

RENEWING THE MIND

Vincent Cheung

Copyright © 2002 by Vincent Cheung. All rights reserved.

Author's web site: <http://www.faithstudio.com>

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
1. UNGODLY COUNSEL	4
2. RENEWING THE MIND	11
3. ONLY GOD IS GOOD	18
4. UNFADING BEAUTY	24
5. THEOLOGY OF WAR	42

PREFACE

Here we have a collection of five short essays. Although they were written independently, I have arranged them in an order that seems to exhibit a coherence and purpose.

Arguing that intellectual neutrality does not exist, the first chapter uses Psalm 1 as its foundation to illustrate that all ideas are either Christian or non-Christian. The believer must not heed the counsel of the world, but must study the Scripture for wisdom and guidance.

Conversion involves a person's fundamental change of intellectual commitment. Rather than being a friend of the world and an enemy of God, he is now favorable to the precepts of God and hostile to secular ideas. However, although his basic dispositions have been changed, his mind does not yet comprehend the entire system of Christian truth and its implications. This is why Christian development, or the process of sanctification, is first an intellectual renewal. This is the topic of the second chapter.

The rest of the book provides several examples of the above as the implications of biblical teachings are worked out in areas such as sin, the deity of Christ, the choice of a spouse, war, and capital punishment.

1. UNGODLY COUNSEL

A much quoted verse in Proverbs says, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (11:14, KJV). These words are used to teach that the Christian should entertain the advice of others while making important decisions; some use them to justifying their attempts to impose their rather half-witted suggestions on their victims. Although, as the NIV translates it,¹ the verse refers more to warfare than personal decision-making, few would perceive the principle as completely inapplicable. Besides, at least one other verse in Proverbs restates the teaching seemingly without limiting it to warfare: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (15:22).

This is not to say that believers should heed suggestions from others without discrimination. Psalm 1 begins thus: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers" (v. 1). Or, to make the parallelism in the verse explicit:

Blessed is the man
 who does not
 (1) walk in the counsel of the wicked
 or
 (2) stand in the way of sinners
 or
 (3) sit in the seat of mockers.

Although I do not object to taking the three marked phrases as roughly equivalent, something may be said for the understanding that they illustrate the progressive stages of wickedness into which one who strays from God enters. With each stage, the ungodly becomes more resolute and his hostility against righteousness increases.

The path toward apostasy and perdition begins when one heeds "the counsel of the wicked." This is sufficient to restrict the application of the two verses from Proverbs cited above. While we should pay attention to advice from others, the Bible excludes ungodly counsel, and states that the righteous man shuns such.

The counsel of the wicked is at times explicit and graphic:

My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and

¹ "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure" (Proverbs 11:14, NIV).

fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse" – my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood (Proverbs 1:10-16).

We expect those who call themselves Christians to know not to follow this type of invitations, although we are almost just as often surprised in this regard. The distorted gospel message preached by many today must be blamed for the large number of false converts in our churches. Still, even some unbelievers refuse to follow criminals.

Not all ungodly counsel is as obviously adverse to biblical faith. Beginning from any non-Christian *a priori* or *telos*, any valid process of reasoning results in proposals that are questionable. We may obtain several examples from Jeffrey J. Fox's *How to Become CEO*,² in which the author gives a number of "rules for rising to the top of any organization."

One refreshing aspect of this book is its break from corporate common sense. "Common sense" is overrated. One often hears the exclamation, "That's just common sense!" But this is often why the proposed course of action ought not to be followed. In ordinary usage, the term means "sound practical judgment that is independent of specialized knowledge, training, or the like; normal native intelligence."³ But I am both delighted and amused to find my definition of "common sense" in *Merriam-Webster*: "the unreflective opinions of ordinary people; sound and prudent but often unsophisticated judgment."⁴

Based on either definition of the term, I object to the popular notion, affirmed even among some theologians, that the Book of Proverbs is a compilation of "common sense" sayings. Some say that much of Proverbs, or even other parts of Scripture, is just "plain common sense," as if this is an argument for their hearers to follow the Bible. But to how many people is it common sense to think, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10)? Even professing Christians fail to understand that devotion to God must begin and permeate the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge.

In our day, common sense rejects the very notion that, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child..." (Proverbs 22:15). The verse teaches human depravity, that foolishness is "bound up" even in the hearts of those supposedly least corrupted by evil. But contemporary common sense tells us that everyone, and especially the child, is born innocent and inherently good. This anti-biblical premise results in curriculums that maximize the child's self-expression instead of self-discipline. A Christian philosophy of education must emphasize verbal instructions and moral excellence, not student participation and unbridled creativity.

² Jeffrey J. Fox, *How to Become CEO*; New York: Hyperion, 1998.

³ *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*; New York: Random House, Inc., 2001.

⁴ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2001.

And surely, if the child is inherently innocent and good, physical punishment constitutes abuse and not discipline. Thus, a denial of the first portion of Proverbs 22:15 also necessitates a rejection of the second part: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but *the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.*" It follows that Proverbs 13:24, 23:13-14, and 29:15 are all discarded as false and primitive: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him"; "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death"; "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother."

The Bible is opposed to what sinful man thinks. Proverbs, as with the rest of Scripture, does not teach common sense – it teaches against it. By both definitions of the term, the Bible rejects common sense – "normal native intelligence" has been crippled by the noetic effects of sin, and no Christian believes that the Bible teaches "the unreflective opinions of ordinary people." The Scripture is divine verbal revelation, not common sense.

However, even without the religious objection, "normal native intelligence" does not always arrive at the same conclusions, although a naïve consensus is often reached by a majority. Fox suggests several rules that deviate from the common sense of corporate culture, and for this I applaud him. For example, "Don't have a drink with the gang," "Skip all office parties," "Don't take work home from the office," "Avoid superiors when you travel," and "Eat in your hotel room" seem to differ from much of conventional wisdom. Fox himself is successful in terms of his career, and assuming that he follows his own principles, his example shows that skipping all office parties does not doom one to corporate oblivion.

Under "Study these books,"⁵ I am glad to find *Webster's Third Unabridged Dictionary* and the Bible, although it is likely that the latter is included only to enhance one's moral and cultural awareness, rather than to be revered as divine revelation. *The Art of War* is superior to other contemporary secular works, and I know there is *The Art of War for Executives*.⁶ To read Machiavelli's *The Prince* is at least more cultured than *Who Moved My Cheese?*⁷

However, our purpose is to discover whether his suggestions, despite their seemingly non-religious and non-moral nature, escape the designation, "the counsel of the wicked." Right way, one questions whether *The Art of War* and *The Prince* may be applied to business in accordance with biblical principles. Take as another example, "Always take the job that offers the most money." Fox gives several reasons that commend such a rule:

First, all of your benefits, perquisites, bonuses, and subsequent raises will be based on your salary...Second, the higher paid you are, the more visible to top management you will be...Fourth, if two people are

⁵ Fox, p. 71.

⁶ Donald G. Krause, *The Art of War for Executives*; Berkley Publishing Group, 1995.

⁷ Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese?*; Putnam Publishing Group, 1998.

candidates for a promotion to a job...the higher paid person always gets the job...⁸

Let us assume that all the reasons he provides are true, but they support the rule in question only if a certain purpose or goal is presupposed. If this aim is not derivable from biblical revelation, then what Fox proposes here cannot be consistent with the Christian perspective.

It may be said that Fox is not trying to write a religious book, and thus only assumes what should be the case in a business environment. However, this point carries little relevance for the Christian, since his faith commits him to obeying the Scripture in every aspect of his life. Therefore, before he understands the teleology of work as prescribed in the Bible, he cannot tell if "Always take the job that offers the most money" applies to him. It may be true that one should take the job that offers the most money once the Christian concerns have been considered, but then the principle can no longer remain as stated by Fox, but must be modified accordingly.

Even Christians have produced the kind of books here examined, and in such cases they do not let the Scripture control their thinking as they write. Since they are only writing about business, it may seem inappropriate to bring religious presuppositions to the discussion; however, when they do without biblical premises, they inevitably allow another set of presuppositions to dominate the content. If career success is the highest aim in one's system of thought, then his social and spiritual practices would reflect such a teleology. However, if the knowledge of God is supreme, that all subsidiary categories are dominated and permeated by theological presuppositions.

It is impossible to write a neutral book on business or any other subject; it will either be a Christian or non-Christian book. Fox's book therefore comes under the category of "the counsel of the wicked." Although it does not advocate crime or blatant lewdness, it at least attempts to be religiously neutral. Knowledgeable Christians may find several suggestions in there that may be useful after some modifications, but most believers cannot be sure which rules are consistent with Scripture and which are not.

Those who "walk in the counsel of the wicked" soon begin to "stand in the way of sinners" (v. 1) As one entertains or follows ideas antagonistic to the Christian faith, he begins to travel the same path as the sinners. His sympathy for their way of life becomes greater and greater, so that he now stands with the wicked. When he finally "[sits] in the seat of mockers" (v. 1), he has fully joined himself to unrighteousness. He now has a place at their table. More than pursuing the path of wickedness, he is now one of the "mockers" who scorn the things of God, despising those who expound and follow his precepts.

Such is the road to perdition, and it begins with heeding ungodly counsel. Most professing Christians "walk in the counsel of the wicked" daily, but many also "stand in the way of sinners" and "sit in the seat of mockers" without realizing it, perhaps partly

⁸ Fox, p. 2.

due to self-deception. One who pays lip service to the Bible may nevertheless affirm and follow the unrighteous counsel of non-Christians, and mock those who speak and act in accordance with Scripture.

The fall from righteousness begins from admiration and respect toward ungodly thinking, and ends in intimate fellowship with the wicked. Derek Kidner writes,

Counsel, way and seat...draw attention to the realms of thinking, behaving and belonging, in which a person's fundamental choice of allegiance is made and carried through...the three complete phrases show three aspects, indeed three degrees, of departure from God, by portraying conformity to this world at three different levels: accepting its advice, being party to its ways, and adopting the most fatal of its attitudes – for the scoffers, if not the most scandalous of sinners, are the farthest from repentance...⁹

With this excellent summary, we proceed to the next verse.

One might expect, with the structure and content of the previous verse being what they are, that verse 2 may contrast the counsel, behavior, and fellowship of the righteous, godly, and reverent against what has been said in verse 1. Rather, it says, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

The Psalm moves immediately to the law of the Lord. This warns us that, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22) does not demand many human counselors. In fact, Psalm 119:24 says, "Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors." Proverbs 15:22 still applies to human counselors, but they must be bound by the precepts of God.

Whereas there is an ultimate authority for all Christians, namely, the whole of Scripture, there is no such unifying principle from which comes all secular philosophies. The first principles of non-Christian systems oppose one another; their thinking is in utter confusion.

As we have observed, the turn to wicked living begins from sinful thinking, and so verse 2 addresses the issue at its fundamental level when it says of the righteous man that, "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." To "delight" in the law of God is to think on it "day and night"; one whose thinking is not permeated with Scripture cannot claim to love the word of God. Spurgeon writes, "Perhaps some of you can claim a sort of negative purity, because you do not walk in the way of the ungodly; but let me ask you – Is your delight in the law of God? Do you study God's Word? Do you make it the man of your right hand – your best companion and hourly guide?"¹⁰

⁹ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Psalms 1-72*; Downers Grove, Illinois: 1973; p. 47-48.

¹⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David, Vol. 1*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers; p. 2.

