to Wesley, without perfect holiness, and Christians can walk away from God and “fall” from grace.

3. The Reformed or Calvinistic system heralds what are called the “five points” of Calvinism, codified at the Synod of Dort (1618-19), which include total depravity, unconditional election, limited or definite atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance (as well as preservation) of the saints. The acronym TULIP has been used to describe this system. Many conservative Presbyterians have adopted this theological system along with “covenantal theology,” another system that sees the Bible in terms of God’s covenants with mankind.

4. Dispensationalism is a theological system introduced by J.N. Darby (1800-1882) and popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible. Lewis Sperry Chafer in his Systematic Theology says that biblical history is divided up into seven “dispensations” of God’s ways of relating to his people. The church age is a parenthesis in God’s plan for the ages. While many Dispensationalists today would qualify or even reject many of these distinctives, classic Dispensationalism has a great hold on many evangelicals.

5. The Pentecostal/Charismatic system holds to a classic understanding of the essentials of the faith but adds the teaching that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an event subsequent to conversion made evident by the sign of speaking in tongues and that all spiritual gifts outlined in the New Testament are not only available but to be exercised in today’s world and church. Charismatics, as distinguished from their historic Pentecostal counterparts, will allow differing viewpoints on whether baptism in the Spirit is subsequent to conversion and whether tongue speaking is a necessary mark of being baptized in the Spirit. Often Charismatics view themselves as a force of renewal within numerous denominational groups rather than being a denomination themselves.

6. The Hebrew term here pictures the extensive and inexhaustible nature of Scripture, with an expanse that nothing else can even approach. Allen translates v. 96 this way: “Every aspiration I have seen fall short of realization: Your command is so wide in its scope” (Leslie Allen, Psalms 101–150 of the Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 21 (Waco: Word Books, 1983).

7. The Westminster Standards are the collection of documents which include the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms used by orthodox Presbyterians since the documents creation in 1643-7.


9. The popular claim that there are over 33,000 Protestant denominational groups has been challenged by the Catholic press — http://www.ncregister.com/blog/sbeale/just-how-many-protestant-denominations-are-there. Certainly, whatever the
number, there are hundreds of them.
13. The German word would be Nachfolge, which the early Anabaptists used to identify their commitment to obedience to Jesus Christ as His example and teachings are set forth in the Gospels. They were so fixed on obedience to Christ that the Pauline Epistles, as well as the Old Testament, were often overlooked in their theological writings and convictions.
15. Grudem, 29.
17. “Waldenses, also spelled Valdenses, also called Waldensians, French Vaudois, Italian Valdesi, members of a Christian movement that originated in 12th-century France, the devotees of which sought to follow Christ in poverty and simplicity. The movement is sometimes viewed as an early forerunner of the Reformation for its rejection of various Catholic tenets. In modern times the name has been applied to members of a Protestant church (centred on the Franco-Italian border) that formed when remnants of the earlier movement became Swiss Protestant reformers.” Cited in https://www.britannica.com/topic/Waldenses.
19. “Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (August 27, 1770 – November 14, 1831) was a German philosopher and an important figure of German idealism. He achieved wide recognition in his day and—while primarily influential within the continental tradition of philosophy—has become increasingly influential in the analytic tradition as well. Although Hegel remains a divisive figure, his canonical stature within Western philosophy is universally recognized. Hegel’s principal achievement was his development of a distinctive articulation of idealism, sometimes termed absolute idealism, in which the dualisms of, for instance, mind and nature and subject and object are overcome. His philosophy of spirit conceptually integrates psychology, the state, history, art, religion and philosophy.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Wilhelm_Friedrich_Hegel)
Historical Theology
An Introduction

“Theology is, more precisely, the scientific determination, interpretation and defense of those Scriptures, together with the history of the manner in which the truths it reveals have been understood, and the duties they impose have been performed, by all Christians in all ages.”

(A.A. Hodge in Outlines of Theology)

What is historical theology? A.A. Hodge defines it as “the actual development of the theoretical and practical elements of Scriptural revelation in the faith and life of the church.” Consequently, historical theology studies history not merely for the facts and dates of certain happenings, but for the providential and sovereign thread of truth that God has given us through the ages. Historical theology is not idealistic rationalism or skeptical empiricism. The facts of church history are not unconnected, disparate instances without any real connection. But neither are they to be marshalled as idealistic markers for all time.

God is sovereign Lord of time, providence and knowledge. History thus moves from his directing decrees from the future to the present to the past. Most New Testament theologians see the movement of history from the perspective of the future coming of Christ governing and enlightening the present circumstances of believers. Because God is Lord of history, He defines and gives meaning to its development. Since “theology” is technically the “science of God,” it is the application of God’s Word by people to all areas of life and thought throughout the ages. Historical theology is therefore concerned about people, communities, events and trends in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages.

“Dogma” has been a frightening term for many, seemingly invested
with dictatorial authority over peoples’ lives. Yet, the biblical evidence suggests the word means a “decree” about God’s Word. Luther defines “dogma” as “an official pronouncement by an ecclesiastical body on what the Bible does or does not say.” Essentially, dogma is systematic theology endorsed by an ecclesiastical body as a system of truth.

Dogma uses confessions or creedal statements to summarize and categorize biblical theology. The term “confess,” from which we get “confession,” comes from 1 Timothy 6:13, 14 — “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” A proper “confession” acknowledges the kingship of Jesus Christ. It is a public, heartfelt, life-giving loyalty to Jesus placed in statements of objective truth. Creeds and confessions are not historically or technically statements of Christian experience, but rather assertions of Christ-centered submission to the authority of God’s Word. Hoeksema would say creeds are simply the “spiritual children of the faith of the church.” And Berkhof will define dogma as “doctrine, derived from Scripture, officially defined by the Church, and declared to rest on divine authority.”

“Evangelical” dogma was historically first used by Tyndale to draw a line of demarcation in the Christian Church. It was then a line that meant life or death in the sixteenth century. At issue was the core understanding of the gospel of Christ. The Reformers sought to reformulate primitive Christian faith itself in their declarations. This line of demarcation was between evangelicalism and the Roman Catholic Church, where the Roman Church defined dogma as the centrality and authority of Church tradition. Protestantism understood dogma as developing formally from the church, as a body of believers, and materially from the self-authenticating Scriptures.

Later church history will unfortunately take its cues from the writing of Immanuel Kant and other liberal theologians and philosophers, stressing the priority and authority of one’s Christian consciousness or Christian experience. Fundamentalist dogma will be then seen as
Christian scholasticism, to be tossed aside in preference for the living, vibrant, and ever-revealing understanding of the Bible.

Theological Germany became more and more “liberalized” by Enlightenment rationalistic thinking. Gladdened by the availability of the Bible in the common language and ancient Greek texts of the New Testament, theological scholarship began to dispute the orthodox understanding of the text of the Bible. “Higher criticism” replaced biblically defined categories and standards. Major thinkers in the steps of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Søren Kierkegaard moved God out of the realm of the definable, knowable, objective categories of thought and belief to an anthropocentric projection or encounter. The supernatural was either denied or relegated to an unreachable and unknowable realm of thought and life. In America, the social gospel replaced the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Pietistic reactions to this rejection of God-revealed truth emphasized holy living and devotional warmth toward God. C.I. Scofield, J. Gresham Machen and others sought to defend the biblical faith and absolute truth. As the evangelical world moved toward separatism from mainline denominationalism and from their anti-supernatural rationalism, others sought to either defend the Bible or eclipse the whole argument by focusing on spiritual gifts and intimacy with God. The charismatic movement erupted onto the scene in many churches and denominational settings. Devotional writers talked about closeness to God, experiencing God, sensing God and subjective spiritual renewal.

Many Christians consequently went from a highly objectifiable, definable view of God and his character to a subjective, highly emotional viewpoint. Discussions as to the knowability of God degenerated into “how to’s” – how to live for God, how to experience God, how to get close to God, how to connect with God. Thus the shift from “how does a sovereignly defined and described God love human beings” to “how does a loving God express his sovereignty over human beings.” The focus had shifted. Modernism had done its nasty work. God had become dethroned. Postmodernism added to the mix a rejection of absolute, objective truth about God to “my” truth about God, what God means to
me, not what He means over me. Spirituality was no longer a biblically defined category but a “human” category in which I define what it means to be spiritual. God was not only de-throned but stripped of his revelatory status.

Creeds and doctrine and dogma are important to evangelical thought and life. Most contemporary evangelicalism shares in the theological continuity of Protestant orthodoxy. It advances the passion to be biblical, wanting to retain the Reformation motto of “the Word and the Spirit.” It shares the goal of seventeenth century precision in theology, not neglecting or ignoring the “mystery” of revelation, but denying it to be vague mysticism, or mere poetic ramblings or just a good story. We need to realize that historical theology will be changeable and will move along organic, progressive God-ordained lines of thought and reflection. Our understanding of truth grows and develops over time. This does not re-define truth, but it understands and describes it more precisely and hopefully more accurately.

What we need to keep in mind in the study of historical theology is that Jesus Christ must remain pre-eminent in all things. Advances in historical theology must not merely preserve and defend the pre-eminence of Christ, but they must clarify and enhance that pre-eminence. We must also recognize the depth of the sinfulness of the human heart in doing historical theology. Historical theology will therefore record the successes as well as the failures of the Church in its carrying out the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our understanding of humankind must always be subservient to the Gospel. We must hold the Bible as the complete and perfect revelation of the whole counsel of God in all of our historical theology. Without this baseline, we will most definitely go astray. The issue here, as Iain Murray said, is the “Christ of my experience” versus the “Christ of the Bible.”

**Self Reflection & Discussion**

1. Do you have a Confession of Faith in your church or group? If so, find it, and spend some time reading through it.
2. Does your statement of faith coincide with your personal belief in the
Bible, God, and Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

3. Do you agree that a church’s creeds are the “spiritual children of the faith of the church.” If so, how so?

4. If you are part of a mainline church, have you seen the effects of “higher criticism” in your church’s teaching or stances? How so?

Notes
1. A.A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology (Hardpress reprint, 2018), 18.
4. "Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a German philosopher, postulated that “because of the limitations of argumentation in the absence of irrefutable evidence, no one could really know whether there is a God and an afterlife or not. For the sake of society and morality, Kant asserted, people are reasonably justified in believing in them, even though they could never know for sure whether they are real or not.” (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant) Kant proposed a “noumenal” world where God might exist if He exists at all, and a “phenomenal” world of sense and experience. The problem is that there is an uncrossable “line” between the worlds. Consequently, “God” cannot objectively influence or speak into the world of sense and experience. No one can really know for sure if there is a God and an eternity. “With regard to morality, Kant argued that the source of the good lies not in anything outside the human subject, either in nature or given by God, but rather is only the good will itself. A good will is one that acts from duty in accordance with the universal moral law that the autonomous human being freely gives itself. This law obliges one to treat humanity – understood as rational agency, and represented through oneself as well as others – as an end in itself rather than (merely) as means to other ends the individual might hold. These ideas have largely framed or influenced all subsequent philosophical discussion and analysis.” (ibid)
5. “Higher criticism” refers to the “work of German biblical scholars of the Tübingen School. After the path-breaking work on the New Testament by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the next generation – which included scholars such as David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72) – in the mid-19th century analyzed the historical records of the Middle East from Christian and Old Testament times in search of independent confirmation of events related in the Bible. These latter scholars built on the tradition of Enlightenment and Rationalist thinkers such as John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Gotthold Lessing, Gottlieb Fichte, G. W. F. Hegel and the French rationalists.” Such criticism often has repudiated the supernaturally inspired view of the Scriptures to which most evangelicals adhere. Higher criticism is to be distinguished from “lower criticism,” or textual criticism, in which the biblical manuscripts are examined according to ancient documents to seek to obtain the reading closest to the original Greek or Hebrew. Thus, the variant readings in the footnotes of many New Testament Greek Bibles are there to seek to

6. These three thinkers negatively affected conservative, or orthodox, theological scholarship in the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) “was a German theologian and philosopher known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Protestant orthodoxy. He also became influential in the evolution of Higher Criticism. His work also forms part of the foundation of the modern field of hermeneutics. Because of his profound impact on subsequent Christian thought, he is often called the ‘Father of Modern Liberal Theology.’” (See article in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Schleiermacher)

Kierkegaard (1813–1855) “primarily discussed subjectivity with regard to religious matters. He argues that doubt is an element of faith and that it is impossible to gain any objective certainty about religious doctrines such as the existence of God or the life of Christ. The most one could hope for would be the conclusion that it is probable that the Christian doctrines are true, but if a person were to believe such doctrines only to the degree they seemed likely to be true, he or she would not be genuinely religious at all. Faith consists in a subjective relation of absolute commitment to these doctrines.” (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Søren_Kierkegaard)

7. These two conservative evangelical leaders, at opposite poles theologically, sought to stem the rising tide of liberalism in America. J. Gresham Machen repudiated the growing liberalism of Princeton Seminary and founded Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). He wrote an important work at the time, Christianity and Liberalism (Eerdmans, 2009, revised edition, originally published in 1923). C.I. Scofield, author of the Scofield Study Bible, in which he outlined the major points of fundamentalist dispensationalism, vigorously defended the orthodox faith against liberalism in the Congregational churches of New England and others.

