

Let me start by saying that this paper is not a polemic or intended to be divisive but rather educational. I may seem biased (because I am) but it is my desire to attempt to equip you with this information with a minimal of personal testimony or experiences, which are hardly standard or verifiable. I have a bachelor in secular psychology, and a heavy influence of secular psychology in my years before receiving Jesus Christ. I would also like to let you the reader know that on the onset, I am reformed (not “TR” – a term given to let others know that your “Totally Reformed” and maybe even at times a hyper-Calvinist), covenantal, historic premillennial and presuppositional (for you die-hard theology fans you will immediately understand the presuppositions I embrace). This article is not to convince you of these specific positions.

Both terms, “Reformed Theology” and “Christian Counseling” are very interesting terms regarding definition, responses, and world-views. When the term “Reformed” is used, one might presuppose that one of the first things that come to mind is the historical “Calvinism vs. Arminianism” debate. Others would contend that there are liberal and conservative views of Reformed Theology. Is Christian Counseling a neutral discipline or does it operate on religiously significant presuppositions? Is it possible as Tim Keller suggests, that “Reformed Christianity needs a vision that encompasses not only doctrinal statements, but also our piety, evangelistic outreach and missions of mercy” when it comes to counseling? I believe it does. In this article I hope to address the main topics of biblical and systematic theology that may be considered “reformed” and they relate to Christian Counseling (for the sake of the rest of the article I will call this “discipleship” instead of counseling) and present what I consider to be the biblical grounding for this view. It is my hope that this will not turn into another article that “bashes” others who hold to differing views. Many Christian counseling/discipling exchanges

today of this nature have a tendency be extremely polemic in their reporting. Instead, while bringing attention to the same concerns, it is my intent to reflect a “reformation” in current discipleship specifically within the confines of the local church.

In a presentation to Denver Reformed Roundtable, Alan Myatt in 1989 wrote;

“We live in a time when many seminaries are finding their Christian counseling and psychology departments to be their bread and butter. It is not unusual to find that one-half or two-thirds of the student body some Evangelical seminaries are enrolled as counseling majors. Most of the curriculums for these degrees promote the idea that a positive self image is essential for mental health. The concept of self esteem is having a profound impact on the church.”¹

James Boice states,

“We live in a therapeutic age now. So evangelicals have recast their theology in psychiatric terms. Sin has become dysfunctional behavior, Salvation is self-esteem and wholeness. Jesus is more of an example for right living than our Savior from sin and God’s wrath.”²

I concur with Dr. Igou Hodges, “Theology does not peddle novelty, but it does make fresh applications of biblical truth to new situations.” He goes on further to say, “Whether it is counseling and the social sciences, capital punishment, or women’s liberation, the ultimate fulcrum for the Reformed mind is what God has revealed, not the faddish fancies of men.” We must admit that we are in a therapeutic age. It is my opinion that when one reads the bible from a reformed view that the bible begins to make sense. It is those items that might be considered the essentials of reformed theology and foundational that I base an understanding of discipleship in this article.

It is at this point that we must discuss some doctrines of the bible, which have become known as *The Five Solas*, the *Doctrines of Grace* and more specifically as they relate to

¹ Alan & Kathy Myatt, *The Christian’s Self-Image: Self-Esteem and Reformed Theology* (part 1 & 2), <http://www.myatts.net/articles/self1.PDF>, <http://www.myatts.net/articles/self2.PDF>, 1989, 1990.

² James Montgomery Boice. *What Ever Happened to the Doctrines of Grace? – Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World.*, pg 24 Crossway Books, 2001.

discipleship (counseling), the doctrines of Anthropology, Hamartiology, Soteriology, and Theology. I realize that there are many other topics that are pertinent to discipleship today and perhaps this might be something to discuss in future articles but for the sake of readability and brevity, I will stick with the brief outline of the above.

The *five Solas* and the *Doctrines of Grace* might be called the alma mater of the reformed theologians. However, I think that without much explanation many evangelicals could claim these as foundational doctrines and faith statements for ministry and many do. What are the *five Solas*? In brief order, *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture Alone”), *solus Christus* (“Christ Alone”), *sola gratia* (“Grace Alone”), *sola fide* (“Faith Alone”), and *sola Deo Gloria* (“glory to God alone”). Regarding *sola scriptura*, I would say that this might be the fundamental backbone of what discipleship is battling for today. Rick Holland states,

“When the “hard” sciences failed to bear the weight of man’s depravity, the “soft” science of psychology made an all-out effort to answer the call. For two hundred years psychological “experts” purported to have solutions to man’s problems through understanding the complex intricacies of the human psyche. Yet the DSM (Diagnostics and Statistics Manual—the “Bible” for psychological sciences) goes through an almost annual revision to change the standard by which clients are evaluated.”³

This to me is quite alarming in that regarding the Westminster Confession (WCF), we have two points that I would like to draw our attention to;

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. (2 Tim. 3:15–17, Gal. 1:8–9, 2 Thess. 2:2) Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: (John 6:45, 1 Cor 2:9–12) and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of

³ Rick Holland, *What Happened to the Reformation?*, Shepherd’s Conference Notes, March 2003.

*nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. (1 Cor. 11:13–14, 1 Cor. 14:26, 40)*⁴

Two critical items are addressed in the WCF above (there are many pertinent to this article but I would like to draw our attention to two), that of “scripture alone” and that only regenerate Christians can benefit fully from the Word of God. This is a divisive issue at times because many who call themselves “Christian Counselors” also disciple non-believers. I would also like to bring to the reader’s attention that also implied in the WCF quote above, is the fact that one might be able to incur that discipleship might be one of those areas in which Christian prudence could be a factor. Robertson McQuilken brings the warning forward regarding the behavioral sciences and the authority of scripture with the following;

*“Therefore greater effort and greater care is necessary if Scripture is to control the presuppositions, methods and conclusions in the fields of psychology, anthropology or sociology. And since man is finite and sinful, Scripture teaches it is inevitable that his thinking will be wrong to some extent. Thinking that deliberately excludes the divine dimension from the outset will inevitably be at least partially wrong in its understanding of man’s nature and his relationships.”*⁵

What is being inferred here is that in our enthusiasm to embrace the latest methodologies from the social sciences, we forget that we are fallible and that scripture is supposed to be our plumb line. I am constantly amazed when engaging “counselors” how surprised they are that I am more interested in what scriptures have to say rather than their social science opinions and philosophies. Recently in an article I wrote, a professor underlined and put question marks next to one of the sentences, “if one is committed to sola scriptura as your faith statement claims, you might want to consider Welch’s book in walking under the stewardship of ‘Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with

⁴The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I, 6. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

⁵Robertson McQuilken, *The Behavioral Sciences Under The Authority Of Scripture*, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 20, The Evangelical Theological Society, 1977; 2002.
c Matt. 23:8; [Rom. 2:20, 21; 1 Tim. 1:7]

greater strictness.”⁶ What I was drawing attention to was the fact that when we put ourselves into positions of “teaching” such as that of “counselors,” “discipler,” etc, we must understand that we will be judged with greater strictness by God despite what our years of schooling in a certain discipline might be. I think that the deception of integration (adding to the bible) are those times when challenged with scripture, that the accused are flabbergasted in that they stand exposed before the sword of the word. I am convinced that while wearing the badge of a Christian – “counselor” they have been caught with their hand in the secular psychology “cookie-jar.” Scripture is quite clear,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2Pe 1:3-4 ESV).