To "meditate" on the Scripture means to think on it, to ponder its meaning and implication. Although the word can mean "to mutter; to make sound with the mouth,"¹¹ it does not require the translation, "murmurs his law day and night" (NJB). The GNT says that the righteous "study it day and night." The idea to be stressed is the intellect's contemplation of divine revelation, whether it is spoken aloud or not. To quote Kidner again, "The mind was the first bastion to defend, in verse 1, and is treated as the key to the whole man...The psalm is content to develop this one theme, implying that whatever really shapes a man's thinking shapes his life."¹²

We can see this in God's command to Joshua: "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Joshua 1:8). His instruction for raising children is also similar: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Knowledge comes before practice and application, and repetition reinforces God's precepts on the mind. This has always been the way of the righteous: "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this" (2 Timothy 2:7). What distinguishes the wicked and the righteous? The former heed ungodly counsel, while the latter delight in and think on the Scripture. This basic difference in the thoughts divides the two groups. Verses 5-6 say, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Professing Christians may perform many good works in the name of Christ, but their thoughts betray them; "the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Contemporary Christianity, an aberrant version of the true faith, seeks to minimize the relevance of one's theological position; only love and unity are important. But the Bible says our thoughts define us, and it is the starting point from which the totality of our lives is derived. Therefore, let those who profess the name of Christ cease whoring after the wisdom of this world, and press the irreconcilable antithesis between the biblical worldview and all secular systems.

The reader may still be concerned that, if all non-Christian counsel is wicked, then one cannot trust his physician, or even a car owner's manual. I will answer this with a personal example. A dentist told me that I had cavities, but several minutes later another one came in and said that I did not. Did I have cavities? If I had obtained a third opinion, there was no guarantee that a fourth dentist would have agreed with the third. And this was supposed to be a simple problem. Anything short of divine revelation is at best uncertain, and a non-Christian premise or teleology will compel a non-Christian

¹¹ William Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers; p. 271.

¹² Kidner, p. 48.

conclusion. On the other hand, the way of the righteous is the Reformation motto, *sola Scriptura* – the Scripture alone.

2. RENEWING THE MIND

Intellectual development is perhaps the most neglected aspect of Christian sanctification. Being the very foundation of spiritual growth, failure in this area undermines the entire enterprise of discipleship. Worse than being neglected, intellectualism is maligned as an obstacle to conversion and an enemy of spiritual progress. One preacher said, "An intellectual spirit is deadly." This contradicts "the first and greatest commandment" of loving God with all our mind (Matthew 22:37-38). One can hardly love God with all of his mind or intellect in a non-intellectual way.

An intellectual spirit is only deadly to the irrational mysticism of the above preacher. Rather, one of our most urgent tasks is to recover a spirit of biblical intellectualism. Destructive to the spiritual life is the unbiblical content of one's thinking, not thinking itself. "The new self," according to Colossians 3:10, "is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." Peter makes Christian knowledge the foundation of "life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). In the following discussion we will focus our attention on Romans 12:1-2, from which we may derive information concerning the role and development of the intellect as it pertains to the Christian life:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Commentators express a typical distinction between doctrine and application, or theory and practice, when they say that Paul begins to set forth in Romans 12 the practical application of the doctrinal expositions that precede it. However, one should not make a strict dichotomy between doctrine and application, especially when referring to biblical content. As with the preceding chapters, Romans 12-16 also teach doctrines – only doctrines about different things.

The word "therefore" signifies that the content of these later chapters follow from the previous ones. "God's mercy" refers to the salvation that God has extended toward his elect. Paul now appeals to the believers for a proper response. The proper response to the saving grace of God is to pursue sanctification, part of which is "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." The word "offer" is a technical term for presenting Levitical sacrifices. Differing from the Old Testament sacrifices is that we are to present our own bodies as "living sacrifices," as opposed to the slain animals of previous times. Such sacrifices, of course, provide no redemptive value, but are rather our response to what Christ has done.

In the context of explaining the redemptive work of Christ and our relation to it, Paul states, "count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11). "Therefore," he adds, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (v. 12). Sanctification involves "[putting] to death the misdeeds of the body" (8:13). The same word translated "offer" appears in verse 13, which says, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."

Chrysostom says, "How can the body become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil, and it is a sacrifice. Let the tongue utter nothing base, and it is an offering. Let the hand work no sin, and it is a holocaust.¹ But more, this suffices not, but besides we must actively exert ourselves for good; the hand giving alms, the mouth blessing them that curse us, the ear ever at leisure for listening to God." To offer our bodies as "instruments of righteousness" is "pleasing to God."

Paul says that this is a "spiritual act of worship." These words deserve close attention. They are sometimes misinterpreted, and their significance often left undetected. The word rendered "spiritual" is *logikos*, which is best translated "rational" instead. Several modern translations have "spiritual" (NIV, NASB, NCV, CEV, ESV), so as to emphasize the idea of spiritual worship "in the sense of being inward as opposed to a matter of external rites."²

Some scholars contend that *logiken* in this verse is almost synonymous to *pneumatikos*, or "spiritual." However, the *pneuma* word group is common in the Pauline corpus, whereas *logikos* occurs only here.³ That is, Paul intends the meaning that *logikos* conveys. The most accurate translation is probably "rational service," as in Schreiner.⁴ But The Jerusalem Bible and the translation by Ronald Knox help emphasize the intellectual nature of Paul's exhortation to worship: "...worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings"; "...this is the worship due from you as rational creatures." The Latin Vulgate has *rationabile*.⁵

As Thayer says, the term denotes "the worship which is rendered by the reason or soul."⁶ Wuest gives a more theological interpretation and writes, "Israel preached the gospel through the use of object lessons, the Tabernacle, Priesthood, and Offerings. The Church

¹ The word means a burnt offering.

² C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985; p. 295.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament); Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998; p. 645.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 642.

⁵ *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*: "obsecro itaque vos fratres per misericordiam Dei ut exhibeatis corpora vestra hostiam viventem sanctam Deo placentem rationabile obsequium vestrum"

⁶ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002 (original: 1896); p. 379.

preaches the same gospel in abstract terms."⁷ Under the new covenant, we render not to God ceremonial worship, but as is consistent with rational beings, intellectual worship – worship that is performed by and stemming from the mind, even as it affects bodily conduct.

This is not to say that Old Testament worship was non-intellectual. The ceremonial laws were precise, prescribing procedures for many activities from the sacred to the mundane. However, even then the Old Testament gives great emphasis to the intellect and doctrines, as one may note from the repeated commands to teach, hear, and meditate the words of Scripture.

Jesus declares in John 4:23, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." That New Testament believers are to worship "in spirit and truth" – both words relating to the intellect – does not mean that those who worshiped under the Old Testament did it in flesh and falsehood! The Old Testament religion was already the most intellectually rigorous among the various ancient worldviews.

The New Testament does not teach a different gospel, but it is a new and superior administration of the Abrahamic covenant. We need to repeat this often, since much of popular preaching makes false distinctions between the two Testaments, with disastrous results. In any case, this new administration liberates us from the Old Testament ceremonial practices since Christ has fulfilled them. Now we are free under the new covenant to worship God even more as rational beings; therefore, preaching, studying, and thinking receive preeminence in the process sanctification.

Romans 12:1 stands against the anti-intellectualism of the modern church, which encourages believers to remain as little children without understanding. Thus, contemporary preaching emphasizes the practical and procedural, rather than the doctrinal and theological. The result is that we have several generations of Christians that do not know much about the Bible at all.

That we are to think of ourselves as rational creatures produces some important ramifications. If the essence of our nature is rationality, then a program of spiritual development must take this into account so that it treats human beings as rational creatures – it will first deal with the mind, the thoughts of the individuals. A program of spiritual growth must first target the mind. This is what we find in verse 2: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

I took a course in college on sociobiology. The subject presupposes biological evolution and applies it to human thought and culture. From the assumption that human beings are descendants of animals, and are animals, it observes and extends the social behavior of

⁷ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955; p. 206.

animals to explain human behavior. For example, E. O. Wilson attempts to account for altruism and religion using the theory of evolution.⁸

One of the essay questions on the final exam was, "How has this course changed your view of human nature?" Part of my answer read, "Only an idiot would let a 100-level course in undergraduate biology to change something as important as one's view on human nature. It would be like taking a semester of German or Spanish and then immediately adopting it as one's primary language."

Yet such morons abound. With no more than a most elementary understanding of evolutionary theory, and sometimes not even that, they rely on it as one of the most basic principles that govern their thinking. In a speech at the American Museum of Natural History, Colin Patterson said, "Can you tell me anything you know about evolution, any one thing that is true? I tried that question on the geology staff at the Field Museum of Natural History and the only answer I got was silence."⁹

If the public is guilty of believing the scientists without examining the evidence, the scientists are in turn guilty of suppressing evidence contrary to their theories:

It is...right and proper to draw the attention of the non-scientific public to the disagreements about evolution. But some recent remarks of evolutionists show that they think this unreasonable. This situation where scientific men rally to the defense of a doctrine that they are unable to define scientifically, much less demonstrate with scientific rigor, attempting to maintain its credit with the public by suppression of criticism and the elimination of difficulties, is abnormal and undesirable in science.¹⁰

Many Christians, affected by an anti-intellectual secular philosophy, are also ignorant of the major tenets of their faith, and this reveals disobedience to biblical instructions. However, evolutionists do not believe in an omnipotent Spirit who converts the fundamental commitments of the chosen ones so that they may assent to the truth and be saved. The Christian worldview permits one to convert to the faith without a thorough understanding of the entire system, since it is the sovereign God who exercises irresistible power on the will of man by means of the gospel message. Nevertheless, Scripture commands the diligent study of the word of God to gain a comprehensive intellectual understanding of the Christian faith.

The unbeliever cannot justify a change in fundamental commitment based on an undergraduate course in biology, especially those who pride themselves of being rational and scientifically minded. To demand one argument for evolution citing actual evidence

⁸ E. O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*; Harvard University Press, 1988.

⁹ Colin Patterson, "Evolution and Creationism," New York; November 5, 1981. Dr. Patterson was a senior paleontologist at the British Museum of Natural History.

¹⁰ W. R. Thompson, "Introduction," *Origin of Species*, by Charles Darwin; Dutton: Everyman's Library, 1956; p. xxii. Thompson was Director of the Commonwealth Institute of Biological Control, Ottawa.

for the theory is often sufficient to silence many lay evolutionists. Many of them cannot even explain the theory of evolution, let alone provide evidence in support of it. However, they claim to revere only science, and will believe nothing without evidence.

But the point that I wish to emphasize is that the question on the final exam implied an agenda to alter or shape the thinking of the students. "How has this course changed your view of human nature?" betrays an intention and expectation that the content of the course would change one's view of human nature. The professor wished to work out some of evolution's implications for human behavior so that the students would think and act more consistently with evolutionary theory.

In the words of René Dubos: "Evolutionary concepts are applied also to social institutions and to the arts. Indeed, most political parties, as well as schools of theology, sociology, history, or arts, teach these concepts and make them the basis of their doctrines. Thus, theoretical biology now pervades all of Western culture indirectly through the concept of progressive historical change."¹¹ Julian Huxley likewise writes, "The concept of evolution was soon extended into other than biological fields. Inorganic subjects such as...linguistics, social anthropology, and comparative law and religion, began to be studied from an evolutionary angle, until today we are enabled to see evolution as a universal and all-pervading process."¹² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin declares that evolution is "a general condition to which all theories, all systems, all hypotheses must bow and which they must satisfy henceforward if they are to be thinkable and true."¹³

Evolution is a theory concerning human origins that produces ramifications in subjects outside of biology. Due to its wide acceptance, it has affected secular theories on psychology, education, criminology, and many other areas of study. Huxley believes that evolution is an "all-pervading process." However, if the theory is false, then the secular theories deduced from it can only be all-pervasive nonsense. Besides his optimistic view of evolution cited in the previous paragraph, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin also says, "[Evolution is] above all verification, as well as being immune from any subsequent contradiction by experience."¹⁴ It cannot be verified or falsified. But this is not very "scientific," is it?¹⁵ Imagine the ridicule if a Christian were to make the same claim regarding supernatural creation.