The Sweep of History
A Broad Overview of Historical Theology

“The history of the church is simply an account of its success and its failure in carrying out Christ’s Great Commission.”
(Renwick, The Story of the Church)

Philip Schaff, in his Creeds of Christendom, suggests four classes of church creeds.¹ There are creeds which are ecumenical symbols of the early church, creeds that develop the nature of the Trinity, the Person and Work of Christ, and so forth. Then, there are creeds of the Greek Orthodox Church, over against the Western Church, which debate the doctrine of the papacy, the question of “filioque” and “double procession.”² The third set of creeds are those that are symbols of the Roman Catholic Church from the Council of Trent (1563) to the Vatican (1870) discussing papal infallibility. The fourth set of creeds would be evangelical Protestant Church creeds, from the sixteenth century Reformation onwards, including Lutheran, Calvinistic groups, Arminian, Moderate and Anabaptist gatherings. Here’s a very brief overview of historical theology.

Pre–1650 historical theology
(See following chapters for early creedal affirmations.) The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion (1563–1571). As England under Henry VIII broke with the papacy in Rome, and under the continental influence of Calvinism, articles of faith and church order were written over a period of thirty years.

The articles went through at least five major revisions prior to their finalization in 1571. The first attempt was the Ten Articles in 1536, which showed some slightly Protestant leanings — the result of an English desire for a political alliance with the
German Lutheran princes. The next revision was the Six Articles in 1539 which swung away from all reformed positions, and then the King’s Book in 1543, which re-established most of the earlier Roman Catholic doctrines. During the reign of Edward VI, Henry VIII’s only son, the Forty-Two Articles were written under the direction of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1552. It was in this document that Calvinist thought reached the zenith of its influence in the English Church. These articles were never put into action, due to Edward VI’s death and the reversion of the English Church to Roman Catholicism under Henry VIII’s elder daughter, Mary I.

Finally, upon the coronation of Elizabeth I and the re-establishment of the Church of England as separate from the Roman Catholic Church, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion were initiated by the Convocation of 1563, under the direction of Matthew Parker, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The articles pulled back from some of the more extreme Calvinist thinking and created the peculiar English reformed doctrine.

The Thirty-nine articles were finalized in 1571, and incorporated into the Book of Common Prayer.3

*The Canons of Dort* (1619). The classic “five points” of Calvinism come from a historical-theological debate that took place in the seventeenth century, called the Synod of Dort. The followers of Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch-Reformed minister of the period, issued a statement called the Remonstrance in which the classically taught orthodoxy, Calvinism, was attacked in five statements: (1) Everyone possesses a free will, not enslaved to his sinful nature. While God must help people to repent and believe,4 He does not interfere with this free will; (2) God saves those whom He foresees responding to His call, those who freely respond to the gospel invitation; (3) Christ’s death on the cross was sufficient for everyone without exception, but only those who actually trust in Him are saved; (4) Even though God’s Holy Spirit is at work, people can successfully resist this internal work. Faith precedes regeneration; and,
(5) It is possible to lose one’s salvation by failing to continue to believe.⁵

Against these declarations the Synod rejected the Remonstrant’s theses and declared their own five points, which have come to be known as the five points of Calvinism. One of the more famous summaries of these points, along with Scriptural evidence, comes from David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented*. Essentially, they said that (1) humankind’s will is in bondage to his evil nature and therefore not free or neutral to choose good over evil. This is called total depravity which includes total inability; (2) God freely and sovereignly chose certain individuals to salvation, not based upon what they would or would not do. This is unconditional election; (3) Christ’s redeeming work actually secured salvation only for the elect. This is termed limited or definite atonement; (4) The internal, special call of the Holy Spirit in the elect irresistibly and inevitably brings them to salvation. Regeneration must precede faith. This is called irresistible grace; and, (5) All those chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Holy Spirit are eternally saved. Those so preserved by God persevere to the end by his Almighty power. This is called perseverance of the saints.

It is to be noted that the classic orthodox understanding of the faith was Calvinism. The Arminian Remonstrance was a deviation from the classic understanding. While much of current day evangelicalism stresses the Remonstrance positions, it was not always or usually so.

*The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (1643–47). These documents were framed by 121 Puritan churchmen to reform the English Church and bring it in line with Scottish Presbyterian standards and practice. The Confession served as the foundational confession of the period, birthing the Savoy Declaration (1658) and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, which was also adopted by the Philadelphia Association of Baptist Churches as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1741). “The Philadelphia Confession was a modification of the Second London Confession that added an allowance for singing of hymns, psalms and spiritual songs in the Lord’s Supper and made optional the laying on
of hands in baptism.”

These confessions were precise, comprehensive and mature creedo statements of Reformed, or Calvinistic, theology. While the Baptist and Congregational derivatives differed in ecclesiology and “sacraments” replaced by “ordinances of sovereign and positive institution,” they all affirmed Dort’s theological distinctives within a framework of covenant theology.

Chapter 7 is a description of covenant theology, which holds that God has dealt with humans through various covenants. In the first covenant, a covenant of works, Adam and his descendants were promised life on the condition of perfect obedience. The fall made it impossible for man to keep this covenant, so God made another covenant, this one called the covenant of grace. In the covenant of grace, God freely offered sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ. As part of this covenant, God promises to give the elect the Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.

According to the confession, the covenant of grace was administered differently in the time of the law (during Old Testament times) and in the time of the gospel (during and after New Testament times). Under the law, the covenant was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances instituted among the Jewish people. These all anticipated Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, and were sufficient to give the elect of that time forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. The confession teaches that under the gospel, the covenant of grace is dispensed more fully through the preaching of the Bible and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Although there are sections dismissing the Pope as “anti-Christ,” common from Protestant statements in this time period, this Confession’s longevity over the centuries demonstrates its biblical breadth and well-thought out concepts of orthodoxy.
The Anabaptist Confessions, Schleitheim (1527) and Dordrecht (1632). While the Anabaptists shied away from creedal and confessional statements in general, they did adopt basic and essential statements of belief and practice. Anabaptists were known for their “community hermeneutic,” which meant that the gathered church, as they read and discussed Scripture, came up with what they believed was the faith pronounced and lived out by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Distinctive of the mature Mennonite thought of the Dordrecht Confession is baptism and church membership given only to those mature enough to have made sincere and credible repentance of life. Foot-washing should be actually practiced, according to the example of the Lord Jesus. Those found willfully living in sin are to be separated from the body of believers:

We also believe in, and confess, a ban, Separation, and Christian correction in the church, for amendment, and not for destruction, in order to distinguish that which is pure from the impure: namely, when any one, after he is enlightened, has accepted the knowledge of the truth, and been incorporated into the communion of the saints, sins again unto death, either through willfulness, or through presumption against God, or through some other cause, and falls into the unfruitful works of darkness, thereby becoming separated from God, and forfeiting the kingdom of God, that such a one, after the deed is manifest and sufficiently known to the church, may not remain in the congregation of the righteous, but, as an offensive member and open sinner, shall and must be separated, put away, reproved before all, and purged out as leaven; and this for his amendment, as an example, that others may fear, and to keep the church pure, by cleansing her from such spots, lest, in default of this, the name of the Lord be blasphemed, the church dishonored, and offense given to them that are without; and finally, that the sinner may not be condemned with the world, but become convinced in his mind, and be moved to sorrow, repentance, and reformation.
Persons so separated from the body of believers are to be “shunned” — “...the same must, according to the doctrine of Christ and His apostles, be shunned, without distinction, by all the fellow members of the church, especially those to whom it is known, in eating, drinking, and other similar intercourse, and no company be had with him that they may not become contaminated by intercourse with him, nor made partakers of his sins; but that the sinner may be made ashamed, pricked in his heart, and convicted in his conscience, unto his reformation.”

The purity of the church and obedience to the brethren were hallmarks of Anabaptist confessions. Election to church offices were by consent of the gathered body, many using the system of “lot casting” for God’s choice of leaders.

Post–1650 historical theology

Confession of Dositheus (1672). While most of Catholicism was very entrenched in their creedal positions, the Eastern Orthodox Church had been disturbed by the work of Cyril Lucaris, Patriarch of Alexandria (1602) and Constantinople (1621). It was alleged that he wrote a confessional statement more in line with Reformed Protestant orthodoxy than the Catholic faith.

A Synod of Eastern Orthodox Churches was called in Jerusalem in 1672 to refute the position of Cyril Lucaris, Patriarch of Constantinople, who had published a Confession in which he attempted to express Orthodox beliefs in terms of the predestination beliefs of Calvinism. From a Reformation perspective, he had also challenged some of the important religious practices of the Eastern churches, such as the veneration of icons and prayers to the saints. Orthodox leaders contended that the Confession of Cyril was a forgery perpetrated by Calvinists to spread their influence among Eastern churches. They presented quotations from known writings of Cyril to show that he had not held the positions expressed in the Confession. In addition, they argued that the Confession was not an official pronouncement by
an Orthodox Patriarch.

The Synod of Jerusalem of 1672 soundly rejected any further attempts at reformulation of Orthodox teachings and strengthened Orthodox beliefs against both the Protestant Reformation and Catholicism. The Synod produced its own confession, the Confession of Dositheus (Patriarch of Jerusalem), in which point by point it refuted Cyril’s’ eighteen points. In addition it added four catechetical style questions that defended the restriction of reading and study of Scripture to the priests, defended the role of tradition, as well as a lengthy defense of the veneration of icons and prayers to the saints.\(^{10}\)

Such statements solidified the Catholic position of the role of tradition, veneration of icons and role of the priests in the Church.

*Helvetic Consensus Formula* (1675). John Henry Heidegger of Zurich, at the request of the Swiss Diet, wrote a clear, logical, well reasoned statement of faith that illustrated the height of Protestant Reformed scholasticism. It was written to eliminate theological controversy and as a means to stating the final truth of Scripture. It primarily dealt with the false teachings of Saumur theology,\(^{11}\) and was used in Switzerland for half a century. The Formula is best known for its contention that even the Hebrew vowel points of the Old Testament in the original manuscripts were inspired.

*Theses Theologicae of Robert Barclay* (1675). Fundamental to the faith of the Quakers, Robert Barclay (1648–1690), a student of Scottish Presbyterianism, rejected that Reformed creedal statement. He believed in “immediate revelation,” that all people can be illuminated by the “inward light of Christ.” His anti-intellectual stance disparaged “school divinity,” and he became a spokesman for the Society of Friends, having close ties to George Fox.