The default setting for well-intentioned counselors/disciplers to fall back on psychological theories and failing integrations leaves much to be desired and provides no hope of a sovereign God. Hindson concurs and brings in the doctrine of man with his thoughts on the authority of scripture in counseling and exclaims;

“The use of Scripture in counseling involves an interaction of five essential factors:

- 1. A biblical understanding of the counselee’s problem, from...*
- 2. A clear understanding of the Holy Spirit’s telos in scriptural passages appropriate to both the problem and the solution, and...*
- 3. A meeting of man’s problem and God’s full solution in counseling, according to...*
- 4. The formulation of a biblical plan of action, leading toward...*
- 5. Commitment to scriptural action by the counselee.*

...counseling requires a prior knowledge of Scripture on the part of the counselor. He must be “thoroughly furnished” in order to teach, reprove, correct, and instruct the counselee. It is the fear that the Bible does not have the answer to the problem that forces many pastoral counselors to abandon it in favor of some other approach. This practice must be stopped before the pastoral counselor finds himself adrift in a maelstrom of conflict and confusion. Most non-Christian and

⁶The Holy Bible : English Standard Version., Jas 3:1. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001.

*non-biblical counseling errs on the very first point of Adams's scheme. It fails to understand the counselee's problem biblically and hence is able neither to diagnose it adequately nor to treat it effectively. The basic understanding of man is essential to one's personality theory and method of therapy. Thus, the use of Scripture in counseling could just as easily be called "Bible therapy!"*⁷

One of my favorite websites⁸ has this to say about sola scriptura:

Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music. As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction. Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church's understanding, nurture and discipline. Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through the seductive images, clichés, promises and priorities of mass culture. It is only in the light of God's truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preacher's opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given. The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture, we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth.

On to the next *sola, solus Christus* ("Christ Alone"), Boice states;

"Justification because of Christ alone means that Jesus has done the necessary work of salvation utterly and completely, so that no merit on the part of man, no merit of the saints, no works of ours performed either here or later in purgatory, can add to his completed work...A therapeutic worldview has replaced the classical Christian categories I have mentioned—sin, grace, redemption, and

⁷ Edward E. Hindson, *The Inerrancy Debate: and the Use of Scripture in Counseling*, Grace Seminary. Grace Theological Journal Volume 3, Grace Seminary, 1982; 2002.

⁸ <http://www.monergism.com>

others—and many have identified the gospel with such modern idols as a particular political philosophy, psychology or sociology.”⁹

O Palmer Robertson states, “The grace of God in salvation is not against creation’s order; it is against sin.” What does Christ have to do with counseling you might ask? The Bible tells us that one surpassing truth should govern our lives. Christ died for our sins. The message of a cross-centered life is that the Christian’s anticipation, confidence, guarantee and foundational reality is that Jesus Christ died so that his elect would be reconciled and forgiven by God. Many disciples have no understanding of what Christ has done for them or how to walk this out in their lives or how Christ’s example is foundational. John Hendryx states,

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision.¹⁰

Is it not amazing that sometimes the most obvious truths are the ones we need to be reminded of the most?

“Not only do we need to help people begin a relationship with Christ but we must also provide hope to true Christians by helping them strengthen their relationship with Jesus Christ. Many Christians lack hope simply because they lack maturity in their interaction with Christ and His Word.”¹¹

Our next *sola, sola gratia* (“Grace Alone”), has come under hard times. In our society today there is a general opinion that man is good and that God owes everyone an opportunity to be saved. If we really believe that man is “dead in his trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1-3), then we

⁹ James Montgomery Boice. *What Ever Happened to the Doctrines of Grace? – Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World.*, pg 88 Crossway Books, 2001.

¹⁰ John W. Hendryx, Five Solas of the Reformation, Accessed Dec 2004, <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/fivesolas.html>

¹¹ MacArthur, John, F., Jr, Wayne A. Mack, and Master’s College. Introduction to Biblical Counseling : Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling. Electronic ed., Page 200. Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1997, c1994.

must conclude that only God's gracious effectual call can waken the soul in faith. In a frequently-asked-question," David Powlison says this about grace in discipleship,

*"Every part of biblical counseling is made of gospel and grace; from understanding people and their problems to solving those problems. Why do people wonder whether grace is central to biblical counseling? There are three possible reasons. First, many people think that the purpose of the Bible is to get people saved and tell them what to do. From that perspective, all the counselor can say to people is, "Here is how to accept the gospel and God's forgiving grace so you will go to heaven. Now, until then, do this. Do not do that. Shape up. Just say, 'no.' Be a good person." Such moralizing, however, is antibiblical. The Bible does not tack willpower and self-effort onto grace. The gospel and grace of God are not only about forgiveness for the guilt of sin but about God's power to change believers progressively throughout their lives. The indwelling Spirit intends to change people in the practical details of life. God's self-revelation becomes the environment we live in; God's promises become the food we live on; God's commands become the life we live out. Can anyone doubt that biblical counseling worthy of the name is a ministry of God's own power in the gospel, changing people both inwardly and outwardly? Here is a second reason people ask about the place of grace in biblical counseling. Biblical counselors aim for practical obedience. Many people think that emphasizing obedience to God's commands means ignoring or contradicting the free grace of the gospel. But free grace is effective grace. It is no treat to be forgiven adultery and yet remain adulterous. It is no glory to God to forgive anger and yet leave people given to angry outbursts. It is no honor to the gospel if anxiety can be forgiven yet people who are nervous wrecks continue to live in unbelief. It is no advance for God's kingdom to forgive self-centered people, if they do not learn in some measure how to consider the interests of others. It is no happiness for a grumbler to be forgiven, if that person remains utterly self-absorbed, demanding, and pessimistic. It does no good to either the world or the Church if forgiven war makers do not learn how to become practical peacemakers. God is in the business of making disciples through the grace of the gospel. The Spirit will produce His desires and His fruit, and biblical counseling is a servant of such practical and sweet-tasting changes. Biblical counseling is the ministry of God's grace to individuals, just as biblical preaching is the ministry of God's grace to the multitudes."*¹²

Grace then could be described as the favorable influence of God in a disciple's life. This influence is divine influence or the influence of the spirit, in renewing the heart and restraining from sin. How important then is Grace to discipleship? I would say that it is the fundamental

¹²MacArthur, John, F., Jr, Wayne A. Mack, and Master's College. *Introduction to Biblical Counseling : Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*. Electronic ed., Page 370. Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1997, c1994.

hope that the secular disciplines do not have or hold and is the only hope that a theologically sound biblical counselor can provide. Hendryx states,

*Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world; from the self-esteem gospel, to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works. This silences the doctrine of justification regardless of the official commitments of our churches. God's grace in Christ is not merely necessary but is the sole efficient cause of salvation. We **must**¹³ confess that human beings are born spiritually dead and are incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace.¹⁴*

What about *sola fide* (“Faith Alone)?” I am convinced that the WCF also addresses this adequately with the following:

“Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God, and estate of salvation (Job 8:13–14, Micah 3:11, Deut. 29:19, John 8:41) (which hope of theirs shall perish): (Matt. 7:22–23) yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, (1 John 2:3, 1 John 3:14, 18–19, 21, 24, 1 John 5:13) and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed. (Rom. 5:2, 5)”¹⁵

What does Reformed Theology have to say about discipleship? Can non-Christians be counseled? I purposely did not use the term “discipled” to set you, the reader up. Notice how the difference in words changes everything, “Can non-Christians be discipled?” Sure, they can, but with what are they being discipled? What is a non-Christian’s first need? Hendryx provides some insight in a blazing quote,

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored,

¹³ Author’s emphasis and addition of the word, “must.”

¹⁴ <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/fivesolas.html>

¹⁵ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XVIII, 1. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical. Although fallen human nature has always recoiled from recognizing its need for Christ's imputed righteousness, modernity greatly fuels the fires of this discontent with the biblical Gospel. We have allowed this discontent to dictate the nature of our ministry and what it is we are preaching. Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations. While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to him our sin and imputed to us his righteousness. Because he bore our judgment, we now walk in his grace as those who are forever pardoned, accepted and adopted as God's children. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our patriotism, churchly devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach him.¹⁶

It is clear that salvation is more important than resolving issues of a disciple's past, their depression or their marriage problems, or why their upbringing has caused them to do whatever.

The heart of *sola fide* is the recognition that salvation is all of God and none of man. R.C.

