

12-1-2016

# Rediscovering the Bible for Involvement and Insights for Spiritual Growth for the Restoration Church Member

John F. Woodward  
*George Fox University*

This research is a product of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at George Fox University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

---

## Recommended Citation

Woodward, John F., "Rediscovering the Bible for Involvement and Insights for Spiritual Growth for the Restoration Church Member" (2016). *Doctor of Ministry*. 204.  
<http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/204>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolf@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolf@georgefox.edu).

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY  
REDISCOVERING THE BIBLE  
FOR INVOLVEMENT AND INSIGHTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH  
FOR THE RESTORATION CHURCH MEMBER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOHN F. WOODWARD

PORTLAND, OREGON

DECEMBER 2016

George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

DMin Dissertation

---

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

John F. Woodward

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on October 7, 2016  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: MaryKate Morse, PhD

Secondary Advisor: Derek Voorhees, DMin

Expert Advisor: Jim Eichenberger, M.Ed

Copyright © 2016 by John F. Woodward  
All rights reserved

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi
SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Contextualization .....	2
Restoration Context .....	6
Formational Context .....	6
Restoration Theology and Practice .....	11
Restoration Legacy .....	17
Summary .....	21
SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS .....	23
Introduction.....	23
Individualist Spirituality .....	24
Extra-Biblical Spirituality.....	29
Goodness-based Spirituality .....	33
Restoration Solutions .....	37
Summary .....	45
SECTION 3: THESIS.....	48
Rediscovery of the Bible.....	49
The Bible in Its Entirety.....	50
The Contextual Nature of Scripture .....	54
The Bible as Source for Spirituality.....	58

Rediscovering Soteriology.....	61
Salvation as Theosis.....	62
Rediscovering Relational Language .....	70
Rediscovery of Mission .....	73
Summary .....	78
SECTION 4: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT .....	80
SECTION 5: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT SPECIFICATIONS.....	82
SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT .....	88
APPENDIX 1: ARTIFACT MANUSCRIPT CHAPTERS.....	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	159

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The best things in my life involve community effort. This journey through Leadership and a Global Perspective Doctoral Program is the very best example of God's diverse and lovely community coming together for the sake of a greater cause.

I have been so very blessed by my LGP4 cohort, a very real source of strength and encouragement over the last three years. Their prayers, intelligent discussions and international perspective helped me to grow spiritually, intellectual and globally. I have been blessed by the amazing staff at George Fox Seminary who provided insights, teaching and personal examples of what it means to be a globally engaged Christian. For Jason Clark, Loren Kerns, Cliff Berger and Heather Rainey, whose patience, persistence, good humor and never ceasing encouragement, made possible the completion of this dissertation. I am grateful for the loving and gentle—but always wise and generous—help of MaryKate Morse, who guided me to many of the important insights in this study. It was a great honor and blessing to have her as my advisor. I am also thankful to my expert reader Jim Eichenberger, my second advisor Derek Voorhees, and to my editor, David Steel, whose brilliant eye polished this work to its final shine.

Finally, my deepest thanks goes to my dear wife, Gwen, who always believed in me far more than I ever did. All I've done well in life is because of you, including this monumental work.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes that many individuals in the Restoration Church, an early nineteenth-century American church movement founded by Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell that today includes hundreds of Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, are experiencing spiritual malnourishment, while finding in the tradition a lack of resources, rhetoric, or guidance to stem the hunger. Section 1 describes the influence of contextualization, tracing the history of the Restoration Movement back to its early philosophical and social influences that resulted in a rationalist and Biblicist interpretation of the Bible that focused primarily on conversion and church organization, while distracting attention from spirituality and divine immanence. Section 2 critiques popular spiritual formation literature from the rationalist-Biblicist mindset to determine its ability for both invitation and instruction for spiritual formation for Restoration members. Section 3 argues for a modest movement toward a more authentic Christian spirituality by maintaining a solid hold on two foundational Restoration beliefs of biblical authority and conversion. Moving forward will involve, first, the rediscovery of Scripture to include the entire canon. This will allow, second, the possibility for a richer soteriology that includes a more informed pneumatology. Third, it will be argued that a more robust and experiential understanding of conversion will lead to a more effectual Christian life. Sections 4 and 5 outline a non-fiction book for the church member to rediscover a wider view of the Bible, salvation, and service that will invite and empower the believer to move into a deeper faith and active Christian life based squarely on the familiar foundations of the Restoration tradition. The artifact will be several chapters of the book described in Sections 4 and 5.



## SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

### Introduction

David is a campus minister for a Restoration ministry. Today he is meeting with Rebecca, a brilliant young student. David has patiently worked with her concerning numerous issues that haunted her life, many resulting from her superior intellect that often sabotaged her personal relationships. He also sensed that her intellect also contributed to her spiritual emptiness. What did not make sense to David was that Rebecca was raised in a strong church and she knew her Bible inside and out, yet something essential was missing. Today, as they talked, a light went on for David. Hesitantly he asked Rebecca, “Do you have any idea what it means to have a relationship with Jesus? Do you—or have you ever—experienced the Spirit of God in your life in any meaningful way?” There was a long silence as tears began to flow from Rebecca’s eyes. She slowly shook her head, saying softly, “I have no idea what that even means.”

Rebecca was just one of many young people from David’s heritage who are unaware of Jesus’ promises to abide within his followers and exhibit the Spirit’s presence, in spite of growing up in the church, hearing hundreds of sermons and being superior students of the Bible. Time and again David witnessed a disconnect between Bible knowledge and spiritual life, but he was not sure why. Because of David’s similar upbringing in the Church of Christ, he did not see that Rebecca’s issues arose from a deeply ingrained mindset of his church that developed out of a particular context that allowed little room for effectual, relational, or

experiential faith. To begin to help Rebecca, David first needed to understand the underlying inclinations of his church and where they came from.

### Contextualization

The deep spiritual struggles that Rebecca faced are the result of the particular mindset found in the Restoration tradition, which developed out of a specific context from which the denomination first evolved. A church's context includes "its historical, social, religious, political, economic, physical, psychological, and philosophical dimensions"<sup>1</sup> that inform its theology and worldview from its inception. Because of David's lifelong involvement in the Churches of Christ/Christian Church<sup>2</sup> heritage, he himself was oblivious to the continuing contextual influence of his tradition on his own thinking and theology as well as on the spiritual lives of his students.

The study of context brings to light the often hidden influences that guide one's thinking, actions, and interpretation of the world and the Word. This suggests that theology "does not happen in a vacuum, but happens where faith and life cross."<sup>3</sup> According to Harris and Shelby, "Most of us, as we come to Scripture, bring to our reading the heritage of a particular religious tradition. Many of us have deep personal ties and commitments to such traditions. It is, of course, inevitable that such experiences

---

<sup>1</sup> Duane A. Olson, "Contextualization: Everybody's Doing It," *Word and World* 10, no. 4 (September 1990): 351, accessed October 11, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>2</sup> Churches of Christ/Christian Churches are the most common designations for churches in the United States that grew out of the Restoration Movement under the direction of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell. These titles reflect territorial differences, as well as doctrinal and practical differences. However, all hold strongly to Restoration roots. In this paper, the terms "Church of Christ," "Restoration Movement," and "Stone-Campbell Movement" will refer interchangeably to the broad and varied churches that grew out of early Restoration leadership, while "Restorationists" will indicate members of these churches.

<sup>3</sup> Olson, 350.

will have an impact on our interpretation of Scripture.”<sup>4</sup> This process of crossbreeding life and faith, of culture and Scripture, is more often an unconscious effort. As the philosopher David Bentley Hart reminds us:

So much of what we imagine to be the testimony of reason or clear and unequivocal evidence of our senses is really only an interpretive reflex, determined by mental habits impressed in us by an intellectual and cultural history. Even our notion of what might constitute a ‘rational’ or ‘realistic’ view of things is largely a product not of a dispassionate attention to facts, but of an ideological legacy. . . . If we examine the premises underlying our beliefs and reasoning honestly and indefatigably enough, we will find that our deepest principles often consist in nothing more—but nothing less—than a certain way of seeing things, an original inclination of the mind toward reality from a certain perspective.<sup>5</sup>

It is therefore natural to be unaware of the cultural and philosophical influences on tradition and theology. These blinders are found in all Christian communities, as Eugene S. Heideman argues: “Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestants from North America, Europe, and the Middle East are often remarkably insensitive to their own long contextualization, syncretizing traditions.”<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Shreiter gives a more positive assessment, suggesting that: “While all Christians hope that their theological expression is firmly rooted in biblical witness, they also know that it is shaped by language and concepts, both of which have strong culture-specific components.”<sup>7</sup> Either way, Craig Blomberg highlights the significant role contextualization plays in the work of establishing churches: “Every successful cross-cultural communication of the gospel that

---

<sup>4</sup> Randall J. Harris and Rubel Shelby, *The Second Incarnation: Empowering the Church for the 21st Century* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 1992), 19.

<sup>5</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Conscious, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 293-4.

<sup>6</sup> Eugene P. Heideman, “Syncretism, Contextualization, Orthodoxy, and Heresy,” *Missiology* 25, no. 1 (January 1997): 40, accessed October 11, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>7</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, “Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies,” *Missiology* 12, no. 3 (July 1984): 261, accessed October 11, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

has led to a truly indigenous church with significant social impact throughout church history has involved contextualization, whether implemented consciously or not.”<sup>8</sup>

The founding historical and philosophical milieu of a church plays a significant role in the development of its theology and practice, which becomes a part of the DNA of that community, lasting long after the original context has changed. This particular mindset is given further credence by the fact that they “emerged as reaction to what was once considered . . . excesses.”<sup>9</sup> Calling the church back to a pure, unmediated gospel, the early Restorationists claim to have a more honest, unadulterated proclamation of the Bible. When “(r)eactionary views . . . become consolidated and established as part of a tradition . . . usually lead towards a biased understanding,”<sup>10</sup> that takes on the same meaning as “gospel.” Early Restorationists “assume the assured results and orthodoxy of their own creedal and liturgical traditions and their ministerial orders as if these must be of universal application rather than understood as a valuable but somewhat provincial contextualized endeavor to confess the faith.”<sup>11</sup>

Contextualization was very much the story of the Restorationists. Their claim was to be free from human tradition, to be “New Testament Christians” only. They held to classical theology, in which they “conceived theology as a kind of objective science of faith. It was understood as a reflection in faith on the two *loci theologici* (theological sources) of scripture and tradition, the context of which has not and never will be

---

<sup>8</sup> Craig Blomberg, “We Contextualize More than We Realize,” in *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization*, ed. Matthew Cook, Rob Haskell, Ruth Julian, and Natee Tanchanpongs (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Unitas Press, 2004), 124.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Heideman, 40.

changed, and is above culture and historically conditioned expression.”<sup>12</sup> Revelation was “understood in terms of eternal truths framed in unchanging and unchangeable divinely given language . . . having little or nothing to do with the realities of culture or social change.”<sup>13</sup> Because of this, early Restorationists like Stone and Campbell felt compelled to call churches to return to their original, untainted biblical roots, overstepping eighteen hundred years of church development, creeds and traditions, to recapture the pure and authentic divine truth. This return to Christianity’s primitive foundations perpetuated “the illusion of existing without tradition”<sup>14</sup> that exists even today. “This unique self-understanding has served to create institutional identity out of a denial of institutional identity, and it has shaped the history and character of Churches of Christ in countless and often paradoxical ways.”<sup>15</sup> Fundamentally, it has blinded the church to its actual historical, cultural, and theological roots based firmly in “the rugged nineteenth-century American frontier.”<sup>16</sup> In short, the Restorationists “have never been much fond of their history,”<sup>17</sup> because they failed to see that “*biblical interpretation (or theology) is always a human enterprise.*”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in A Secular World* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Paul M. Blowers, “Neither Calvinists nor Arminians, but Simply Christians: The Stone-Campbell Movement as a Theological Resistance Movement,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 2000): 146, accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>17</sup> David Edwin Harrell, Jr., “Christian Primitivism and Modernization in the Stone-Campbell Movement,” in *Primitive Church in the Modern World*, ed. Richard H. Hughes (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 114.

<sup>18</sup> Allen, 26 (*italics in original*).

Yet, their historical context influenced important theological and ecclesiological concepts, which contributed to the displacement of spirituality, transformation and the experiential focus of the gospel. Our first task is to understand the particular philosophical and historical context that gave birth to the Restoration Movement that contributed to the jettisoning of spirituality and divine immanence. This section will take on the task of describing the historical and philosophical context for the Restoration Movement, exploring how this particular mindset impacted the Movement's theological understanding of salvation, the Bible, and spirituality.

### Restoration Context

At the time of this writing, the Restoration Movement boasts over a million members in the United States and more than double that overseas in Asia and Africa.<sup>19</sup> This movement came from humble roots in the United States during the first decades of the nineteenth century. However, Restoration Movement leaders like Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) and Barton Stone (1782-1844) set out *not* to start a new denomination, but to bring unity to a severely divided Christianity in the United States.

### *Formational Context*

The Restoration Movement that birthed the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches developed in the newly settled mid- and upper-southern Atlantic states during the Post-revolutionary period. As settlers moved west, emboldened by revolutionary ideas, they also moved away from the centers of ecclesiastical powers, allowing for a new synthesis of “evangelical Protestant religion, republican political ideology, and

---

<sup>19</sup> For statistics for church membership of Independent Christian Churches, see *The Association of Religion Data Archives* at [http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D\\_1070.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D_1070.asp).

commonsense moral reasoning.”<sup>20</sup> This provided the perfect formula for the growth of the new and autonomous churches that quickly sprang up during the early 1800s.

The first major influence on these new churches was republicanism. Republicanism was the popular ideology of statehood under which the people hold popular sovereignty, that contributed to the rhetoric of freedom and liberty that permeated the air via the recent American Revolution. “Only by renouncing all institutional forms could ‘the oppressed . . . go free, and taste the sweets of gospel liberty,’”<sup>21</sup> wrote Campbell. Stone likewise stated that the attempt “to impose any form of government upon the church . . . should be justly abandoned by every child of gospel liberty.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore people could act on their own without reliance on church hierarchies or divinely appointed leaders. Encouraged by the eighteenth century Great Awakening, common people experienced the personal movement of God and a growing sense that the established church was no longer speaking for them. As the settlers migrated west, older Protestant churches were unable to keep up with the growing needs for pastors in the new territories. The arrival of the eastern-educated, privileged pastors on the frontier only fed the changing views of governance and the new “confidence in the religious powers of the people.”<sup>23</sup> Rejecting the snobbish clergy, the “reform-minded immigrants found themselves in a congenial setting far from persecuting bishops.”<sup>24</sup> Local church leaders,

---

<sup>20</sup> Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 77.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Noll, 76.

with little more than rudimentary training, were free to preach to the best of their ability. “The Methodists with their circuit riders and emotional preaching, the Baptists with their democratic polity and critique of infant baptism, and the Christian movement with its sense of restoring the New Testament church were sweeping the nation.”<sup>25</sup>

Into this mix came a second major influence. European immigrants from dissenting churches imbibed in the newest philosophical thinking, including Alexander Campbell and his father, Thomas, who were both active in the Restitution Churches of Scotland. Once in America, they found fertile soil for “the restitution of the apostolic church”<sup>26</sup> among newly forming congregations. Reminiscent of the situation in Scotland, “the climate for religious groups to develop independent of any official church authority”<sup>27</sup> made it possible for a number of independent churches to spring up. These new churches developed free of traditional theology, historical precedence, and direction from established churches. According to Hatch, “these movements empowered ordinary people by taking their deepest spiritual impulses at face value rather than subjecting them to the scrutiny of orthodox doctrine and the frowns of respectable clergymen.”<sup>28</sup> This opened a floodgate for the establishment of new churches, directed by ordinary people

---

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Dwight Bozeman, “Biblical Primitivism: An Approach to New England Puritanism,” in *The Quest for the Primitive Church*, ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 26.