*New Hampshire Confession* (1833). Drafted by John Newton Brown of New Hampshire, this confession drew on the Baptist London Confession of Faith and the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. However, it was what has been called a “warm” Calvinistic document, espousing moderate
Calvinism. Note the section on “election” —

We believe that election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which he graciously regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners; that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end; that it is a most glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, being infinitely free, wise, holy and unchangeable; that it utterly excludes boasting, and promotes humility, love, prayer, praise, trust in God, and active imitation of his free mercy; that it encourages the use of means in the highest degree; that it may be ascertained by its effects in all who truly believe the gospel, that it is the foundation of Christian assurance; and that to ascertain it with regard to ourselves demands and deserves the utmost diligence.¹²

and compare that with the standard Westminster Confession of Faith (as well as the London and Philadelphia Confessions) —

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, has chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

As God has appointed the elect unto glory, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the
unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extends or withholds mercy, as he pleases, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.¹³

The American Baptist Publication Society adopted and published the New Hampshire confession, and it became attractive to Landmarkian independency. That teaching denies the universal Church, opting only for local New Testament churches. The Southern Baptist Convention in 1859 refuted Landmarkianism.

*Scripture Way of Salvation* (1765). This document is an introduction to the theology of John Wesley and Methodism. It grew out of conversations by Wesley and his colleagues on topics suggested by the exigencies of revivals in America. It became the doctrinal standard of early Methodist societies.

Wesley includes in his understanding of the doctrine of salvation what he called “preventing grace” (prevenient grace) — God’s work in the heart of a yet uncommitted person to Christ. “Justification occurs first (Plain Account of Christian Perfection 441), and is the moment in which a person is pardoned of their sins and reconciled to God: ‘It is the forgiveness of all our sins (Scripture Way of Salvation 44).’ The moment of justification brings about a “real” personal change, not just a “relative change” in forensic status before God.”¹⁴ Sanctification is to be “saved from sin and perfected in love” (SW 52). Beginning at justification, sanctification produces active love toward all, especially in the church.

*Articles of Religion* (1784). Adopted by the Methodist Conference of Baltimore in 1784, these twenty-five articles of faith were a revision of the 39 Articles of the Church of England. Following John Wesley’s theology, the 23rd Article acknowledged the United States as a sovereign, independent nation. The emphasis in the document is on Christian experience and holiness.

This very brief overview of historical theology demonstrates the difficulties people had with stating the faith of the Scriptures. They
also show the way our hermeneutic, or the way we understand and use Scripture, predisposes a person’s viewpoint on almost everything in the Bible. Consequently, just affirming “I believe the Bible” is hardly sufficient to claim absolute and total consensus of all believers everywhere.

Self Reflection & Discussion
1. With which of the Confessions outlined in this chapter do you identify most closely? Why?
2. Why has the Westminster Confession of Faith lasted so long as a guiding statement of faith for many Presbyterians?
3. Would you adhere to a “warmer” Calvinistic statement and why?
4. Do you believe the Anabaptist effort to have a “pure” church has succeeded for them? Why or why not?
5. It was noted that revivalism affected John Wesley’s idea of salvation and holiness. How much does the current situation play into what we believe about the Bible?

Notes
2. “Filioque” or “double procession” are ancient Latin terms used in the Nicene Creed (325 and 381) to describe the Person of the Holy Spirit as proceeding eternally from both God the Father and God the Son, instead of just the Father.
4. “The lost sinner needs the Spirit’s assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man’s act and precedes the new birth.” Noted in David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, The Five Points of Calvinism, (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963), 5-6.
5. Many Arminians would dispute this last point claiming that once God saves a person they can never lose their salvation, a position called “eternal security.” It is important to note that Calvinists do not hold to this position even though it might seem that way. The perseverance of the saints (“P” in TULIP) maintains that God keeps those who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ and given faith by the Holy Spirit. They will thus persevere to the end, a position many Wesleyan-Arminians dispute.


11. Also called Amyraldianism, the Academy of Saumur taught that “Christ came into the world to do whatever was necessary for the salvation of men. But God, foreseeing that, if left to themselves, men would universally reject the offers of mercy, elected some to be the subjects of his saving grace by which they are brought to faith and repentance. According to this view of the plan of salvation, election is subordinate to redemption. God first redeems all and then elects some.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_of_Saumur)


The Triune God

The Trinity in Historical Theology

“We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. . . . And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified”

(The Nicene Creed, 324 AD)

The Trinity. Rather than an obscure and out-of-date theological tenet, the Westminster Confession of Faith rightly points out that this doctrine is the foundation of all our communion with God and comfortable dependence on him. The Trinity serves as the foundation of all true saving faith. Christian salvation is dependent on the work of the Triune God. Everything that makes the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ the “power and wisdom of God to salvation” can be understood only in light of this doctrinal truth. God the Father planned redemption and chooses. God the Son accomplishes redemption according to the plan of the Father, and saves those the Father has chosen. God the Holy Spirit applies the redemption of Christ to the lives of people. You cannot have one without the other. It is notable in the history of the Church that whenever the doctrine of the Trinity is obscured or abandoned, every other characteristic of the gospel goes with it.

The Trinity comforts the Christian. It does this by fully revealing what is meant by the statement, “God is love.” It is the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father and the Holy Spirit for both. In this sweet Trinitarian love we find peace and joy and love because of our union with Christ through the power of the indwelling Spirit to the glory
of our heavenly Father.

But such sweet comfort has not always been evident in the Church's development and understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Certain tendencies to destroy the Trinity, and thus weaken our faith, have been around since the earliest of church life. There has been the tendency to “solve” the mystery of the Trinity by either denying the deity of Christ or the personality of the Holy Spirit. There has been the tendency to deny the One God and maintain a co-existence of three distinct Gods. Added to this was the tendency to press the One God so far as to make the Father, Son and Holy Spirit the same Person, so that the titles or names merely refer to different aspects or functions of this One God. It is not true that the Son was “created” for salvation, or that the Holy Spirit was “created” for sanctification. In redemption, God the Son chose as God to become Incarnate. The Spirit as God chose to be subject to the Father and the Son.

Tertullian (155 – 240 AD) was the first to use the term “trinity” to refer to God. Although his conception of three Persons sharing one substance with the “subordination” of the Son to the Father has been discounted, the Presbyterian theologian B. B. Warfield notes that his idea of the immanence of the Trinity helped approach it in later theology.

With such a conceptual mystery as the Trinity gives, doctrinal errors soon began to crop up. Monarchianism said that Jesus is simply man specially endowed with the Spirit at his baptism. By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus was then “adopted” into the family of God. Another form of this idea held that Jesus was God at one time, for part of the time. He appears in one form or another as Creator and at another time as Savior. The former view led some to “Adoptionism,” while the second led to “Sabellianism.” Adoptionism was the view that Christ gained Godhood by his resurrection. Sabellianism held that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are simply descriptions to three roles fulfilled by One God.

The Church was forced to draft a doctrinal understanding of the Trinity which would be clear and biblical. The results of these discussions gave us four general Church Councils. The First General Council of Nicea (324 AD) condemned the teaching of Arius that the Son was a created being, only like the Father (homoiousios). The Council said Christ is of the
The very essence of the Father; He is true God, begotten not made. This began what we know as the Nicene Creed, still repeated in some churches to this day.

The Council of Constantinople (381 AD) declared the deity of the Holy Spirit and condemned Apollinarism, which taught that Jesus is fully God but not then fully man in the complete sense. In other words, the Incarnation was not really real. The Council of Ephesus (431 AD) declared that Christ had two natures in fighting against Monophysitism which said Christ had only one nature, so that the divine absorbed the human. The Council of Chacedon (451 AD) finally set the record straight when it declared once and for all that Jesus Christ has two natures, yet is one substance (homousios) with the Father.

These two natures were united in one Person, without change, without division and without separation. This hypostatic union held that Christ has two natures, yet in One Person inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly and inseparably. These words will later appear in evangelical Reformation creeds. The Westminster Confession, for instance, will use the terms “without conversion” to indicate that the divine was not changed to the human nor the human transmuted to the divine in Christ. “Without composition” means there is no coalescence to form a third distinct nature in Christ. “Without confusion” means there was no mixture of natures in Christ. Consequently, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q 21, will say it this way: “The Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.”

It should be noted here that the deity of Christ was not really resolved by church rivalry or a Council’s decrees, but rather by the fact that Jesus Christ was worshipped as God by all Christians, and that He had always been so worshipped from the earliest days of the Church. It was the constant, abiding conviction of God’s people that really mattered in the final analysis. One’s faith and strength of convictions concerning biblical truth are really important!

In conclusion, we can say that the Trinity declares three things — One
God exists in three distinct Persons; Each of these three Persons is God; and, These three equal Persons have personal distinctions. The terms used in confessional statements from these early years of the Church should not be lost on us. “Substance” refers to an independent Being, what we call the “essence” of Personhood. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are of one “essence.”

“Subsistence” is that mode of existence which, while relating to the other two Persons of the Trinity, can be distinguished from the other two. “Begotten” or “eternally begotten” means God was never “born.” The Father is always the Father; The Son is always the Son; the Holy Spirit is always the Holy Spirit. “Proceeding” as referring to the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit from eternity freely chooses to be subject to the Father and the Son in the Trinity. Thus, “in the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”

Terms and Definitions

Traducianism was the view that the soul comes into being by the natural generation of the parents. This was championed by Tertullian.

Monarchianism is that view of God which opposes the idea of the Trinity in which the Son and the Holy Spirit are simply emanations from God the Father. This heresy took four forms. Dynamic Monarchianism says that Jesus was indeed born of a Virgin, but is simply man with a special endowment of the Holy Spirit at his public baptism. Adoptionism is the view that Christ gained Godhood by his resurrection and was thus adopted into the family of God. Modalistic Monarchianism held that Jesus was God at one time, for part of the time. Sabellianism was the view that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are but descriptions given to three roles fulfilled by One God. They are separate “substances.”

Modalism maintains that God appears in one mode or another, at times as Creator and at other times as Savior.
Arianism with respect to the Trinity taught that the Son was a created being, a begotten being, while the Father was a pure, uncompounded being, thus “unbegotten.” The Son was like the Father, but not of the essence of the Father. The First General Council of Nicea denied this heresy.

Apollinarianism declared that Jesus is God but then not truly man in the fullest sense. The reality of the Incarnation was denied. This view was condemned by the Council of Constantinople.

Monophysitism was advanced by Theodore of Mopsuestia who taught that Christ had only one nature so that the divine absorbed the human. It blurred the distinction between the God-man in Christ. The Council of Ephesus (431 AD) condemned this view.

Nestorianism denied the unity of the two natures, human ans divine in Christ, teaching that Jesus had a dual personality, and, thus, almost two persons.

Monothelitism was a derivative viewpoint from the Monophysites. It held to the unity of the will between the Father and the Son and was an attempt to downplay Monophysitism.

While such definitions and distinctions seem unimportant or smack of rationalism, they helped drive the Church to declare, without equivocation, the full deity and humanity of Christ for succeeding ages of the Church. These early theological discussions sought to preserve the integrity of the Triune God as He has revealed himself in the Scriptures.

Self Reflection & Discussion

1. What illustrations have you heard given to try to explain the Trinity?
2. Why do you think there was so much initial controversy concerning the doctrine of the Trinity in early Church history?

Notes

Christology

Jesus Christ in Historical Theology

“We therefore acknowledge two natures or substances, the divine and the human, in one and the same Jesus Christ our Lord (Heb., ch. 2). And we say that these are bound and united with one another in such a way that they are not absorbed, or confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one person the properties of the natures being unimpaired and permanent. Thus we worship not two but one Christ the Lord. We repeat: one true God and man. With respect to his divine nature he is consubstantial with the Father, and with respect to the human nature he is consubstantial with us men, and like us in all things, sin excepted (Heb. 4:15).”