I have in my possession hundreds of pages of additional quotations that can embarrass the evolutionists, but since it is not my aim to refute the theory here, I must refer the reader to my other writings. Now, evolution is one of the major secular and anti-biblical theories that seeks to capture our minds. The point is that non-Christians adopt ludicrous fundamental principles to eliminate the God of the Bible as the determiner and

¹¹ René Dubos, "Humanistic Biology," *American Scientist*, vol. 53; March, 1965; p. 4-19.

¹² Julian Huxley, "Evolution and Genetics," in *What is Science?* edited by J. R. Newman; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955; p. 256-289.

¹³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*; New York: Harper and Row, 1965; p. 219.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵ It is a philosophical presupposition not derived from, but rather imposed upon, empirical data.

explanation of all human thought and experience. They opt for unbiblical – and therefore false – principles from which to construct their worldviews.

Regeneration is a radical reconstruction of the personality and intellect after which one assumes biblical authority as his first principle. However, much of the false ideas he has acquired prior to conversion remain, causing his thoughts and behavior to exhibit irreconcilable inconsistencies with his new fundamental commitment. The process of sanctification is therefore first an intellectual development, through which we discard unbiblical ideas, such as evolution and its implications, and make our thoughts and actions conform to the word of God.

Whether they are anti-Christian scientific theories or autonomous standards of morality, Paul commands his readers to throw off the unbiblical intellectual mold into which the world attempts to shape us. This is his prescription for the Christian life: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." In other words, stop thinking like non-Christians, and start thinking like Christians.

The second part of verse 2 says, "Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will." This follows from the first part of the verse that teaches the renewal of the mind. An anti-intellectual spirit stifles Christian thinking, and therefore destroys one's ability "to test and approve what God's will is." Many people claim they wish to know the will of God, but failing to follow Paul's instruction, they misunderstand the very nature of God's will and how he reveals it to us. Mysticism may be more spectacular and romantic, but it is also the unbiblical and lazy way of pursuing God.

Spiritual transformation entails the total rejection of secular thinking, adopting the Christian worldview in its entirety, and working out its implications for every area of thought and life. Then, Paul says, we will be able to "test and approve" what the will of God is. The way to know God's will is therefore to develop intellectual discernment. Paul does not say that the knowledge of God's will comes from an inner intuition or impression, or a "still, small voice." Rather, he says to train ourselves to think like Christians, so that we may test something to see if it is God's will, and if so we will approve of the thought or action in question.

The final portion of verse 2 is often misinterpreted. Some have made it to say that there is a range of possibilities within the plan of God so that even if one fails to attain his perfect will, one may perhaps remain in his "permissive" will. This interpretation takes the three adjectives – good, pleasing, and perfect – as indicating increasing proximity to that which is the perfect will of God. However, grammatical considerations dictate that one translate the verse in a way that applies the adjectives equally to the will of God. That is, the will of God is good, pleasing, and perfect.

That God has a permissive will is an invention of certain theologians who wish to harmonize scriptural data with their unbiblical systems of theology. Those who disobey

God obtains comfort from this theory, since at least they consider themselves as operating under his permissive will. Such an interpretation also helps preserve the false doctrine of human autonomy. However, God does not "permit" anything, as if the universe can exist and function apart from him. If God does not decree an event, it can never occur. This is true whether we are speaking of the death of a sparrow, or a thought in the human mind.

Romans 12:1-2 prescribes for us the basic structure that must characterize any program of Christian development. We must think of ourselves as rational creatures, so that every strategy designed to increase godliness must first target our minds by communicating the divine precepts of God in Scripture. A primary agenda of sanctification is to remove any remnant of unbiblical thinking from our minds, replacing it with the biblical worldview and its implications. Familiarity with Scripture produces intellectual discernment, by which we are able to test any proposed course of action, so that if it passes the test, to approve of it as the way that God would have us follow. Accordingly, an anti-intellectual spirit is deadly because it spurns the biblical way to attain spiritual maturity.

3. ONLY GOD IS GOOD

"Who then can be saved?" exclaim the disciples in Mark 10:26. Many people believe that it is easy to obtain salvation, while others consider it difficult. The disciples at least imply that, based on what they have just heard from their teacher, not just anyone can attain it. Jesus does not only say that salvation is difficult to obtain – he says, "with man this is impossible" (v. 27). In another place he says, "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:14).

But let us start from the beginning of the passage: "As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" (Mark 10:17). Characteristic of the Gospel of Mark, the verse maintains a sense of urgency and activity as the man *ran* to Christ, and then fell on his knees. Whatever is on his mind is a perturbing issue to him. He wants his answer desperately, and he knows from whom he should seek it.

His question is indeed important, and pertinent to everyone: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question as stated does not have to imply an assumption of salvation by works on the part of the inquirer, since even to believe in Christ is something that a person does. What we deny is meritorious good deeds as the ground of one's salvation, and even if faith is in a sense meritorious – contrasting with the evil of unbelief – it is doubtful that the man includes believing Christ as a possible good work in his question.

Nevertheless, from the context of the passage and the possible background of the man as a synagogue ruler, it is likely that he indeed has good works in mind. In any case, contrary to the doctrine of justification by faith, he assumes that there is something he can do to achieve or earn eternal life.

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good – except God alone" (Mark 10:18-19). Such a reply perplexes many readers. The man holds Jesus in high regard as a Jewish teacher, even kneeling before him as he approaches, not as an act of worship, but a display of the utmost respect.

Yet while Jesus would accept worship from others (Matthew 14:33), here he appears to deny even goodness as applied to himself. It cannot be that Jesus would admit to being sinful, or that he is no more than a human being. He says in one place, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46), and Hebrews 4:15 teaches that although he has been tempted in every way, he was without sin.

Instead of being a rather direct statement of self-abasement, the reply among other things may be an indirect claim to deity. The reasoning is not that since only God is good, Jesus is not good; rather, since only God is good, Jesus is God. Only God is good; any goodness attributable to human beings is at best relative and derived. In what sense is the

man applying goodness to Christ? As we shall see, Jesus' reply also exposes the man's superficial idea of goodness, which in turn proves to be crucial to answering his question.

Verse 19 says, "You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" Given the subsequent content of the passage, some believe that Jesus deliberately omits "You shall not covet" from the list of commandments in anticipation of exposing the man's spiritual defect in verse 22.

However, such an interpretation is implausible since Jesus includes "Do not defraud" in his recitation of the commandments, probably derived from Leviticus 19:13. The statement also leaves out a number of other commandments. Therefore, the exclusion of certain commandments does not necessarily imply that those are the ones the man fails to keep, but Jesus is only providing a summary of the commandments. To paraphrase, "Why do you call me good? Only God is good. Besides, you know the commandments of God already, do you not?"

The man answers, "All these I have kept since I was a boy" (v. 20). He says that he has kept all the commandments of God. "That man possesses the ability to fulfill the commandments of God perfectly was so firmly believed by the rabbis that they spoke in all seriousness of people who has kept the whole Law from A to Z."¹ Do we really believe that this man has kept the whole law perfectly?

On another occasion "an expert in the law" asks Jesus the same question as the man in our passage: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). When Jesus asks him to state his own interpretation of Scripture on the subject, he answers, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," and, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 27). These are the two commandments with which Jesus himself summarizes the Old Testament precepts, and so he approves of this answer.

However, no one can fulfill such a requirement. The only way is for one "to limit the extent of the law's demand and consequently limit his own responsibility."² For one's conduct to measure up to the commandments of God, one must distort them to conform to his own limitations; otherwise, it would be impossible to keep them perfectly. Therefore, wanting "to justify himself," the expert in the law asks, "And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29). If he can restrict the definition of neighbor, perhaps it is possible to fulfill the scriptural requirement. Jesus accuses the Pharisees, saying, "You nullify the word of God by your tradition" (Mark 7:13).

The man who approaches Jesus has a warped sense of goodness. Based on this distorted principle, he calls Jesus good and affirms that he has been obeying the commandments of God. Therefore, Jesus questions the designation the man assigns to him, not that he

¹ Strack and Billerbeck: *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (1:814).

² *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 8*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984; p. 942.

denies the attribute of goodness, but that he realizes the man does not understand what he is saying when he calls him "good teacher." By it, the man means little more than that Jesus is one of the better rabbis, or perhaps even the best one, but he is nevertheless human.

This view of Jesus is common today. Jesus was a good man, they say, but he was nothing more than that. Our reply is, "Do you know what you are saying? Only God is good." Their standard of goodness is so superficial and inadequate that they judge themselves to be good and decent, and attribute the same type of goodness to Christ. But if only God is good, then his is the only standard of goodness, and one must make all moral judgments in light of this absolute standard. When we do this, we find that far from being justified, humanity is condemned, and their "righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

As long as man holds to an inadequate concept of goodness, he may continue to think that humanity is good at the core. This permits him to attempt to attain salvation – if he even needs salvation – by his good works. Failing to obey God's law by his own corrupted moral power, and when his depraved nature begins to come crashing through, he distorts the law of God to make room for abortion, homosexuality, perjury, divination, and a myriad of other evils. If the law of God accuses him of sin, he will alter his concept of sin to escape the charge. It is redemption by redefinition.

However, good and evil are not up to man to define. God is the judge of all, and it is to him that we must give account. It is his standard of righteousness that we must satisfy. This being so, the Scripture declares that, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). John the apostle affirms over the denial of even some professing Christians, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Sin is a fair master, who always pays his wages, only that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

It is a gross misunderstanding of Christianity to say that grace excludes the preaching of God's law. "Through the law we become conscious of sin," Paul explains (Romans 3:20). At a time in which sin is assumed to be nothing more than an imaginary religious construction, that only psychological illnesses exist due to a dysfunctional society, believers must make clear the moral requirements of God that humanity has transgressed. Man is a sinner, and he is so helpless that a power other than himself must rescue him from destruction.

Machen wrote decades ago: "The true schoolmaster to bring men to Christ is found, therefore, now and always in the law of God – the law of God that gives to men the consciousness of sin. A new and more powerful proclamation of that law is perhaps the most pressing need of the hour...a low view of law always brings legalism in religion; a high view of law makes a man a seeker after grace."³ Contemporary Christians have it reversed: they think that a low view of law makes room for grace, while a high view of law is the basis of legalism. However, it is a low view of law that deceives man into

³ J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?*; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991 (original: 1925); p. 141-142.

thinking that he can meet its requirements, but a high view of law drives him to seek God's mercy in desperation.

Lacking a consciousness of sin, one finds it impossible to understand substitutionary atonement as the means of redemption, for being sinless he needs no atonement. The man says to Jesus, "Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy" (Mark 10:20). Jesus wishes to answer his question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" However, at this point the man's thinking does not appear favorable to the doctrine of justification by faith.

The greatest commandment and a summary of the law of God is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). One who obeys the law therefore should acknowledge the total ownership of God over his life and being. Let us see, then, if the man will respond accordingly when he faces the demand to carry out this implicit commitment.

Jesus says to him, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mark 10:21). Is Jesus a "good teacher" or not? It is the man who asks Jesus to tell him what to do. Now that Jesus tells him to sell everything and follow him, can he act in a consistent manner with the commandments of God, and acknowledge God's claim to all that he has? Instead of following Jesus' instruction, his expression changed. "He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (v. 22). But Jesus taught that we cannot serve both God and Mammon.

Jesus responds, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (v. 23). The disciples are amazed at this statement; their Jewish background has conditioned them to consider the rich as occupying a privileged position, that God has especially blessed them. It is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, since their wealth has a strong grip around their thinking and devotion. Their money is their source of pride and security. For the less disciplined, the lure of wealth causes them to do all sorts of immoral deeds; God becomes far from their thoughts. Luke 12:15 says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Since I am not only addressing those who trust in riches, I will not elaborate on the particular weakness that this man exhibits, Jesus' response, or the disciples' misunderstanding regarding the relationship between wealth and spirituality. Rather, we shall proceed to the next statement, since Jesus adds, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!" (v. 24). Although the rich experience specific difficulties when striving to enter the kingdom of God, Jesus is now saying that "what holds for the rich is true with respect to all, namely, that it is very hard to enter the kingdom of God."⁴

Verse 25 says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples understand the implication, and now even more amazed than before, ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus answers, "With man this is impossible." A necessary element to understanding the biblical gospel is to realize

⁴ William Hendriksen, *Mark*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002 (original: 1975); p. 399.

that perfect righteousness is impossible for man to achieve, whether rich or poor, and thus salvation is impossible to attain.