<sup>25</sup> David L. Holmes, “Restoration Ideology among Early Episcopal Evangelicals.” In *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 164.

<sup>26</sup> Lynn A. McMillion, *Restoration Roots* (Dallas, TX: Gospel Teachers Publications, 1983), 88.

<sup>27</sup> C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes. *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Hatch, 10.



who “wanted their leaders unpretentious, their doctrines self-evident and down-to-earth . . . and their churches in local hands.”<sup>29</sup>

Though claiming to stand alone in the rejection of all tradition and for original forms of pure Christianity, Restorationists “actually stood shoulder to shoulder with Zwinglians, Puritans, Baptists, and others who also imagined they stood alone.”<sup>30</sup>

Beginning with the Zwinglians and the Anabaptists in Europe, “Proponents of ‘restoration’ . . . sought a direct and unmediated understanding of Scripture, rejecting almost completely the tradition shaped by church councils, theologians, and creeds.”<sup>31</sup>

For the Anabaptist, it was the return to the basic teachings of the New Testament. The Puritans focused on the Old Testament, and, as the “new Israel,” they were confident “that they had fully recovered the ancient and pure way.”<sup>32</sup> To free themselves from the restraints of tradition and human practices, “a number of religious movements dedicated themselves to recovering primitive Christianity.”<sup>33</sup> This “*primordial reform* . . . dominated both the worldview and the theological method of Christian Humanism, Reformed tradition, and the Puritans”<sup>34</sup> that fed naturally into the Restoration Movement.

Mormons and “Christians” came to birth and Baptists experienced significant growth and popularity precisely when numerous factors converged to make the appeal to pure beginnings a powerful dimension of American popular culture. In this context, and in the face of a bewildering array of Christian denominations,

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>30</sup> Allen and Hughes, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Hughes and C. Leonard Allen. *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988), 5.

sectarians found that the appeal to pure beginnings was the surest way to cut through the confusion of religious pluralism.<sup>35</sup>

Into this historical setting came rationalist philosophy. Campbell had been trained in common sense moral reasoning and ethics during his time at Glasgow, where Francis Hutcheson developed his thinking (1730-1746).<sup>36</sup> The leaders of the Restoration Movement in general were “deeply influenced by Bacon, Locke, and the Scottish common sense philosophers,”<sup>37</sup> that brought “to the fore the primacy of empirical observation and the importance of compiling and comparing facts.”<sup>38</sup> During the Revolution, rationalism’s marriage to republicanism provided the foundations for a unified American society out of great cultural diversity. It was believed that this thinking might also bring unity to the divided churches. According to Noll, by the “1820s Protestant precepts had joined securely to the principles of republican and commonsense reason.”<sup>39</sup>

At this time two major theological issues surfaced. The first was the proliferation of denominations. This led many to ask the question of why the church was so divided. Joseph Smith, at age seventeen, asked this very question when visited by “God and Jesus,” where he “learned from them that all the churches then existing were false and that he would be the agent of the restoration of the true church.”<sup>40</sup> The search was on for

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>36</sup> Noll, 94.

<sup>37</sup> J. Caleb Clanton. *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 13.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>39</sup> Noll, 11.

the primitive church that would provide the foundation to unify and restore the church. For Stone and Campbell, unifying the Church around Biblical (not denominational) truth became their driving concern.

A further concern for many dissenting immigrants was the Calvinistic belief that “a direct operation of the Holy Spirit was a necessary prerequisite to saving faith or that a person be regenerated before he could believe.”<sup>41</sup> During the revivals in the late 1800s, a mourner’s bench was provided for those who were waiting for the Spirit to come on them. Churches required individuals to give a testimony of a spiritual experience before bestowing membership. The stress and doubt from these practices gave rise to a more rationalist interpretation of Scripture to provide greater assurance of salvation.

### *Restoration Theology and Practices*

Out of this historical and philosophical context grew the three major characteristics that from its inception distinguished the Restoration Movement: Biblicism, church unity, and salvation. Each is rooted in New Testament primitivism and common sense philosophy.

*Biblicism.* Numerous Restoration leaders developed independently the concept that the Bible alone is a sufficient guide for knowledge and practice for Christian faith. What had transpired over the centuries was the “‘inventions of men’ that have clouded

---

<sup>40</sup> Jan Shipps, “The Reality of the Restoration and the Restoration Ideals in the Mormon Tradition,” in *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 183.

<sup>41</sup> Pat Brooks, “Alexander Campbell, the Holy Spirit, and the New Birth,” *Restoration Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (January 1, 1989): 151, accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

the divine pattern.”<sup>42</sup> Doctrines of religion, Robert Owens suggested, “create and perpetuate . . . a total want of mental charity among men [and] generate superstitions, bigotry, hypocrisy, hatred, revenge, wars, and all their evil consequences.”<sup>43</sup> It was believed by early Restorationists that the vast array of competing doctrines and denominations came from human-made theologies, traditions, and creeds. Calvinism was common fodder for arguments against doctrines that left people both confused and uncertain of their salvation. Frequent debates involving Campbell and Presbyterian leaders demonstrated the illogical nature of Calvinistic thinking compared to the plain teaching of the Bible. This led Campbell to view “metaphysical/ theological speculation with the same sort of antipathy Locke was prone to view them with.”<sup>44</sup>

Into this confusion of doctrines and divisions stepped Restorationist’s primitivism that drew primarily on the first century apostolic church found in Acts. With the Bible as the only source of God’s revelation, it was possible to determine “universally revealed facts, which cannot but be true.”<sup>45</sup> In this rationalist milieu, the Bible became a book of facts to be viewed like nature: information to be studied and organized in a clear and understandable form. Restorationists “believed that while others interpreted the Bible, they did not. . . . If their understandings were identical with the Bible’s intent and

---

<sup>42</sup> C. Leonard Allen, “Roger Williams and ‘the Restoration of Zion,’” in *The Quest for the Primitive Church*, ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 36.

<sup>43</sup> Richard J. Chero, *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell’s Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America*. (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008), 58.

<sup>44</sup> Clanton, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Chero, 57.

purpose, there was really, then, no reason to do any further search.”<sup>46</sup> This created a basis for absolute intellectual certainty in exchange for any forms of freedom or inquiry.

As the Bible gained central importance, the Holy Spirit was understood primarily in service to the Word. As Campbell noted in 1824, “since those gifts (of the Spirit) have ceased, the Holy Spirit now operates upon the minds of men only by the word.”<sup>47</sup> By the 1830s, Restoration church leaders denied that the Spirit was “a personal agent or anything more than a mere influence, firmly shackling the Holy Spirit to the word.”<sup>48</sup> God now worked through his final revelation, the Bible.

God’s power to affect people, [Campbell] said many times, is “all contained in (revealed) words.” Since the Bible already contains all the arguments which can be offered to reconcile man to God and to purify them who are reconciled, therefore “all the power of the Holy Spirit which can operate on the human mind is spent.” To be filled with the Spirit thus meant little more than having the words and arguments of the Bible in one’s mind.<sup>49</sup>

This thinking would also lead to a dispensational view of the Bible, where the Old Testament was God’s revelation specifically for the Jews, the Gospels for the first century early church, and the Epistles being the primary and final revelation for the church today.

This Biblicism of Campbell and Stone then removed the need for church traditions that were seen as the cause of division among churches and the Holy Spirit. However, Campbell clearly “did not just read the Bible, purely and simply. He read it as a grandchild of the Puritans . . . as a child of the European and American Enlightenments

---

<sup>46</sup> Hughes and Allen, *Illusions*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>49</sup> C. Leonard Allen, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and After) the Modern Age* (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2004), 62.

. . . as an ardent disciple of John Locke and of the Scottish Common Sense philosophers.”<sup>50</sup> Such reading relied extensively on human reason.

*Unity.* For early Restorationists, church unity would come through a return to a pure and simple teaching of the Bible. Campbell “was a rationalist who based Christian union on adherence to the New Testament as a kind of scientific blueprint for the church.”<sup>51</sup> Applying reason to God’s final revelation to the Apostles, the church had an adequate guide for its structure and practice that could find universal agreement. This simple, honest, and rational study of the Bible would untangle “the Holy Scriptures from the perplexities of the commentators and system makers of the dark ages.”<sup>52</sup> This included discarding words and phrases like “Trinity” that Campbell called “the rubbish of human traditions for hundreds of years.”<sup>53</sup> The idea was to make “the Bible . . . plainly understandable, in both a literal and a logical way.”<sup>54</sup> “Campbell believed that stripping away accretions of theology and tradition would restore peace, harmony, and vitality to the Christian church.”<sup>55</sup> So confident was Campbell in the process that he stated that “his movement had, in fact, recovered primitive Christianity in its entirety.”<sup>56</sup> He fully believed that primitive Christianity would restore the true church and bring about unity.

---

<sup>50</sup> Allen, *Cruciform*, 39.

<sup>51</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Hatch, 163.

<sup>53</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Gregory McKinzie, “Barton Stone’s Unorthodox Christology,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 33, accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>55</sup> Hatch, 163.

<sup>56</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 23.

With such a narrow focus, Campbell gave “little attention to the doctrine of God and focus[ed] more on issues of ecclesiology.”<sup>57</sup>

*Salvation.* In this new republican society, inundated with preachers with little knowledge of the finer nuances of theological thinking, Calvinism became a major focus of debate. Calvin’s view of God’s election and salvation lacked security because of human depravity. God’s provision of faith was necessary for the individual to respond to the gospel, requiring seekers to “undergo weeks and months of uncertainty seeking all the while for a sign that one was in fact among the redeemed.”<sup>58</sup> The Restoration leaders, influenced by the Scottish Dissent churches with Anabaptist leanings, applied simple rational thinking to the question of salvation to determine that salvation came through the preaching of the gospel and by a simple examination of the facts. “In this system it is premised that divine influence reaches man wholly through the intellectual powers; that conversion is wholly from the force of knowledge and motive offered to understanding.”<sup>59</sup> This intellectual pursuit would bring a person to belief and baptism.

This particular view of salvation did three things. First, it removed the Holy Spirit from the process of salvation. Since the Spirit was primarily tied to understanding the Bible, “the Spirit of God converted sinners only through the written word.”<sup>60</sup> Though Campbell would defend a high pneumatology, many “increasingly found little or no place

---

<sup>57</sup> Mark E. Powell, “Canonical Theism and Theological Commitments in the Stone-Campbell Movement,” *Restoration Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (January 1, 2009): 231, accessed April 1, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Holbright, “Alexander Campbell’s View of the Holy Spirit,” *Restoration Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1962): 10, accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>60</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 100.

for the Holy Spirit, even following conversion,” in his soteriology.<sup>61</sup> Too often Western theologies of salvation have lacked “a balance between the work of Christ and the Spirit.”<sup>62</sup> This lack of balance is clearly evident in early Restoration theology.

Second, it took away doubt and fear. Salvation became a sure thing as God’s promise of salvation was sealed in baptism. Campbell “declared that the design of baptism was to give believers an assurance or ‘formal token’ of their ‘cleansing’ from all sins.”<sup>63</sup> Third, it based salvation squarely on human understanding and initiative. “What frightened Campbell most in this regard was . . . that the Holy Spirit might work on the hearts of men and women separate and apart from the Bible. Campbell rightly surmised that such a view undermined a rational and scientific approach to the biblical text.”<sup>64</sup> As Fluhman argues, “a vibrant supernaturalism ran against powerful, secularizing cultural currents [based on] assumptions relating to nature’s predictability and orderliness.”<sup>65</sup> The movement then “built its house on the foundation of human initiative and self-sufficiency inherited from Alexander Campbell.”<sup>66</sup>

With the Gospels now viewed as a set of facts to be rationally examined and affirmed, salvation was no longer a matter of doubt. Once believed and acted upon in

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>62</sup> Karkkainen, 32.

<sup>63</sup> D. Newell Williams, *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 175.

<sup>64</sup> Hughes and Allen, *Discovering Our Roots*, 85.

<sup>65</sup> J. Spencer Fluhman, “*A Peculiar People*”: *Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 45.

<sup>66</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 144.



baptism, complete assurance of eternal salvation was acquired. Once believed and affirmed by all denominations, unity would be restored throughout all of Christendom.

### *Restoration Legacy*

The concepts of Biblicism, unity, and salvation continue to influence the thinking of the Restoration churches and dilute the spiritual and transformational power of the gospel in several significant areas, including grace, Christo-centrism, Biblicism, the Trinity and personal transformation.

The first concerns grace. The grace of God is the initiating factor for all spiritual experiences, not human action. However, grace is rarely discussed by the founders of the Restoration Movement. For Campbell, the “mark of God’s grace in Jesus Christ” was no less than “the establishment of a means by which believers could know, once and for all, that their sins had been forgiven and that they had been given the Holy Spirit.”<sup>67</sup> That “means” for assurance was baptism.

For Campbell, what is considered fundamental for salvation was not grace but obedience to the five-fold tasks of salvation, four of which are human responses (repent, believe, confess and be baptized) and only one is a gift from God: the Holy Spirit. By the late nineteenth century, the understanding of the gift of the Spirit was exorcised for another human response: obedience. What God intended as an outpouring of grace had become a set of human actions.