(Second Helvetic Confession, 1566)

This mature, reflective statement from the Helvetic Confession of 1566 summarizes nicely the hard work of historical theology through the Reformation of the Church. The fact of the incarnation of Jesus Christ was fully accepted. The mode of his coming was the Virgin Birth. There was never any suspension or surrender of divine attributes, prerogatives or activities in Jesus Christ. All theological discussions up to this point sought to preserve the integrity of both the divine and human natures of Christ. The point of departure for these discussions was a theocentric (God-centered) one.

However, that discussion as to who Jesus was and is and how He functions in this world and the next was about to drastically change. Orthodoxy and its statements, though adhered to, became cold, sterile marks of scholasticism and rationalism. The doctrine was correct, but evangelical life and vibrancy were missing as the Church became part of the 1800s landscape. Pietism, with its emphasis on human feelings, personal encounters with Jesus, missionary movements and so forth, superseded cold, orthodox statements of faith. A neglect of Chalcedonian
orthodoxy fostered a drift from precise theology to warm feelings about Jesus. It was not that the ancient statements were denied as much as they were ignored.

Added to this was the historical movement of scientific rationalism fostered by the Enlightenment. Man’s reasoning powers became supreme over and against supernaturalism. The push was to concern ourselves with the human condition, the “historical” Christ, the Jesus who fully identifies with us in our desperate need and want. The distinction now was made between the “historical Jesus” and the “theological Christ.” While orthodoxy in Lutheranism was talking about “communicato idiomatum,” (divine properties are imparted to the human nature of Christ), and other Reformers were positing “communio idiomatum” (what is true of either nature is true of the Person of Christ), the theology of the period grew quite restless and out of touch with these abstractions.

**New England theology and Unitarianism**

Nathaniel Emmons (1745–1840), a Congregational theologian and a zealous patriot for the American revolution and cause, called “eternal generation” eternal nonsense. The distinctions in the Godhead — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — were only distinctions manifested in the economy of redemption, not eternal realities of God as they are in and of themselves.

Unfortunately, although New England’s son, Jonathan Edwards, had a great impression on revivalism and Princetonian ethics, his Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy infected his theological treatises. Under Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803) and Nathaniel Taylor (1786–1858), New England Theology took on the cast of not merely moderate Calvinism, but fostered liberal views of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Reason and personal experience, not the Scriptures, became the determining viewpoints of theology. With the scientific community under Isaac Newton and Joseph Priestly trumpeting the “reasonableness of Christianity,” Unitarianism became the preferred theological viewpoint of the Massachusetts congregationalists.

In terms of Christology, “Unitarians believe that mainline Christianity does not adhere to strict monotheism but that they do by maintaining that
Jesus was a great man and a prophet of God, perhaps even a supernatural being, but not God himself. They believe Jesus did not claim to be God and that his teachings did not suggest the existence of a triune God. Unitarians believe in the moral authority but not necessarily the divinity of Jesus.” The point here is that the example and life of Jesus become the guiding force of Christianity, not the divinity of Jesus. Consequently, moral lessons from the Sermon on the Mount, social justice issues and civil rights are prominent themes. Later Unitarianism would unite with Universalism stressing the oneness of the human family, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and a lack of biblical absolutes altogether. The point of theology was to define and declare the welfare of mankind, having “liberty, equality and fraternity” as the foundation of religion.

Anthropology overtook Christology. The human condition, human needs, and human ideals replaced the theocentric point of view of God that had endured through the ages. We now need the “historical Jesus” who identified with our feelings, needs and cares and the human condition in general. Social gospel projects flourished. Princeton became so infected by this trend that theologians such as Charles Hodge, Cornelius Van Til, and J. Gresham Machen withdrew and began their own seminary — Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia — proclaiming and defending classic Calvinism and the Chalcedonian view of Christ.

**German Liberalism**

With the rise of populist Pietism and Enlightenment reason, German scholars and theologians diverged from their Reformation roots. Frederick Schleiermacher (1768–1834) wrote in his book, *The Christian Faith* (1821), that orthodoxy based on revealed biblical truths and natural theology based on abstract speculation must be replaced with self-consciousness. The role of Jesus Christ is to mediate redemptive awareness of God to humanity. As we view Jesus’ dependence on God, we imitate that consciousness of dependence. Thus, God the Father is now God coming in conscious personality in man. God the Son is God coming as the life of the risen Christ in his church. Schleiermacher anticipates the
later theology of Paul Tillich and J.A.T. Robinson.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), who grew up in a Pietistic atmosphere, rejected realism (reality exists independently of the mind) and subjective idealism (reality is the product of human consciousness). All experience presupposes the unity of the knower and the known. This “dialectical” method of reasoning says that religion is only a pictorial way of representing philosophical truth. God himself is dead. Truth must be reconstituted through synthesis of God as absolute spirit and man as rational spirit. Hegel builds on the phenomenal/noumenal philosophy of Immanuel Kant.4

The beliefs of the Church are, consequently, merely symbols expressive of metaphysical truth. Human history is the process of God’s becoming, and this is the only way to understand the incarnation of Jesus. Consequently, the historical manifestation of God in Christ can be seen in two different ways. Humanity sees Jesus as a supreme ethical Teacher, and faith conceives of him as the revelation of God. In Christ, God draws near us, touches us and takes us up into the divine consciousness. We would call this Pantheism by any other name.5

“Kenotic” theories of Jesus sprang into existence. Using the Greek notion of “kenosis” from Philippians 2:7 (“but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”), it came to be held that Christ in the Incarnation emptied or divested himself of his divinity. The divine Logos (John 1:1) literally became a man by reducing himself to that dimension of reality. He then increased in wisdom and power to reassume the divine nature. Motivations for this theory were to maintain the reality or integrity of the manhood of Christ as well as to throw in stark relief the greatness of Christ’s humiliation. All of this came quite close to Apollinarianism, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) rejected metaphysics and opposed statements and doctrines that went beyond verifiable history and present Christian experience. Consequently, the divinity of Christ is merely an expression of the revelational value of the Church’s faith based on Christian experience, not objectifiable truth. Certain “mysteries” of the Christian faith may be recognized, but not seriously maintained or
discussed. The emphasis in Christianity should be on the work of Christ more than the Person of Christ. Religion is a social phenomenon.

Diagrammatically, we can contrast the theocentric and anthropocentric viewpoints as two umbrellas of thought.
Anthropocentric View of
the Trinity and Jesus Christ

**New England Theology**
- Moderate Calvinism
- General benevolence of God
- Moral view of atonement
- Weakened view of Christ

**Unitarianism**
- Rejects Trinity
- Rejects Deity of Christ
- Jesus as a revelation of God, but solely a man
- Example of Christ crucial

**Schleiermacher**
- Supreme “God-consciousness” in Jesus
- Christ’s human nature elevated to ideal perfection

**Kant**
- Philosophical basis for separation of faith and science

**Hegel**
- Incarnation a revelation of perfect humanity in Christ; no evidence of real Personhood

**Kenotic Theories**
- Incarnate Christ emptied himself of divinity to become fully man

**Ritschl**
- No objective divinity of Christ
- Faith based on experience of Christ
- No verifiable Deity of Jesus

Example and model of Jesus Christ is what is crucial for theology and life
Self Reflection & Discussion

1. Why did the Pietist movement have so great an impact on Christology?
2. Liberal ideas of Christ became fashionable in the 1800s. Why was the departure from historic orthodoxy so comprehensive?
3. What have you read or studied in liberal thought? What were the leading tenets in your study of that thought?

Notes

1. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, and A Discourse of Miracles* (Library of Modern Religious Thought), I. T. Ramsey, ed., Stanford University Press, 1958. “John Locke (1632 – 1704) was an English philosopher and physician, widely regarded as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers and commonly known as the ‘Father of Liberalism.’ Considered one of the first of the British empiricists, following the tradition of Sir Francis Bacon, he is equally important to social contract theory. His work greatly affected the development of epistemology and political philosophy.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke)


3. These hallmarks of the Enlightenment became the marching orders of the French Revolution against the royal dictators up to that point in time. The notions of liberty, equality and fraternity were linked by Fenelon at the end of the 17th century, and the linkage became widespread during the Age of Enlightenment. At the time of the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” was one of the many mottos in use, but was by no means the only contender as a motto for the revolutionaries. Os Guinness in his *Last Call for Liberty: How America’s Genius for Freedom Has Become Its Greatest Threat*, (InterVarsity Press, 2018), maintains that the freedom gained by the French Revolution of 1789 is vastly different than the freedom gained by the American Revolution of 1776. The former defines freedom as “part and parcel of postmodernism” in the world today.

4. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a German philosopher, postulated that “because of the limitations of argumentation in the absence of irrefutable evidence, no one could really know whether there is a God and an afterlife or not. For the sake of society and morality, Kant asserted, people are reasonably justified in believing in them, even though they could never know for sure whether they are real or not.” (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant) Kant proposed a “noumenal” world where God might exist if He exists at all, and a “phenomenal” world of sense and experience. The problem is that there is an uncrossable “line” between the worlds. Consequently, “God” cannot objectively influence or speak into the world of sense and experience. No one can really know for sure if there is a God and an eternity. “With regard to morality, Kant argued that the source of the good lies not in anything outside the human subject, either in nature or given by God, but rather is only the good will itself. A good will is one that acts from duty in accordance with the universal moral law that
the autonomous human being freely gives itself. This law obliges one to treat humanity – understood as rational agency, and represented through oneself as well as others – as an end in itself rather than (merely) as means to other ends the individual might hold. These ideas have largely framed or influenced all subsequent philosophical discussion and analysis.”

5. Made popular by Spinoza, “in the mid-eighteenth century, the English theologian Daniel Waterland defined pantheism this way: ‘It supposes God and nature, or God and the whole universe, to be one and the same substance—one universal being; insomuch that men’s souls are only modifications of the divine substance.’ In the early nineteenth century, the German theologian Julius Wegscheider defined pantheism as the belief that God and the world established by God are one and the same.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism)
Anthropology
Creation, Nature, and State of Mankind

“It is not the will of God, however, that we should forget the primeval dignity which he bestowed on our first parents — a dignity which may well stimulate us to the pursuit of goodness and justice. It is impossible for us to think of our first original, or the end for which we were created, without being urged to meditate on immortality, and to seek the kingdom of God. But such meditation, so far from raising our spirits, rather casts them down, and makes us humble. For what is our original? One from which we have fallen. What the end of our creation? One from which we have altogether strayed, so that, weary of our miserable lot, we groan, and groaning sigh for a dignity now lost.”

(Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book Second)

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.¹

Many Christians have read the poem, *Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley, with a negative reaction. It seems to exalt mankind and give him an outlook and destiny dictated by prideful and sinful self-will, rather than giving inner strength and perseverance, as many suppose. However, another reading gives a picture that is unfortunately and sadly true of the state of mankind after the Fall of created man recorded in Genesis 1 – 3. There is an inner urge for being more than we are, for claiming a supreme role in the universe as uniquely made by God. This longing and striving for exaltation of humankind persists. Historical theology has much to say when it comes to the creation, nature and state of mankind.

**The origins controversy**

Controversy has raged over the creation story found in Genesis. However, much more is at stake throughout the history of the Church and society than textual interpretation of that story, which includes the creation of humankind. Historical theology records and witnesses the development of two contradictory viewpoints that guide our discussion of origins and the development of humankind. They can be summarized as impersonal materialism and personal creationism.

In a recent article, “New Film *Is Genesis History? Presents a False Dichotomy: I Dissent from My Role in It,*” by Paul Nelson,² he notes that the age old controversy concerning origins and the origin of man goes much deeper than merely “evolution” versus “creation.” In fact, it is the way that the universe and creation works which forms the basis of the chasm between Darwinian evolution and theistic creation.