Sproul states;

"Martin Luther came to the conclusion that the central issue was sola fide. Hence his well-known assertion that sola fide is "the article with and by which the church stands, without which it falls" (articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae).¹ Luther said of justification: "The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raises up our conscience before God. Without this article the world is utter death and darkness."² Elsewhere Luther wrote: "If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time."³ Luther was not alone in regarding justification by faith alone with such singular importance. John Calvin likewise attached crucial importance to it: "The doctrine of Justification . . . is the principal ground on which religion must be supported, so it requires greater care and attention. For unless you understand first of all what your position is before God, and what the judgment [is] which he

¹⁶ <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/fivesolas.html>

¹ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, ed. Ewald M. Plass, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 2:704 n.5.

² *Ibid.*, 2:703.

³ *Ibid.*

passes upon you, you have no foundation on which your salvation can be laid, or on which piety towards God can be reared.”⁴ Both Luther and Calvin expressed the singular importance of justification with the metaphor of a foundation. Of course both men understood that the biblical metaphor of foundation is that of the prophets and apostles, a foundation that is laid in Christ, the Chief Cornerstone.”¹⁸

Soli Deo Gloria (“To God Alone be Glory”), Rick Holland states it best when he says,

“Any time there is a lessening of the glory of God in the mind, heresy is not far behind. Open theism is a classic case of exchanging the glory of God championed by the Reformers for a dumbed-down deity worthy of our sympathy and compassion. The Reformers who bled and died over the glory of God would be horrified at some of the things that are claimed by so-called evangelicals today. We need a vision of a great and holy God to redirect the church back to her Master. Only then will we give God the glory He deserves. The tragedy of Reformational amnesia is manifested in the impotence and ineffectiveness of the contemporary church to impact our culture and shepherd our people. Our generation's ignorance and neglect of the convictions that forged the Protestant Reformation are at the heart of our church's greatest problems and the believer's greatest struggles. It is past time for a modern-day Reformation.”¹⁹

One of the biggest failings I see at the local church level is the outsourcing of discipleship to secular or “licensed” professionals due to ignorance and societal pressures. Slowly over time what used to be the elders, and bodies’ responsibility has been given over to non-regenerate men. The WCF has an alarming paragraph on this and I am struck with the sobering implications of what it suggests;

Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others: (2 Kings 10:30–31, 1 Kings 21:27,29, Phil. 1:15–16,18) yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; (Gen. 4:5, Heb. 11:4,6) nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; (1 Cor. 13:3, Isa. 1:12) nor to a right end, the glory of God, (Matt. 6:2,5,16) they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God: (Hag. 2:14, Tit. 1:15, Amos 5:21–22, Hosea 1:4, Rom. 9:16, Tit. 3:5) and yet, their neglect of them is more

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (1845; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:37 (3.11.1).

¹⁸ Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone : The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*. electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, c1995.

¹⁹ Rick Holland, *What Happened to the Reformation?*, Shepherd’s Conference Notes, March 2003.

*sinful and displeasing unto God. (Ps. 14:4, Ps. 36:3, Job 21:14–15, Matt. 25:41–43, 45, Matt. 23:23)*²⁰

Subsequently we have become a culture of “recovery” instead of the redeemed. I frequently tell folks in discipleship that Jesus died on the Cross to set the captives free and that they have been redeemed and not for recovery but to bring glory to God. Although I sense that maybe this movement (recovery) may have been an attempt to bridge the culture gap with sanctification, it has become an enabler for blatant sin and rebellion. Hendryx again rightly observes,

*Wherever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing his work in our way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us. God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.*²¹

In many cases, it is hard to distinguish the difference between the elect and non-elect in these settings due to what C.J. Mahaney observes are the cause of;

1. *A theological deficiency among pastors.*
2. *The lack of respect for the competence of pastors and the unquestioned reverence for and deference to psychologists and psychiatrists.*
3. *The biblical illiteracy that characterizes the average Christian.*
4. *The attractiveness of the content.*
5. *The failure to build churches that are relationally strong.*²²

²⁰The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XVI, 7. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

²¹<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/fivesolas.html>

²²C.J. Mahaney, *Another Gospel? The Challenge of the Therapeutic Movement*, Sermon-Series, Covenant Life Church, <http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/pdf/teaching/therapeutic.pdf>, Gaithersburg, MD, November 2000.

Incidentally, the *five solas* are not something so antiquated that they are some soap box that I jumped on, as a matter of fact this topic is still addressed today. Recently a document called, The Cambridge Declaration, A Statement by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, April 20, 1996, which can be accessed online²³ or purchased was developed for the same growing concerns mentioned above.

This brings us to the next part of the discourse in which we discuss the *Doctrines of Grace* and how they relate to discipleship. In giving a brief definition of the Doctrines of Grace, one might recognize them by the acrostic T.U.L.I.P.

*Calvin did not author the so-called “five points of Calvinism.” They originated at the Synod of Dort (1619) and are a result of affirming the distinctives of Calvinism over the centuries since. God as sovereign was central in the theology of Calvin, and that is reflected in the five points. The five points emphasize God in His sovereignty and grace but also man in his depravity and sin. The five points are popularly named: total depravity; unconditional election; limited atonement; irresistible grace; and perseverance of the saints. (Theologians have nicknamed these points “tulip,” a popular acronym based on the first letters of the doctrines.) These five concepts are arranged logically and are contingent upon one another. If man is totally depraved, then he is unable to make an initial response to God; God must call man to salvation through unconditional election. God also makes provision for those whom He calls to salvation by the death of Christ; He secures their salvation by the effectual call of the Holy Spirit and keeps them secure in order that they might receive the eternal life He has promised them.*²⁴

I am convinced that a proper understanding of these “*Doctrines of Grace*” is also the place in which personal ministry flows. To clarify, how one views the items mentioned in TULIP changes the flavor in which ministry is pursued, counsel given, personal ministry, worship and discipleship- evangelism is walked out. Some of the best and thorough reading on these distinctives can be found in Loraine Boettner’s, *The Doctrine of Predestination*²⁵, James

²³ http://www.christianity.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086|CHID560462|CIID1411364.00.html

²⁴ Enns, Paul P. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1997, c1989.

²⁵ This awesome book is also online at: <http://www.ccel.org/b/boettner/predest/default.htm> and I have attached in the appendix the

Boice's, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel*, and a doctrinal study by Jim McClarty, *By Grace Alone*²⁶. McClarty's article outlines all the different names given to the acrostic. Many have tried to change the titles and terms to not be divisive and spur argument, but I find that most of the controversy comes from outside the reformed camp as we have resolved these issues and find no problems with the terms. Boettner states for instance regarding this topic,

*In the light of modern scientific exegesis, it is quite evident that the objections which are raised against the Reformed Theology are emotional or philosophical rather than exegetical...So long as we hold to the Reformed principle that the Scriptures are to be accepted as the sole authority in matters of doctrine the Calvinistic system will stand as the only one which adequately treats of God, man, and redemption.*²⁷

This statement about emotionalism and philosophy is even striking 72 years later! In an age of moral relativism and pragmatism, it is quite apparent that discipleship (counseling in the church) has these influences as well. Looking at our Christian "best-sellers" one is struck by the many books focused on personal issues of the psychological compared to giving glory to God and obedience to what God requires with our lives. It is further disturbing that when this prophetic call back to *sola scriptura* proclaimed, how much opposition comes from Christian circles! Boice states in *Doctrines of Grace*, "These doctrines are important because they take confidence away from any spiritual good that might be thought to reside in man and instead anchor it in the will and power of God alone." I agree with Ryken²⁸,

The doctrines of grace have a two-fold effect. First, they humble the sinner and encourage the saint by giving God his due place. Reformed theology invigorates the believer; if God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31). The second effect is that these doctrines give great glory to God. God is God, and he will not give his glory to another (Isa. 42:8). Reformed theology recognizes that man is man and God is God. We exist for God's glory.

²⁶ Can be downloaded for FREE at: <http://www.salvationbygrace.org/uc/sub/docs/bygracealone.pdf>

²⁷ Boettner, Lorriane. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination.*, pg 53, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966.