The second concern is the lack of Christo-centrism. True Christian spirituality centers on the person of Jesus Christ. In early Restoration theology, like “many

---

<sup>67</sup> D. Newell Williams, “Disciples’ Piety: A Historical Review with Implications for Spiritual Formation,” *Encounter* 47, no. 1 (December 1, 1986): 7, accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

traditional and contemporary Christologies, we see a curious lack of focus on the earthly life and ministry of Christ.”<sup>68</sup> This has resulted in a loss of Christo-praxis, a concern “with the knowledge of Christ in his meaning for us today, lead[ing] to discipleship and appreciation of community in which the ‘practical’ reflection on the teaching and life example of Jesus is being practiced.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, “Jesus’ life of service, culminating in his self-giving death and revealing the character of God’s reign, is often overlooked (Mark 10:45).”<sup>70</sup>

The Christo-centric loss is the result of a severe Biblicism, our third concern. The early Restoration view of the Bible creates several problems. First, the testimony concerning Jesus Christ is now relegated to historical data. What was “a stunning display of suffering love, increasingly became a bare contract.”<sup>71</sup> Second, it presents the book of Acts and the Epistles as the revelation that alone speaks to the present dispensation of the church, which focuses primarily on conversion and church practice. Third, it fails to understand “Scripture as mediating a divine reality, which always transcends Scripture itself. It becomes an idol when our faith becomes focused on Scripture rather than in the God Scripture reveals to us.”<sup>72</sup> For some Restorationists, “The Bible was our religion. Getting religion was getting the Bible. Knowing God was knowing the Bible.”<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 44.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Ben Wiebe, “Cross Currents: Rethinking Atonement (with Reflection on Campbell, Stone, and Scott),” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13, no. 2 (September 1, 2010): 193, accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>71</sup> Allen, *Cruciform*, 135.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>73</sup> McKinzie, 43.

This narrow Biblicism had numerous consequences. It limited Restoration thinking and it “drained Christianity of its belief in the miraculous.”<sup>74</sup> It misplaced Christ’s passion for the world, his teachings on love and forgiveness, and his life of self-sacrifice. With the Old Testament virtually ignored, the church lost the “dominantly Hebraic world vision within which the church was born.”<sup>75</sup> Jesus’ Jewish roots and the prophetic fulfillment that were the basis of his life and ministry, along with the promises and illustrations of actuality for the divine-human relationship were also lost. What is left is a properly functioning, biblically structured church devoid of Christ’s real presence and the larger story of the Bible that “announces God’s initiative towards human beings, of God’s suffering and searching love, of divine mercy and forgiveness, of covenant faithfulness . . . that calls people into a living relationship with God . . . .”<sup>76</sup>

The fourth weakness is the loss of the Trinity. Having lost interest in the theological struggles of history and having a distaste for non-biblical terminology, the Trinity was considered by the Stone-Campbell movement a doctrine that was “unintelligible.”<sup>77</sup> Barton Stone, who feared not being authentically biblical, argued against the Trinity because it lacked a rational and simple understanding.

The Trinity is foundational for both salvation and the Christian life. The Trinity makes possible the incarnation, God crucified, and Christ’s real presence in the lives of believers through the Holy Spirit. It makes understandable unity in diversity. Separating

---

<sup>74</sup> Fluhman, 44.

<sup>75</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Primitivism in the Radical Reformation: Strengths and Weaknesses,” in *Primitive Church in the Modern World*, ed. Richard H. Hughes (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 82.

<sup>76</sup> Allen, *Cruciform*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> McKinzie, 39.

Jesus from the work of the Holy Spirit and separating Jesus from God the Father and Creator loses the beauty and possibility of God's majestic plan for redemption and reconciliation. Jesus' death merely forgives sins without sanctification, adoption or indwelling.

This results in the final concern, an absence of the personal and transformational presence of God in the believer. "There was no room in Campbell's theology for mysterious urges, inner influences, and supernatural transforming powers."<sup>78</sup> For Campbell, righteousness was primarily a human effort. "Holiness is conformity to the universal law of love to God and man [sic], both in the spirit and letter of it. In heart, the saints love God and man [sic]; in life they keep the commandments."<sup>79</sup> What is ultimately lost is the "profound mystery that engages us [and] deepens as we experience the divine love and glimpse the transcendent purpose"<sup>80</sup> that God's incarnation and indwelling presence reveal. What was rejected was the belief that the "Holy Spirit of God is imparted to the believer, really and truly, taking up his abode in his person, as a distinct guest."<sup>81</sup> Instead, the "Spirit has been institutionalized, so that in place of the free, dynamic, personal and particular agency of the Spirit, he is made into a substance which becomes the possession of the church."<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Tim Woodroof, *A Spirit for the Rest of Us: What Jesus Said about the Holy Spirit and How it Applies to Your Life* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2009), 196.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Rea, "'Holiness' in the Writings of Early Stone-Campbell Movement Leaders," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 8, no. 2 (September 1, 2005): 166, accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>80</sup> Allen, *Cruciform*, 65.

<sup>81</sup> Allen, *Unseen*, 73.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

This view of God, lacking the Trinitarian nature of the Spirit’s indwelling and eternal love, separated from the Father’s extensive history of long-suffering and passion for his people, has resulted in a salvation merely about facts and forgiveness. The early movement lacked the language and practices for intimate and life-changing spiritual connection that is the true heart of God and the full message of the gospel.

### Summary

Starting off with the best intentions of restoring the Church to its pure and glorious roots found in the New Testament, the Restoration Movement underestimated the hold of the times on their “vision of the Scriptures”<sup>83</sup> and it overestimated their “ability to get back, to recover the ideal time.”<sup>84</sup> The movement drew far afield of its goal by ignoring its own historical, philosophical, and theological roots. By 1865, what had developed was a “sectarian tradition of Biblical legalism, a fanatical disposition, and uncompromising separation from the world.”<sup>85</sup> Recently one author commented on the movement’s impotency on the heart that resulted in “multitudes of prayerless, saintless, Christless, joyless hearts.”<sup>86</sup> What was lost was not only centuries of history, theology, and traditions, but three essential aspects of Christianity that proved detrimental to true spirituality: (1) a broad and inspired view of Scripture; (2) a robust understanding of

---

<sup>83</sup> Noll, 127

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Harrell, 122.

<sup>86</sup> Mark John Hicks, “The Role of Faith in Conversion: Balancing Faith, Christian Experience and Baptism,” in *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. William R. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), Kindle, 1200.

salvation; and (3) the loss of authentic spirituality.<sup>87</sup> It will be necessary then to reexamine the issues of the Bible, salvation, and effective spirituality with new eyes to rectify the shortcomings of the Biblicist mindset of the Stone-Campbell movement, in order to help individuals move towards an authentic divine-human involvement.

---

<sup>87</sup> These foundational views continue to influence today's Restoration theologians. For instance, Evertt Ferguson writes: "People often want to objectify or psychologize the presence of the Spirit and so identify the coming of the Spirit with some feeling. . . . The proper perspective is to view the gift of the Holy Spirit in the same way as the forgiveness of sins. Both rest on the promises of God, and God cannot lie . . . . Just as we trust in God for forgiveness of sins, so we trust in him that the Spirit dwells" (in *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing., 1996], 204.) The same concern is found in Virgil Warren's study, *What the Bible Says About Salvation*. He states that "*salvation has centrally to do with restoring interpersonal relationship*," but only touches on relationship with God briefly in the first three pages, never to return to the topic again in the remaining 500 pages (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1982, 5, italics in the original). Over one-third of the book is focused on baptism, without referencing either the gift of the Spirit or union with Christ. Restoration theologian Jack Cottrell's treatment of the Holy Spirit, discussed in Section 2, demonstrates a similar distance from relational language and free actions of the Spirit. He argues that the gift of the Holy Spirit is to "provide us with an indwelling source of moral power . . ." but says nothing about the intimate union made possible between God and humanity through the Spirit. Jack Cotrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Redeemer: The Doctrine of God*, vol.3 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1987), 259.

## SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

### Introduction

Today, there is no shortage of books, websites, and conferences on spirituality. The last few decades have “seen a kind of spiritual renewal in America.”<sup>88</sup> For Protestants, this is due to a growing awareness that “the New Testament is not concerned with mere conversion, but rather with formation and transformation, with ‘life in Christ’ . . . or ‘walking in the Spirit.’”<sup>89</sup> The material on spiritual formation today is both abundant and readily accessible for church members. However, it must be asked whether this popular renewal of spiritual awareness speaks into the Restoration worldview. Can this recent interest in spirituality provide resources for spiritual connection and development for the Restoration Church member? This author will argue that because of the particular historical and theological context of the Restoration mindset, acceptance and application of valuable contemporary spiritual formation teaching will find little traction. A Restoration critique—based on a Restoration perspective of the Bible, salvation and mission—would question whether popular spiritual approaches are thoroughly scriptural; whether they hold to the traditional understanding of salvation; and finally, whether they speak to the rationalist sensibility. This critique will find most recent spiritual literature lacking. Three important aspects of modern spirituality will be

---

<sup>88</sup> Anderson R. Campbell, “Realms and Redescription in Ricoeur: Discovering Fresh Metaphoric Networks for Spiritual Formation in a Postmodern Consumer Culture” (DMin diss., George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2013), 18. Accessed October 15, 2015, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/45>.

<sup>89</sup> Rick Langer, “Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement,” *Journal Of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 183, accessed January 27, 2014, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

shown to collide with the most basic beliefs of the Restorationists preventing even a hearing of possible helpful insights for deeper divine connection. The three aspects of contemporary spirituality that will be examined are individualism, extra-biblical resources, and goodness-based spirituality. Also recent Restoration literature will be reviewed to determine the availability of spiritual formation resources within the tradition.

### Individualist Spirituality

The first Restoration criticism of popular Christian spirituality is its apparent individualism. “So much of the literature today is focused on the individual, the self.”<sup>90</sup> Restorationists generally view modern spiritual practices to assume that it is within the grasp of humans to bring about, through personal disciplines, the completion of the salvific task. Much spirituality further holds that movement toward God requires a similar movement within, toward self-discovery. For Restorationists, any tendency toward individualism and discipline as central to spiritual formation is suspect.

Restorationists see an individualist and discipline focus approach upon reading Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, which suggests, “God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”<sup>91</sup> Restorationists interpret the goal of spiritual formation is to locate oneself properly to receive both the blessings of God and inner righteousness. A number of self-regulated practices are available for

---

<sup>90</sup> Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (Costa Mesa, CA: Paulist Press, 1996), 20.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1978), 7.



the individual to draw from. This also can be found in Dallas Willard's writings, who suggests: "Spiritual formation in Christ is the process through which disciples or apprentices of Jesus take on the qualities or characteristics of Christ himself, in every essential dimension of human personality."<sup>92</sup> His definition of spiritual formation is also viewed by Restorationists as individualistic, highlighting the inward, psychic change as central to spiritual development.

In another popular introduction to Christian mysticism, John R. Mabry defines mysticism as the "*pursuit of—or enjoyment of—union with God*" and goes on to quote Julian of Norwich as saying, "And this I saw God, and sought God. I had God, and at the same time I wanted God. And this is, and should be, what we are all working towards."<sup>93</sup> Notably, this book focuses on how the individual (the persistent "I" in Julian's quote) who can make "a home with God."<sup>94</sup> Similarly, in Richard Rohr's work, this self-focus taken to greater lengths. "Yet the answer we seek is already inside each of us and largely resolved—not fashion but fact. Our True Self knows that there is no place to go or to get to. We are already at home—free and filled."<sup>95</sup>

This focus on finding the true self apart from a communal discovery in Christ is echoed in Phileena Heuertz's book *Pilgrimage of the Soul*. "We are asleep to our unconscious motivations, and these motivations mask our true self. In essence we are

---

<sup>92</sup> Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation and the Warfare Between the Flesh and the Human Spirit," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 152-159, accessed January 27, 2014, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, 152.

<sup>93</sup> John R. Mabry, *Growing into God: A Beginner's Guide to Christian Mysticism* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2012), 3; emphasis in the original.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2013), 22.

hiding.”<sup>96</sup> Her book is a very personal study confronting her own masks that prevented her from enjoying the presence of God. Heuertz’s husband Christopher likewise suggests that what holds one back from seeing and knowing God is how “I perceive myself through false identities.”<sup>97</sup> Similarly, the self in spiritual formation is evident in Diane Butler Bass, who writes that salvation means “being saved to ourselves”<sup>98</sup> because ultimately “Salvation and spirituality and self are related.”<sup>99</sup>

Thomas Merton critiques this tendency toward self-focus spirituality by arguing that “we might profitably admit that much that passes for ‘contemplation’ is mere narcissism and self-love.”<sup>100</sup> More recently, the Franciscan priest Joseph Nangle concluded that

in the United States, spiritual writers and practitioners tend to concentrate on the individual. An amazing amount of attention goes to concerns regarding one’s own life in God, one’s development as a person, the obstacles in the way of realizing one’s full potential. We put great emphasis on an individualistic, highly psychologized—not to say narcissistic—approach to spiritual matters. In this culture, I came to believe, that spirituality seems to be basically ‘all about me.’<sup>101</sup>

This perceived tendency toward individualistic spiritual teachings presents three major stumbling blocks for Restorationists. First, some Restorationist consider salvation a completed work. Any suggestions of further efforts to add to one’s salvation or to

---

<sup>96</sup> Phileena Heuertz, *Pilgrimage of a Soul* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>97</sup> Christopher Heuertz, *Simple Spirituality: Seeing God in a Broken World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>98</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 182.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 115.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph Nangle, *Engaged Spirituality: Faith Life in the Heart of Empire* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), xv.

better connect with God are viewed as irrelevant. Calls for fasting, extended prayer, meditation, retreats and tithing could only be considered matters of works, adding human effort to God's gracious gift of salvation. The need for disciplines to develop a "deeper spirituality" or "closer walk with Christ" would make little rational sense, in spite of clear biblical instruction for "working out your salvation" (Phil. 2:12, NASB<sup>102</sup>).

The second stumbling block is the individual focus of this approach.

Traditionally, the Restoration Movement gave central place to the church as the recipient of salvation and the Holy Spirit. Personal spiritual experiences only perpetuate the "trendy myth that the sole aim of Christianity is to help the individual build a good 'personal relationship with the Lord.'"<sup>103</sup> It was not on the self that Jesus gave attention, nor was the individual the focus of the Holy Spirit. "Scripture focuses more on the role of the Spirit *in the community* . . . . The emphasis is not on the individual. Personal fulfillment or enjoyment are not factors."<sup>104</sup> Rowan Williams questions the nature of this personalized spirituality by asking whether it "speaks of the God whose nature is self-dispossession for the sake of the life of the other . . . [or] the divine relinquishment of 'interest' and claim as embodied in the life and death of Jesus?"<sup>105</sup> Ironically, the God claimed by some writers, who emptied himself for the sake of the other, has given birth to a spirituality that is persistently self-centered. Mulholland suggests that the cross of

---

<sup>102</sup> All Bible quotes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: The University of Abilene Press, 2002), 135.

<sup>104</sup> Childers, 181; emphasis in the original.

<sup>105</sup> Rowan Williams, "Interiority and Epiphany: A Reading in New Testament Ethics," in *Spirituality and Social Embodiment*, eds. L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 49.