Nelson mainatins that it is the assumption, or rather, presumption, of *methodological naturalism* that governs all scientific methodology since Darwin. In fact, Nelson notes that “scholars and scientists such as William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Michael Behe, Hugh Ross, John Bloom, Fuz Rana, Phillip Johnson, Jonathan Wells, Stephen Meyer, Guillermo Gonzalez, John Lennox, and many thousands of others see unmistakable
evidence of design in biology and the universe — but also accept the standard 13.7 billion year time scale. These persons would vigorously deny that their positions are accurately represented by either the “conventional paradigm” or “historical Genesis paradigm.”

Methodological naturalism is the philosophical rule that “the statements of science must invoke only natural things and processes.” He diagrams the controversy as below:

The issue between believers and non-believers in the creation of the universe and the development of mankind is not really the age of the universe. It is in the design and function of the universe that the controversy really exists.

**Origin of man**
Judaism and then later Christianity have consistently held to the authenticity and veracity of the creation of man. Humankind is uniquely and definitively created by God with a unique endowment and dignity over the rest of creation. Humankind is invested with a unique lordship under God over the rest of creation. Humankind was uniquely formed by God and for God’s glory. Genesis 2 and 3 record the earliest days of the
human race under the representatives of humankind, Adam and Eve.

The Church Father, Saint Augustine, while allowing an allegorical interpretation of the creation in Genesis 1, held to a literal, historical creation and development of mankind. Wikipedia, which we must always read with a grain of skepticism as authoritative, is correct in saying that

In the 5th century, Saint Augustine wrote *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* in which he argued that Genesis should be interpreted as God forming the Earth and life from pre-existing matter and allowed for an allegorical interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis. For example: he argues that the six-day structure of creation presented in the book of Genesis represents a logical framework, rather than the passage of time in a physical way. On the other hand, Augustine called for a historical view of the remainder of the history recorded in Genesis, including the creation of Adam and Eve, and the Flood. Apart from his specific views, Augustine recognizes that the interpretation of the creation story is difficult, and remarks that Christians should be willing to change their minds about it as new information comes up. He also warned believers not to rashly interpret things literally that might be allegorical, as it would discredit the faith.6

The acceptance of Adam and Eve as real, live, historical people was held by Catholic and Christian scholars through the Reformation years. It has been pointed out that Jesus considered them historical persons in his comments about marriage and divorce in the Gospels (Matthew 19:3–12; Mark 10:1–12). The Apostle Paul clearly established our first parents as historical representatives for the human race in Romans in passing on the sinful nature — “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.” (Romans 5:12–14)
Aristotelian naturalism, however, became dominant as the Enlightenment theologians and philosophers began to critique the Bible as the written Word of God. In essence, Aristotle postulated that all nature comes from natural processes and does not require a Maker or Creator. This was amplified in Kant’s philosophical division between what is “real” (the “phenomenal” world) and what is taken by faith (the “noumenal” world). We operate solely within the phenomenal world. This is where all science and knowledge of history must operate.

The operational principle of all life moves from simple celled organisms to man and beyond, developing divinity in all of life until we reach perfection or the utopian state of being. Darwin in 1859 proposes the law of natural selection, in which gradual formation and improvement are postulated. Mankind is fully identified with the animal world. We are to reject supernaturalism and maintain our duty to science.

Lamarckianism and especially Neo-Lamarckianism proposed that all of life possesses an inherent evolutionary drive, from simple to complex, with the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which has since been disproved or strongly debated. Interestingly, Lamarck departed from Darwin’s “mechanistic” view of natural selection. “The selection theory made life into a game of Russian roulette, where life or death was predetermined by the genes one inherited. The individual could do nothing to mitigate bad heredity. Lamarckism, in contrast, allowed the individual to choose a new habit when faced with an environmental challenge and shape the whole future course of evolution.”

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) applied Darwin’s theory to social societies, with the theory of the survival of the fittest. Post-Darwin thinking demonstrates the determinism of natural law, the continuity of mankind with the animal kingdom, the thinking that science is neutral and evolution becomes a world and life viewpoint.

To counter such growing secular influences the botanist, Asa Gray (1810 –1888) sought to convince Darwin and others of God’s design of the universe, especially mankind. “Gray, considered by Darwin to be his friend and ‘best advocate,’ also attempted to convince Darwin in his letters that design was inherent in all forms of life, and to return to his faith.
Gray saw nature as filled with ‘unmistakable and irresistible indications of design’ and argued that ‘God himself is the very last, irreducible causal factor and, hence, the source of all evolutionary change.’ Darwin agreed that his theories were “not at all necessarily atheistical” but was unable to share Gray’s belief — ‘I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect.’”

Bernard Ramm (1916 – 1992) proposed a theory of theistic evolution (which he called progressive creationism), admitting that all things evolve over millennia but that God is behind all of the development. The later Creation Society movement sought to include creationism with the teaching of evolution in public schools, with all such advances struck down by court cases. Creationism has been replaced by Intelligent Design, which secular scientists claim is false science and just another form of religion in science. The die had been cast.

Nature of man

The consistent biblical position concerning the nature of man is that man is body and man is spirit, not man has a body and a spirit — “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28) For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” (1Cor. 2:11) Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1Thes. 5:23) The union of body and soul is internal and intensive, a “mystery” indeed, but avoids a dualistic view in the history of the Church.

The verse in Thessalonians brings up an interesting debate as to whether man is body and soul/spirit, or man is body and soul and spirit, with the latter view of trichotomy saying that the “soul” references the life of mankind in general, while the “spirit” is the faculty of God consciousness in man. The Greek Church Fathers, including Origen and others, held to this viewpoint. Such a view was sustained by the Roman Catholic Church through the Middle Ages, the 19th century revivalist
period, and the popular speaker, Bill Gothard.9

The dichotomist view, where “soul” is just another way of noting the
“spirit” of man, has been generally accepted in the history of most of the
Church writers.

What about the origin of the soul? There have been three suggested
positions on the soul’s origin — creationism, pre-existence and
traducianism. “According to creationism, each individual soul is created
directly by God, either at the moment of conception or some later time.
According to traducianism, the soul comes from the parents by natural
generation. According to the preexistence theory, the soul exists before
the moment of conception.”10 Plato held to the pre-existence of the soul,
with Origen suggesting the transmigration of the soul.11 Calvin and the
Eastern Orthodox Church held to creationism of the soul. Tertullian and
the Western Orthodox Church, Luther, and Jonathan Edwards held to a
traducian theory of the origin of the soul.

While theories and discussions ensued about the makeup of man,
what surfaced as much more interesting and much more debatable were
the problem of sin in man and freedom of the will. What does Scripture
mean when it speaks of man being made in the “image of God?” Did
man have a free will before the Fall and what about after the Fall? These
questions have consumed historical theology.

Image of God in man

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And
let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of
the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every
creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own
image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created
them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and
multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the
fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living
thing that moves on the earth.’” (Genesis 1:26–28; cf. 2:3, 4; 5:1, 2; 6:7;
Deuteronomy 4:32)

*Imagio Dei* profoundly defines mankind. Tom Smail, in his book,
Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity, notes that “the essential nature of human being is determinative for the understanding of the kind of redemption God has wrought for human beings through his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the true image of God.” How we understand the image of God in man crucially informs our view of the mind and heart of mankind, the body with which we are endowed, the service of mankind toward God and others, and the relationships in which we engage. In fact, there have been in the history of theology three main views of the image of God in man:

Substantive views emphasize ‘essential characteristics, qualities, or faculties within a person which either in themselves correspond to God, or which constitute that person as in the image of God. . . . they adopt and are dependent upon a substance approach to metaphysics, or being.’ Functional views focus on ‘God’s call upon humanity to specific activity. . . . to dominion or the stewardship of creation (human work), and often flowing from this is the call to develop culture.’ Relational views underscore ‘a corporate understanding of being,’ i.e., ‘being-with others.’ Darrell Cosden helpfully points out that loose definitions, such as he uses, enable the views to share elements with one-another. Although many emphasize a particular perspective, elements of all of the perspectives are necessary for completeness.

The early Patristic writers discussed the image of God in man to reference their Christology. “Most of the early Fathers and later Greek fathers take the image according to which man is created to be Christ himself; hence man is an “image of the image” (Clement of Alexandria, Marius Victorinus).”

Chrysostom (347 - 407) and Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335 – ca. 395) pointed out God’s triune deliberation over the creation of humans. Several of the patristic writers emphasized the building toward “the greatest” creation. Furthermore, Gregory of Nyssa gave attention to God making “human nature participant in all
good” and the “royal nature,” i.e., after the archetype of God. Augustine devotes thought to human beings being made in the triune image of God. The patristic perspective is substantive.15

John Calvin would disagree with Augustine’s “trinity in man,” and would describe the image of God in mankind this way:

Hence, although the soul is not the man, there is no absurdity in holding that he is called the image of God in respect of the soul; though I retain the principle which I lately laid down, that the image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals. Accordingly, by this term is denoted the integrity with which Adam was endued when his intellect was clear, his affections subordinated to reason, all his senses duly regulated, and when he truly ascribed all his excellence to the admirable gifts of his Maker. And though the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and the heart, or in the soul and its powers, there was no part even of the body in which some rays of glory did not shine.16

What happens after the Fall distorts, but does not totally destroy the image of God in man, even though Calvin talks about the “death” of mankind in their alienation from God. That image still functions, according to Genesis 9:6, and can be redeemed and restored in Christ — “assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:10) Calvin notes in his Institutes — “Wherefore, although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful deformity; and, therefore, our deliverance begins with that renovation which we obtain from Christ, who is, therefore, called the second Adam, because he restores us to true and substantial integrity.”17 This substantive view of
the image of God can be seen in Luther and Zwingli as ethical desires for what God wants.

**State of mankind — theocentric points of view**

William Cunningham notes in his massive *Historical Theology* the crucial importance of correct understanding of the state of mankind — “The history of the church seems to indicate that somehow the prosperity of vital personal religion is more closely connected with correct views of the points involved in the Pelagic controversy, than even with correct views upon the subject of the Trinity and of the person of Christ.”\(^{18}\) The great spiritual struggles of understanding the Fall and the resultant state of mankind forged much of the history of the Church.

Augustine (354 – 430) outlined much of the doctrine later espoused as total depravity involving total inability to choose the good. While mankind was created in a state of *posse non peccare et mori* (the ability not to sin and die), by his pride man violated God’s command in the garden and thereby forfeited the natural ability to choose God apart from God’s grace. The Fall affected the will and desires, losing the moral capacity for choosing what God desires. Mankind has moved to a position of *non posse non peccare et mori*, the inability not to sin and die. Only God in his grace can free the will to choose that which pleases Him. This doctrine was more fully developed in Augustine’s argument with Pelagius, a quiet, austere, disciplined monk who countered in 409 –411 AD that “human nature cannot lose its moral capacity for doing good, but a person is free to act or not to act in a righteous way. Pelagius gave an example of eyes: they have capacity for seeing, but a person can make either good or bad use of it.”\(^{19}\)

Indeed, “in response to Pelagius, Augustine said that the sin of pride consists in assuming that ‘we are the ones who choose God or that God chooses us (in his foreknowledge) because of something worthy in us,’ and argued that God’s grace causes individual acts of faith.”\(^{20}\) Pelagius taught that there is no such thing as original sin and no hereditary transmission of sinful nature or guilt to the human race through the Fall. Adam and Eve functioned only as sinful examples to us, but we need not follow their
example. Pelagius's views were condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD.