²⁸ <http://www.tenth.org/articles/ReformedTheology.pdf>

Now that I have stressed the importance of some doctrinal commitments, we arrive at what I believe is the backbone of discipleship (counseling) in the church today, views on Anthropology, Hamartiology, Soteriology, and Theology.

The study of man is called anthropology from the Greek words *anthropos*, meaning “man,” and **logos** (*logos*) meaning literally "word" or "knowledge," hence, anthropology is a knowledge about man. The discipler’s view of the nature of man will influence the approach to ministry, as well as our personal walk with Christ. Traditionally called the trichotomy vs. dichotomy debate,

*(1) Dichotomous view. Dichotomy comes from Greek *dicha*, “two,” and *temno*, “to cut.” Hence, man is a two-part being, consisting of body and soul. The nonmaterial part of man is the soul and spirit, which are of the same substance; however, they have a different function. The support for the dichotomous view is: (a) Genesis 2:7 affirms only two parts. God formed man from the dust of the ground, breathed life into him, and he became a living soul (cf. Job 27:3). (b) The words soul and spirit may be used interchangeably. Compare Genesis 41:8 with Psalm 42:6, and Hebrews 12:23 with Revelation 6:9. (c) Body and soul (or spirit) together are mentioned as constituting the entire person (cf. Matt. 10:28; 1 Cor. 5:3; 3 John 2).*

*(2) Trichotomous view. Trichotomy comes from Greek *tricha*, “three,” and *temno*, “to cut.” Hence, man is a three-part being, consisting of body, soul, and spirit. The soul and spirit are said to be different both in function and in substance. The body is seen as world-conscious, the soul as selfconscious, and the spirit as God-conscious. The soul is seen as a lower power consisting of man’s imagination, memory, and understanding; the spirit is a higher power, consisting of reason, conscience, and will. The support for the trichotomous view is: (a) Paul seems to emphasize the three-part view in desiring the sanctification of the entire person (1 Thess. 5:23). (b) Hebrews 4:12 implies a distinction between soul and spirit. (c) 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4 suggests a threefold classification: natural (fleshly), carnal (soulish), and spiritual (spiritual).²⁹*

Berkhof states that “the prevailing representation of the nature of man in Scripture is clearly dichotomic... It is customary especially in Christian circles, to conceive of man as

²⁹ Enns, Paul P. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1997, c1989.

consisting of two, and only two, distinct parts, namely, body and soul.” Most secular psychology today looks at man from a trichotomist view. This basic failing in the understanding of anthropology affects the counsel given to a disciple. In the reformed view of man, dichotomy is the only approach concerned with man’s pre-fall nature as it relates to discipleship and is the only one that addresses the WHOLE man as outlined quite clearly in scripture. The trichotomist view actually lacks thorough exegetical support and just as “thoughts and intentions” are lumped together comprehensively in order to express the entire intellectual side, so spirit and soul are both mentioned to show that no aspect of the inner man is beyond the penetrating power of God’s Word. A return to a biblical view of man I am convinced provides more hope to the disciple than dancing on a thin hermeneutic. The largest threat I see to discipleship is that there is a growing sentiment of the idea that the body is to be treated by the physician, the spirit by the pastor, and the soul by the psychologist whereas scripture makes no such assertions. This brings into discrepancy the property rights to the soul. Psychotherapy has methodically claimed sole authority in speaking convincingly of spiritual matters. It appears to have won the cultural mêlée, since a psychologist is a recognized last word in court, while a pastor is not. However, God and the Bible alone claim sole jurisdiction in matters of the soul (2 Peter 1:3, 19-21).

Hamartiology. (Gk., hamartia, missing the mark), the doctrine of sin and its consequences. Knowing something of human nature before sin gives us some information about God’s norm for life. The fact that all are sinners (Rom. 3:23) does not make sin normal...the norm is righteousness...the sort of life that Christ lived. Error is universal, but not normal. This is important so that the discipler has the proper goal. Man must be changed at the inner core of his being so that his very set of values and the springs of his motivation are affected...it is from the heart that people’s problems stem. Sanctification is the process by which the image of God is

being restored and the disciple is becoming more “normal.” The biggest issue here regarding discipleship is whether to call it of sin or sickness. Scripture speaks of man as a depraved sinner, not as a determined victim. Man is responsible for his choices and often achieves beyond his expected capacity. When each one stands before God someday, and is asked to give an account for his life, he will NOT have the gratuity of saying that his excuse was because of his parents, his spouse, his environment, his drug abuse, his genes, ect. Only through supernatural transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word brings about unexpected and lasting heart change. Biblical discipleship for serious problems does not require diplomas in psychology or expense of professional offices and fees. Properly taught Christians should be able to counsel one another (Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14). The cure of souls is part of the body of Christ’s duty of humbly walking out the one-another’s as found in scripture with most of the work being done through a regenerate heart. An observation by MacArthur brings this to a sobering reality that we all can agree upon,

The Church is thereby ingesting heavy doses of dogma from psychology, adopting secular wisdom, and attempting to sanctify it by calling it Christian. Evangelicalism’s most fundamental values are thus being redefined. “Mental and emotional health” is the new buzzword. It is not a biblical concept, though many seem to equate it with spiritual wholeness. Sin is called sickness, so people think it requires therapy, not repentance. Habitual sin is called addictive or compulsive behavior, and many surmise its solution is medical care rather than moral correction³⁰

Regarding our next topic, Berkhof states that soteriology,

...deals with the communication of the blessing of salvation to the sinner and his restoration to the divine favor and to a life in intimate communion with God...it deals with the application of the work of redemption.³¹

³⁰MacArthur, John, F., Jr, Wayne A. Mack, and Master's College. *Introduction to Biblical Counseling : Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*. Electronic ed., Page 17. Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1997, c1994.

³¹ Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. pg 415, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941.

How does this affect discipleship? We must agree upon a presupposition that discipleship is not a solitary activity. It must contain an element of evangelism. Preaching the gospel to ourselves, to our disciples, and to the world is a constant activity, not a one-time shot (Phil 2:12). Packer states,

“We glorify God by evangelizing, not only because evangelizing is an act of obedience, but also because in evangelism we tell the world what great things God has done for the salvation of sinners. God is glorified when His mighty works of grace are made known.”³²

How much our discipleship ministry too can bring this glory to God when He is lifted up and put in his rightful place! One of the reasons I see many going outside the church for counsel is because we have lost a passion for discipleship-evangelism. Where does discipleship start? With salvation and MacArthur rightly observes,

It turns out that the good news about salvation starts with the bad news about sin. As Jesus said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk. 2:17). Paul knew that those who underestimate the enormity and gravity of human sinfulness—especially those who do not see their own depravity—cannot apply the only effective remedy to their problems. That, after all, is precisely the issue we are addressing in this book. There can be no salvation for those who aren’t convinced of the seriousness of their sin. There can be no word of reconciliation for sinners who remain oblivious to their estrangement from God. True fear of God cannot grip those who are blind to the depth of their sinfulness. And no mercy is available for those who do not tremble at God’s holy threats. In other words, to attempt to eradicate the human conscience is one of the most spiritually destructive pursuits any individual or society can engage in.³³

J.I. Packer tells us,

The gospel is a message about sin. It tells us how we have fallen short of God's standard; how we have become guilty, filthy, and helpless in sin, and now stands under the wrath of God. It tells us that the reason why we sin continually is that we are sinners by nature, and that nothing we do, or try to do, for ourselves can put us right, or bring us back into God's favor.³⁴

³² J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 75.

³³ MacArthur, John, F., Jr. *The Vanishing Conscience*. Electronic ed. Logos Library Systems. Dallas: Word Pub., 1994.

³⁴ J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: IL: Intervarsity Press, 1991) p.59.

We have become a culture of avoidance of responsibility and when we are confronted with our admittance for a savior, believing in a savior, and committing to a savior, only then can we glorify God with our lives. Reformed theology and the future of Christian counseling is the only delivery system in which through participation with God, that is capable of true moral reform.