Christ should remind us that Christ-likeness can never be a “self-referenced, self-contained achievement independent from our life with others in creation” because “God’s love is a radically other-referenced love, a love that seeks the well-being of the other and of all creation.”<sup>106</sup> The Restoration concentration on the corporate work of the Spirit precludes most approaches to this perceived personal spiritual formation.

Finally, for some Restorationists, individual spirituality lacks the ability to bridge spiritual life with practical life. The Church of Christ “is somewhat at a loss when experiential aspects of the life of the Spirit come up [because] the ministries of the Spirit . . . happen at the point of conversion. The Spirit convicts us, regenerates us, and seals us. We experience these works, but they are not exactly experiential.”<sup>107</sup> Restorationists are comfortable delineating the work of the Holy Spirit at conversion, where the task of applying justification to the believer has concreteness. But such goals as “closeness to God” or “growing in Christ,” whose meanings lack concrete definitions and few clear applications to life outside of one’s personal experience, are confusing and uncomfortable.

When salvation is a logical and cognitive affirmation of clearly stated biblical precepts, concepts like “union, participation, partaking, (and) intermingling”<sup>108</sup> find little connection, along with the disciplines necessary for their development. In the movement’s church-centered focus, with salvation understood as a finished task, any hint of personal and progressive spirituality finds little resonance.

---

<sup>106</sup> Robert M. Mulholland, “Spiritual Formation in Christ and the Mission with Christ,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, no. 1 (2013): 13, accessed January 27, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

<sup>107</sup> Langer, 185.

<sup>108</sup> Karkkainen, *One with God*, 31.

### Extra-Biblical Spirituality

The second Restoration critique of contemporary spirituality concerns extra-biblical appropriations in much spiritual teaching. With today's modern globalized culture, there is opportunity to both learn about and to choose from the world's vast collection of spiritualities. Elizabeth Dreyer contributes this to the influence of consumerism, which "fragments the elements of any whole into discrete, free-floating signifiers" which is how society views religion.<sup>109</sup> "Religious doctrines, symbols, and practices have been ripped from the historical, social and historical nexus in which they were born and developed."<sup>110</sup> A free-floating spirituality is abundant in popular mystical literature, which draws widely from multiple traditions. This is especially evident in two areas: the uncritical acceptance of other traditions or religions and the creative re-interpretations of traditional biblical doctrines and teachings.

First, a recent trend in some writings on spiritual formation is to incorporate non-Christian religious concepts and practices in Christian spirituality. In *The Modern Christian Mystic*, Albert J. LaChance encourages openness to other religions by suggesting that the "mission of the true Christian mystic is to expand the understanding or meaning of 'the descendants of Abraham,' certainly to all Jews and Muslims, but now to others as well. To be a 'missionary' will now mean to go to other cultures and learn from them how to identify this interior sentience in their approach to the 'transcendent

---

<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Dreyer, "How to Remain Faithful in a Consuming Culture and Is New Age Spirituality All That New?" *Religious Studies Review* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 1–8, accessed January 27, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost, 2.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

One.”<sup>111</sup> This same openness is found in Richard Rohr’s writings, where he liberally sprinkles wisdom from Eastern thinkers and mystics: “Jews call this Word the Law; Christians call it the *Logos* or the blueprint; Taoists call it the Eternal Tao; Buddhists call it Emptiness or the Great Compassion; Hindus call it Brahman; Sufi Muslims call it the dance; and science speaks of universal theories. But we are all pointing to one underlying truth that we all strive toward in ten thousand ways.”<sup>112</sup> There are no particular distinctions between the authoritative statements from Buddha, Jesus, Tao or Mohammad; they are all treated as equally valid for spiritual formation.

Even Thomas Merton found in his later years a growing openness to other religions, though maintaining Christianity as a more perfect and complete revelation. “Not only did Merton see that contemplatives of other religions than his own. truly met God, but . . . he sometimes felt closer to them than to his own contemporaries.”<sup>113</sup> He concluded that it was “important . . . to try to understand beliefs of other religions.”<sup>114</sup> Powell sees the growing disaffection with modern society as contributing to a “growing interest in the religions of other cultures, including Native American cultures and Asian religions; in ancient and esoteric traditions, including Kabbalah and Celtic religion.”<sup>115</sup>

Second, some Christian writers on spirituality provide few biblical references, and, when they do appear, their creative interpretations result in radically redefined

---

<sup>111</sup> Albert J. LaChance, *The Modern Christian Mystic* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2007), 39.

<sup>112</sup> Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*, 137-8.

<sup>113</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, “Mystics and Sufi Masters: Thomas Merton and Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15, no. 3 (July 2004): 306, accessed January 27, 2014. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Powell, 20.

theological concepts. For example, LaChance uses Abraham's descendants as a defense for seeking wisdom in other cultures with no consideration of the Old Testament context,<sup>116</sup> where God clearly commands the Hebrews to not practice or associate with the religions of their neighbors (Deut. 13:6-11). In *Growing Into God*, the author highlights the story of Jesus healing the paralytic in Mark (never directly quoting the passage) to argue for universal salvation, suggesting that Jesus here "is simply telling the man the truth: 'Your sins are forgiven you.' God holds nothing against you, never has, never will. God doesn't hold anything against anybody. Never has, never will."<sup>117</sup> This is a lovely sentiment, but in the context of Mark's Gospel, Jesus makes the stunning claim of his authority to forgive sin, a task allotted only to God and is deemed necessary by Jesus' appearance in the world. In Mabry's study, he teaches the importance of letting "previous revelations go completely—so that a deeper, truer view of God, the universe, and ourselves can emerge."<sup>118</sup> This begs the question: what are these revelations that should be let go? And if these revelations are biblical and true, should they be jettisoned? What is encouraged is relinquishing any preconceived ideas of God, no matter how orthodox, making possible the formulation of one's own unique view of God not limited to any one tradition or singular text.

Several important Christian doctrines are redefined in *The Modern Christian Mystic*. "Damnation is life lived in the hell of a separate identity. To be 'saved' is to awaken from that hell into the heaven of a unitive and eternal, an undying divine identity.

---

<sup>116</sup> LeChance, 39.

<sup>117</sup> Mabry, 77.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 33.

We are baptized by heaven and earth in that hydrogen is from the heaven and oxygen is from the green plants of Earth. . . . *That* is salvation and nothing less than that!”<sup>119</sup> Here, the concepts of salvation, baptism, heaven, and hell are completely removed from any biblical foundations and mixed with Eastern mysticism (unitive heaven), environmentalism (earth with a capital E) and psychological concepts (self and identity), leaving a confusing hybrid of religions with little connection to orthodox Christianity.

A. N. Williams also sees this trend in some books on spirituality. “The books, the articles, the testimonials, all exhibit a common religiosity undifferentiated with respect to their doctrinal foundations. One may adopt Native American prayer forms, the teachings of a Zen master and Julian of Norwich, making use of all simultaneously.”<sup>120</sup> Religious freedom now means we “express all religious sensibilities indiscriminately.”<sup>121</sup> This ultimately means that “theology is an inconvenience for an eclectic spirituality.”<sup>122</sup>

James M. Houston sees a danger in the lack of discernment in the contemporary Christian spirituality when he asks: “Can evangelicals today, well-meaning in their desire for more ‘spirituality,’ become so naively eclectic in issues of the pursuit of contemporary spirituality? Since only truth stands the test of time these syncretistic adoption . . . can divert undiscerning Christians with ‘tools’ and ‘techniques,’ instead of having a deeper biblical faith.”<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> LaChance, 74; emphasis in the original.

<sup>120</sup> A. N. Williams, “Mystical Theology Redux: The Pattern of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” in *Spirituality and Social Embodiment*, eds. L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 53.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-4.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>123</sup> James M. Houston, “The Future of Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and*



With a Restorationist's high regard for the Scripture, seeking any practices outside the Bible would be unthinkable. If God has spoken finally in the completed, though narrow, canon of the New Testament, there is nothing that can be added. This would apply to non-Christian religions as much as to other church traditions. The accumulated wisdom of the church throughout history, including testimonies of Christian practitioners whose experiences enlightened the faithful through the centuries, is considered insignificant, if not sacrilegious, as it flies in the face of the Restoration ideal of the Bible as the only source of truth. Spiritual writings that incorporate extra-biblical traditions and practices will find little resonance for most Restorationists. Considering these "tools and techniques" to be mere human additions that lack biblical affirmation, they are considered distractions from and heretical to God's sufficient revelation.

#### Goodness-based Spirituality

The final Restoration critique, goodness-based spirituality, recognizes the lack of attention given to the reality of sin and evil in popular spiritual formation literature. Houston perceives that: "'Soul care' today is perhaps a pastoral shift from the much more traditional role of being 'sin-sick,' and of the need of 'soul-cure.'"<sup>124</sup> He goes on to say that "'Sin' has become a peripheral category."<sup>125</sup> The removal of sin and evil from the equation allows for the belief that all creation is harmonious and is a viable resource for personal spiritual harmony.

---

*Soul Care* 4, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 131-139, accessed January 27, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost, 134.

<sup>124</sup> Houston, 135.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

An extreme example of this is found in the writings of Matthew Fox. “Fox places creation at the centre of spirituality, as a centre of value, a locus of the divine, and the foundation of the spiritual life. Fox stresses the beauty and goodness of the created order.”<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Mabry rejects the belief that the world exhibits anything but beauty because God is inseparable from his creation: “For it is in this final stage of Illumination that we realize that God is not in the world, but that the world is *in God*. Divinity . . . reveals to us that, in fact, there are no dark and dire places.”<sup>127</sup> LaChance echoes these ideas, reflecting a Eastern religious worldview in his mysticism when he states: “We are part of a cosmos that was, is, and will be the sacrament of God, the unitive presence of God. We are inseparable from the One because we are made of the One.” He further suggests that “this planet and all others are the self-expression of God and, therefore are divine by their very being.”<sup>128</sup> In both Mabry and LaChance, creation becomes divine, which naturally eliminates any consideration of evil and sin. This same disinterest in dealing with the dark side of creation and the fallen state of humankind is found in Rohr, who states: “For me, this wondrous universe cannot be an incoherent and accidental cosmos, nor can it be grounded in evil, although I admit that this intellectual leap and bias toward beauty is still an act of faith and trust on my part.”<sup>129</sup> He further states that:

---

<sup>126</sup> David Keen, “Creation Spirituality and the Environment Debate.” *Ecotheology: Journal of Religion, Nature and the Environment* 7, no. 1 (July 2002): 13, accessed January 27, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

<sup>127</sup> Mabry, 76; emphasis in the original.

<sup>128</sup> LaChance, 17.

<sup>129</sup> Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 110.

“Faith in any religion is always somehow saying that God is one and God is good, and if so, then all of reality must be that simple and beautiful too.”<sup>130</sup>

In response to this trend, Keen makes two important points. First, in “the Gospels, harmony is restored as Jesus heals the brokenness of nature (storms, scarcity, disease) through the assertion of his *Lordship over*, not *kinship with*, the natural order.”<sup>131</sup> Scripture recognizes the brokenness of creation, which requires Jesus’ transcendence over creation for restoration. Second, he asks the pointed question: “if things really are *not* this bad, then is there a need for a fundamentally new spirituality?”<sup>132</sup>

The unwillingness to confront the fallen state of the world also applies to humanity’s sinful nature. If there exists a true, immortal self—untarnished and divine—there is then no sin to be redeemed or brought to account. Sin in this paradigm becomes hard to define. For Rohr, “sin is any kind of moral mistake; afterward, *sin is a mistake about who you are and whose you are.*”<sup>133</sup> He elsewhere suggests that “the Christian revelation was precisely that you are already spiritual (‘in God’).”<sup>134</sup> In LaChance, the closest reference to sin comes under a discussion of judgment, which is based on “the guilt of living in contradiction to life within.”<sup>135</sup> This suggests that God’s judgment is “our own judgment of ourselves, of the false selves we build to cover our essential, our

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 111; emphasis in the original.

<sup>131</sup> Keen, 22; emphasis in the original.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*, 50; emphasis in the original.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing, 2013), 69.

<sup>135</sup> LaChance, 57.

eternal and divine selves.”<sup>136</sup> As with Fox’s theology, “sin...is not a moral or spiritual state, but is a way of thinking, seeing things in terms of ‘either/or.’”<sup>137</sup> What is needed is not forgiveness, but a change in how we think, especially in our attitudes about ourselves.

Because the central concern in some spirituality is not sin or evil, but wrong attachments, false selves, and blindness to the beauty and harmony of creation, some Restorationists would be most critical. What is missing is the need for conversion, for an entirely new self, due to the reality of sin. According to Paul, the self is not the solution, but the problem, because “the old self . . . is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (Eph. 4:22). A new self is not found within, rather it is found “by faith in Jesus’ life, spirit, and righteousness . . . although within oneself one continues to be a sinner, again and again in need of forgiveness.”<sup>138</sup> Pannenberg argues that “it is our very guilt and sinfulness that will not allow the individual to establish a new identity.”<sup>139</sup> This would suggest that the deeper spiritual life sought by many today is impossible due to the unresolved sin and guilt that separates a person from God. A Restorationist emphasis on conversion recognizes that biblical Christianity understands the reality of sin and evil, which requires no less than God’s intervention in history to bring reconciliation. It is the horrific suffering of Christ on the cross that prevents blindness to the very real issue of sin and to the brokenness of the world. Because of Restorationist’s awareness of the fallen state of man and the cosmos, much spirituality would not receive a hearing among church members of the Restoration Movement.

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Keen, 18.

<sup>138</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983), 21.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 20.

## Restoration Solutions

Within the Stone-Campbell Movement there are very few present day resources focused on spirituality or spiritual formation. The closest one gets are books on the Holy Spirit, that highlight biblical exegesis and polemics more than spiritual insights. The only other resources are recent critiques of the Churches of Christ, which indirectly address spiritual issues.