Augustine held that there is an organic connection between our first parents and humanity. There was indeed a transmission of the fallen nature along with its guilt and corruption. This is what historical theologians have called a realistic union, as opposed to a federal union of the race under Adam. After the sixteenth century Reformation, the organizing idea of covenant theology grew from theologians such as Henrich Bullinger (1504 – 1575), Amandus Polanus (1561 – 1610) and Johannes Cocceius (1603 – 1669). Adam under this theological framework is seen as the federal head of the human race, its moral and legal representative for all his descendents. Consequently, all people sinned in Adam representatively, not merely literally. The guilt of Adam is thereby imputed to all people.\(^2\)

However, the seed that Pelagius sowed in church doctrine would reappear in different forms and instances throughout the history of the Church. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, semi-Pelagian thought surfaced in which man can choose God by an act of free will, but needs the grace of God to continue growth in sanctification. The nature of man is weakened rather than fatally injured by the Fall. Fallen human nature can cooperate with divine grace. God aids us as we freely choose to follow Christ. This teaching was condemned at the Council of Orange in 529 AD.

Arminianism under Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609) rejected the doctrine of original sin as outlined by the Reformers. The guilt of Adam's sin is not imputed, though the pollution of sin is passed on through natural generation. Such pollution is only a disease or weakness, not sinful in and of itself. Arminianism teaches various theories of grace. There is prevenient grace, sufficient to counteract the effects of depravity and enables a person to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in regeneration. There is also the grace of evangelical obedience as well as the grace of perseverance. The Remonstrance movement generated by the teachings of Arminius was refuted at the Synod of Dort (1619) (SEE pp. 32, 33). The Synod reaffirmed the doctrine of original sin, that regeneration is strictly monergistic, and the immediate imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin and corruption propagated to his race.
Amyraldism, (also known as School of Saumur, moderate Calvinism, four point Calvinism, or hypothetical universalism) from Moses Amyraut (1596 – 1664), sought to “soften” the perceived harshness of the traditional Calvinistic system. More particularly, his universal redemption scheme precedes the particular election scheme, and not vice versa. He reasons from the benevolence of God towards his creatures; the traditional Reformed presentation of predestination, he thought, improperly reasons from the result and makes facts interpret the decrees. Amyraut distinguished between objective grace which is offered to all, and subjective grace in the heart which is given only to the elect. He also makes a distinction between natural ability and moral ability, or the power to believe and the willingness to believe; man possesses the former but not the latter in consequence of inherent depravity. It, therefore, takes an act of God to illuminate the mind, thereby engaging the will towards action.\textsuperscript{22}

This school denied immediate imputation. Humanity derives from Adam the corruption of nature, and this is now imputed to them as guilt. We are inherently depraved, and therefore we are involved in the guilt of Adam’s sin because we inherit a corrupt nature from him. It is described as an indirect or mediate imputation of sin, because it is founded on the fact that we share his moral character. This has been called consequent imputation. The Synod of Clarenton (1644) rejected the seminal teaching of Joshua Placeaeus, and the \textit{Formula Consensus Helvetica} (1675) was drafted to refute this position.

Wesleyan Arminianism was an attempt “in the early 1770s by John Wesley, aided by the theological writings of John William Fletcher, [to emphasize] Arminian doctrines in his controversy with the Calvinistic wing of the evangelicals in England. In 1778, he founded a theological journal which he titled the \textit{Arminian Magazine}. This period and the Calvinist – Arminian Controversy was influential in forming a lasting link between Arminianism and Wesleyanism.”\textsuperscript{23}

In a well researched biography of the eighteenth century evangelist
George Whitefield, Arnold Dallimore makes the case that the problem Wesley had with the Calvinist Whitefield boiled down to predestinating grace. While the founder of Methodism retained the doctrine of original sin and total depravity, such corruption of the human nature did not negate the free will of mankind. Mankind is absolutely dependent on grace for salvation. However, Wesley believed in sufficient enabling grace from the universal atonement of Jesus Christ for all people. People who are saved do believe by grace, but they have the capacity and ability to do so.

The United Methodist Book of Discipline (2004) defines prevenient grace as “. . . the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God’s will, and our ‘first slight transient conviction’ of having sinned against God. God’s grace also awakens in us an earnest longing for deliverance from sin and death and moves us toward repentance and faith.” Wesley described it as “enabling grace” — “The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing [preceding] us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.” Wesley stated that prevenient grace elicits, “. . . the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning His will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against Him.” This is far from the doctrine of irresistible grace affirmed by the Synod of Dort.

Jonathan Edwards had a very complex view of soteriology and how a person comes to faith in Christ. He maintained a realistic theory of the transmission of sin. We are connected with Adam as branches on a tree. His sin is our sin and imputed to us as such. According to McClymond and McDermott, “Edwards stressed that we are free in our willing: we choose what we want. In grace God moves our will, but it is our will.” He did not like the “I” in TULIP (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints) in
classic Calvinism since it seemed to make man too passive in salvation. We choose, but God makes us willing to choose. Edwards discussed and defined faith around three foci — (1) an intellectual assent or belief in Jesus Christ as the truth of the gospel; (2) a trust or submission to the promises of God and the all-sufficiency of Christ’s work; and (3) a stable and practical and abiding quality that persevered to the end, a habit or disposition to follow Christ.

Edwards believed the Spirit convicts people, moving people to trust in Christ’s righteousness over their own, enlightens the reason and works with the written Word in giving divine light to people to see. The act of turning toward God follows a believing, penitent disposition. Disposition is before act. Regeneration is new birth. The temper and disposition changes through the Spirit and God comes in a person’s life as a new principle of action and life. God does all and we do all. Both are active in the process of conversion.

State of mankind — anthropocentric points of view
Socinianism, besides its non-Trinitarian theology, revived Pelagianism in the Minor Reformed Church of Poland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It taught that the image of God in man was merely and simply his dominion over lower creation, not moral perfection. Adam and Eve had no positive righteousness to lose. Man has no natural tendency to sin and can avoid sinning altogether. God is a kind God who forgives man’s frailty. Sinning does not incur the wrath of God, thereby no need of a Savior. Mankind dies because they are mortal, not because of original sin. Socinianism gave birth to Unitarianism and became known for its “dissenting” opinions against the Church.

The German philosopher, Hegel (1770 – 1831), maintained that the original condition of man was one of brute intelligence, knowing nothing of good or evil, having naive innocence. Mankind makes a transition from the natural to the moral state through knowledge. Mankind fell from the state of Paradise bliss, having their self-consciousness awakened, their egos fully functioning and, thus, they follow involuntarily their selfish desires. The struggle against such selfishness is the path to virtue.
While Ritschl denied any original sin in mankind, he agreed with Hegel that sin is a necessary step in man's moral development. Man knows sin only from the point of view of the religious consciousness. Guilt is formed in us as we increase in the knowledge of the Ideal. We impute guilt to ourselves. God does not, and cannot, impute sin as guilt.

Schleiermacher said sin is simply an acquired habit that has gradually been formed and is now the source of all actual sin. Sin is the necessary product of man's sensuous nature, a result of the soul's connection with the physical organism. When that sensuous nature dominates, there is sin. However, sin as such is not an objective reality. It only exists in our consciousness. Guilt is merely the feeling of deficiency of a God-consciousness.

Immanuel Kant rejected any physical inheritance of a sinful nature, as well as any biblical beginning of mankind. He postulated a “radical evil” in man, a fundamental inclination that cannot be eradicated by us. It is rooted in the autonomous will. Sin is consequently a free act of the will in disobedience to a moral law.

While Enlightenment philosophers and theologians have generally dismissed Augustine, he is generally revered in theocentric circles. His analysis of mankind has been and continues to be the touchstone of much of anthropological discussions in historical theology. We are reminded in his *Confessions*:

```
Late have I loved Thee, O Lord; and behold,
Thou wast within and I without, and there I sought Thee.
Thou wast with me when I was not with Thee.
Thou didst call, and cry, and burst my deafness.
Thou didst gleam, and glow, and dispel my blindness.
Thou didst touch me, and I burned for Thy peace.
For Thyself Thou hast made us,
And restless our hearts until in Thee they find their ease.
Late have I loved Thee, Thou Beauty ever old and ever new.28
```
Self Reflection & Discussion
1. What is your view of origins?
2. Study the texts in the Bible on the image of God in man. What conclusions do you reach? How do they fit in with historical theology?
3. What is your take on the freedom of the will in mankind? Can you defend your position from the Scriptures?
4. Discuss the Fall of man. What did mankind lose in the Fall?
5. What is the place of God’s grace in redeeming mankind from the Fall?

Notes
1. William Ernest Henley (1849 – 1903) wrote Invictus in 1875 from his hospital bed in a battle with tuberculosis. It has been used to emphasize the “manliness” of mankind or the perseverance and determination that we need to have in life. Interestingly, Henley died of tuberculosis, with the disease the conqueror.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
11. Origen may or may not have believed in the Platonic teaching of metempsychosis (“the transmigration of souls”; i.e. reincarnation). He explicitly rejects “the false doctrine of the transmigration of souls into bodies”, but this may refer only to a specific kind of transmigration. Geddes MacGregor has argued that Origen must have believed in metempsychosis because it makes sense within his eschatology and is never explicitly denied in the Bible. Roger E. Olson, however, dismisses the view that Origen believed in reincarnation as a New Age misunderstanding of Origen’s teachings. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origen)
12. Tom Smail, Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity (Eerdmans, 2006), 41.


15. Grosh, 29.


17. Calvin, Institutes, Chapter 15, Section 4.

18. William Cunningham, Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church Since the Apostolic Age, Volume 1 (Hardpress, 2018), 321.


26. Wesley, ibid.


28. Quoted in Augustine of Hippo, ibid.
Appendix

Finney’s New Measures:
The Controversy and Its Effects

by

Wayne Brandow
Albany Bible Institute
1984
Finney’s New Measures
The Controversy and Its Effects

(The following was a paper submitted for class credit at the Albany Bible Institute in Schenectady New York in 1984. That now defunct Institute functioned as an extension of the King’s College. Wayne Brandow was a student of the author in the course, The History of Doctrine, 1650 – 1900. I am pleased to be able to transmit this paper as part of this book.)

In the spring of 1824, Charles Grandison Finney introduced his “new measures” to the Christian community with the commencement of his revival ministry. Prior to 1824 many components that are common place in evangelism today would have been foreign elements. These new measures caused quite a stir at first, but gradually found acceptance. In this paper we will address the topic of Finney and his new measures in a two-fold manner: (1) The development and description of Finney’s new measures, and (2) The carryover of Finney’s new measures to present day evangelism and evangelical practice.

The development and description of Finney’s new measures
The point of controversy regarding Mr. Finney’s new measures was at first a conflict with methodology rather than ideology. During the first stage of opposition, the concern was in respect to what Mr. Finney did rather than what Mr. Finney believed. An example to demonstrate this focus can be found in a letter written by Lyman Beecher to Mr. Beman in January 1827.¹

I have confidence in the piety and talents of brother Finney, and have no doubt that he brings the truth of God to bear upon the conscience with uncommon power and in a manner highly
calculated to arouse the public mind, and awaken, and convict of sin . . . But the more important revivals of religion are, the more should we depreciate all needless repellences in the manner of conducting them . . . (Italics mine.)

Beecher then goes on to delineate what he found offensive in the new measures. Upon examination of the list, one can readily see the grievances in this stage of Finney’s life were not concerned with doctrine but with practice.

A common complaint of Finney’s manner of conducting revivals was his harsh style and crude speech. “[Finney’s] shocking blasphemies, his novel and repulsive sentiments, and his theatrical and frantic gesticulations struck horror into those who entertained any reverence either for religion or decency.”

Examples of his crude speaking can be seen in such terms as “cut God’s throat” and “I am going to blow my brains out.” An example of Finney’s lack of sensitivy can be seen by one who heard Mr. Finney speak on hell. After hearing Finney, he felt the subject should be broached “with that affectionate earnestness that would denote that the preacher felt what he uttered, and that he was prompted by a deep anxiety for our salvation.” Evidently, Finney failed to convey that to this hearer.