The Westminster Confession of Faith states, "Man, by his Fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (IX, 3). Note: he cannot even "prepare himself thereunto." In his unregenerate condition, man is spiritually impotent and hostile, unable and unwilling to even cooperate in his salvation.

However, not all are doomed to perdition. Herein is the good news: "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (v. 27). In salvation, it is all up to God, and not man, since the latter is incapable of entering the kingdom of God by his own power. Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). Thayer defines "draws" as "to draw by inward power, lead, impel," or even "to drag off."⁵ God extends his grace to his elect by dragging them to Christ by an irresistible inward summon. Therefore, a person's coming to Christ for salvation – his faith in Christ – originates from the will of God and not his own will. That is, God changes the will of his chosen ones so that they may accept Christ; therefore, salvation is all of grace and there is no room for boasting (Ephesians 2:9).

Jesus says in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation; there are no alternatives. Finding such exclusivism too repugnant for their taste, some dismiss Christianity for this reason. If we claim that only we are right, then we must be wrong. Democracy has been smuggled into the discussion to stand as judge over truth.

Then there are others who do not denounce Christ outright, but acknowledge him as a "good teacher." But certainly, they say, he cannot be God or the only hope of mankind. Lest Christians think that these who say good things about him are closer to Christ than those who abhor the very sound of his name, Jesus says, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). Rather than sympathizing with the Christian faith, this view subverts its very foundation. With Christ, it is either all or nothing. Either one acknowledges him as the Son of God or he does not, but Christ is not merely a good moral teacher.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we

⁵ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002 (original: 1896); p. 204-205.

must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁶

One must either denounce Christianity as false, in which case his worldview clashes with ours, and he must face our arguments, or he must confess with his heart that "Jesus is Lord," which no one can do but by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:3). Any middle position is nothing more than "patronising nonsense."

"Who then can be saved?" The answer is that no one can attain salvation apart from the grace and power of God. Salvation comes from God alone, the Bible says. It does not depend on the will or effort of man, but on the election and mercy of God. It depends on the redemptive work of Christ, and the sufficiency of such work in turn depends on the deity of Christ. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God alone." We must either deny the goodness of Christ to the damnation of our soul, or affirm his deity and be saved from our many sins. There is no middle place; there are no alternatives.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; New York: Touchstone, 1996 (original: 1943); p. 56.

4. UNFADING BEAUTY

Unbelievers are rather brutish in thought and behavior, and tend to apply the corresponding principles and priorities when it comes to mate selection. But the fact that Christians are not wild animals demands that they look to higher standards for guidance in the area of courtship and marriage.

There is an episode in *Alice in Wonderland*, where our protagonist asks the Cheshire Cat for directions:

"Cheshire Puss...Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where – " said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

" – so long as I get *somewhere*," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."¹

If one has no idea what he is or should be looking for in a mate, then it seems to matter little which direction he takes in terms of the selection process, and it is not important what he ends up with. The Christian, on the other hand, is given authoritative guidelines, providing him with the conception of the kind of family he should be seeking to establish. Once there is a *telos*, or purpose, the individual elements become focused and directed aright.

In what follows, I intend to outline several characteristics of a biblical wife. Most requirements are common to all Christians – just as no believer should be a liar, a dishonest woman is unfit as a candidate for marriage. What we are interested in are the especially important and relevant characteristics that a man should seek. Although the information provided here will benefit married or unmarried women, as well as married men, I will write primarily with the unmarried male in mind who is looking for directions in this area.

As mentioned, the God-given *telos* for marriage governs the criteria by which a woman is deemed appropriate to be a Christian's wife. Without going into the details, I will here only list several examples that indicate God's purpose for the union of a man and a woman. Genesis 2:18 indicates that the wife is to be a "suitable helper" to the man. This alone carries tremendous implications for the type of woman that one may or may not marry. Surely, all feminists are excluded; the same is true with every woman whose

¹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*; Vermont: Everyman, 1993 edition; p. 56-57.

personal ambitions – be it social, financial, or vocational in nature – will threaten the agenda the husband sets for the family.

Another revealed purpose for a marriage worthy of divine approval is that God is "seeking godly offspring" (Malachi 2:15). A man considering a woman for marriage should be confident that she would be a positive contribution to such a program. It is with this sort of biblical precepts in mind, although the above does not exhaust them, that I present the general principle that a biblical wife should be reverent, obedient, and competent; these words are interchangeable with spiritual, submissive, and capable in the present study. We will now consider the meaning and implications of each.

The word *reverent* may seem very broad if used loosely, but here I have a definite meaning in mind. First, the word should indicate a legitimate spirituality, which by it we mean the woman in question must be a Christian. This in itself creates great difficulty, since most people in churches nowadays are not genuine Christians, and even those who are truly regenerated may be at such a low level of sanctification that the spiritual life in them is hardly detectable.

It may seem that this is my suggested answer to everything, but it only serves to illustrate the consistency of biblical theology, that the first step to learning how to find a mate is to go study theology. If a man cannot make basic distinctions between true and false professions of faith, he cannot even begin to pick a woman to be his wife. At this point, if we may be so bold, we assume that the man himself is a true Christian.

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 applies to a number of situations, including marriage: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" The Christian and the non-Christian submit to two antithetical ultimate authorities, and to the extent that they live consistently with their opposing worldviews, conflicts will arise within the relationship.

But if both the man and the woman have God's verbal revelation, the Scripture, as their first and ultimate principle of reasoning and conduct, then any dispute is resolved through an appeal to it. Although, as will be indicated below, the final decisions in the home is in the power of the husband, he is not the God of the wife, since they *both* look to a third and higher authority, which is the word of God. This same authority has imposed an authority structure upon the family, with the husband as the head; but he governs the home through divine precepts, and not his own independent thinking and preference. This way, conflicts are also resolvable, and resolvable in a way that is objectively right; disagreements are, in the final analysis, not central but peripheral.

This is not so if one is a believer and the other is not. There is no gray area between being a Christian and a non-Christian – one either has faith in the gospel message, or he does not. James writes, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an

enemy of God" (James 4:4). These are strong words – you are either a friend of God, or you are his enemy. There is no neutral ground. If you claim to have no opinion, you are still his enemy. Jesus remarks, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30).

Everyone who does not obey Christ defies him; everyone who does not love him, hates him. For two people who disagree on such a fundamental level to unite in the most sacred of all relationships between two mortals is disastrous. Relevant statistics, such as the divorce rates, should be well-known to the reader so that I will not need to produce evidence at this point. However, statisticians and pollers, who have no interest in Christian theology, seem to have shown that the divorce rates among evangelical Christians are about the same as the non-Christians, or even higher.

This only reinforces my earlier emphasis that we must learn to distinguish between true and false professions of faith. Even without a close examination of those sampled, we may assume that most of them were in fact *nominal* Christians only – that is, non-Christians who consider themselves to be genuine believers. The reason we may say this is that the Bible commands reconciliation and not divorce among believers, and only allows for the latter option in the case of adultery. Or, it may be that there is a high rate of adultery among professing Christians, in which case our point is once again demonstrated, that most of them are not true Christians at all.

Since we are not interested in statistics at this point, we will not consider other possibilities here, such as the cases where one becomes a Christian after marriage, and the unbelieving one refuses to remain in the relationship. In any case, such instances cannot account for the high divorce rates among professing Christians, but the figures make sense when we realize that most of them have never been regenerated by God. On the other hand, consistent obedience and application of biblical precepts by both husband and wife guarantee the permanence of the sacred union; failure only occurs when there is a breach of divine precepts.

So a marriage candidate must be a true Christian. To ignore this biblical teaching is to risk suffering a lifetime of heartache and frustration, but the desire to obey the commands of God should be sufficient in itself to prevent us from making such an error. We may now make an additional observation on the meaning of being reverent, which is in reality only an extension of what has already been said.

Romans 8:7 states, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." Just as a sinful mind cannot submit to God's precepts, a mind made spiritual through regeneration and is growing in maturity in sanctification can and does obey the laws of God. As verse 5 explains, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

A "spiritual" person is not one taken up in mysticism and esoteric knowledge, but one whose mind is "set on what the Spirit desires" as revealed to us in the Scripture.

Therefore, when we say that a woman must be spiritual, we are saying that she must be a good Christian, or one whose thoughts and actions are in conformity with the Bible.

When speaking to the women concerning marriage, Paul writes, "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). Technically, God's precepts do not prevent one from marrying anyone he wishes as long as the other person is a Christian. However, given this biblical decree, in practice it appears necessary to exclude backslidden Christians, since while the person remains in such a state, one cannot be certain that she is a genuine believer.

Of course, if the individual in question returns to the Lord, and shows true signs of faith and repentance, then she becomes a legitimate candidate for a Christian marriage. This is why I say that a Christian may only marry another *good* Christian – it is to prevent one from finding an excuse to marry nominal Christians who are not believers at all. It is important not to go beyond biblical precepts in defining a legitimate marriage candidate, while being careful to obtain assurance that its full meaning is enforced.

If being spiritual means to submit under God's precepts, then our second characteristic of obedience appears to go under this broad requirement, and it does. A spiritual person is also obedient to legitimate authorities. But here I am bringing up this point particularly in regards to the woman's relationship with her husband.

After the fall of man as recorded in Genesis 3, God says to the woman, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (v. 16). One common, yet unlikely, understanding of the verse takes it as saying that the woman will experience great desire for her husband sexually, or at least for his companionship, which seems to be unrelated to the last clause of the sentence. Reflecting this view, the Living Bible says, "You shall welcome your husband's affections, and he shall be your master."

Another interpretation of this verse amounts to reading it as, "Your desire will be to *dominate* your husband, *but* he will rule over you." Judging from a similar expression in Genesis 4:7, this is better. Matthew Poole elaborates and writes:

...thy desires shall be referred or submitted to thy husband's will and pleasure to grant or deny them, as he sees fit...And this punishment was...very grievous to her, because women's affections use to be vehement, and it is irksome to them to have them restrained or denied. Seeing, for want of thy husband's rule and conduct, thou wast seduced by the serpent, and didst abuse that power I gave thee together with thy husband to draw him to sin, thou shalt now be brought down to a lower degree, for he shall rule thee; not with that sweet and gentle hand which he formerly used, as a guide and counsellor only, but by a higher and harder hand, as a lord and governor, to whom I have now given a greater power and authority over thee than he had before, (which through thy

pride and corruption will be far more uneasy unto thee than his former empire was,) and who will usurp a further power than I have given him, and will, by my permission, for thy punishment, rule thee many times with rigour, tyranny, and cruelty, which thou wilt groan under, but shalt not be able to deliver thyself from it.²

There are those who assert that prior to the Fall, man and woman had equal authority in the marriage relationship, and it was only after the woman had sinned that the man was given to rule over her as punishment. Poole's comments above, although generally correct, may be misunderstood as granting support to such a position, since he does not assert the distinct authority the man has over the woman even before the Fall, even though he provides a weak acknowledgment to it.

Poole admits that the man ruled the family before the Fall, but nevertheless with a "sweet and gentle hand." And now God gives him "greater power and authority...than he had before," implying that he had power over the woman at the start. However, it is doubtful that Adam was "a guide and counsellor only" to the woman. Biblical evidence indicates that he was a lot more.

Some claim that the subordination of the woman is only a result of sin, and has been negated entirely after the death and resurrection of Christ. But if this is so, sickness and death also originated because of sin, and by the same logic should be now completely absent from human experience, at least for the Christians. The point is that even if it is true that God has subjected the woman under the man purely due to sin, it does not necessarily follow, unless the Bible indicates such, that the authority structure in the home has been abolished.