In the first category, two popular books are available on the Holy Spirit written for a Church of Christ audience within the Restoration Movement. Tim Woodroof, a Restoration pastor, writes in *A Spirit for the Rest of Us* a detailed exegesis of all the passages in the Gospels that specifically reference the Holy Spirit. This is not a theology of the Spirit, as much as verse-by-verse exegesis. The approach is emphatically Christocentric, emphasizing the Spirit's role of teaching, illuminating and drawing one to Jesus Christ. Woodruff argues that "the most fundamental work Jesus came to accomplish will continue through the on-going ministry of the Spirit. And what is that *most fundamental work*? Revealing God to the world. Making the invisible God known."<sup>140</sup> This is accomplished as the Spirit testifies about Jesus and brings to mind the words and actions of Jesus. "But the *Paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Woodruff explains, "The Spirit will remind; but he will also explain and expound. . . He will take the teachings of Jesus and apply them in relevant

---

<sup>140</sup> Tim Woodroof, *A Spirit for the Rest of Us: What Jesus Said about the Holy Spirit and How It Applies to Your Life* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2009), 129; emphasis in original.

ways to believers' new lives and changing circumstances."<sup>141</sup> Woodroof provides one example of the Spirit's work in revealing the purpose of Jesus' cross to the disciples:

The Cross *revealed Jesus*: the depth of his love for us, the extent of his obedience to the Father, his trust in self-giving love as antidote to the power of sin. And the Cross revealed the *Father*: his hatred of sin, his love of the world, the extent to which he would go to win us back to himself. At the Cross, we meet a selfless God of boundless mercy and infinite grace. All of this the Spirit revealed to the first Christians.<sup>142</sup>

Woodroof recognizes that for the Bible to be fully understood and applied requires more than human reason. "We need a Teacher who can touch our minds, showing us what the gospel means in the face of changing circumstances and new challenges [who] will guide you into all truth (John 16:13)."<sup>143</sup>

The author maintains a grounded Restoration stance, in which the Holy Spirit is tied securely to Scripture. This is in spite of the fact that he laments a lack of a more intimate and personal Spirit: "But we also need a Comforter who can touch our hearts, soothing our wounded spirits and fractured feelings. Such a need makes us impatient with those who point so relentlessly (and exclusively) to the Bible as our sole source of spiritual instruction."<sup>144</sup> Though seemingly moving the conversation in a positive direction, Woodruff fails to expound further on this more relational Spirit, nor does he inform the reader on what this other "source of spiritual instructions" might be.

Woodruff suffers from the failings of other Restorationists who attempt to delve into spiritual territory: he lacks both a fully informed pneumatology necessary to develop

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 162; emphasis in the original.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

the Spirit's larger role in sanctification and the spiritual language to capture the depth of connection and communion that is offered by God through the Spirit. In a later chapter, Woodruff suggests ways to "seek the Spirit" that include such general headings as: "Ask for the Spirit," "Become a Spirit Student," and "Develop Spirit Eyes." These practices view the Spirit as an object for study and examination, in a similar way that Scripture is viewed as a scientific specimen to be analyzed. The Spirit is not fully developed as a person to be known through a personal and life-transforming relationship. Again, Woodruff laments that

What we have is Scripture. What we do *not* have is a God who intervenes in the world to accomplish his purposes by any means other than the Bible and believers. What we do *not* have is the presence of Jesus—actual, tangible—accompanying us on our journey and assisting us in our mission. What we do *not* have is an indwelling Spirit, moving mysteriously in the church and in the disciples, working directly in our hearts and minds.<sup>145</sup>

Stunningly, Woodruff is able to articulate with great clarity the missing elements, but his study leaves the reader with the age-old message that the Spirit's role is merely to assist the believer in the study of Scripture.

This same emphasis exists in the popular study *The Holy Spirit: A Biblical Study*, by Restoration theologian Jack Cottrell. His study begins by stating that "we should work very hard to train our minds to think of the Spirit in personal terms."<sup>146</sup> Ironically, the remainder of the book portrays the Spirit as a very impersonal and dispassionate being. For Cottrell, the Holy Spirit is a powerful force that gives spiritual gifts, leads believers into deeper truth, and applies justification. The Spirit's primary role is to give

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 202; emphasis in original.

<sup>146</sup> Jack Cottrell, *The Holy Spirit: A Biblical Study* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2015), 216, Kindle.

knowledge through the Bible. “The only knowledge provided for the church today as a specific work of the Holy Spirit is the knowledge that comes to us through the Bible, not through any knowledge of direct working upon the individual’s mind or intellect.”<sup>147</sup> He further suggests: “This will not be new knowledge, but discernment in how to use and apply what is already known in Scripture.”<sup>148</sup>

The book turns into a polemic against a more active Holy Spirit, specifically arguing against direct communication, miracles, tongues, or personal experiences. Due to Cottrell’s emphasis on the completed revelation of God found in the New Testament, he discounts the need for any new supernatural activities of the Spirit. Miracles gave testimony to the truth of the gospel prior to the completion of the New Testament. Now that Scripture is complete, the role of the Holy Spirit is confined to the Word of God and to the application of justification to the believer. “In this connection the Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration because his work is to apply the saving benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection to the sinner. He is the person of the Trinity who brings the power of Christ’s death and resurrection to bear upon us.”<sup>149</sup> Cottrell’s primary description of the Holy Spirit’s involvement in the life of the believer is awkwardly stated as: “to use your body as a dwelling place.”<sup>150</sup> The believer is cautioned that “his indwelling must not be based on some kind of personal experience, such as a glowing feeling or an episode of tongue-speaking.”<sup>151</sup> The Spirit, then, is a force that makes “use” of the believer but is

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 405.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 852.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 978.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 998.



not expected to relate to the believer in any personal or experiential way. Assurance “must be based, rather, on the simple promises of God’s word, which we accept by faith.”<sup>152</sup>

The Spirit remains an impersonal force or power relegated to the moment of conversion, who “sets the sinner on the road to spiritual wholeness.”<sup>153</sup> The Spirit’s role then is to develop moral character, “enabling us to obey God’s commands and live a godly life. He gives us power for holy living.”<sup>154</sup> Restoration scholar Don DeWalt agrees. “When the Holy Spirit took up residence within us, He did so with the thought of aiding us in developing holy character.”<sup>155</sup>

The Spirit, then, is limited to providing moral power and biblical insights. In Cottrell, there is a lack of insight for the believer seeking to know personally or experientially the Holy Spirit.

After books on the Holy Spirit, the only other spiritual discussion is found in Restoration critiques of the present day Church of Christ. These popular books, reviewed below, have several themes in common: they agree that the church is stuck in its thinking and practices; that it is facing a crisis of identity in a changing post-modern context; and particular corrections are necessary to maintain the health of the church into the future. They then diverge on what corrections are needed. Thee suggested corrections will be examined to determine their engagement with, and application to, spirituality.

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 939.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 962.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 1047.

C. Leonard Allen, a Restoration historian has written several books critiquing the movement. His extensive knowledge of Restoration history provides important insights into philosophical and cultural influences of the Stone-Campbell Movement. In *The Cruciform Church*, Allen concludes that, the church is “marked by a major deficiency in its pneumatology.”<sup>156</sup> Because of this deficiency, the “Spirit’s present eschatological work in the church was minimized or denied, thus doctrinally undercutting the very conduit of kingdom life and empowered discipleship,” leaving the church as a mere “holding tank, a place to wait for rescue and for heaven.”<sup>157</sup> In *Things Unseen*, Allen further laments the taming and institutionalization of the Spirit, based on Campbell’s views of discipleship that upheld the New Testament blueprint for structuring the church. This resulted in a lack of “vision of a radically transformed kingdom community” where baptism was a mere “ordinance required for salvation and church membership—not as a sign of entry into a community formed by trust in and radical obedience to a Christ who walked the way of the cross yet triumphed mightily over the power of this world.”<sup>158</sup> Allen’s works paint a broader picture of the life of the Spirit-endowed disciple and missional community that is encouraged in Scripture. Sadly, his work remains at the level of critique, highlighting and explaining these essential deficiencies but failing to provide guidance for implementing the necessary corrections.

A more extensive critique of the church is found in *The Heart of the Restoration Series*, written by professors of Abilene Christian University, a Restoration school. The

---

<sup>156</sup> Allen, *Cruciform Church*, 202.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>158</sup> Allen, *Things Unseen*, 161.

title of the first volume suggests what is at issue: *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ*. The authors call the church to closely examine “our own tradition and history [that] we may not only see ourselves more clearly but also understand how our intellectual and cultural climate affected how we use Scripture.”<sup>159</sup> Unlike Allen, these authors call for a tighter embrace of the Restoration distinctive. The “crux of the matter” is the failure to properly practice “healthy doctrinal reflection.”<sup>160</sup> They argue for holding to the core of the Bible (which is the confession that “Jesus Christ is Lord”) that will guide the proper interpretation of Scripture. They also see the church as both the arbiter of proper doctrine as well as the source of salvation. This book is a reaffirmation of the Restoration thinking and practice. “Like the Jews of Jesus’ time, who by observing Passover connected themselves to their past and enriched their present, our faith will be more solid and productive as we respectfully celebrate our own heritage.”<sup>161</sup> For a church that prides itself on being without tradition, this call to return to one’s historical roots is stunning.

In this text, the Holy Spirit is rarely mentioned (a criticism the authors note in the introduction of their second edition<sup>162</sup>). The very concept of personal spirituality is summarily written off as modern and self-seeking:

Today we are seeing much attention focused on the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in individual Christians. Not a bad topic. It’s biblical. But Scripture focuses more on the role of the Spirit *in community* . . . . The emphasis is not on the individual. Personal fulfillment or enjoyment are not factors.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> Childers, *The Crux of the Matter*, 14-15.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 181; emphasis in original.

Like the founders of the Restoration Movement, the focus is on rightly dividing the Word and properly ordering the church, which provides no space for divine involvement:

Scripture, faith, core doctrine, tradition, community, ministry, and piety. All integral. And, we hope, all recognized by the reader as important emphases throughout our book. When properly correlated, they form together the ingredients of a church well suited to face crisis moments in ways that defend the faith and honor God.”<sup>164</sup>

In a later volume of *The Heart of the Restoration Series*, the same themes continue. In *Unveiling Glory: Visions of Christ’s Transforming Presence*, the central focus is given to “right thinking” that will influence “good habits and practices.”<sup>165</sup> As the authors suggest, “One of the basic principles . . . is that individuals and congregations must make their own decisions and apply Scripture to their own situation.”<sup>166</sup> These wise decisions rest upon the concept of gazing on Jesus. “Those who have chosen to fix their gaze upon Jesus having had the veil separating them from the Father lifted from their eyes [become] so sensitive to him that they begin to reflect his character.”<sup>167</sup> In a confusing series of biblical sounding phrases, they explain how this life-changing gaze works: “It falls away when we are ‘in Christ.’ Due to our faith in him, he recreates us by his Spirit. . . . Adopted back into the family through our brother Jesus, we enjoy the first fruits of God’s salvation as he works to bring his creation back to himself.”<sup>168</sup> Important ideas like being “in Christ” and “adoption” remain unexamined, while transformation

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 174-5.

<sup>165</sup> Jeff W. Childers and Frederick D. Aquino, *Unveiling Glory: Visions of Christ’s Transforming Presence* (Abilene, TX: Christian University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

into Christ-likeness requires only human activities. “The education of new disciples needs to include training habits that will cultivate the continuing formation of their knowledge, character, and abilities to serve. Baptized into Christ, disciples ought to find themselves in a body that helps them grow, one devoted to the practices of gazing on Jesus so fixedly that transformation happens naturally.”<sup>169</sup> Here, there is no discussion on the inner transformation the Holy Spirit or the wonder of Jesus abiding within. The Christian life is presented as character building through human effort based on a Jesus who remains exterior.

### Summary

A Restorationist view of spirituality as “a means of self-fulfillment, with its attendant individualism, fits well the modern partiality toward pluralism and diversity and the suspicion of universal solutions and master narratives of truth.”<sup>170</sup> Two aspects of modern spirituality will prevent spirituality from becoming a practice for the Restorationist. First much spiritual writing is view as jettisoning orthodox biblical foundations. As Randell states: “It is easy in today’s world to come up with a hybrid spirituality which is no longer evangelical.”<sup>171</sup> Now, other religious practices are allowed without critique or consideration of truth claims. Second, there is a loss of concern for the state of the world. The apparent self-focused teaching, tied with a faith in the absolute goodness of the cosmos, distracts from confronting human sin and the need for

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>170</sup> Samuel Powell, 23.

<sup>171</sup> Ian Randall, “Recovering Evangelical Spirituality,” *European Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (April 2010): 33–44, accessed March 29, 2014, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, 41.

full reliance on God for salvation. Not all modern writings on Christian mysticism have bought into these trends, but where there are traces of individualism, tolerance for non-biblical beliefs and a lack of recognition of the reality of sin and evil, provides a distraction for Restorationists. It fails to offer the necessary encouragement and teaching to develop spirituality among people thoroughly embedded in Biblicism and rationalism, who practice a predominantly Spirit-less Christianity.

For those writing within the Restoration Movement, there tends to be three major tendencies that detract from developing deeper spirituality. First, is the continued hermeneutic applied to the Bible that displaces the Spirit as the primary method of how God works in the world. By limiting the Bible to portions of Scripture that focus on conversion and church, it further impedes developing a robust theology of salvation, the Trinity, ecclesiology and missions, making true spirituality virtually impossible and leaving no room for the supernatural activity of God in human life. Without a broader view of the Bible that brings insights into the Spirit and the essential relational nature of God, life-giving spirituality will not be possible.

Second, the emphasis on conversion as the central concern (only second to the Bible) weakens any movement toward deeper involvement with God. This is because salvation, in the forensic view, is complete. This comes from a too narrow focus on Scripture, leaving no space for growth and transformation by the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the actual abiding of Christ in the believer through the Holy Spirit that is required for living an authentic spirituality and missions in the world.

Finally, as long as there is an absence of relational language to capture the reality of the divine-human connection, there will be no hope of finding in Jesus an actual

“person” who can nourish the soul. As Langer suggests: “The focus of the Christian life should *not be deeds and actions but a relationship*; it is centered not on a product but on a Person.”<sup>172</sup> Without a language of relationships, biblical concepts like indwelling and union will be impossible to capture. The next chapter will argue that these three deficiencies need to be addressed in order for Restorationists to experience the divine-human involvement sought by God and illuminated in the dance of the Trinity.

---

<sup>172</sup> Langer, 194; emphasis in the original.

### SECTION 3: THESIS

To rectify the problem of the absence of spiritual teaching, mentality and language necessary to develop a robust and nourishing spirituality within the Restoration Movement, I will advocate a biblical and mission informed spirituality that can speak to the Restoration Church member. What is required is the rediscovery of three essential insights that will give invitation and language for the individual to move into a more experiential divine-human relationship. These are (1) Rediscovering the Bible in Its Entirety; (2) Rediscovering the Full Meaning of Soteriology; and (3) Rediscovering Mission.

The rediscovery of the wider biblical canon will be foundational for reestablishing the concepts and language necessary to develop a robust spirituality. What is needed, according to J. Todd Billings, are new eyes to view Scripture, a process in which “the Spirit brings new life and insight through illuminating God’s word.”<sup>173</sup> The illumination of the greater part of God’s Word that has been overlooked will reveal spiritual realities accessible for those captured in the Restoration mentality. Rediscovering spirituality must be biblically based, providing abundant scriptural evidence for real divine-human interactions and for Spirit transformation. This biblical foundation will provide a safe starting point for a Restoration believer to move into uncharted territory, like the explorer who desires to discover new lands without losing sight of familiar shores.<sup>174</sup> The solution is not a paradigm shift as much as a broadening of one’s perspectives. Retrieval and illumination of large segments of the Bible

---

<sup>173</sup> J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 6.