The discipler's views about God will greatly direct and guide his/her counsel to those in and outside the body. *Theology* is derived from the two Greek words, **qeoj** (*Theos*) meaning "God" and **logoj** (*logos*) meaning literally "word" or "knowledge." Theology is simply the study or truth of God. The Scripture is the sole, supernatural, self-revelation of God, the source of all true knowledge. A discipler should believe that the Bible contains God's progressive self-revelation as revealed to man and the sole authority for his way of life. Why is there a degradation of this as the final authority? R.C. Sproul in his great little systematic theology, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, lists 10 ten causes that work against the Christian goal of spiritual maturity, which outline 10 areas which he is convinced are the reasons why we do not study the truth of God.³⁵ I read them as a reminder from time to time as they are a stark reality of the spirit of the age that comes against even the well-intentioned when it comes to discipleship. John Frame in his excellent treatise called, "*Introduction to the Reformed Faith*" states,

...theology is the application of scriptural truth to human situations. Progress in theology is the continual application of Scripture to new situations and contexts as they arise. It is not the mere repetition of doctrinal formulations worked out in past generations, as some "traditionalists" might suppose. Rather, the work of theology engages our creativity, without compromising the authority and

³⁵ Many times I realize that when references are made to outside sources, most readers might perhaps not visit these sources, so as a blessing to you the reader, I have included the introduction to R.C. Sproul's book in Appendix 2 regarding the ten causes that work against the Christian goal of spiritual maturity for your encouragement.

*sufficiency of Scripture...Thus Reformed people have spoken of living all of life coram deo, in the presence of God. This intense sense of God's reality encourages a rich piety, as well as energetic obedience in all areas of life.*³⁶

This statement gives the essential bridge I see that is needed between the integrationist and the biblical counselor when it comes to the future of Christian discipleship (counseling). I agree with Tim Keller when he states “Jesus must be the answer to the questions that the culture is asking.” I propose that for true discipleship to occur that our world-view must start from biblical theology versus secular theories and philosophies. Until we become committed to living all of life in the presence of God, only then can God be glorified with our lives, especially in our counseling.

Conclusions:

*We do not do sinners a favor by glossing over the serious, pervasive nature of pride, lust, greed, jealousy, and self-centeredness. We only truly help sinners when we lovingly but honestly help them to see the truth as revealed in God's Word. The closer anyone draws near to the unapproachable light of God's holy presence, the more he sees the contamination of sin in his own heart. If he truly knows Christ as his Savior from sin, he will hate the sin he sees within, make efforts to root it out, and thankfully appropriate God's abundant grace and forgiveness. Similarly, we do not do sufferers a favor by not pointing them to the Lord as their refuge and hope, as the one in control, as the one at work. To make the lesson in suffering be victimization is to teach people the wrong meaning for their experience. For thousands of years the Bible has been adequate to equip the saints to go through tragedy, to face persecution and even martyrdom. Why are we so insistent on turning from our all-sufficient Lord, the fountain of living waters, to hew cisterns for ourselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13)? We do not need psychology. We need the Lord and His Word.*³⁷

John Frame concludes his article with some insights that I can cross apply here to our topic in which he states,

I do sense some movement on both sides, especially in the last ten years or so: integrationists seem to be more and more impressed with insights from Scripture

³⁶ John Fram, *Introduction to the Reformed Faith*, Web Article: http://www.thirdmill.org/files/reformedperspectives/hall_of_frame/ST1_Introduction%20to%20the%20Reformed%20Faith.pdf, February 2001.

³⁷ Cole, Steven J. *How John Calvin Led Me to Repent of Christian Psychology*, pg 39, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Winter 2002.

relevant to the problems of people; and nouthetics seem to recognize more and more the importance of general revelation. Adams has always admitted the importance of medical care for physical problems. But the science of the last thirty years has found more and more links between the body and the mind, such as in the treatment of schizophrenia. But for all this rapprochement, the mutual suspicion and partisan divisions have been formed, and they do not seem to be going away.³⁸

I disagree, as evidenced by my own training, mentors, and Berean study, that spending my time fighting with “integrationist” is a waste of time. A question I ask frequently is, “Is this a hill to die on?” I have been struck by two scriptures in my walk of juggling integration and biblical counseling;

And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luk 5:30-32 ESV)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2Ti 2:24-26 NASB)

These scriptures to me are pivotal in building a bridge of grace in the discipleship movement of the church. The Luke verses keep me cautious that Jesus spent much time battling with the Pharisees and scribes reminding them about the purpose of the gospel and Paul reminds me that if I do think I am to engage those who differ from me regarding a theology of discipleship (counseling) that it is not my responsibility to convict them of the convictions that I have.

You see, I attend an integrationist (integration is a term used by biblical counselors to bring to attention that the world-view model of counseling includes something “else” besides the bible alone) seminary and being almost complete with my M.Div, earlier on, approached

³⁸ John Fram, *Machen's Warrior Children*, Christian Counterculture Newsletter, <http://www.christiancounterculture.com/40615/machen.html> June 2004.

NANC³⁹ to pursue certification. I was informed that, my school did not meet the requirements and that I would have to participate in training for my certification. I have happily submitted and have been quite thankful to do so. I have learned from my training mentor that it is possible to taper the *“mutual suspicion and partisan divisions that have been formed, and that do not seem to be going away”* by being intentional with showing grace. In every presentation, paper, article and venue I have been afforded, I have presented the reformed and biblical counseling position without *“being quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance,”* which has resulted in more ministry investment opportunities than aggressive polemics might have. I have provided resources, cds, books, sermons, articles, and discipleship to many because of this tempering and God has been glorified internationally because of this example. Because I have been working on my M.Div and NANC certification at the same time, God in his providence provided my foundational courses; hermeneutics, surveys, languages and systematic theologies, all taught by PCA members, thus the heavy reform influence. Furthermore, every “integrationist” course I took, I treated as an apologetic and Berean in that I always verified everything through the filter of scripture. Was it a hassle? No. My integrationist teachers might have been burdened with my constant insistence to come back to the biblical mandates but I was struck with their patience, grace, and love as we did. As I intern at my church and disciple the body, I discover that if I had been in a protected and compartmentalized institution, I might not have had compassion on my psychologized disciples, and may be even a modern Pharisee. Furthermore, when we isolate ourselves from culture it is harder to build bridges of grace. I close with another John Frame quote,

³⁹ <http://www.nanc.org>

Scripture often condemns a 'contentious' spirit (Prov. 13:10, 18:6, 26:21; Hab. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:11, 11:16; Tit. 3:9) and commends 'gentleness' (2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 5:22; 1 Thes. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2:24; Tit. 3:2; Jas. 3:17). The Reformed community should give much more attention to these biblical themes. That Reformed thinkers continue to have bright, fresh ideas, but that they present these ideas with humility and treat with grace and patience those who are not immediately convinced. That Reformed thinkers with bright ideas discourage the rapid formation of parties to contend for those ideas. That those initially opposed to those bright ideas allow some time for gentle, thoughtful discussion before declaring the bright ideas to be heresy. That these opponents also discourage the rapid formation of partisan groups. That those contending for various doctrinal positions accept the burden of proof, willing to bear the difficulty of serious biblical exegesis. That we try much harder to guard our tongues (Jas. 3:1-12), saving the strongest language of condemnation (e.g., 'denying the gospel') for those who have been declared heretics by the judicial processes of the church. That Reformed churches, ministries and institutions be open to a wider range of opinions than they are now — within limits, of course. That we honor one another as much for character and witness as we do for agreement with our theological positions. That occasionally we smile and jest about our relatively minor differences, while praying, worshipping and working together in the love of Christ.⁴⁰

If we can do this, I am convinced that Frame's contention can be disproved. I am for one going to do my part to build this bridge and not participate in the "unrealistic dream." I think you will agree that Reformed Theology definitely has a future with Christian Counseling and I would contend, the only future.

⁴⁰ John Fram, *Machen's Warrior Children*, Christian Counterculture Newsletter, <http://www.christiancounterculture.com/40615/machen.html> June 2004.