In any case, Paul teaches that the authority of the husband over his wife is not only a result of sin, but is a creation ordinance. That is, by the nature and order of the creation of man and woman, the husband is granted authority over the wife: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Corinthians 11:8-9); "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:11-13). Any ordinance of God instituted due to the very nature of creation is still in effect, as long as we remain human beings.

There are those who understand Genesis 3:16 as a predictive declaration that the marriage relationship from that time forward would be one in which the man and woman each seeks the dominant position; that is, to sinfully take control. This interpretation presupposes that neither the husband nor the wife should dominate, but given other passages on family structure in both the Old and New Testaments, we cannot accept this presupposition or its resultant interpretation of this verse. One may say that although the verse does not deny the right of the husband to rule the home, it is predictive of the tyrannical use of authority; that is, while the woman seeks domination, the man abuses

² *Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Holy Bible, Vol. 1*; Hendrickson Publishers, p. 11.

his place in the home. I am unconvinced by this interpretation; while some men undoubtedly abuse their authority, the text in question does not state or imply this.

Being careful not to give a simplistic generalization of it, at least an important aspect of the feminist movement, and also feminist theology, is to alter the established structure of the marriage relationship. But in the name of equality, the efforts of these ungodly souls often result in the erosion of the most basic unit of society, the family. From the beginning, God has designed that the man be the head of the home, but sin has generated in the woman an urge to usurp the husband's authority, to be liberated from his rule, and thus defies the family structure imposed by God himself. But the joy and hope of both men and women rest in knowing and obeying biblical commands, and not in fighting against them.

The leadership of man in the family has been a controversial issue, both within theological circles and without. As we will see shortly, the reason for much heated debate is not because Scripture is unclear on the subject, but rather due to the ideological climate of the day, the sinful tendency of human beings (in this case, the women) to resent legitimate authority, and actual instances of abuse of authority on the part of the husbands. But none of these reasons negates God's divine precepts.

The authority given to the husband can be abused; however, God's word regulates the husband's power in the home, and provides directions as to the way he must treat his wife: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). And a related portion of my *Systematic Theology* states, "Do not underestimate what God is demanding from men here – they are to love the wives in the same way that Christ loves his church, which is characterized by his sacrificial death on her behalf. Paul is commanding men to love their wives enough to die for them. To the extent that one does not possess such love for his wife, he is less than a real biblical man. Personally, my estimation of a man will never rise higher than his love for God, the Bible, and his wife."³

So by insisting on the wife's submission, we are by no means excusing the husband for his own faults. Even though we may readily acknowledge the responsibility of the husband, and real instances of abuse, the woman's obligation to submit under God-ordained authority remains unchanged. The greatest cause for denying the biblical authority structure for the family is sin, the now inherent tendency of women to defy even legitimate authority. Instead of overcoming divine precepts, this simply proves God's decree as true, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." This is a desire, says *Keil & Delitzsch*, "bordering upon disease."⁴

Now we will examine several additional biblical passages on the subject. The first one is 1 Peter 3:1-6, which says, "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the

³ Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*, 2001; chapter 4.

⁴ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001; p. 64.

behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

First, the passage shows that not only are wives to subject themselves to Christian husbands, but they must be submissive even if the men are unbelievers. Of course, elsewhere we find that a Christian woman may only marry another Christian man (1 Corinthians 7:39). And thus Peter here addresses women who became Christians after they were married to an unbelieving man.

The part concerning submissiveness enters into the discussion when the apostle says that the men may be "won over without words." However, this does not mean that a person may bring another to faith in Christ without verbally communicating the gospel message. It is popular to assume nowadays that "action speaks louder than words," but this is contrary to the biblical position.

Notice that these husbands, to whom Peter exhorts the wives to submit, are said to have already rejected the gospel as verbally communicated, whether by the wives or by someone else. Thus, the intellectual content of the Christian faith has already been conveyed to these men, while they have refused to give it their assent. Peter, then, is telling the wives that God may yet subsequently use their "purity and reverence" as the means by which to impress and convert their husbands, so that they may give assent to what they have already heard. Thus, this passage presupposes the preaching of the gospel.

Peter continues to note that a life characterized by submission, purity, and reverence is what makes a woman truly beautiful. Against the standards of the world, Christianity emphasizes inner beauty, so that a woman's true worth is not limited or defined by her appearance. On the other hand, even one whose outward features mesmerize most men may nevertheless be grotesque and wicked on the inside. But since the power of inward transformation is only available through the gospel, it follows that no unregenerate woman is truly beautiful.

Even the best-looking women possess only a beauty that is superficial and fleeting, while "unfading beauty" belongs to one with a "gentle and quiet spirit." This is truly a rare trait in our day. As Proverbs 21:9, 19 says, "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife...Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife" Concerning Delilah, it is recorded in Judges 16 that, "With such nagging she prodded [Samson] day after day until he was tired to death" (v. 16). In another place, the Bible says, "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand" (Proverbs 27:15-16; also 19:13). Drip...Drip...Drip!

A "gentle and quiet spirit" will not only prevent the husbands from jumping out the window, but Peter says that it is also "of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4). What appears to be a Venus in the eyes of men is more often a Medusa in the sight of God. Part of sanctification involves learning how to see people and things as God sees them: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

While natural beauty may fade, the inner beauty only possible for a Christian can develop and increase throughout one's lifetime, and even persist after death. Paul says, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). A woman who does not possess inner beauty will in the end have nothing. Likewise, a person who cannot see beyond developing his physical health and figure lacks wisdom: "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

Parenthetically, contrary to some, I affirm that although physical beauty is relatively unimportant, and possesses no spiritual value, it is nevertheless a blessing from God. For example, we read that when Job's fortune was restored to him, God also gave him daughters who were described as physically attractive: "The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers" (Job 42:12-15).

Peter continues, "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (1 Peter 3:5-6). How did they make themselves beautiful? "They were submissive to their own husbands." Even though Sarah was "a very beautiful woman" (Genesis 12:14) in terms of appearance, Peter cites her case as an example of the priority of achieving inner beauty through submissiveness. Being physically attractive is not enough – Sarah made herself beautiful because she "obeyed Abraham and called him her master."

Just as Christians become the children of Abraham through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:7), women should pattern themselves after Sarah in her obedience. Peter does not ignore the existence of abusive husbands, but he says, "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (v. 6). The ungodly behavior of the husbands does not excuse the wives from following the precepts of God. The biblical instruction is to "do what is right and do not give way to fear" in the context of being submissive to one's husband, so that "if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without

words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (v. 1-2).

Proceeding to the next passage, we will read from Ephesians 5: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church...Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything...However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33).

The complete passage from verse 22 to 33 contains rich content and demands sophisticated exegesis to fully expound, but for our narrow purpose at this point, such is not necessary. The portion quoted is quite self-explanatory if not for the many attempts by commentators to subvert the clear meaning of this passage. Watch as one such scholar tries to escape the force of Paul's words:

To submit meant to yield one's own rights. If the relationship called for it, as in the military, the term could connote obedience, but that meaning is not called for here. In fact, the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5).⁵

While submission is here defined as "to yield one's own rights," a more popular notion of the term, when contrasted with "obedience," has submission as referring to one of humility and respect in terms of the wife's attitude, as opposed to conformity to the husband's wishes in behavior. Therefore, under this latter definition, it is conceivable that a wife may disobey her husband at every point, while being fully submissive to him, simply because she possesses a respectful attitude. Both of these explanations are problematic given the context of the passage and the existence of other biblical verses that contradict them.

But before we attempt a refutation, let us examine one more argument against the wife's obligation to obey that will subsequently backfire against them. It may be argued that since verse 21 – which says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" – defines the context of the passage as one that teaches mutual submission, verse 22 cannot be telling the wives to obey their husbands, just as mutual submission among Christians does not imply mutual obedience.

However, this line of reasoning misses the point of the passage. Even if we allow for the understanding that verse 21 defines the context for 5:22-6:9, the content of the passage makes clear that mutual submission does not mean the same thing in every relationship. The meaning and basis of mutual submission between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves are not the same in every case.

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1995; Notes on Ephesians 5:22.

For example, Paul says that the wives should obey their husbands because "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (v. 23). This is not true in regards to *any other* human relationship – whether between Christians, parents and children, or masters and slaves. Now, if the wives should submit to their husbands in the same sense as the church submits to Christ, it is not possible that we are simply referring to the yielding of one's own rights or a respectful attitude. The church is supposed to render absolute obedience to Christ in both thought and action; likewise, the meaning of submission in the marriage relationship means that the wives must be both respectful in attitude and obedient in her action and behavior.

The husband's part in marriage is also defined, not as one of obedience, but sacrificial love: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (v. 25). To say that mutual submission means the same thing for everyone in every relationship is to ignore all these details in this biblical text. Thus, Paul is not saying that wives should respect but need not obey their husbands, while only the children and slaves need to obey. He is indicating that wives must obey their husbands, children their parents, and slaves their masters.

Even more embarrassing is the claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5)." First, although the word translated "submit" (*hypotassō*) in verse 22 is different from the one translated "obey" (*hypakouō*) in 6:1 and 6:5, in itself it carries the meaning of obedience.

For example, the same word *hypotassō* is used in Luke 2:51, but this time the translation in the NIV reflects the meaning of obedience: "Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them." But *hypakouō* is used in Ephesians 6:1 where it says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Does our commentator dare insinuate that Jesus merely submitted to his parents in his attitude, but did not do what they say? If so, did Jesus obey the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," as cited to be the basis for the children's obedience in Ephesians 6:2? Evidently, our commentator has confused his exegesis through his agenda to protect the wives from having to obey their husbands.

But that is not the best part. Recall that he has stated, "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives." By that, we may assume he means that *hypakouō* is never used in Scripture when referring to wives, but only *hypotassō*. However, *hypakouō* is used to describe Sarah in the passage we have already looked at, 1 Peter 3:5-6: "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed [*hypakouō*] Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

Since Sarah was the wife of Abraham, and she obeyed (*hypakouō*) her husband, and Christian wives are told to emulate her, with her obedience to Abraham as the specified object of imitation, it necessarily follows that *hypakouō* must be equally applied to all

Christian wives. Whether *hypakouō* or *hypotassō* is used, the Bible is saying that wives must be subject to, be respectful toward, *and* obey their husbands – nothing less.

If wives protest that this is too difficult to do, let them be reminded that the duty of the husband is much more challenging: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The command is not for the husbands to merely show affection, but to love the wives to the death, and cherish her more than his own life and welfare.

Many women are difficult to love, especially the rebellious ones. If God had not generated divine love within our hearts, it would indeed be humanly impossible to love as Christ loves. At any rate, it is best for both the husband and the wife to follow God's precepts, seeing that perhaps it is easier to obey a loving husband, and to love an obedient wife. But even then, each is accountable to God regardless of what the other does, as affirmed by the apostle Peter (1 Peter 3:1-7). That a husband is unloving does not excuse the wife's disobedience.

Given the above arguments and explanations, the extended translation of Kenneth Wuest on this passage is justified: "The wives, be putting yourselves in subjection with implicit obedience to your own husbands as to the Lord, because a husband is head of the wife as the Christ is Head of the Church...as the Church subjects itself in obedience to the Christ, in this manner also the wives should subject themselves in obedience to their husbands in all things...let her be continually treating her husband with deference and reverential obedience" (Ephesians 5:22-33).⁶

Just to quickly dismiss a popular but erroneous objection to the biblical authority structure for the family, many cite Galatians 3:28 to argue against all gender "inequality" or distinctions: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Since in Christ, there is "neither...male nor female," the argument is made that neither should there be any role distinction nor difference in authority within the marriage relationship.