<sup>174</sup> Rhea, 11.



will expand the language and provide the concepts necessary to move more deeply into authentic biblical spirituality.

With the rediscovery of the wider canon, the believer will also discover a broader understanding of salvation. A retrieval of a more comprehensive soteriology will further illuminate God's desire for relationship and give greater permission to the individual to seek real experience with God. This wider canon will further encourage mission involvement, as true biblical spirituality will provide motivation and empowerment for effective involvement in the world.

I will argue for the retrieval of three essential and interrelated foundations that will create a space for believers to experience a transformational union with Christ: the Word, salvation, and mission. As each is biblically grounded and reasonably understood, they will provide an approachable way to an experiential relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and a more vital spirituality for Restorationists.

### Rediscovery of the Bible

Restoration theology is based on the premise of the ultimate authority of the New Testament, specifically Acts and the Epistles, as the final and sufficient communication of the gospel. Jettisoning the Old Testament and the Gospels has serious consequences for theological development, such as severely reducing insights into God, the Trinity, humanity, and salvation. In order to rediscover biblical spirituality, it will require a broader view of the Bible based on solid biblical scholarship done by respected Christian scholars? A case must be made for: (1) the entirety of the Bible as God's Word for believers today; (2) the contextual nature of the Bible and what that means for biblical

interpretation; and (3) the rediscovery of the whole of Scripture as a vital resource for spirituality.

*The Bible in Its Entirety*

A major focus of the Restoration Movement was unifying the vast number of denominations across America. The search was on for a reasonable and universal approach to determine the essentials of the true Church. This naturally turned thinkers to the Book of Acts where the original Church was established. This narrative became the central theological resource for the Restoration Movement, leading to a neglect of the wider canon of Scripture. This “neglect of the Old Testament and of the essential ‘Jewishness’ of Christian theology and spirituality [ultimately] led to the most appalling distortions of the gospel.”<sup>175</sup> As Leech argues: “It is vital that we see the Christian understanding of God against the Old Testament background.”<sup>176</sup>

The Old Testament is primarily the story of God, his “promise-plan”<sup>177</sup> to restore relationship with humanity through the community of God and bring glory to him and his creation. It is foundational for understanding both Jesus and the work and character of God. “It would be impossible to describe the message of a New Testament writer without referring to the seed, the people of God, the kingdom of God, the blessing of God to all nations, the day of the Lord, and so forth.”<sup>178</sup> In the Old Testament, God’s prior existence is not explained, nor are details given describing God’s being or essence.

---

<sup>175</sup> Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing 1985), 66.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Kaiser, 17.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

Because of God's uncreated nature, "God's essence remains transcendent."<sup>179</sup> In other words, God will always be a mystery. Job is exasperated by this truth, as he struggles with the doubts and confusion about this God who disturbs his life. Instead of getting answers to his deeply troubling questions, he receives only questions in return. The same confusion and frustration is found in prophet Habakkuk, who cannot make heads or tails of God's actions, and is required to simply stand in silence before his mystery (Hab. 2).

What the Bible does provide are the activities of God, or God's "energies," as God is known primarily in his actions. "God is absolutely incomparable. . . . When we say God or Creator, we are referring only to that aspect of him turned towards the world, the God of 'economy,' of his providence, never God in himself."<sup>180</sup> We know God as God makes himself known, but we never are privy to God's inner being. Those who were fortunate enough to get close to God's essence were dramatically changed. Moses' face shown with God's glory, having merely glimpsed the back of God (Exod. 33:23), to the extent that people feared to look on. It is a reminder that God is other, unapproachable, beyond the reach of human language, philosophy and speculation. God is best sought through negative (or apophatic) theology. As Lossky states:

In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself but something intelligible, something which is inferior to Him. It is by unknowing . . . that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge.<sup>181</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Evdokimov, 100.

<sup>180</sup> Peter Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy*, trans. Jeremy Hummerstone (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011), 62.

<sup>181</sup> Lossky, 332.

By jettisoning one's power of reason and insight, and refusing any attempt to capture God, one begins to sense the true reality of God. It is not by "analysis" or "intellectual intuition" or "discursive reason" that God is grasped, but in admitting to his "unknowable depth,"<sup>182</sup> "through learned ignorance rather than knowledge"<sup>183</sup> that humans begin to understand God for who God is.

This incomprehensible God of the Old Testament provides the foundation for understanding the miracle of the incarnation:

God is mysterious; yes, our own theology is not adequate to the great glory and majesty of God, but precisely in this mystery, God has made himself known by stooping over in accommodation to us in our weakness . . . emphasizing transcendence makes God's closeness and intimacy with us possible, because it is none other than the Holy One of Israel who has accommodated himself to us in Jesus Christ.<sup>184</sup>

The Old Testament illumination of God's transcendence makes possible God's immanence, while the "promise-plan" sets the stage for the Messiah, providing prophetic foreshadowing of the very nature and work of the Christ. All Jesus' actions and teachings are explained as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Luke 4; Luke 24:44). Jesus saw himself as the climax of God's long-running story of salvation.

This wider canon then presents a stunning reality: God Almighty planned from the beginning, and has continued to work tirelessly throughout history, to return humanity to intimate involvement with God by using his covenant community. The entirety of the story is required to grasp the breadth of God's passion, longsuffering, and self-giving that culminated in Jesus' death on the cross. No wonder Paul gave high honor to this Hebrew

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 420, 471.

<sup>183</sup> Evdokimov, 119.

<sup>184</sup> Billings, 69.

Scripture as being “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The early Christians saw themselves as part of one grand, continuous love story that dated back to Genesis, turning to Hebrew Scripture for their apologetic sermons throughout Acts. Jesus himself, in one of his last appearances, took time to “explain the Scriptures” to the disciples (Luke 24:32), in order to solidify in the Hebrew Scripture the foundation for their understanding of the work that God accomplished in Jesus’ life and death.

What then is lost by reducing all of Scripture to the book of Acts as some founding Restoration Movement members have done? First, and most importantly, is a complete understanding of God. This includes God’s majesty and intimacy, God’s otherness and personal concern, including God’s love and long-suffering. This paradoxically unknowable and holy God is demonstrably one who seeks to be known and is persistently and intimately involved in the lives of his people. God faithfully brings to fruition the hope, peace, and love promised in his covenants. This God of both transcendence and intimacy is found throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

This tension between intimacy and transcendence foreshadows the very incarnation of Christ. It is only through grasping the full reality of God’s otherness that we are awed by the miracle of the incarnation and glimpse the fullness of God’s love. Philippians 2:5-7 illustrates the amazing self-emptying of God: “Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” The incarnation, the lowering of God to humanity, naturally elicits a response of awe and reciprocal love, as the depth of God’s true majesty is understood.

God's passion, so evident in the incarnation of Jesus, is absolutely consistent with his character throughout Hebrew Scripture.

*The Contextual Nature of Scripture*

A second major distinctive in Restoration hermeneutics is the belief in the timeless, authoritative nature of the Bible. This view holds the New Testament to be the inerrant Word of God, unimpeded by any human influence. By applying common sense reasoning to this text, the essentials for salvation are available for all.

Two major issues are overlooked by this approach. The first is the contextual nature of the New Testament, which is a cultural or theological document of events occurring two millennia ago.

The writings of Scripture and the context, practices, and feel of tradition did not simply fall from the sky. They themselves are products of human beings and their contexts. They have been developed by human beings, written and conceived in human terms, and conditioned by human personality and human circumstances. As we study Scripture and tradition, we . . . have to be aware of their inevitable contextual nature.”<sup>185</sup>

The authors of the New Testament brought their own perspective and background into their writing. Interpretation requires both recognizing and studying their original setting. Viewing the New Testament as immortal documents or unalterable universal facts primarily for articulating doctrine and practice, overlooks the rich historical and cultural nature of the texts.

The early Restorationists deduced simple formulas from passages like Acts 2:38, that reduced salvation to simple formula of repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. These actions were devoid of any connection to the larger theological story of the

---

<sup>185</sup> Bevans, 5; emphasis in original.

Hebrew faith, or to the cultural influence and social background of the author. This rationalistic timeless, non-contextual approach removed the meat of the story—not only of God’s larger story, but the rich cultural, social, and religious insights of the human writers—from the very bare bones of a basic formulaic dogma. This reduced thousands of years of God’s grand story to a specific set of requirements. In doing so, God’s actions and nature are overshadowed once again by reducing God’s glorious Word to a few human actions. A greater appreciation of the entire Bible can illuminate the very human and contextual process given to the transmission of God’s story into human language and life, preventing the idolizing of the biblical text that leads to Biblicism and blind traditionalism.

Second, the inherent mystery of the Biblical text is overlooked. In early Restoration theology, God, the Bible and salvation have all been rationalized, systemized, and codified for all times. Reducing God to human understanding ultimately stifles awe, paradox, and mystery, removing the necessity to struggle with deeper questions about God or the Bible. Understanding the contextual nature of the Bible, imbedded in human language and its unique *Sitz in Leben*, makes it difficult to claim “a false clarity and precision,” where “paradox and creative doubt are unable to exist.”<sup>186</sup> The mystery of God “transcends the laws of logic and number, [and] raises through to the metalogical plane where our formal laws simply do not apply.”<sup>187</sup> The ultimate paradox of a transcendent God who meets mere humans within history, described within their particular culture and in limited human language, naturally suggests an incomplete or imprecise retelling. The placing of the stories of God within human history and in the

---

<sup>186</sup> Leech, 25.

<sup>187</sup> Evdokimov, 22-23.

hands of culturally informed and agenda-driven writers, provides room for—and anticipates—contradiction, doubt and paradox. As Evdokimov reminds us, doctrine “is rational in form only because it was mystical at first, and this is the history of all doctrine.”<sup>188</sup>

The contextual origins of the Restoration Movement resulted in dispelling the mystery and wonder of Scripture. Early Restoristion interpretation of the Bible was clearly marked by the philosophy and culture of their time that “deflect[ed] the Word by turning the hearing of it into an intellectual exercise. [Rationalist] substitute[ed] understanding it for responding to it, fitting it into their theological grid so that it does not impact their lives.”<sup>189</sup> This cerebral and scientific approach failed to recognize the complexity or emotional nature of Scripture. As D. A. Carson warns, “*we should be rightly suspicious of forms of theology that place all the emphasis on coherent systems of thought...but do not engage in the affections, let alone foster an active sense of the presence of God.*”<sup>190</sup> Ultimately, Scripture “points beyond itself to God and to his Son the Lord Jesus, and results in more than Bible knowledge.”<sup>191</sup> Or, as Peter Enns suggests, “The book doesn’t limit God. There is more to God than what the book says. God is bigger than the Bible.”<sup>192</sup> Scripture can only give glimpses into the mystery. God’s Word is then a gift from God. “Revelation has come to be conceived in terms of a

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>189</sup> Peter Adams, *Hearing God’s Word: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 171.

<sup>190</sup> Quoted in Adams, 20; italics in the original.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>192</sup> Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So . . . Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014), Kindle, 2015.



personal self-offer of God's very self to men and women, an offer of friendship and loving relationship"<sup>193</sup> that is far greater than human language can begin to capture. This provides a radically different perspective on the Bible.

If God is a God of paradox and mystery who welcomes doubt and lament, should we be surprised that God's revelation reflects these very same features? The writer of Hebrews captures this vibrant nature of God's Word as "living and active" (Heb. 4:12), and the Psalmist finds the law a rich wellspring of learning and nourishment that can feed one's faith (Ps. 1:2-3).

But true faith can only grow and mature if it includes the elements of paradox and creative doubt. Hence the insistence of orthodoxy that God cannot be known by the mind, but is known in obscurity of faith, in the way of ignorance, in the darkness. Such doubt is not the enemy of faith but an essential element within. For faith in God does not bring the false peace of answered questions and resolved paradoxes.<sup>194</sup>

The goal of Scripture, then, is to open the believer to new possibilities, to a larger story, to the One who is greater than words can capture, who inspires, excites and elicits awe.

Finally, this is a story that reaches into all areas of the believers life. "The word of God addresses every part of us: mind, emotions, heart, intellect, will, desires, fears, hopes, intentions, relationships and actions."<sup>195</sup> As Austin Farrer reminds us: "Anyone who has felt, even in the least degree, the power of these texts to enliven the soul and open the gates of heaven must have some curiosity about the manner in which the miracle is worked."<sup>196</sup> If revelation is received as God's gift of love and friendship, it now

---

<sup>193</sup> Bevens, 14.

<sup>194</sup> Leech, 25.

<sup>195</sup> Adam, 172.

<sup>196</sup> Quoted in Adams, 26.

“shapes and molds us by drawing us into its world and inviting us to connect on many different levels, wherever we are on our journey, and to see ourselves better by its light by stirring our spiritual imagination to walk closer with God.”<sup>197</sup> The Bible, like the incarnation, is both very human in its contextual makeup and very much God’s communication, uniquely qualified to invite one to join the story that is often confusing, complex, and clearly unfinished.

“As we read these Spirit-inspired words, the Spirit also works within us, prompting us to know that God is our Father and that we may approach him with boldness because of Christ’s death for us on the cross.”<sup>198</sup> The original Restoration context brought rationalism, systemization, and structure to the Bible, while Scripture invites the believer to join in and experience God in the heart as well as the mind, within believers’ unique context.

### *The Bible as Source for Spirituality*

If the underlying message of the Bible is God’s promise-plan to enter into the very lives of God’s creation, the Scriptures should illuminate this divine-human relationship. Scripture is replete with stories of God’s interactions with people. As God tirelessly seeks to connect with, guide, and bless his people, humanity tenaciously rejects God’s initiative. Consistently throughout Scripture, those whom God sought out to bless reverted back to the most elementary characteristics of pride and disobedience. Many of

---

<sup>197</sup> Enns, 1880.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 174.

God's most rebellious children soon discovered God's abundant capacity for forgiveness and compassion, as did David:

Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
 And all that is within me, bless His holy name.  
 Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
 And forget none of His benefits;  
 Who pardons all your iniquities,  
 Who heals all your diseases;  
 Who redeems your life from the pit,  
 Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion,  
 Who satisfies your years with good things,  
 So that our youth is renewed like the eagles.  
 The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
 Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. (Ps.103:1-5, 8)

The great paradox of Scriptures is the juxtaposition of God's blinding holiness that requires separation from the sin, with God's passionate desire to draw close to those who find God utterly unapproachable and terrifying. God's absolute and terrifying holiness is seen in Moses before the burning bush (Exod. 3) and on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 20); with Job being questioned and humbled by God (Job 40); Isaiah entering into the throne room of God (Isa. 1:1-6); Elijah before the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18); and in the terror of the great flood (Gen. 7).