Bibliography

- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941.
- Bobick, Michael W. *Guilt and Growth: Jay Adams and John Owen on Motivating Christians with Guilt*, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Volume VI, Number 2, 1983.
- Boettner, Lorriane. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *What Ever Happened to the Doctrines of Grace? – Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World*. Crossway Books, 2001.
- *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel*. Crossway Books, 2002.
- Calvin, Jean, and Henry Beveridge. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.
- Cole, Steven J. *How John Calvin Led Me to Repent of Christian Psychology*, pg 31-39, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Winter 2002.
- Enns, Paul P. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1997, c1989.
- Frame, John. *Machen's Warrior Children*, *Christian Counterculture Newsletter*, <http://www.christiancounterculture.com/40615/machen.html> June 2004.
- *Introduction to the Reformed Faith*, Web Article: http://www.thirdmill.org/files/reformedperspectives/hall_of_frame/ST1_Introduction%20to%20the%20Reformed%20Faith.pdf, February 2001.
- Gidley, James S. *The Future of Calvinism*, *Ordained Servant*, Vol. 2., No. 2., Web Article: <http://www.opc.org/OS/html/V2/2c.html>, April 1993.
- Girardeau, John L. *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*. 1890; reprint, Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1984.
- Hendryx, John W. *Five Solas of the Reformation*, Accessed Dec 2004, <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/topic/fivesolas.html>
- Hindson, Edward E. *The Inerrancy Debate: and the Use of Scripture in Counseling*, *Grace Seminary*. *Grace Theological Journal* Volume 3, Grace Seminary, 1982; 2002.
- Hodges, Louis Igou. *Reformed Theology Today*. Columbus, Georgia: Brentwood Christian Press, 1995.
- *The Theological Curriculum Series. Volume 11. "Reformed Theology."*

- Holland, Rick. *What Happened to the Reformation?*, Shepherd's Conference Notes, March 2003.
- Horton, Michael. *What is the Reformed Faith?* Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Inc web article:
http://www.christianity.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086%7CCHID560462%7CCHID1415586,00.html, accessed 6.Dec.04.
- Johnson, Gary A. *Recapturing a Vision: Lay Counseling as Pastoral Care*, Journal of Psychology and Christianity, No. 2, Pg 132-138, Web Article:
<http://www.fpcboulder.org/images/RecapturingAVision.pdf>, 1997.
- Kaiser, Walter C., ed. *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*. Grand Rapids; Baker, 1972.
- Keller, Tim. *Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs: Leading the Secular to Christ*, Web Article:
<http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/oct/deconstructing.html>, 2004.
- Kruis, John, G. *Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling*. electronic ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997, c1994.
- Mahaney, C.J. *Another Gospel? The Challenge of the Therapeutic Movement*, Sermon-Series, Covenant Life Church,
<http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/pdf/teaching/therapeutic.pdf>, Gaithersburg, MD, November 2000.
- MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997.
- MacArthur, John, F., Jr, Wayne A. Mack, and Master's College. *Introduction to Biblical Counseling : Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*. Electronic ed. Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1997, c1994.
- McComiskey, Thomas Edward. *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985.
- McQuilken, Robertson, *The Behavioral Sciences Under The Authority Of Scripture*, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 20, The Evangelical Theological Society, 1977; 2002.
- Murray, John. *Collected Writings of John Murray*. 4 Volumes. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982.
- Myatt, Alan & Kathy. *The Christian's Self-Image: Self-Esteem and Reformed Theology* (part 1 & 2), <http://www.myatts.net/articles/self1.PDF>, <http://www.myatts.net/articles/self2.PDF>, 1989, 1990.

New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

New Geneva Study Bible. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995.

Packer, J.I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God.* Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961.

Reymond, Robert L. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

Robertson, O Palmer. *The Christ of the Covenants.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980.

Sproul, R. C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith.* Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996, c1992.

Sproul, R.C. *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology.* electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, c1997.

Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification.* electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, c1995.

The Holy Bible: *English Standard Version.* Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001.

The Westminster Confession of Faith. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs. 3rd edition. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

Appendix 1

The following material from Romans: An Interpretative Outline (pp.144-147). by David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, contrasts the Five Points of Arminianism with the Five Points of Calvinism in the clearest and most concise form that we have seen anywhere. It is also found in their smaller book, The Five Points of Calvinism (pp. 16-19). Both books are published by The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia.(1963). Messrs. Steele and Thomas have served for several years as co-pastors of a Southern Baptist church, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

| THE "FIVE POINTS" OF ARMINIANISM | THE "FIVE POINTS" OF CALVINISM |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Free Will or Human Ability Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.</p> | <p>1. Total Inability or Total Depravity Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not — indeed he cannot — choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ — it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation— it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God.</p> |
| <p>2. Conditional Election God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew</p> | <p>2. Unconditional Election God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.</p> | <p>or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.</p> |
| <p>3. Universal Redemption or General Atonement Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.</p> | <p>3. Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore guaranteeing their salvation.</p> |
| <p>4. The Holy Spirit Can Be Effectually Resisted The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the</p> | <p>4. The Efficacious Call of the Spirit or Irresistible Grace In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The</p> |

Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

eternal call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By mean, of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent. to come freely and willingly to Christ. God', grace. therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>5. Falling From Grace Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith. etc.</p> <p>All Arminian, have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ — that once a sinner is regenerated. he can never be lost.</p> | <p>5. Perseverance of the Saints All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.</p> |
| <p>According to Arminianism:</p> <p>Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of <i>God</i> (who takes the initiative) and <i>man</i> (who must respond)—man's response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, "choose" to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REJECTED by the Synod of Dort</p> <p>This was the system of thought contained in the "Remonstrance" (though the "five points" were not originally arranged in this order). It was submitted by the Arminians to the Church of Holland in 1610 for adoption but was rejected by the Synod of Dort in 1619 on the ground that it was unscriptural.</p> | <p>According to Calvinism:</p> <p>Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus <i>God</i>, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REAFFIRMED by the Synod of Dort</p> <p>This system of theology was reaffirmed by the Synod of Dort in 1619 as the doctrine of salvation contained in the Holy Scriptures. The system was at that time formulated into "five points" (in answer to the five points submitted by the Arminians) and has ever since been known as "the five points of Calvinism."</p> |

Appendix 2

Cause #1: The Childlike Faith Error

In some Christian circles the biblical call to a childlike faith has been elevated to a spiritual ideal that radically distorts the biblical meaning of faith. The New Testament does describe a certain childlike faith as a virtue. Jesus said, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it” (Mark 10:15).

But what is this childlike faith? The word *like* suggests some sort of analogy. The analogy is obvious. As little children trust their parents and take them at their word, so we, in similar fashion, are to trust God. An infant’s life depends on trusting in the care of parents. When a curious toddler reaches for the flame on a stove, the parent says, “No!” There is no time to explain the intricacies of thermal energy, and such sophisticated explanations would be wasted on the child anyway.

However, as children begin to grow, their capacity for trusting in their parents’ leadership begins to wane. Before long they begin to ask why, and not long after that, they are openly defiant.

Such defiance has no place in the kingdom of God. God’s children are to remain forever in a state of childlike awe and trust of their heavenly Father. There is an appropriate exercise of implicit faith here. God deserves to be trusted implicitly. Indeed, it is foolish as well as foolhardy not to trust Him implicitly. He is altogether trustworthy. The mature Christian never outgrows this sort of childlike faith.

There is a vast difference, however, between a *childlike* faith and a *childish* faith, though the two are often confused. A childish faith balks at learning the things of God in depth. It refuses the meat of the gospel while clinging to a diet of milk. For this, the childish Christian receives an admonition:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)

The call of the New Testament is to maturity. The apostle Paul says, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11). Paul makes a further distinction between the way in

which we are to remain as babes and the way in which we are called to adulthood. He says, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature” (1 Corinthians 14:20).