However, if this is the intended meaning of the verse, it would be pointless for Paul to write, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord," and "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" (Ephesians 5:22, 6:5). In addition, if the verse may be applied in this manner, then by the same reasoning homosexual marriages are also permitted, since gender becomes utterly irrelevant in marriage. But Scripture roundly condemns homosexuality as sin and the consequent of a depraved mind (Romans 1:24-28).

Therefore, Galatians 3:28 does not abolish all gender distinctions, and certainly not those that Scripture explicitly asserts, such as the authority structure of the family. When read in context, it becomes obvious that the verse refers to the equality of every elect individual in his ready access to justification by faith: "You are all sons of God through

⁶ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961.

faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

Every person regardless of race, gender, and social status has equal access to salvation in Christ through faith, although in actuality only the elect will obtain it (Romans 11:7). The verse in question carries no reference to gender equality or role distinctions in any other setting. However, it is important to note that nowhere does Scripture say that women are inherently inferior as human beings. In fact, since Genesis 1:27 tells us that both men and women have been made in God's image, they are inherently equal as human beings: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Nevertheless, God has willed it so that women are to be subordinate to their husbands within the marriage relationship.

We have only examined three biblical passages in some detail – Genesis 3:16, 1 Peter 3:1-6, and Ephesians 5:22-33 – but there are many more that state or imply the divinely instituted authority structure in the family as expounded above. After listing a number of relevant passages on the subject, Elizabeth Handford writes, "If you are intellectually honest, you have to admit that it is impossible to find a single loophole, a single exception, an 'if' or 'unless.' The Scriptures say, without qualification, to the open-minded reader, that a woman ought to obey her husband."⁷ A wife must obey her husband, Paul says, "so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5); a disobedient wife thus brings shame to the kingdom of God.

To be a biblical wife, a reverent and obedient woman also needs to be competent. Unlike the first two, this characteristic is at least a partially functional necessity within the marriage relationship, and not entirely a moral trait, although part of what is meant, such as diligence, remains a moral issue. I grant that a spiritual and obedient woman may at the same time not be very capable, but this deficiency will prove to be a great hindrance to her fulfilling her role as a wife, which is to be a helper to her husband.

Proverbs 31:10-31 consists of a poem, constructed acrostically using all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in which the writer extols the virtues of a "fully-capable"⁸ wife. Here is the passage in full:

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She

⁷ Elizabeth Rice Handford, *Me? Obey Him?*; Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1994; p. 31.

⁸ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Commentary: Proverbs*; Woodruff, South Carolina: Timeless Texts, 1997; p. 228.

considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

I will only take time to list several elementary observations here, leaving it to the reader to perform a deeper reading and contemplation on the text.

The passage pictures a woman who has been given great latitude in decision-making by her husband. From the contents of the passage, we may observe that his "full confidence" in her is not only based on a knowledge of her pure motives, but also on an assurance concerning her capability as a helper in the household. A helper she may be, but the text lists an astounding array of qualities and abilities unequaled by many men, so that a scholar commenting on it says, "This lady's standard is not implied to be within the reach of all, for it presupposes unusual gifts and material resources."⁹

Although I partly agree with the first part of the commentator's statement, I have doubts concerning the reasons he gives for making the lady in the text too much of an exception. Surely, the abilities attributed to her are unusual by today's standards; it is rare for them to appear in the same person. The majority of women would be excluded only by considering if there is found "faithful instruction" (v. 26) on their tongues. In other words, it seems the scholar reads the passage too much with today's women in mind.

Nevertheless, none of the tasks described are superhuman in nature, and inherently impossible for a woman to do – except that she "fears the LORD," which can only be a result of God's grace and election. Instead of saying that the passage "presupposes unusual gifts," we should rather admit that it presupposes responsible parental instruction and training.

⁹ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Proverbs*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1964; p. 184.

That said, I agree that in practice, the demands on the wife may be different to the degree that the "material resources" involved vary. Not every wife has the opportunity and responsibility to manage mansions, farms, servants, and real estate. But the principle within every household remains the same – the wife should be an able helper to her husband to the extent that there are assets and tasks regarding which to help him with.

Therefore, rather than the misleading, "This lady's standard is not implied to be within the reach of all," we should say that this lady's actual abilities are not required by every household. The scholar's statement is misleading since it ignores the point of the passage – this is the kind of wife the man should seek, that is, one that is competent to help the husband with his duties and assets. And one should probably think twice before marrying a person whom he knows will not be of much help to him.

Again, the passage is directed to *men* as direction in what sort of woman to marry, thus to exclude those who do not qualify, and not primarily for women to read as something to aspire to, although that would be a good use of the text also. Even the writer admits that such a woman is rare in that period: "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies" (v. 10). No one ever said that the type of woman described is common. The above commentator's statement therefore misses the point, and tries to include candidates that is the point of the passage to exclude.

Now this woman is characterized by diligence: "She...works with eager hands...She gets up while it is still dark...She sets about her work vigorously...and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers...She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness" (v. 13, 15, 17-19, 27). But she is diligent regarding a specific type of work; that is, "she watches over the affairs of her household."

It is not that there are no diligent women today, but they are only working hard to pursue their own personal ambitions, and not for the benefit of her husband or household. Since both she and her husband spend much of their time in advancing their respective careers, *no one* watches over the affairs of the household. In contrast, a woman of "noble character" is diligent because of her faithfulness and love for her husband and household.

Although it would be a useful discussion, this is not the place to fully expound the legitimate career goals of a woman. The emphasis is placed on her motivation and agenda; that is, regardless of whether she is pursuing a personal career, are her priorities structured around her husband and the family, or herself? In listing a few of the wife's responsibility in this regard, Martha Peace says to the woman,

Put him first over the children, your parents, friends, job, ladies' Bible studies, etc....Willingly and cheerfully rearrange your schedule for him when necessary...Do whatever you can to make him look good, to accomplish his goals. Some examples are offer to run errands for him, organize your day to be available to help him with his projects...Consider his work (job, goals, hobbies, work for the Lord) as

more important than your own...Think of specific ways that you can help him accomplish his goals. Examples are get up early in the mornings to help him get off to work having had a good breakfast, take care in recording telephone messages for him, anticipate any needs he may have in order to attain a specific goal, and keep careful records of money spent to keep up with the budget...Realize that just as God is glorified when man obeys Him, your husband is glorified when you obey your husband."¹⁰

Peace does not assume that the wife has no career of her own, but she says, "Put him first over...your...job...Consider his work...as more important than your own." At this point of our discussion, it is not necessary to settle to legitimacy of a woman having a career of her own, but the point is whether she is willing to put her husband's work and agenda before hers. Any resistance in this area betrays a character flaw on her part, and renders her that much less effective in being a helper to her husband.

Continuing with our passage, this woman is characterized by keen foresight, "When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet...She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come" (v. 21, 25). Instead of fretting about future contingencies, she can "laugh at the days to come." But her foresight reaches beyond the home: "She sees that her trading is profitable...She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard" (v. 18, 16). Having decent business sense, she *considers* a field a buys it; she thinks well. And since "her trading is profitable," she is able to plant a vineyard "out of her earnings." She is able to bring additional income into the household besides what her husband earns.

There is another quality that is particularly important to me: "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue" (v. 26). This means that she is able to teach the children, and carry fruitful conversations with her husband. *Keil & Delitzsch* observes, "Such graceful instruction she communicates now to this and now to that member of her household, for nothing that goes on in her house escapes her observation."¹¹ And Jay Adams writes, "Indeed, she is well versed in biblical teaching and can speak wisely to others, including her children. She is not gruff, sarcastic, short-tempered or careless in speech."¹²

Different atmospheres within households, as defined by the husbands and circumstances, require the wives to be wise concerning different things. For example, because my work in Christian doctrine is also my greatest and only interest, I often enjoy carrying sustained dialogues with my wife that are highly theological and philosophical in nature. The intellectual demands of these conversations, including an uncommon precision in reasoning and word usage that I have also come to expect in daily speech, are such that most people will find them difficult, if not maddeningly intolerable. That she is able to

¹⁰ Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective*; Bemidji, Minnesota: Focus Publishing Incorporated, 1999; p. 55-56.

¹¹ Keil and Delitzsch, Vol. 6; p. 488.

¹² Adams, p. 230.

repeatedly rise to the challenge brings me tremendous delight and pleasure, and makes her a truly fitting companion.

A woman should have the intellectual capability and knowledge to discuss the husband's work with him, even if it is only on an elementary level. For instance, if her husband is an engineer, and yet she has never been trained in this area, it would help their relationship for her to learn something about the subject, enough to engage in meaningful conversations with him regarding his work.

Without going into any details, this follows from the biblical teaching that the wife should be her husband's closest companion and confidant, so that he will require no outsiders to discuss his most intimate thoughts and plans. Due to the unique covenantal nature of marriage, it is unbiblical for a wife not to at the same time be his husband's best friend.

Since the husband's career occupies much of his time, the wife's ability to be a companion and helper to him will be limited if he is unable to share his triumphs and disappointments with her. I would say that the reverse is also true, that the husband should learn something regarding his wife's work. That said, all Christians should be able to discuss theology, if nothing else (Deuteronomy 11:18-21; Joshua 1:8; Malachi 3:16-18).

We have not exhausted the contents of this passage, but will end with its own description of this amazing woman: "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (v. 30). All the positive qualities listed regarding her have as their foundation the fear of the Lord. Likewise, the latter two characteristics I propose in this study – obedience and competence – depend wholly on the first characteristic of reverence. An irreverent woman (or man, for that matter) is good for nothing. But when a woman's works flow from her worshipful attitude toward God, "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life" (v. 11-12). "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting" – only the "unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit...is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4).

There are a number of things that one may observe in order to discover whether a particular woman possesses the qualities of reverence, obedience, and competence. Regarding reverence, one needs to consider if she exhibits signs of genuine regeneration and conversion. It is important that she demonstrates a consistent willingness in altering her thinking and lifestyle to better conform to biblical teaching. An eagerness to study and obey Scripture should be evident. Preferably, opportunities will be granted for the man to observe her under pressure of various sorts, since such occasions often succeed in exposing a false or temporary faith: "The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Matthew 13:20-21). Remember, at the bare minimum, a woman

must satisfy the biblical definition of a Christian before being considered a candidate for marriage.

As for obedience, it will be difficult to directly ascertain at the outset whether a woman will submit to her husband in particular. However, one may infer with some accuracy by observing if she obeys the legitimate authority figures that she currently lives under. For example, does she obey the government (Romans 13:1-5), her parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), pastor (Hebrews 13:17), and employer (1 Peter 2:18-19)?¹³ What is her general attitude toward rules and restrictions? Does she tend to follow closely verbal instructions, or does she often deviate from them? If it seems that she has problem submitting to most forms of authority, then it may also be difficult for her to obey her husband after marriage.

Now, a man does not have the full authority of a husband over the woman before marriage. However, once it is certain that the two will marry, a semblance but not the full version of the authority structure should be to emerge. This is because many decisions must usually be made before the marriage concerning life after marriage, such as the location of residence. It would be futile to allow the final decision to rest upon the husband only after marriage, since he would then have the authority to change any decision made before the marriage anyway.

Therefore, although the husband only receives full authority after marriage, a woman should begin to show deference, if not complete obedience, toward her fiancée even before marriage. This will also create an opportunity for the man to anticipate the attitude of the woman once they become married. Nevertheless, before marriage, the woman's obedience is first owed to her father (Numbers 30:3-15).

Competence is probably more easily assessed, since there are many outward signs that one may expect. The man should note whether the woman tends to be organized, clean, punctual, and knowledgeable. Superhuman abilities are of course not expected, so the man should not be overly picky, but rather look for general tendencies. It is essential for the woman to be able to understand and follow verbal instructions, especially from the authority figures to whom she currently owes obedience.

Minimal communication skills, sufficient so that she may convey her thoughts in a coherent manner, are required. Without them, meaningful dialogue with the husband is made difficult, and providing needed instructions for the children may be impossible. Basic abilities in household administration, accounting, sewing, and cooking should also be present. Other items should be added to the list as the husband's agenda for the family so requires.