In the New Testament, Jesus' holiness is witnessed in Peter's fear on first meeting Jesus (Luke 5:8), the cries of demons (Luke 4:41), and in the transfiguration (Luke 17:1-8). Throughout Psalms, descriptions of God's awe-inspiring energies illustrate God's otherness, and uncreated and awe-inspiring nature. But, this Wholly Other God creates space to be present with his people. "One writer speaks of the 'easy familiarity' with which Abraham relates to God, and later Biblical writers refer to him as the 'friend of God' (Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7; Jas. 2:23),"<sup>199</sup> and "Moses is said to have known the Lord

---

<sup>199</sup> Leech, 30.

‘face to face’ (Deut. 34:10). So the relationship with God, established in the Abraham story, is continued and reinforced.”<sup>200</sup> God even takes notice of the persistently disobedient Israelites. God talks with Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Abraham and Sarah, Ishmael and Hagar, Joseph and Jeremiah, David and Solomon. “We find examples of personal communication in the accounts of Enoch (Gen. 5:24), Hannah (1 Sam. 1), Samuel (1 Sam. 3), and Amos (7:15). There is a kinship between God and the people of God.”<sup>201</sup> God further approaches humble folk in the New Testament such as Mary, Joseph, and Elizabeth. As Enns suggests: “Sometimes he is up there and out of the way, unmoved and unmovable. But more often he is the kind of God you can actually have a relationship with. Both are in the Bible.”<sup>202</sup>

In Jesus Christ, God most dramatically demonstrates desire for friendship and communion with his creation. In becoming human, God insisted that fear need not accompany his presence as demonstrated by God’s birth into the world as a helpless baby. The message of the Christ-story was clear: God’s goal was to reconcile people to himself that God might not only appear to people, but would make his home in them. This goal is the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy: “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them” (Ezek. 11:19). It also fulfills Isaiah’s intimate portrayal of God:

For thus says the high and exalted One  
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,  
“I dwell *on* a high and holy place,  
And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit

---

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>202</sup> Enns, 2197.

In order to revive the spirit of the lowly  
And to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isa. 57:15)

This paradox of the immanent and the transcendent, where “the One who is utterly separated from the inhabitants of earth”<sup>203</sup> seeks interaction with sinful humanity, is the story of the Bible. All the necessary insights are readily available to grasp God’s desire for authentic relationship, but only in the Bible in its entirety. What is evident in this wider view of Scripture is “God’s commitment to unite himself to his people by his identifying . . . with them by becoming one of them, sending his Son in the likeness of human flesh (Phil. 2:7).”<sup>204</sup> The lessons from the entirety of Scripture argues for a God who seeks to know and embrace humanity, providing endless insights for authentic spiritual life.

### Rediscovering Soteriology

After Biblicism, the most pressing issue for Restorationists is a narrow view of salvation. Focusing primarily on conversion, Restoration soteriology highlights justification, while severely underemphasizing sanctification. This is a result of a strong Christocentric focus that gives little consideration to pneumatology for either justification or sanctification, which explains the absence of relational language in much of Restoration hermeneutics. It is important to “recapture one great spirit vision of Christian salvation which twentieth century Protestants have largely ignored.”<sup>205</sup> This too will require an expansion of biblical insights into the meaning of salvation, recognizing that “an enormous amount of

---

<sup>203</sup> John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 620.

<sup>204</sup> Peterson, 24.

<sup>205</sup> Karkkainen, *One with God*, 3.

the New Testament is not concerned with mere individual conversion, but rather with formation and transformation with the community of Christ, with ‘life in Christ’ or ‘walking in Christ’ or ‘abiding in Christ’ or ‘walking in the Spirit.’<sup>206</sup> Illuminating a more comprehensive soteriology from Scripture will open the believer to a more participatory and experiential involvement with God.

### *Salvation as Theosis*

Soteriology for many Restorationists focuses primarily on the cross for forgiveness and eternal life. Such a focus fails to address the presence of Christ or working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Early Restoration soteriology, like most Reformed theology, proclaims that “the doctrine of justification includes only God’s favor which means imputed or forensic justification.”<sup>207</sup> This means that justification is limited to “the declared forgiveness of sin [or] the recognition of forgiveness, knowledge of faith, and confidence,”<sup>208</sup> which further reduces justification to “something that happens only intrinsically in the human mind, in awareness, and in knowledge.”<sup>209</sup> For some Restorationists, salvation means affirming or giving intellectual assent (faith) to the saving work of Jesus, by which one is declared righteous.

What is missing is the affective aspects of justification, in which “the believer is not only proclaimed just but also made just.”<sup>210</sup> This suggests that in justification “God

---

<sup>206</sup> Langer, 183.

<sup>207</sup> Karkkainen, *One with God*, 55.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-6.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

changes the sinner ontologically in the sense that he or she participates in God and in his divine nature, being made righteous and ‘a god.’”<sup>211</sup> Gorman argues that: “Salvation is *received* is best described . . . [as] full *participation*, a comprehensive transformation of conviction, character, and communal affiliation.”<sup>212</sup> True justification involves the “real presence of Christ in believers [and] regeneration, renewal, vivification, and God’s presence in the sinner.”<sup>213</sup> In other words, justification includes both forensic *and* affective aspects, to be fully biblical. Justification must then include sanctification, which is both the process and the state of being set aside as holy or righteous. “Sanctification and inner change form an integral part of the doctrine of justification and cannot be distinguished from each other.”<sup>214</sup> Gorman describes salvation as

not merely a pronouncement of forgiveness, but an event of conversion, an act of new creation. . . . Because they are in him, clothed by him, reshaped by him, those who are reconciled by God through Christ are already now being transformed into the righteousness/justice of God (2 Cor. 5:21), that is, they are not only *benefiting* from God’s reconciling love but *participating* in it.<sup>215</sup>

Karkkainen further states: “God’s aim is rather to fulfill the purpose for which he created human beings, namely to participate in God’s life. The earthly life is for growth and development for this eternal communion.”<sup>216</sup> This fuller biblical meaning of salvation, that includes “participation in God [that] is possible through the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>212</sup> Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 23; emphasis in original.

<sup>213</sup> Karkkainen, *One with God*, 57.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>215</sup> Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 158; emphasis in original.

<sup>216</sup> Karkkainen, *One with God*, 21.

of adoption,<sup>217</sup> is necessary to grasp the rich spiritual life of authentic divine involvement obtained through justification. A more robust understanding of new life in Christ, then, requires that the “doctrine of salvation cannot be expressed only in Christological terms but requires pneumatological grounding as well.”<sup>218</sup>

In Scripture, Jesus promises and the Apostles celebrate the actual indwelling presence of God Almighty through the Holy Spirit. Several New Testament writers highlight this new, intimate relationship, most prominently John. The “mutual indwelling and communion with God is central to Johannine mysticism.”<sup>219</sup> Concerning the promised gift of the Comforter, John writes: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever...you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). The promise is for the Spirit of God to “abide” or be at home in “you,” referring to “His followers” in the plural.<sup>220</sup> But Jesus suggests a more intimate relationship than he enjoyed with his disciples. In verse 25, he tells them again that the Spirit would not only dwell *with* them, but “will be *in* you.” This deeper relationship is best illustrated when Jesus stated: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:11). Here we have rich Trinitarian insights, with the mutual indwelling of Jesus and the Father. What Jesus promises is the same intimate indwelling he experienced with the Father—a oneness without separation—that would now be experienced by the disciples with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit fulfills Jesus’ promise to his disciples to “not leave you as orphans” (John 14:18). He concludes with

---

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>219</sup> Leech, 94.

<sup>220</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 648.



the promise: “On that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). The Greek word for “know” used by Jesus means “*to know by communion*, in the nuptial sense: the ultimate knowing of God . . . symbolized in the marriage of the Lamb.”<sup>221</sup> In other words, they would receive deeply and intimate knowledge of Jesus’ presence. As Leech argues: “there is the sense of the Spirit’s power completing the ministry of Jesus and perpetuating his presence within the community.”<sup>222</sup>

This mutual abiding is illustrated by Jesus’ teaching on the vine and branches. “Abide in Me, and I in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in them, he bears much fruit. . . . Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in my love” (John 15:4, 5, 9). Jesus promises the producing of fruit as long as there is mutual abiding. This is a two-sided process, where the believers are called to actively abide in Christ as Christ also abides in them. But astonishingly, Jesus suggests that the entire Godhead would come to abide in the lives of believers: “My Father will love him, and We will come and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). It is no wonder then that abiding in Jesus is equal to abiding in his love and sharing in the Father’s love.

In John’s Gospel, salvation is taken far beyond merely rectifying old scores, or shifting one’s position from fallen to forgiven. For John, salvation is *theosis*, or sharing divinity. It is an intimate communal relationship with the Transcendent, as the promise of salvation means, “believers will mutually indwell the Trinitarian persons as an act of grace insofar as creatures can partake of the divine life.”<sup>223</sup> Here, relationship with God

---

<sup>221</sup> Evdokimov, 194-5; emphasis in original.

<sup>222</sup> Leech, 94.

<sup>223</sup> Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 16.

is not an afterthought of conversion; it is the very purpose and meaning of conversion. “To put it plainly, *to be saved is to be united to the Savior.*”<sup>224</sup> This radically changes the goal and focus of the Christian life, from applied forgiveness to knowing experientially the person of Jesus in all his love, leading, and presence in community. This provides a vastly different perspective on the work and reality of the Holy Spirit than found in Restoration theology.

That is, the belief that the Spirit is not limited to the pages of the scripture but rather actively working to change the lives of believers who increasingly become like the person of Jesus. The Spirit is at work in the believer’s life to draw them to Christ (Jn. 16:8), to assure of God’s divine love (Rm. 5:5; 8:16), to illumine minds, and to guide into all truth (Jn. 16:13). The Spirit also mediates the personal presence of Christ (Jn. 14:15-26) and illumines the full meaning of the new life in Christ (1 Thes.1:4-5).<sup>225</sup>

The teaching of Jesus is that “the same Spirit who worked in the earthly ministry of Jesus works in us, primarily to join us to the person of Christ and his many spiritual benefits.”<sup>226</sup> Peterson concludes that: “Union is the large set of which these elements are subsets: regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, preservation, and glorification. They all occur in union with Christ and are all brought about by the Spirit.”<sup>227</sup> This intimate union or participation with the Spirit then is the basis of true transformation of believers “which calls humanity to become truly human by sharing in that divinity.”<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 71; emphasis in original.

<sup>225</sup> Rhea, 7.

<sup>226</sup> Peterson, 311.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>228</sup> Gordman, *Inhabiting*, 32, 37.

The apostle Paul also argues that intimate connectivity with Christ involves participation in salvation. In Roman 6, salvation is described as being “united with Him” (v. 5) in order to “walk in newness of life” (v. 4). Paul locates in baptism the point where all join with Christ by partaking of Jesus’ sacrificial offering: “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” (v. 4). In baptism “our old self was crucified with Him” (v. 6). Gorman terms this dying with Christ as “co-crucifixion.” Co-crucifixion allows us to be “co-raised” with Christ, because if we were with him in death, then “certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection” (v. 5). Conversion is not merely an application of forgiveness against a criminal record. Conversion is a process that involves believers in the very death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, “justification ‘by *faith*’ is for Paul justification by co-crucifixion. It is hard to resist the conclusion that faith is, for Paul, a death experience: a death to Law (and/or to the flesh) and a death *with* Christ.”<sup>229</sup>

The believer does not simply delight in the results of Jesus’ salvific work but, through baptism, they join with Christ in emptying oneself completely, giving up their demands and rights, and entering into the transformative participation of co-crucifixion with the crucified God. It is here that believers have “an encounter with a living person whose presence transforms and animates believers.”<sup>230</sup> This means that “conformity to Christ, or holiness [is best] understood as participation in the very life of God—

---

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 71.

inhabiting the cruciform God.”<sup>231</sup> True spiritual life begins with sharing in the process of salvation.

If this is what happens to those who believe the gospel and are baptized, then the very meaning of belief, or faith, has implicitly shifted from a notion of assent or even trust to one of participation: of transferal from one realm to another. It is an understanding of faith as embrace—or better yet, of being embraced, even enveloped.<sup>232</sup>

Since some in the Restoration Movement relies heavily on Luke’s account of conversion in Acts, the relational concepts and language of “in Christ” and “abiding” that are found in John and Paul are lost. What Luke provides in Acts is “primarily descriptive, not theological. He shows us what baptism looks like and how it is practiced in the life of the early church, but does not explain all its theological implications, including its connection to the union with Christ.”<sup>233</sup> Recapturing of the theological and spiritual implications of baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the promises of Trinitarian abiding are essential for a more effective, experiential, and transformational spiritual life.

Finally, Peter raises the concept of salvation above mere intellectual assent to attaining the divine. In 2 Peter 1:4, he writes “For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature . . . .” The phrase “partakers in the divine nature” is unique in Scripture and breathtaking in its implications. As Gorman summarizes: “The apostle does not break down the distinction between God and his creatures. Never is the line between creatures

---

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>232</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 27.

<sup>233</sup> Peterson, 45.

and Creator trespassed. We do not become God or part of God. When Peter writes, ‘become partakers of the divine nature,’ he speaks of Christians’ sharing in God in some sense. There is a real union with God.”<sup>234</sup>

The tendency of some Restorationists is to overemphasize the distinction between humanity and divinity, and to write-off such passages as 2 Peter 1:4 as hyperbole or wean them of any potency to speak of real divine-human union. However, “because Christians believe in the incarnation, theosis or deification cannot be separated from Christology. It means sharing in the likeness of the Son, who is the image of God.”<sup>235</sup> Peter, along with Paul and John, argue that humans take on divinity, as Jesus’ incarnation demonstrated that this was indeed possible. This raises the goal of Jesus’ work to nothing short of fulfilling God’s promise to be with believers in the most intimate way. The plan has been fully implemented, as Jesus stated: “the kingdom of God is in you” (Luke 17:21). There is now no question of finding God because God has made his dwelling in his followers, who share both his resurrected life and in his divine nature.

The Bible offers a far more substantial, inspiring and transformational soteriology than found in traditional Restoration theology. This more relational, intimate, and biblical view of salvation is necessary for a deeper spiritual life. It recognizes that the Jesus whom one wishes to know and love, has demonstrated his love and desire for union by his self-sacrifice. Jesus is not merely available for “gazing on” or imitating. He is the one who is united with, envelopes, abides in and shares his very nature with the believer. “The goal of human existence . . . is to participate now and forever, individually and

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>235</sup> Gorman quoting Schreiner in *Becoming the Gospel*, 269.

corporately, in the very life and character of this cruciform, missional, world redeeming God of righteousness and restorative justice.”<sup>236</sup>

### *Rediscovering Relational Language*

Maintaining a forensic view of salvation based on a rationalistic hermeneutics, traditional Restoration theology is better equipped to discuss salvation from a legal and scientific perspective rather than a relational or mystical point of view. Early Restorationists have succumbed to “a disenchanting faith . . . what [Charles] Taylor calls an excarnational faith, one that lives more in the head than in the heart, in the brain than in the body.”<sup>237</sup> Sadly, this has left theologians like Cottrell and Ferguson with little to say concerning the dynamic working of the Holy Spirit, despite the rich language in Scripture describing *theosis*. To develop a deeper spirituality, it is imperative to rediscover the biblical language of relationship and spiritual experience.