Cause #2: Fear of Theological Skepticism

There is a deep distrust in the Christian subculture for theology. In many cases this aversion to theology flows from a distrust of theologians. J. V. Langmead Casserley, the noted Anglican apologist, devoted an entire chapter in his book *Apologetics & Evangelism* to the theme, “The Treason of the Intellectuals.”¹ Casserley observed that the Christian public’s growing distrust for theologians has been provoked by the radical skepticism toward the Bible and historic Christianity exhibited by modern higher-critical scholars. It was theologians in the church who declared the death of God. It is seminary professors and Christian college professors who are most vocal in their attack on the trustworthiness of Scripture. At the turn of this century the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper remarked, “Biblical criticism has become biblical vandalism.”

Undoubtedly many theological seminaries in America have become citadels of unbelief. Christian parents are often shocked and dismayed when their children return home from “Christian” colleges filled with doubt and skepticism they learned from their professors. The reaction to this theological treason is often, “If this is what studying theology leads to, then I’m going to avoid it altogether.”

No doubt there is bad theology. No doubt the serious study of theology exposes the student to skeptical criticism. No doubt much of what passes for Christian theology is merely the theologian’s attempt to justify his own unbelief.

We must remember, however, that though skeptical theology is currently rampant in our institutions, its presence is not new. The chief opponents of Jesus during His earthly ministry were clergy. The theologians of Jesus’ day hated His theology. But to reject all theology and theological education in order to avoid bad theology is to commit spiritual suicide. It is the exercise of another kind of treason. To reject theology is to reject the knowledge of God. This is not an option for the Christian.

Cause #3: The Error of Easy Believism

Easy believism is a modern form of the ancient heresy of antinomianism. It asserts that once a person makes a decision for Christ or prays to receive Jesus as Savior, it is not necessary to embrace Him as Lord. There are no requirements of law that bind the Christian.

There are few Christian teachers, if any, who declare that one who embraces Christ as Savior shouldn’t also embrace Him as Lord. Rather, they encourage the “carnal Christian” to become more spiritual and obedient. But they shrink from declaring that embracing Christ as Lord is necessary for salvation. Indeed, they insist that it is not necessary for attaining salvation. They allow for the reality of a carnal Christian.

¹ J. V. Langmead Casserley, *Apologetics & Evangelism* (Louisville: Westminster, 1970).

This type of antinomianism is so pervasive in American evangelicalism that it may even be the majority report. The current “Lordship Salvation” controversy focuses on this issue.

Recently a pastor spoke to me about a young man in his congregation who was using drugs and living in an illicit relationship with his girlfriend. The pastor tried to counsel the young man about his life-style. The young man said casually, “It’s OK, Pastor, I’m a carnal Christian.”

To be a Christian in the biblical sense of the word is to be a disciple of Christ. A disciple is a “learner.” He enrolls in the school of Christ. The disciple, as the name suggests, is called to a disciplined study of the things of God.

Cause #4: Neo-Monasticism

The monastic movement in church history involved the glorification of withdrawal from this world. Those who made the flight to the cloister were seeking refuge from the despoiling influences of evil society. The monastery was a haven for those seeking spiritual purity.

Many of those who entered monastic life did so to pursue a life of prayer and spiritual devotion. For others, it was an opportunity for secluded study. An element in classical monasticism that is missing from neo-monasticism is devotion to theological scholarship.

When I speak of neo-monasticism, I am referring to the tendency among some evangelicals to “drop out” of the world. I am describing an attitude as well as a life-style. It is a kind of world denial that includes far more than a rejection of worldliness. It involves a rejection of the world as the primary arena of Christian activity. It restricts the Christian’s activity to a spiritual ghetto. It includes a willful rejection of the study of anything that is not clearly “evangelical.”

I remember the second year of my Christian life. As a sophomore in college, I was stirred in my soul in a class on Western philosophy. The professor was lecturing on an essay written by St. Augustine. The lecture awakened my mind to a whole new plane of understanding the character of God. As a young Christian I yearned to go deeper in my faith. I saw the work of Augustine and others like him as a tremendous help to that end.

I decided to change my academic major from Bible to philosophy. When I made that change I was all but drummed out of the evangelical corps on our campus. My friends were horrified at my apparent apostasy. The Bible verse I heard quoted too many times to count was “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit” (Colossians 2:8).

I was both confused and hurt by the reactions of my friends. I had turned to philosophy to strengthen my understanding of God, not to weaken it. Though I was no longer a Bible major, by no means had I rejected the Bible or my study of it. I couldn’t figure out how one could “beware” of something without first being “aware” of it. My study of secular philosophy only increased my appreciation for the depths and riches of the things revealed in Scripture. It also provided me with an understanding of those issues crucial to the Christian task of apologetics. It never occurred to me that we were supposed to abandon the world to the pagans.

Neo-monasticism breeds ignorance—ignorance not only of culture and the ideas that shape culture, but ignorance of theology as well. It displays more lack of faith than strength of faith.

The effects of neo-monasticism are catastrophic. By retreating from engagement with the world we have suffered defeat by default. We wring our hands at the secularization of American culture and wonder how it could have happened.

Cause #5: Fear of Controversies

Theology breeds controversies, no question about it. Whenever theology is studied, arguments inevitably follow. We all desire relationships that are marked by peace and unity. We also understand that the Bible forbids us from being contentious, divisive, argumentative, and judgmental. We are to manifest the fruit of the Spirit, which includes gentleness, meekness, patience, and kindness.

Our reasoning then goes: If we are to avoid a quarrelsome spirit and show forth the fruit of the Spirit we must avoid the study of theology. An American axiom is “Never discuss religion or politics.” The reason this statement has been elevated to the level of a prime axiom is because discussions about religion or politics often generate more heat than light. We are tired of witch hunts, nit-picking, persecutions, and even wars that are triggered by theological controversy.

Yet controversy accompanies theological commitment. John Stott, in a book entitled *Christ the Controversialist*,² stated what should be obvious to anyone who reads the Bible—Jesus’ life was a storm of controversy. The apostles, like the prophets before them, could hardly go a day without controversy. Paul said that he debated daily in the marketplace. To avoid controversy is to avoid Christ. We can have peace, but it is a servile and carnal peace where truth is slain in the streets.

We are called to avoid *godless* controversies. We are called to *godly* controversies. One positive aspect of Christian controversy is that Christians tend to argue with each other about theology because they understand that truth, especially theological truth, is of eternal consequence. Passions rise because the stakes are so high.

Often godless controversies arise, not because the combatants know too much theology, but because they know too little. They fail to discern the difference between weighty matters of dispute and minor points that should never serve to divide us. We have another maxim: “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.” It is the immature student of theology who is the nitpicker. It is the half-trained theologian who is brittle and quarrelsome. The more one masters the study of theology, the more one is able to discern what issues are negotiable and tolerable and what issues demand that we contend with all our might.

Cause #6: Antirational Spirit of the Age

² John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970).

I believe that we are living in the most anti-intellectual era of Christian history ever known. I do not mean antiacademic, antitechnological or antiscientific. By anti-intellectual, I mean *against the mind*.

We live in a period that is allergic to rationality. The influence of existential philosophy has been massive. We have become a sensuous nation. Even our language reveals it. My seminary students repeatedly write like this on their exam pages: “I feel it is wrong that . . .” or “I feel it is true that . . .” I invariably cross out their word *feel* and substitute the word *think*. There is a difference between feeling and thinking.

There is a primacy of the mind in the Christian faith. There is also a primacy of the heart in the Christian faith. Surely that paradoxical declaration sounds like a contradiction. How can there be two primacies? Something must be ultimately prime. Of course we cannot have two different primacies at the same time and in the same relationship. When I speak of two different primacies, I mean with respect to two different matters.

With respect to the primacy of *importance*, the heart is first. If I have correct doctrine in my head but no love for Christ in my heart, I have missed the kingdom of God. It is infinitely more important that my heart be right before God than that my theology be impeccably correct.