With such high standards, one may despair of ever finding a woman who qualifies. While we must learn the biblical description of a Christian wife, and it is helpful to list definite items for the reader to consider, Scripture also explains that the rarity of such superior individuals is due to the effect of sin. The only chance that one may find a legitimate wife

¹³ After marriage, the woman is no longer to obey her parents, but her husband instead. The parents of both the husband and the wife have no authority over the new family.

is among those who have been truly converted and transformed by the power of the gospel. But with the realization that every Christian, even those whose profession is genuine, are growing in sanctification, one must allow for certain deficiencies in his potential marriage partner.

Therefore, the above only serves to help the reader observe general tendencies in a woman, and thus infer the likelihood of having a successful marriage with her. In addition, some things that are currently lacking in a person may be developed after marriage, so there is no reason to wait until one finds a woman with no flaws whatsoever, or to delude oneself that such a woman exists. Nevertheless, no promise of positive development is possible unless the woman has been truly converted.

To address a question that may have arisen in the reader's mind, since this is supposed to be a study on the characteristics of a biblical wife, I have given little place to the significance of romantic love and personal preferences in the relationship between a man and a woman. Is it not important for the man to be fond of the woman in order to marry her? This is undoubtedly a legitimate consideration, and silence on this matter in the present study is not to be taken as a denial of its role. It is simply that our purpose prevents us from delving into this aspect of the matter. Also, the case against dating as practiced by most individuals has been excluded from this study, even though it is a most crucial topic as well.

The Bible says that a good wife is hard to find: "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). She is reverent, obedient, and competent – she worships God as ruler over all; she obeys her husband as head of the home; she fulfills her role as helper to her husband. In our day, most women are irreverent, disobedient, and incompetent; if one can find a woman who even remotely fits the biblical description, he will know that he is favored by the Lord indeed.

Does it mean that one is not allowed to marry a woman unless she has all of the above characteristics? No – as mentioned, technically all she needs is to be a true Christian for the marriage to be permissible. But as the Cheshire Cat says to Alice, if all one wishes to accomplish is to get "somewhere," then it does not really matter which path he takes. If there is no definite end, then one path is just as good as another.

However, if a man designates a noble purpose for his marriage, the options will accordingly narrow, since the means to that end must then also be equally worthy. The biblical purpose for marriage, among other things, has in view the glory of God at the present, as well as the establishment of a godly heritage for subsequent generations to follow. Given this magnificent agenda, no longer is it true that just any Christian woman will do; rather, she must be reverent, obedient, and competent.

5. THEOLOGY OF WAR

A complete theology of war must answer a number of questions: What is God's role in war? Does God cause war, and if so, in what sense does he cause it?¹ What is the place of human sin in war? What is the purpose of war? When and how will war end? What are the ethical principles that Christians must consider in relation to war? As with just about almost every other doctrine, a theology of war is unavoidably connected with the doctrines of divine sovereignty, human sin, eschatology, and several others. And if we were to apply our theological formulations, it would also affect our view regarding the history, sociology, and science of war.

That said, our present aim is very narrow. I intend only to settle one question, namely, "Is it *ever* right to fight?" – that is, whether Christian theology produces an ethic that forbids all wars. Based on various biblical passages, many have correctly arrived at the understanding that Christianity is essentially a non-violent religion. But from this, some have further deduced that all forms of destructive physical force are excluded by the Christian faith. In the area of warfare, the Christian position then becomes one of religious pacifism, which maintains that it is immoral or sinful for the Christian to participate in any war. The Bible knows no "just war" theory that allows the bearing of arms by the Christian to take the lives of others.

In the following pages, I will present some of the biblical data on the subject, and then proceed to formulate a synthesis in order to answer the question of whether it is sometimes right to fight, even for the Christian, or whether the Bible prescribes pacifism as a moral necessity. In the process, we will also produce some conclusions regarding the use of force in personal self-defense. Due to the number of passages to be cited, and to preserve brevity, no detailed exposition will be provided for each biblical passage. In any case, the relevance of most passages will be evident, and those that are not will be quickly explained.

The Old Testament relates numerous instances in which God's people goes to war either with his approval or explicit command:

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long

¹ Some would insist that God causes no wars, or any natural or moral evils; however, biblical teaching dictates that we regard him as the ultimate cause of everything. John Calvin says, "Wars are not kindled accidentally, or by an arrangement of men, but by the command of God...All wars are stirred by [God's] command, and...the soldiers are armed at His will" (J. Graham Miller, *Calvin's Wisdom*; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust; p. 375).

as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up – one on one side, one on the other – so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner." (Exodus 17:8-15)

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them – to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates – all the Hittite country – to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:1-5)

Not all Old Testament wars are fought in self-defense, but some are initiated by God's command to his people according to his plans and purposes. When King Saul, in sparing the life of King Agag, fails to carry out God's instructions fully, Samuel hastens to complete the assignment: "But Samuel said, 'As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.' And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal" (1 Samuel 15:33, NASB).

More than once, when the people of God inquire of him concerning military decisions, he responds with approval and assurance, and at times even provides the strategy that would lead to victory:

David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. David's two wives had been captured – Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God. Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, and David inquired of the

LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue." (1 Samuel 30:1-8)

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly. He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'" Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. (2 Chronicles 20:14-18)

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land. You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city." (Joshua 8:1-2)

David even adds in Psalm 144:1, "Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle." But beyond directing his people on how to war, the Old Testament portrays God himself as a mighty warrior, an active participant in war, conquering his foes:

The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name. (Exodus 15:3)

Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you." (Numbers 10:35)

The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious – that you, O LORD God, might dwell there. (Psalm 68:17-18)

The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies. (Isaiah 42:13)

Examples for all the above types of biblical passages may be amply multiplied. But lest the reader become impatient with too many quotations, and to leave room for the New Testament data, we will now proceed to the next section.

The New Testament does not contain the type of passages that address the topic of warfare as the Old Testament does, but this relative silence does not translate into agnosticism on the subject for the Christian. Rather than asserting a false dispensational theology that divides the Old and New Testaments, we affirm that silence in the New implies agreement with the Old. Popular readership, brainwashed by poor theology, often assumes a sharp dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments, while the Bible itself asserts the essential unity and continuity of the two.

Therefore, we agree with Loraine Boettner's assessment: "There is absolutely no question that in the Old Testament wars were sanctioned as a means of gaining righteous ends...When rightly understood the two Testaments are supplementary, not contradictory. The silence of the New Testament on the subject of war apparently rests on the assumption that the subject had been adequately treated and did not call for any addition or modification."²

Note that our question is, "Is it *ever* right to fight?" and not how often is it right to fight, or under what conditions is warfare justified. We proceed with the acknowledgment that the New Testament's view of war is like the Old. Our interaction with the New Testament will mainly consist of showing that the teaching of Jesus and the apostles does not lead to pacifism, nor does it alter the view of war as presented in the Old Testament, and thus provides an affirmative answer to our question, that it is *sometimes* right to fight.

One of the most cited biblical verses in support of pacifism is Matthew 5:39, where Jesus says, "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." But we must be sensitive to the use of hyperbolic language in the teaching of Jesus. This verse appears in a context where Jesus also says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30).

Therefore, verse 39 may also be interpreted with the possibility in mind that Jesus employs hyperbole. The point of the verse is to speak against avenging oneself of personal wrongs and insults, and does not constitute an open welcome of abuse in every type of situation. It is true that some people seem to consider the biblical passages they refuse to accept as figurative, so that the Scripture loses its claim on their souls. However, this is not done when we say that verse 39 is hyperbolic, since the behavior of both Jesus and Paul give evidence to this understanding:

² Loraine Boettner, *The Christian Attitude Toward War*; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985; p. 18-19.

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" (John 18:19-23)

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" (Acts 23:1-3)

Neither of them "turn the other cheek," but protest against the wrongful violence directed against them. How this reconciles with Matthew 5:39 to produce a principle on how to react when suffering under abuse I will not say here, but let it be known that the Sermon on the Mount does not teach that one must always have no reaction, or even to have a positive reaction, when coming under unjust cruelty and insult.

Except for the irreverent souls who would suppose that Jesus and the apostles³ could act hypocritically, their examples serve to illustrate how one may understand relevant passages in the Bible. Thus, Exodus 20:12 does not contradict Matthew 8:22, and then also note Mark 7:10-13.⁴ The important principle is to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, so as to render specific and explicit the meaning of a given verse.

In addition, Matthew 5:39 applies to personal injustice, and does not automatically forbid military actions, capital punishment, or self-defense. Often, the verse has been used against all of these things *except* to promote patience when suffering personal insults and wrongs. Boettner explains, "If we are truly Christian, we will live unselfish lives, not always seeking to vindicate our own petty dignity, but returning good for evil...A reasonable amount of patience on our part, together with the manifestation of a good motive, will go a long way toward smoothing over difficulties."⁵ This appears to be

³ The apostles and prophets are only infallible under divine inspiration. See Galatians 2:11.

⁴ "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12); "Another disciple said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus told him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead'" (Matthew 8:21-22); "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that" (Mark 7:10-13).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

closer to the intended meaning of Jesus than the pacifist's interpretation, and does not exclude the use of physical force for reasons of retributive justice or national security.

Luke says John the Baptist "went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). While giving instructions for godly living directed at specific groups of people, some soldiers ask him, "And what should we do?" If there ever is an opportunity for John to speak up against military service, this would be it – and he knows Roman soldiers fight wars and kill people. He answers, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay" (v. 14). While warning them of sins and temptations that surface frequently for them, he speaks nothing directly against their profession, and does not call them murderers for being soldiers.

Having mentioned murder in connection with warfare, let us now deal with the pacifist's argument against all wars from the basis on the Sixth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13, KJV). Translating the Hebrew word *rasah* (or *ratsach*) as "kill" has been the source of much confusion relating to establishing the Christian view on warfare, capital punishment, and self-defense. The NIV appropriately states the commandment as, "You shall not murder." William White endorses this latter translation as "a more precise reading than the too-general KJV 'thou shalt not kill.'"⁶

I define murder as the unjustified killing of another human being; a justified killing would be one sanctioned by biblical precepts. When we speak of justification for an action, we refer to intellectual reasons sufficient to establish the act as morally good or acceptable. If killing another human being requires such a justification to be present in the mind of the one who kills, then murder is no longer mainly a physical act, but is as much intellectual in nature as it is physical. That the proposed definition requires a conscious moral justification in the mind of the one who kills is consistent with Matthew 5:22 and 1 John 3:15,⁷ which makes a person who strikes with an unjustified intent to kill a murderer in the sight of God even if his victim survives.⁸

There are those who wish to adopt a much broader definition, and may allege that the one proposed above imports information and concepts foreign to the commandment itself as stated. They wish to understand the verse to say that any killing, or at least any intentional killing,⁹ of another human being as constituting murder. However, if our

⁶ R. Laird Harris, editor, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 2*; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980; p. 860.

⁷ "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:22); "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:15).

⁸ A person who accidentally kills another is still held accountable, but it is not the same as murder. See Numbers 35:10-15.

⁹ Some of the same people who adopt this broader definition would still not call suicide, euthanasia, and abortion as murder, as though these are unintentional. If we add the element of consent, then what about euthanasia in the case of one who is in a coma? And is such consent for the person to give in the first place? The Bible says that our bodies belong to God. They think that abortion is no problem if they deny personhood to the unborn. But to include these issues would complicate our present discussion.

opponents would like to take the words of the commandment at their face value without understanding them in the light of the rest of Scripture, then even the killing of bacteria may be considered immoral, since the verse does not exclude this by virtue of its own wording.