One further example of arrogance can be seen in Mr. Finney’s conduct in the presence of Mrs. Mosier while on a house call.

Mr. Finney – Do you love God?
Mrs. Mosier – I think I do.
Mr. F (shaking his fist in her face) – You lie!
What reason have you to think you love God?
Mrs. M – When I look upon the works of creation, I feel to praise and adore him.
Mr. F. – You ought to go to hell, and you must repent.
Mrs. M. – I cannot.
Mr. F (again putting his fist in her face) – You lie! You can repent and be converted immediately.
Mrs. M. - I cannot.
Mr. F. (again putting his fist in her face) - You lie!
Mrs. M. – How can I get the new birth unless God gives it to me?
Mr. F. - You ought to be damned.8

Finney did have a strong domineering personality. G. Frederick Wright in a biography highly favorable to Finney described him in the following manner, “Force is, indeed, said to have been his factor; and ‘breaking down’ his process.”9

In Finney’s defense one could point to his background. He was a product of the New York frontier. When Charles Finney was two years old his parents moved from Connecticut to the wilderness of central New York. “The country was covered with a dense forest in which clearings were made by slow and painful effort. There was but few churches and few. er ministers; so that Finney in his boyhood heard very little _ preaching, and that mostly by uneducated and ignorant men.”10

Life on the frontier did not afford the luxuries of city life. There was little time for theological speculation, but for action. There was a land to clear, a crop to plant and a home to build. It required a rugged pioneer spirit. It fostered the kind of thinking that,”Black was black” and “White was white.” There were no philosophical grays. Something was either right or wrong.

This spirit carried over into Charles Finney. He was a country lawyer before his conversion. If he was to convince a jury of plain ordinary country folk it could not be done by speaking in some philosophical “unknown tongue”. He would have to speak in the earthy language of the average homesteader. There was nothing speculative or obtruse about Finney's early preaching. He called for action.

This should be obvious from the fact that during the first twelve years of his preaching Finney “wrote no word of his sermon and often went into the pulpit without knowing the text from which he would preach”.11 Yet the same preaching was described as being “tough, direct and popular”.12

In Finney and his followers we find a class of men known for their zeal and religious fervor, who used the plainest possible language, who spoke with power and unction well-nigh irresistible, but who were opposed by a different class of people, namely, conservative ministers
and their congregations. The early controversy was over cultural values. Conservative ministers and congregations resented being labeled as opposed to revivals. They resented the insinuation that they were either dead or unregenerate. They abhored the course language so unbecoming of a minister of the gospel that was coming from Finney and those in favor of the new measures.

The controversy over Finney heated up until a conference was called in New Lebanon, New York (1827). The result of the meeting was empty rhetoric that did not address the issues, except for the proposition that “in social meetings of men and women for religious worship, females are not to pray.” Even this proposition was deadlocked by means of a tie so that no final resolution concerning women praying was brought forward. Since Finney’s new measures were not brought under censure, it resulted in a tacit approval of Finney and his method of revival. To oppose Finney was to oppose revival. It opened the door to his more extreme measures.

The most notorious of Finney’s measures was “the anxious seat” which he introduced in the first Rochester revival (1831). The anxious seat was “a method to help inquirers. Its purpose was to bring the unconverted to immediate decision and also commit themselves publicly to Christ. For six years he was feeling his way toward this. . . Hereafter it was almost his universal custom.”

This appeal to his hearers was the result of Finney’s rejection of the Calvinism of his early mentor, Rev. George Cale. As a result “Finney’s gospel swept into the discord the strict Calvinistic idea that man was utterly dependent on God for the mere ability to repent.”

During this same year (1831), Finney opened himself up to criticism when he exposed his theological presuppositions in his sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,” preached in Boston. The title itself takes salvation from the sovereign grace of God and deposits it in the realm of man’s control. Man can now be the determiner of his fate. God must stand on the sidelines awaiting the outcome.

In the sermon Finney said, “The fact is sinners, that God requires you to turn, and what he requires of you, he cannot do for you. It must be your own voluntary act. It is not the appropriate work of God to do what he
requires of you.”

Asa Rand made sure this sermon was widely published so that all could clearly see Finney’s heresies. With the publishing of Finney’s *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835) and *Finney’s Lectures on Systematic Theology* (1846), it was confirmed that the new measures were not limited to a departure in methodology, but also at the base of it all was a departure theologically.

This departure doctrinally was pointed out in reviews of these two books by Charles Hodge and Albert Dod with little avail, for Finney had already established himself as the shaper of modern evangelism.

**The effect of Finney’s new measures on present day evangelism**

Having given a brief account of the history and development of Finney’s new measures, we need to draw this paper to a close by asking the following questions. How did Finney’s new measures influence present day evangelism? What can we learn from the foregoing history?

One evident result is that in churches that especially appeal to the American middle-class, the invitation to come forward at the close of the service is an integral part of their worship services. It is so commonplace that a leading fundamentalist, Jack Hyles, has written instructions to pastors on how to circumvent the sinner who during the sermon is preparing for the invitation. Often in certain Christian circles today, if a church does not give an altar call their orthodoxy is suspect. Upon reflection, how can that which was alien to Christianity for the first 1800 years of the church be deemed as orthodox?

Also, in respect to the invitation system so prevalent in Christianity today, have we incorporated into our worship a Protestant ritual, one which could lull people into a false assurance of a salvation they may have never had? How many people are sure they are saved because they remember a time when they walked the aisle? What is the criteria for evaluating whether we are in the faith? Is it a past act or a present reality?

An invitation should be given. But it should be an invitation to come to Christ, not to the front of the church. There should be no external stipulations, instead the convert should look for comfort in the presence
of a renewed heart. What does it mean to be “born again”? Is it just “words” or does it imply a change?

Here is where the invitation system falls short. If instead of regarding statistics of how many walked the aisle as a measure of success, we observed if any change has been wrought in the individuals, we might find many of our so-called conversions aborted. Listen to Finney regarding his own converts — In 1836, he wrote, “The great body of them are a disgrace to religion.”24 Again, “I was often instrumental in bringing Christians under great conviction, and into a state of temporary repentance and faith, but falling short . . . they would of course soon relapse again into their former state.”25 James Boyle, a Finney convert and co-worker, wrote on December 25, 1834: “Let us look over the fields where you and others and myself have laboured as revival ministers, and what is now their moral state? What was their state within three months after we left them? I have visited and re-visited many of these fields, and groaned in spirit to see the sad, frigid, carnal, contentious state into which the churches had fallen, and fallen very soon after our first departure from among them.”26 Can such be truly “born again”, or have they merely gone through the motions of a Protestant ritual?

Secondly, the complaints levied against Dr. Beman’s converts, who in their zeal practiced the new measures, sound like the complaints made against aggressive soul-winning churches of our day.

[Those inspired with newborn zeal] would intrude themselves into houses and stores, with those occupants they were unacquainted, and in the most abrupt manner would speak upon the subject of religion. And what would their first salutation be but, “You are going to hell,” or “Have you an interest in Christ?” or “Are you a Christian?”

Those who were approached in this way, became exasperated, and very naturally leveled their ridicule, and invective, both against their assailants and the religion which they maintained. We venture to say that there was never a time since the existence of the city, in which sacred topics were treated with such profane
levity, and it was attributable only to the hypocritical or perverted zeal of the pretended friends of piety.27

Can such rudeness and rough ways be in keeping with the admonition found in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 — “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; aif God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

Thirdly, the issue of women praying in public has borne fruit as women praying in public can be found. This practice runs contrary to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.28 In this new measure a crack in the church window was opened, and a sense of awe and dignified worship toward God left. It was the beginning of the involvement of lay people in the church which in time brought in many parachurch organizations.29 As these groups grew, the church’s influence declined.

Fourthly, Finney brought about a new view of revival itself. Revival was no longer a “surprising work of God,” as Edwards called it. But Finney described it in the following way — “A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means.”30 Today, Christianity does not look to God for a revival; it plans a week of revival meetings.

In summary it is amazing to see the tremendous influence that one man, Charles Finney has had on the church. I believe the new measures are a dangerous practice based on a defective theology. Both the root and the fruit of Finney’s views are centered on man’s ability. Christianity is advanced now by clever manipulative acts of men. The innovators and workers get the glory. They get the glory due to God alone. In their eyes, they are the successes because they rightly used God’s means. And what of others who are not so successful? Can it be attributed to the sovereignty of God? “No! They are dead!” says the one who has imbibed the spirit of Finney’s new measures.

May God deliver us from such a contentious spirit, and may we be
found patiently living a life committed to him, expectant that God in his providence might rend the heavens and pour out his Spirit in a mighty revival of true God-sent religion.

Appendix: Beecher’s Listing of the New Measures
1. The hasty recognition of persons as converted upon their own judgment, without interrogation or evidence.
2. Severe and repelling mode of preaching and conversing with stupid and awakened sinners, giving a predominance to the awful and terrific traits of the divine character and administration.
3. Assuming without sufficient evidence, that persons are unconverted.
4. The application of harsh and provoking epithets, which though they may be true in some theological sense, are, as they would naturally be understood, a violation of civilized decorum and of Christian courtesy.
5. Another evil to be deprecated by such unusual treatment of mankind, is its tendency to produce imitators, who without the moral power, will offer the same provocation, and will be treated by an indignant community.
6. Female prayer in promiscuous (ie. having men present) assemblies.
7. Bold, or imprudent expressions in the ardour of preaching, or under the provocation of opposition, or in the delirious exultation of spiritual pride.
8. Language of unbecoming familiarity with God in prayer.
9. Coarse, blunt and vulgar expressions.
10. A harsh and severe mode of addressing sinners.
11. Opposition from good men.
12. A self-sufficient and daring state of mind, which is reckless of consequences, and incorrigible to argument or advice.
13. A religion stripped of the mildness, and kindness, and common courtesy of civilized decorum.
14. Success an evidence that all which is done in revivals is right.
Notes
1. Lyman Beecher and Mr. Beman play central roles in the controversy over Mr. Finney. Dr. Beecher was the well known pastor from Boston called upon to confront Charles Finney by a revivalist of the old school, Mr. Asahel Nettleton. Beecher had no intention of allying with Nettleton in opposition to Finney. He sought a more mediating posture. However, Dr. Beecher did in this letter to Mr. Beman expose the weaknesses in Finney’s new measures. (Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered At the River* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1958), 116.) Mr. Beman was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Troy, NY, who was a whole hearted supporter of Charles Finney and the new measures.
3. See Appendix: Beecher’s Listing of the New Measures.
4. *A Brief Account of the Origin and Progress of the Divisions in the First Presbyterian Church in the City of Troy; Containing, Also; Strictures Upon the New Doctrines Broached by the Rev. C.G. Finney and N.S. S. Beman, With a Summary Relation of the Trial of the Latter Before the Troy Presbytery.* By a member of the late church and congregation (Troy, New York: Tuttle and Richards, 1827), 19. Care must be taken in weighing the value of this source. Although the author is not named, from an entire reading of this publication it is evident that he is a disgruntled member of the church at Troy with an axe to grind. In G. Frederick Wright’s biography of Finney, he is identified as “Mr. Brockway.” (*Charles Grandison Finney*, Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1891), 70.
9. Wright, *Finney*, 8. Wright is a source highly favorable to Finney as he was a professor in Oberlin Theological Seminary.
15. Vedder, *History of Baptists in the Middle States*, 153 as quoted by Robert More Jr.,
16. Weisberger, *Gathered at River*, 95. The opposition to Calvinism in Finney’s day can be seen by the popular jingle:

You can and you can’t
You will and you won’t
You’re damned if you do
And damned if you don’t


23. See Matthew 7:21, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Notice it does not say, “he who did” (past tense), but “he that doeth” (present tense).


27. *Divisions in Troy*, 16.