However, for my heart to be right, there is a primacy of the intellect in terms of *order*. Nothing can be in my heart that is not first in my head. How can I love a God or a Jesus about whom I understand nothing? Indeed, the more I come to understand the character of God, the greater is my capacity to love Him.

God reveals Himself to us in a book. That book is written in words. It communicates concepts that must be understood by the mind. Certainly mysteries remain. But the purpose of God’s revelation is that we understand it with our minds that it might penetrate our hearts. To despise the study of theology is to despise learning the Word of God.

Cause #7: The Seduction of Worldliness

We remember that the first detour from the pathway to heaven encountered by Christian in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* came when Christian was seduced by the counsel of Mr. Worldly Wiseman.³ Mr. Worldly Wiseman was not named Mr. False Theologian, but it was a false theology he taught.

We understand how worldliness seduces us in terms of sensuality, materialism, hedonism, and the like. But one of the most powerfully seductive forces of the secular world is the temptation to embrace the view of truth currently popular in American culture.

Allan Bloom, in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*,⁴ has documented modern education’s almost universal embrace of relativism as its governing epistemology. The American mind has become closed to objective truth that can be known rationally. Relativism is ultimately

³ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), 11-15.

⁴ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

irrational. To say that truth is relative is mindless. It is a statement that cannot possibly be true. The statement “All truth is relative” would itself be relative and have no truth value.

The mind-set, or rather, anti-intellectual mind-set, of secular education has infiltrated and all but conquered evangelicalism. Evangelicals are sublimely happy to affirm both poles of contradictory ideas and accept radically inconsistent and mutually exclusive theologies.

To be sure, evangelicals do not call this relativism or subjectivism. The philosophy is baptized and spiritualized, being thinly veiled in religious jargon. The “leading of the Spirit” is the license for a multitude of epistemological sins. People are “led by the Spirit” to do things explicitly prohibited by Scripture. But the subjective leading may overrule Scripture because truth is relative. The affirmation of irrational contradictions (a redundancy) is justified by appeals to a “higher order of logic” found in the mind of God.

If we seek a coherent, logical, consistent, and rational understanding of the Bible, we are immediately accused of worshipping at the shrine of Aristotle. Because the philosophy of rationalism has often been hostile to Christianity, we flee from anything that remotely seems like rationalism. Because Christianity has truth that reason cannot discover by its own naked speculative efforts, we assume that reason itself is negotiable.

Christianity is not rationalism. But it is rational. It may have truth beyond what reason can fathom. But it is more than rational, not less. It is a virtue, not a vice to seek a coherent understanding of the Word of God. God’s Word is not irrational. It was designed to be understood by the mind.

Cause #8: Pietistic Substitution of Devotion for Study

Is it possible that devotional reading of the Bible can be a hindrance to Christian growth? If it becomes a substitute for serious study of the Bible, I answer categorically yes.

I must concede, however, that I really am not sure I understand the difference between “devotional Bible reading” and serious Bible study. Studying the Bible seriously is an act of devotion. C. S. Lewis once observed:

The present book is something of an experiment. The translation is intended for the world at large, not only for theological students. If it succeeds, other translations of other great Christian books will presumably follow. In one sense, of course, it is not the first in the field. Translations of the *Theologia Germanica*, the *Imitation*, the *Scale of Perfection*, and the *Revelations* of Lady Julian of Norwich, are already on the market, and are very valuable, though some of them are not very scholarly. But it will be noticed that these are all books of devotion rather than of doctrine. Now the layman or amateur needs to be instructed as well as to be exhorted. In this age his need for knowledge is particularly pressing. Nor would I admit any sharp division between the two kinds of book. For my part, I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await many others. I believe that many who find that “nothing happens” when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book

of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand.⁵

There are many helps available for daily devotional reading. Those who read the Bible daily for fifteen to thirty minutes are in the minority. But surely fifteen minutes a day reading the Bible is better than no reading.

The problem emerges when we think we can plumb the depths of Scripture by a simple regimen of fifteen to thirty minutes a day. Few disciplines can be mastered by such brief attention. To grow into a mature understanding of God's Word requires a more concerted effort than that gained by short periods of devotional reading. Devotional reading is a great complement to serious study but is not an adequate substitute for it. A study of the Scripture references at the end of each chapter in this book, and the commentary on them within the chapters, can be an excellent beginning to such serious study.

Cause #9: Slothfulness

Karl Barth once remarked that the three most basic and primal sins of fallen humanity are pride, dishonesty, and slothfulness. I'm not sure if Barth was correct in his ranking of them, but they are certainly severe sins about which the Bible has much to say.

If, by our fallen nature we have a strong proclivity toward slothfulness, we must be careful to be on guard against it. It is by no means safe to assume that rebirth immediately and fully delivers us from being lazy. We are no more instantly cured from indolence than we are from pride or dishonesty.

The Christian life requires hard work. Our sanctification is a process wherein we are coworkers with God. We have the promise of God's assistance in our labor, but his divine help does not annul our responsibility to work. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).

This work is not something that earns merit or gains us our justification. It is the labor that follows justification, the outworking of faith. Lazy Christians will remain immature because they fail to apply themselves to a diligent study of God's Word.

I often startle my seminary students by saying that theological errors are sins. They recoil from this charge assuming that there is no moral culpability for making mistakes. I argue that the primary reason we misinterpret the Bible is not because the Holy Spirit has failed to do His work, but because we have failed to do ours. We fall short of loving God with all our minds and neglect the responsibility to apply ourselves to a rigorous study of the things of God.

Cause #10: Disobedience

5 C. S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 204-205

Perhaps it is misleading to include disobedience as a separate causal influence for our failure to grow to maturity, since it is at least implicit in all the others. We will list it, then, as a kind of generic summary of all the rest.

While we have considered a number of reasons why Christians sometimes neglect the study of theology, there are also important positive reasons for such study. It is imperative that we press beyond whatever obstacles lie in our path to a diligent pursuit of deeper theological understanding.

Theology Feeds the Soul

For the soul of a person to be inflamed with passion for the living God, that person's mind must first be informed about the character and will of God. There can be nothing in the heart that is not first in the mind. Though it is possible to have theology in the head without its piercing the soul, it cannot pierce the soul without first being grasped by the mind.

An intellectual understanding of doctrine is a necessary condition for spiritual growth. It is not, however, a sufficient condition for such growth. A necessary condition is a condition that must be present for a desired result to happen. Without it, the result will not be forthcoming. For example, oxygen is a necessary condition for fire. However, the mere presence of oxygen is not enough to guarantee that a fire will occur. That is fortunate for us, since the world would be in flames if oxygen automatically produced fire. Oxygen is therefore necessary for fire, but in itself is not sufficient or enough to make a fire. As oxygen is necessary but not sufficient for a fire to ignite, so doctrine is necessary but not sufficient to light a fire in our hearts. Without the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the mere presence of doctrine, even sound doctrine, will leave us cold.

God Commands Us to Be Diligent in Study

The second positive reason to pursue a knowledge of theology is that God, who is the subject matter of theology, commands us to progress in doctrinal understanding. Let us follow the apostle Paul's exhortation to "put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11) so that we might press forward to the goal of Christian understanding. In evil we are to be babes, but in understanding we seek mature adulthood (1 Corinthians 14:20). We don't do this to become arrogant in our knowledge, but that we might grow in grace. Mature understanding is the foundation for mature living.

Growing in the knowledge of God is a great joy and privilege. It is a matter of delight for us. Yet it is more than a privilege; it is also a duty. God commands us to grow up into the fullness of Christ. Consider the Shema of Old Testament Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your

eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

At the heart of this sacred command is the solemn duty of learning the law of God, of mastering His revelation. It is by no means a casual or cavalier enterprise. To master God's Word is to be deeply immersed in the study of theology.

We remind the reader that it is possible to have a sound theology without having a sound life. But we cannot have a sound life without having a sound theology. In this sense, theology must never be viewed as an abstract science. It is a matter of life and death, even eternal life and eternal death. This book is intended as a guided tour through those life-and-death issues on the theological landscape.⁴¹

⁴¹Sproul, R. C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996, c1992.