But once we allow knowledge of other parts of the Bible, we see that God at least permits the slaughter of animals for food: "The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (Genesis 9:2-3).¹⁰

To kill an animal, therefore, is not murder; to kill an animal that belongs to another person without his permission is still not murder, but only theft, which is serious enough in itself. God provides instructions for the treatment of animals and warns against abuse, and Proverbs 12:10 says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal"; nevertheless, even a righteous man may kill his livestock to put food on the table, and he has committed no murder.

In Genesis 9:6, God restricts the definition of murder to the killing of human beings due to the fact that they have been made in the divine image: "Whoever sheds *the blood of man*, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." Here, as elucidated in other places of the Bible, God institutes capital punishment as just compensation for murder. But if capital punishment is itself murder, it would require that the executioner be executed also, and whoever executes the first executioner would also be a murderer, and so on *ad infinitum*. Biblical teaching is such that it is not murder to perform a just execution of a criminal deserving of such according to divine precepts. And so the murderer is to be killed, and the executioner is not thus morally culpable in the sight of God.

By the same principle, not all wars involve murder, since some are divine sanctioned, either by special revelation or the moral precepts of Scripture. One may question whether *unjustified* individual killings of other human beings in the context of war – such as civilians, foreigners, and children – constitute murder. This is a good question, but it is not as plain and straightforward as it may first appear, and therefore we will not discuss it here.

The above has demonstrated that Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture, and any passage should be read in the light of the whole scope of divine revelation – never out of context, and often not even only within its immediate context. This should be encouragement enough for Christians to study systematic theology day and night. In any case, if our opponents will only take as seriously the Bible's unqualified condemnation against such things as homosexuality, materialism, divination, and non-Christian religions, our society's spiritual and moral climate would improve.

¹⁰ The expression "everything that lives and moves" of course does not include human beings, but designates "all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air...all the fish of the sea..."

Prior to his arrest, Jesus gives instructions to his disciples: "Then Jesus asked them, 'When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' 'Nothing,' they answered. He said to them, 'But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one'" (Luke 22:35-36). Some pacifists, but probably not many, try to make the *sword* into a reference to "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), but are the purse, bag, cloak, and sandals also spiritual? If not, then neither is the sword spiritual unless there is good reason to believe otherwise. Nor does the sword represent an aggressive spiritual attitude, as some say, since one cannot buy an attitude with the money gained from selling a cloak.

Jesus is clearly telling his disciples to purchase weapons for self-defense. Whereas he was still with them when he sent them out before to preach, he would soon depart from them, and they are thus encouraged to obtain the proper tools for self-preservation, such as sandals and swords. Likewise, in terms of God's moral precepts, we should be permitted to acquire reasonable means by which we may secure our own welfare and protection, although in practice such freedom may be heavily regulated and restricted by the laws of the land.

Shortly after this, Judas betrays Christ into the hands of his enemies, and as he is being arrested, Peter¹¹ strikes out with his sword and wounds one of the men: "While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, 'Lord, should we strike with our swords?' And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, 'No more of this!' And he touched the man's ear and healed him" (Luke 22:47-51).

Against our assertion that Jesus permits using physical force in self-defense as inferred from his instruction for the disciples to obtain weapons, the pacifist objects that Jesus promptly stops the disciples from resorting to violence, and heals the one already wounded by Peter. Matthew's account of this incident adds, "'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword'" (Matthew 26:52). That Jesus statement comes in the form of a proverb is relevant to how it may be interpreted and applied, but we may grant an adequate answer without exploiting this fact.

We can agree that Jesus does not want the disciples to physically defend him against those who have come to arrest him. However, the passage cannot be used to prove that Jesus forbids all uses of weapons in self-defense. In Luke 22:38, we read, "The disciples said, 'See, Lord, here are two swords.' 'That is enough,' he replied." Some try to have Jesus exclaim, "That is enough!" as if to express frustration over the disciples' lack of spiritual aptitude in failing to understand that he refers to the sword of the Spirit. But as we have established, neither the sword of the Spirit nor spiritual aggressiveness can be purchased with money obtained by selling one's cloak.

¹¹ See John 18:10.

Now, if "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" is intended as a universal prohibition against violence, even in self-defense, then Jesus could instruct the disciples to dispose of their swords – but he does not. He says to Peter, "Put your sword back in its place" (Matthew 26:52), rather than to discard it altogether. This would be another lost opportunity if Jesus does not want the disciples to own any weapons.

Finally, the obvious reason for Jesus to restrain the disciples is recorded in John's account: "Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?'" (John 18:11). Jesus has been telling his disciples of the things that he must suffer (Matthew 16:21), and this is one situation where injustice is not to be resisted: "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" Therefore, the biblical view is that force is permitted in self-defense, and the example of Jesus' arrest does not contradict this.

Besides the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus instructs one to "turn the other cheek," the most popular objection against using physical force is probably his command to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). When speaking of murder, we have seen how important correct definitions are; I propose that the pacifist in this case is using a definition of love that is foreign to Scripture. As with the former discussion, we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, so that a concept expressed in one verse may be defined and illustrated by other parts of the Bible.

First, we must insist that love and the use of physical force in biblically sanctioned circumstances are not mutually exclusive. Even the commandment of Jesus to love originates in the Old Testament: "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18) – and we need not repeat what the Old Testament says about war. Therefore, we reject the false view that the New Testament teaches a "love ethic" that contradicts the Old Testament "law ethic"; instead, both the Old and New Testaments command God's people to walk in love, and the definition of love remains the same.

Paul defines love in Romans 13:10, saying, "Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."¹² Love does not abolish the moral laws of God, but fulfills them; it performs what the law commands. Galatians 5:14 says that love is a *summary* of the law, and not its replacement: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" A summary that summarizes nothing is meaningless; the Christian concept of love depends on God's moral laws.

Some say that if one walks in love, he will not need to consciously obey the Ten Commandments – one who loves another will not steal from him. However, without already knowing the commandment not to steal, how does one know that this is what love implies? "Love" by itself is without intelligible content, and remains undefined. The problem is that they think of love almost as a mystical force, but if so, there is nothing to consciously obey.

¹² 1 Corinthians 13 contains a description of love, not a definition.

Jesus says, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). To walk in love is to obey God's moral laws, including the Ten Commandments. Note Ezekiel's prophecy regarding the New Covenant: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and *move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws*" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Rather than being free from all moral laws, the Christian is given the ability to obey them. And in this way love is clearly defined – perhaps uncomfortably so for liberals and antinomians.

In the same passage where Paul states, "Love does no harm to its neighbor" (Romans 13:10), he also says concerning the law enforcement official, "For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (v. 4). There is no contradiction if we allow the Bible to define love, so that verse 4 excludes the idea of absolute non-violence from verse 10. It is obvious that many people's definition of love contradicts verse 4, and they try to read it into verse 10 and other texts that mention the subject.

The difference in love's definition generates one of the greatest misunderstandings between unbelievers and informed Christians, with the unbelievers being usually the ones at fault. They have taken the biblical command to love, and require the Christians to submit to this command using the unbelievers' definition of love. But we are only obligated to love as the Bible defines the concept. While unbelievers may have a definition of love resembling "affection resulting in non-harmful, non-offensive, non-threatening words and deeds," biblical love requires us to obey God's moral laws, to speak the truth (Ephesians 4:15), and to "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Ephesians 5:11).

If the unbelievers wish to hold us accountable for obeying biblical commands, they must then also allow us to believe and practice *all* of the Bible, including taking a stance against homosexuality, abortion, and non-Christian religions – from our perspective, this does not contradict the command to love, since the same Bible commands them. Although the Bible says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), he is also the one who sends unbelievers to hell (Matthew 10:28). Truth and justice are thoroughly consistent with the biblical concept of love. If the unbelievers wish to define love differently, they can only do so based on an authority that demands our submission – our authority is God, what is theirs?

Some pacifists sincerely believe that the Bible forbids all forms of violence under all circumstances; they are to be faulted for poor exegesis. However, there are some who care little what the Bible really says, but desire to use it in support of their stubborn presuppositions regarding such issues.

But most pacifists, especially the secular type, are not so because of misunderstanding Scripture, since they do not even read it; rather, they have accepted an ideological

principle that has never been scrutinized, but nevertheless has been imposed upon them. They are like those whose objection against religion is, "I refuse to let anyone tell me what to believe; I would like to think for myself" when this very principle of independent thinking has been taught them by their parents and teachers. In effect, they are simply refusing to hear from God, but remain open to all sorts of influence from their culture.

The instruction in the secular classroom often amounts to, "Do not let anyone, especially those speaking on the basis of religion or tradition, tell you what to think; think for yourselves. And in this hour of lecture, I will be telling you how and what you must think when you are thinking for yourselves." Students should try openly opposing evolution, homosexuality, and abortion in the classroom, and see just how independent most instructors allow their thinking to be. Rather than putting on a pretense of neutrality and boasting a spirit of "free-thinking," the Christian maintains that submitting to authority in the intellectual realm is unavoidable; the question is to whose authority will one submit. We will either submit our thoughts to God, or as our first parents had done, become ensnared to the deceptions of Satan while thinking that we are attaining autonomy.

The unthinking pacifism considered here is most evident on college campuses, where students who know next to nothing concerning international politics and the details concerning specific clashes between nations, would rally in large crowds to protest against wars. Knowing as little as they do, and while protesting against violence, they nevertheless often end up favoring one nation when both parties involved are using physical force. And the one they take sides against is not always the one who started the conflict – often it is only because it is winning.

This type of pacifism, as with most of the other opinions of college students, is to be disregarded intellectually, even if it is impossible for politicians to ignore. Occasionally, a few college students may give relatively good arguments for their views, whether on pacifism or another subject. But these are rare, and even if we were to listen to them, it would only be possible if they are willing to distinguish themselves from the mob. Since this is no place for a theology of the mob, we will conclude with the following summary.

The Old Testament positively affirms that some wars are justified, and the New Testament does not revoke this position. As to which wars are justified, we must judge on the basis of biblical precepts. It is not against divine moral principles for a Christian to be a soldier or policeman, and to perform justified killings in the line of duty.

The Westminster Confession says:

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto; in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth, so, for that end, they may

lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions. (Chapter 25, Section 2)¹³

Likewise, Calvin writes:

But kings and people must sometimes take up arms to execute such public vengeance. On this basis we may judge wars lawful which are so undertaken. For if power has been given them to preserve the tranquillity of their dominion, to restrain the seditious stirrings of restless men, to help those forcibly oppressed, to punish evil deeds – can they use it more opportunely than to check the fury of one who disturbs both the repose of private individuals and the common tranquillity of all, who raises seditious tumults, and by whom violent oppressions and vile misdeeds are perpetrated?...Indeed, if they rightly punish those robbers whose harmful acts have affected only a few, will they allow a whole country to be afflicted and devastated by robberies with impunity? For it makes no difference whether it be a king or the lowest of the common folk who invades a foreign country in which he has no right, and harries it as an enemy. All such must, equally, be considered as robbers and punished accordingly. Therefore, both natural equity and the nature of the office dictate that princes must be armed not only to restrain the misdeeds of private individuals by judicial punishment, but also to defend by war the dominions entrusted to their safekeeping, if at any time they are under enemy attack. And the Holy Spirit declares such wars to be lawful by many testimonies of Scripture." (Book 4, Chapter 20, Section 11)¹⁴

Christ's command to love does not forbid the believer from using physical force, or even weapons, for the purpose of defending themselves and their families; nevertheless, it should be understood that excessive force is excluded by the same commandment. Here we refer to the moral liberty of the Christian; the legal freedom to practice self-defense is often regulated and restricted by the laws of the land.

Although pacifism is both unrealistic and unbiblical, we may sympathize with those who have come to this view due to the traumatic effects of war on their families and relationships; yet, we must maintain that Scripture affirms some wars as having divine sanction, and are thus justified.

¹³ *The Book of Confessions*; Louisville, Kentucky: Presbyterian Church, USA, The Office of the General Assembly, 1999; p. 147.

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; p. 1499-1500.