28. “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as alos saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” (1 Cor. 14:34, 35 KJV) (It is to be noted that the author disagrees with Wayne over the understanding and current application of these verses in the context of church life.)


Selected Bibliography

A Brief Account of the Origin and Progress of the Divisions in the First Presbyterian Church in the City of Troy; Containing, Also; Strictures Upon the New Doctrines Broached by the Rev. C.G. Finney and N. S. S. Beman, With a Summary Relation of the Trial of the Latter Before the Troy Presbytery. By a member of the late church and congregation. Troy, New York: Tuttle and Richards, 1827.


Stewart, James. Class notes from “American Church History” Schenectady: First Presbyterian Church, 1983.


Appendix 2

Creeds of the Ancient Church
Creeds of the Ancient Church

THE APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.  
(*that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places)

History
This creed is called the Apostles’ Creed not because it was produced by the apostles themselves but because it contains a brief summary of their teachings. It sets forth their doctrine “in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity.”
In its present form it is dated no later than the fourth century. More than any other Christian creed, it may justly be called an ecumenical symbol of faith.¹

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith:
That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,
neither blending their persons
nor dividing their essence.
For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
the person of the Son is another,
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.
But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.
What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.
The Father is uncreated,
the Son is uncreated,
the Holy Spirit is uncreated.
The Father is immeasurable,
the Son is immeasurable,
the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.
The Father is eternal,
the Son is eternal,
the Holy Spirit is eternal.
And yet there are not three eternal beings;
there is but one eternal being.
So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;
there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.
Similarly, the Father is almighty,
the Son is almighty,
the Holy Spirit is almighty.
Yet there are not three almighty beings;
there is but one almighty being.
Thus the Father is God,
the Son is God,
the Holy Spirit is God.
Yet there are not three gods;
there is but one God.
Thus the Father is Lord,
the Son is Lord,
the Holy Spirit is Lord.
Yet there are not three lords;
there is but one Lord.
Just as Christian truth compels us
to confess each person individually
as both God and Lord,
so catholic religion forbids us
to say that there are three gods or lords.
The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.
The Son was neither made nor created;
he was begotten from the Father alone.
The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten;
he proceeds from the Father and the Son.
Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers;
there is one Son, not three sons;
there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.
Nothing in this trinity is before or after,
nothing is greater or smaller;
in their entirety the three persons
are coeternal and coequal with each other.
So in everything, as was said earlier,
we must worship their trinity in their unity
and their unity in their trinity.
Anyone then who desires to be saved
should think thus about the trinity.
But it is necessary for eternal salvation
that one also believe in the incarnation
of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Now this is the true faith:
That we believe and confess
that our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Son,
is both God and human, equally.
He is God from the essence of the Father,
begotten before time;
and he is human from the essence of his mother,
born in time;
completely God, completely human,
with a rational soul and human flesh;
equal to the Father as regards divinity,
less than the Father as regards humanity.
Although he is God and human,
yet Christ is not two, but one.
He is one, however,
not by his divinity being turned into flesh,
but by God’s taking humanity to himself.
He is one,
certainly not by the blending of his essence,
but by the unity of his person.
For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh,
so too the one Christ is both God and human.
He suffered for our salvation;
he descended to hell;
he arose from the dead;
he ascended to heaven;
he is seated at the Father’s right hand;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
At his coming all people will arise bodily
and give an accounting of their own deeds.
Those who have done good will enter eternal life, 
and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith: 
one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.

History
This creed is named after Athanasius (AD 293-373), the champion of orthodoxy against Arian attacks on the doctrine of the trinity. Although Athanasius did not write this creed and it is improperly named after him, the name persists because until the seventeenth century it was commonly ascribed to him. It is not from Greek (Eastern), but from Latin (Western) origin, and is not recognized by the Eastern Orthodox Church today. Apart from the opening and closing sentences, this creed consists of two parts, the first setting forth the orthodox doctrine of the trinity, and the second dealing chiefly with the incarnation and the two-natures doctrine.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, 
the Father almighty, 
maker of heaven and earth, 
of all things visible and invisible. 
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, 
the only Son of God, 
begotten from the Father before all ages, 
God from God, 
Light from Light, 
true God from true God, 
begotten, not made; 
of the same essence as the Father. 
Through him all things were made. 
For us and for our salvation 
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen.

History
The Nicene Creed, also called the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is a statement of the orthodox faith of the early Christian church in opposition to certain heresies, especially Arianism. These heresies, which disturbed the church during the fourth century, concerned the doctrine of the trinity and of the person of Christ. Both the Greek (Eastern) and the Latin (Western) church held this creed in honor, though with one important difference: the Western church insisted on the inclusion of the phrase “and the Son” (known as the “filioque”) in the article on the procession of the Holy Spirit; this phrase still is repudiated by the Eastern Orthodox church. In its present form this creed goes back partially to the Council of Nicea (AD 325) with additions by the Council of Constantinople (AD 381). It was accepted in its present form at the
Council of Chalcedon in 451, but the “filioque” phrase was not added until 589. However, the creed is in substance an accurate and majestic formulation of the Nicene faith.

The Arian Heresy

Arianism is a non-trinitarian Christological doctrine which asserts the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was begotten by God the Father at a point in time, a creature distinct from the Father and is therefore subordinate to him, but the Son is also God (i.e. God the Son). Arian teachings were first attributed to Arius (AD 256–336), a Christian presbyter in Alexandria of Egypt. The term “Arian” is derived from the name Arius; it was not a self-chosen designation but bestowed by hostile opponents—and never accepted by those on whom it had been imposed. The nature of Arius’s teaching and his supporters were opposed to the theological views held by homousian Christians, regarding the nature of the Trinity and the nature of Christ. The Arian concept of Christ is based on the belief that the Son of God did not always exist but was begotten within time by God the Father.

Notes


2. The First General Council of Nicea (324 AD) condemned the teaching of Arius that the Son was a created being, only like the Father (homoiousios). The Council said Christ is of the very essence of the Father (homousios); He is true God, begotten not made. This began what we know as the Nicene Creed, still repeated in some churches to this day.
Other Titles
By The Author

People in Jesus are happy when they are at the end of their rope, when they feel they’ve lost what is most dear to them only to be embraced by the One most dear to them, when they are content with just who they are, when they have a good appetite for God, when they care, when they get their inside world put right, when they show people how to cooperate instead of compete and fight, when their commitment to God provokes persecution, and when people put them down or throw them out or speak lies about them to discredit them. (Matthew 5:3–11 The Message) Jesus understands fully the negatives in life, but his concern in these eight ethical lessons is to cheer us and tell us what real, lasting and genuine happiness is all about. That is the approach of this study of the beatitudes. (*Happyness is not a misspelling but intentional.)

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.
Too many people, including many Christians, want a “word” of comfort from the Lord. They want to feel better, to be relieved of the agonies and difficulties of intense affliction and unending pain. They believe God owes it to us, as a kind heavenly Father, to wrap us in his arms of love and care and take away life’s tragedies and afflictions.

Consequently, we do not read and cannot understand the record of Job in the Bible. We need a theology of comfort, not merely a list of “how to’s,” but a thought-out, God-given, time-tested, biblically based understanding about comfort irrespective of the situations we face or can face.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.
When God Says No: The Riches and Blessings of the Ten Commandments, 2019.

Our forefathers of the faith saw in the Ten Commandments God’s road map for living the Christian life. While they don’t repair the human heart or transform the human soul, they are God-given, explicit and undeniable tenets of how God wants us to behave in his creation toward him and toward our neighbors. Jesus never dismissed or voided the Ten Commandments. Instead, he restated them and gave them new life and vitality that the religious leaders of his day had enervated by legalistic additions and summaries.

When God Says No is a theological and practical study of the Ten Commandments. It will immerse you in what God considers right and proper behavior and will expand your horizons in almost every field of endeavor.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.

We are in desperate danger of making Christianity fit our culture rather than transforming that culture by its radical, life changing message and demands. As Patrick Morley points out, “There is a God we want and there is a God who is. They are not the same God. Cultural Christianity means to seek the God we want instead of the God who is. By default, people become cultural Christians when they do not proactively choose to become biblical Christians.”

Os Guinness writes that we live in an age of “post-truth,” making Christianity fit our experiences and cultures. Paul’s message to the Thessalonian Church is all about authenticity — authentic conversion, authentic Christian service, authentic encouragement, authentic lifestyles and authentic expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.

The three New Testament letters, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, are what we call the Pastoral Epistles. Timothy and Titus were young, energetic, trustworthy and effective as Christian workers and leaders. They were both called to difficult and challenging situations. Timothy was more shy than Titus, but both needed encouragement and instruction as how to handle false teachers and difficult questions of pastoral conduct and leadership.

This book is not an exhaustive commentary or study on the Pastoral Epistles. It is rather a close look at some of the major themes of these letters.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.

Francis Schaeffer once said and wrote that we live and minister before a “watching world.” The non-Christian world often wants us to stumble and falter and fail. They want committed believers in Jesus Christ to betray their Lord and Savior. They watch for it, wait for it and then report it when it happens as evidence of moral and institutional failure and sickness. The real question for those daring to enter into full-time professional ministerial service for the Lord Jesus Christ is how do I not fall and finally fail my Lord and Savior? How do I make sure that my ministry years will be biblically fruitful and that I will remain faithful to Christ? How can I leave a legacy of godliness and faithfulness that others can follow safely and surely? This book explores some of the answers to those questions.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.

Nehemiah was an unknown servant to a great ancient Near Eastern king, a cupbearer by trade. He was not a famous Jewish prophet, scribe or known leader. Yet, through this man, the torn down and burnt walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in an amazing fifty-two days. He faced opposition and ridicule by the appointed leaders on the ground in and around Jerusalem. He had to deal with recalcitrant people, scared people and lazy, unproductive people. He had to conquer unfair business practices and engineer conflict resolution, all while facing enemies from a secular empire.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.
Church Warnings! The Seven Churches of Revelation for Today, A Bible Study, 2017.

A Bible study with Teacher Notes and discussion guide on the seven churches cited in Revelation 2–3. Christ’s messages to the seven churches of Revelation are as relevant today as they were then. Ephesus-like churches who have “forsaken their first love,” and churches like Pergamum and Thyatira which tolerate false teachers and teaching, as well as churches like Sardis and Laodicea who are lackadaisical about the faith are in danger. Churches like Smyrna and Philadelphia who have endured much persecution are told to hold on and overcome. To all seven, Jesus says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.
A Bible study and discussion guide on the Old Testament story of Jonah. Grace transforms everything it touches. It does not discriminate, based on race, tradition, church experience, selectability, preference, timing or worth. There is no sin so great that grace cannot conquer and transform. There is no life so lost that grace cannot find and reclaim it. There is no one so wicked or unworthy that grace cannot totally change and renovate. This study of Jonah shows God’s amazing, mighty and magnificent grace.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.


Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.
This is not an exhaustive book, nor a polemic against my Arminian friends. Nor is this a treatise on systematic theology, though there are many theological points in it. It is rather a personal restating of truths that God has impressed on my heart and mind since my college years. Rather than being weakened by all the different ministries and situations in which I have served, they have been strengthened, deepened and made more real for me by a continual study of God’s Word and interactions with many Christians from a variety of theological backgrounds.

This is a study guide for selected Psalms from the Bible. It’s fill-in-the blanks format is perfect for a small group study, or even a personal study of the Psalms. It references 67 of the most read Psalms and includes a special study of Psalm 1. A selection of “Psalms for Christmas” is included in the study.

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers. A Leader’s Guide is also available.

Insights shared by the author from letters, emails and various mentoring situations involving a number of lay and professional ministry leaders over an almost forty year span. Sections include “Feelings About God and Life,” “Knowing God Better,” “Faith and Culture,” “On Church Health and Growth,” “On Church Difficulties,” “On Preaching and Teaching,” and “On Theology.”

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.