The Bible is replete with relational terminology illustrating divine-human interaction, including “union, participation, partaking, intermingling, elevation, interpenetration, transmutation, commingling, assimilation, reintegration, adoption, and recreation.”<sup>238</sup> This chapter already touched on several important relational concepts used by Jesus, such as the metaphor of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-9), the example of mutual indwelling with the Father (John 14:10), and Jesus’ promise of abiding in believers (John 14:20). John’s use of the term “Advocate” for the Holy Spirit

---

<sup>236</sup> Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 6.

<sup>237</sup> Roger Helland and Leonard Hjalmanson, *Missional Spirituality: Embodying God’s Love from the Inside Out* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 39.

<sup>238</sup> Karkkainen, *One with God*, 31.

in John 14:16 “really means a friend, a legal friend.”<sup>239</sup> Also examined was Paul’s powerful illustration of the believer’s connection with Jesus in co-crucifixion and co-resurrection (Rom. 6) and Peter’s focus on sharing in the “divine nature,” in which we are now more like God (2 Pet. 1:4).

A greater awareness of the Old Testament will help broaden insights into God’s persistently relational character. The Old Testament offers many divine-human interactions often with the most intimate and personal details, beginning with humanity’s first encounter with God who walked in the garden and conversed with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2). In Exodus 34:6-7, Moses encounters God and gives one of the earliest descriptions of God: “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin . . .” God’s relational nature is clearly emphasized by Moses. Psalms is a rich resource for relational language, where David expresses his deep passion for God and God’s mutual passion for his people. In Psalm 42, David expresses his longing for God: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God” (v.1). In verse 5, David finds God’s nearness as a source of strength and comfort: “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, for the help of His presence.” For David, his hope came from knowing, not the attributes about God but the experience of his very presence. David’s passion for God came from experiential awareness of God who was absolutely reliable. In poetry and songs—the genre of the heart and its longings—David demonstrates the possibilities of a vital relationship with God. David’s son goes even further, providing a deeply sensual poetry of love and

---

<sup>239</sup> Morris, 649.

passion in Song of Songs that has been the source of spiritual insight for centuries. The prophet Zephaniah also “expresses the deepest inner joy and satisfaction of God himself in his love for his people,”<sup>240</sup> when he states: “The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). God’s delight and care for his children is suggested as stronger than that of a mother’s:

Can a woman forget her nursing child  
And have no compassion on the son of her womb?  
Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.  
Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. (Isa. 49:15-16)

In the New Testament, Jesus shares this same concern for his people, as he laments over those who failed to receive his love: “O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen *gathers* her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!” (Luke 13:34). An equally intimate metaphor is the biblical illustration of adoption. Paul returns to this theme several times in his writing, highlighting the graciousness of God: “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:5-6; cf. Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:5). Adoption here is not merely changing a person’s legal status, but the willful and graceful act of God,<sup>241</sup> securing full son-ship and bestowing the Spirit of the Father. The very presence of God brings intimacy and abiding oneness between Father and child,

---

<sup>240</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 339.

<sup>241</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to The Colossian, to the Philemon and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 258.



which is witnessed in the heartfelt cry of the child: Abba! Father! This cry “represents a relationship of intense intimacy, an exclusive relationship with God.”<sup>242</sup> This heartwarming love of a father and child brightly illuminates the very nature of this divine-human relationship. As F.F. Bruce concludes, “God’s grace has extended to his people and enfolded them: he has ‘be-graced’ them...”<sup>243</sup>

Similar relational illustrations are found throughout the Bible, including marriage (Eph. 5:31; Rev. 21:9), the body (1 Cor. 12), and the home (John 14:16-18), each describing in intimate terms the depth and nearness of the relationship that now exists for the followers of God. Together they proclaim genuine connection, indwelling, intimacy, interaction and the common life “only because Christ died for us and put away our sin that the Holy Spirit can be found at work within our hearts.”<sup>244</sup> Taken as a whole, these concepts paint a rich picture of experiential spirituality, reminding us of God’s astonishing goal of union and participation.

### Rediscovery of Mission

Mission is often overlooked by Restorationists when salvation is viewed as forensic imputation, which tends to leap-frog over life after conversion and focus its attention on heaven. However, if soteriology focuses on the intimate indwelling of God, a radical reorientation of one’s life occurs. What should result is a life spiritually formed by “our continuing response to the reality of God’s grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, *for the sake of the*

---

<sup>242</sup> Leech, 85.

<sup>243</sup> Bruce, 258.

<sup>244</sup> Morris, 663.

*world.*”<sup>245</sup> Further, if God’s story is centered on resolving conflict and bringing unity, then reconciliation too must become the focus for the Christ-bearer. Jesus suggests this in his consolidation of all the “Law and Prophets” into two short commands, when asked “What is the greatest command?” He responded by saying: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ And the second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-38). Jesus indicates that these two commands are similar in that loving God must inevitably involve loving others, and vice versa. John also states: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7). Genuine love of others is a manifestation of God’s love, as God is the source of all love. Love must therefore radiate from those who are “born of God” and “know God.” Put simply, to know God is to love, and to love is to know God. This indicates that an outcome of the indwelling of God will be the overflow of love for others. Jesus also makes clear that love for others will maintain one’s dwelling in Christ, when he stated: “If you keep My commandments [i.e. love God and love others], you will abide in My love . . . .” (John 15:10). There is a perfect correlation between God’s real presence and a person’s love for others.

The gift of love for others comes from God through the Holy Spirit as part of the fruit promised in mutual abiding (John 15:5). Paul describes this fruit in Gal. 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” What is immediately evident is the prominent place of love

---

<sup>245</sup> Helland, 26; emphasis in original.

“at the head of this list of virtues”<sup>246</sup> as the foremost characteristic of the Spirit’s work, reflecting God’s essential nature. Further, the list has a decidedly strong relational focus, suggesting that the manifestation of the indwelling Spirit will be evident in relational unity and harmony. “This incomprehensible love should be the controlling force of the Christian life (2 Cor.5:14f).”<sup>247</sup> This suggests that union with God through the Spirit should result in an increase in the depth and quality of a person’s relationships, in compassion and reconciliation, where joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, goodness, and kindness are found in abundance. The believer’s generous love will be the most visible sign of allegiance to Christ, as Jesus foretold: “all men will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). This then is the mission side of *theosis*.

This missionary outworking of the Holy Spirit’s presence is clearly illustrated in the Book of Acts. At the beginning of the church, the Spirit is poured out on three thousand who “received his words and were baptized” (Acts 2:41), as promised by Jesus in Acts 1:8. They immediately devoted themselves to “the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:52). The outpouring of the Spirit resulted in acts of sacrifice and solidarity:

They began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:45-47)

The believers’ co-crucifixion with Christ was visibly exhibited in their radical self-emptying that included selling and sharing what they had, setting aside their differences,

---

<sup>246</sup> Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 263.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

joyously sharing life together, and seeing that no one had need. The opportunity was given for both discipleship (fellowship, teaching, communion) *and* for tangible acts of sacrifice and love. This real-world service was the very manifestation of the presence of Christ. As Downing argues, this mission spirituality “entails perfection of one’s relationships with others, rather than an ever more purse gaze of the mind on some eternal truth ‘out there’ or in one’s interior life. . . . Spiritual disciplines . . . are aimed at purifying one’s relationships and establishing rightly ordered relationships based on mutuality, equality, and reciprocity.”<sup>248</sup> Gorman goes further by suggesting that, “Justification by crucifixion means a demand for identification with the weak and powerless (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5).”<sup>249</sup> “In justification we become the righteousness of God, the embodiment of God’s covenant fidelity and love, God’s generosity and justice. In a word, God’s holiness . . . is inherently other centered and communal.”<sup>250</sup>

For this reason, the vast majority of Jesus’ teachings are about relationships. In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46), Jesus instructs believers on the treatment of those of lesser social and economic status, who he calls “the least of these” (Matt. 25:25). The beatitudes are a reflection on relationships, as Jesus calls believers to be gentle, to hunger and thirst for righteousness (justice), to be merciful, pure of heart, and peacemakers (Matt. 5:1-9). Jesus continues throughout the Sermon on the Mount to confront real life issues found in daily human interactions.

It is at this point that the shortcomings of the narrow focus on forensic salvation that early Restoration Movement leaders had becomes blatantly clear. Jesus, in the

---

<sup>248</sup> Downing, 45.

<sup>249</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 96.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 104, 126.

Gospels, is very much concerned with living life together in this world. The lack of concern for others is central to Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who failed to see the law as fundamentally about protecting and caring for people. Instead, they used the law to divide and oppress the most vulnerable. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness." (Matt. 23:23). True religion according to Jesus, is about taking on the heart and concern of God, that everyone—but especially the "least among us"—would experience justice and mercy. "Being a disciple of Jesus is . . . a matter of being the kind of person who loves rightly—who loves God and neighbor and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love."<sup>251</sup>

In short, *theosis* results in believers becoming the gospel to the hurting world. As Acts 2 illustrates, when the church experienced an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit, she practiced true reconciliation, exhibited radical justice, and maintained genuine member care through individual self-emptying. As a result, the church experienced "favor with all people" (Acts 2:47). As Gorman suggests: "God's participation in our humanity, in Christ, makes possible our participation in God's divinity. . . . The greatest human privilege, Paul suggests, is to be part of this new creation, to participate in the very purpose of God for humanity: becoming the embodiment of God's saving, reconciling, restorative justice in the world."<sup>252</sup> By living out the dynamic, genuine love that is union with Christ, the world may come to know that "you are my disciples" (John 13:35).

---

<sup>251</sup> Quoting James K. A. Smith in Helland, 122-3.

<sup>252</sup> Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 249.

The church then “is a *living exegesis* of the Gospel of God.”<sup>253</sup> As Peterson summarizes: “The remarkable unity among God’s people is for the purpose of lost persons believing in the Son’s incarnation (and saving ministry).”<sup>254</sup> Our being in Christ means being joined to his church. The church is where we begin to share the fruits of our relationship with God and experience God through others who are likewise joined to him. The church is the believer’s first field of service and the central source of encouragement and spiritual support. It is through mutual love and care within the body of Christ that the world witnesses the truth and efficacy of the gospel.

### Summary

If having a strong biblical foundation is a necessity for Restorationists to be invited to move more deeply into life with God, it should now be clear that ample scriptural support is available for this move. It has been argued that the New Testament relies on the Old Testament for understanding God’s passion and his plan for intimate union with his people. The Old Testament is also necessary for understanding the nature of Christ and the broader purposes of his work. It is therefore essential to rediscover this larger canon of Scripture, including a fresh look at the Gospels, to enlighten the believer concerning God’s involvement in the lives of his people from the beginning, demonstrated abundantly in the life of Jesus, and consistently illuminated in the lives of the Apostles.

This awareness will further broaden one’s insights into God’s great salvation. Understanding God’s passion for reconciliation and union, for authentic connection and

---

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 43; emphasis in original.

<sup>254</sup> Peterson, 67.

intimate involvement throughout Scripture, will better inform the believer of God's intentions in sending Jesus. Grasping the possibility of real union and experiential indwelling of God's presence through the gift of the Holy Spirit, will create expectation for the believer to seek and discover the spiritual fullness for which he or she is longing. As real connection with God occurs, so also will life overflow with gifts of the Spirit, and love and justice will flow from the heart to a lost and hurting world.

For Restorationists, finding a way forward to deeper spiritual life is possible without ever having to venture far from the safe and secure foundation of the Bible. In rediscovery, one can now find the very nourishment for which the soul longs.

## SECTION 4: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT

All Christian denominations are generally captive to their unique cultural foundations that inform their thinking, theology, and practices. For Restorationists, the features of Biblicism, conversion, and rationalism have resulted in a form of Christianity that is highly cerebral and lacking nourishment for the soul or the language for divine-human involvement. Many in the Church of Christ find little help within their traditional practices or theology to develop a deeper connection with the Spirit or insights for participating intimately in the life and nature of Christ.

Section 3 argued that moving forward into a deeper spiritual life requires the illumination of neglected biblical texts set aside because they fell outside the central focus of the tradition or were seen as insignificant to the general focus of the Movement. Maintaining the Restorationist's strong reliance on the Bible, Scripture is now viewed with fresh eyes. For the Restorationists, this provides the essential foundation for receiving vital but neglected insights that can speak deeply to their mindset and encourage them to enthusiastically enter a dynamic and experiential spiritual life. By maintaining links to what is familiar and sacred, the Church of Christ member will be invited to learn about and take to heart deeper truths of the divine mysteries of participation, union with God, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to ultimately find a richer life in Christ and mission spirituality.

I am therefore proposing a book for the spiritually hungry Restorationists. This book will have two major foci: First, it will introduce the concept that traditions grow out of a particular context and determine one's thinking, practices, and approach to the Bible. This is to explain the problem that confronts us. The second focus will be on



shedding light on several key concepts displaced by the contextual foundations of the Restoration tradition that require rediscovery in order to enter into dynamic biblical spirituality. These concepts include the major sections of the dissertation: A rediscovery of the Bible in its entirety; a rediscovery of a thicker soteriology; and a rediscovery of spirituality. This book is not meant to be a theology on these topics. Rather it is providing illumination for the regular church member, shining a brighter light on Scripture to see a biblical spirituality left in the shadows due to the Restoration Movement's unique historical context. What is proposed is an invitation to a much deeper journey of discovery and real connection with Jesus Christ.

Most books on spirituality, as argued in Section 2, simply do not resonate with all Restorationists, based on differences in assumptions about Christianity, while offering spiritual instruction unfamiliar to their tradition. That is why it is important to not simply provide another text on "Christian spirituality," but to provide a well-reasoned, biblically informed introduction to a broader and more experiential understanding of salvation and union with God in the Restoration tradition of "Scripture only" in order to gently guide the reader toward a deeper relationship with Christ. For those who never venture beyond the Bible for guidance, this process of learning anew, of seeing with fresh eyes what is actually in the Bible, will create both a sense of safety as well as adventure, as the Bible becomes fresh and alive, leading not just to greater knowledge but to deeper participation in Jesus.

## **SECTION 5: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION**

This section of the Written Statement follows the Non-Fiction Book Proposal, as specified by College Press, a potential publisher of the completed artifact. To fulfill the requirements for this proposal, Turabian formatting will no longer be followed. College Press is a Restoration publisher, known primarily for printing Church of Christ/Christian Church theology texts. This proposal will include the following:

- Cover letter
- Vita
- Stated purpose
- Table of content
- Target audience
- Uniqueness in the marketplace
- Suitability for College Press Publishing
- Potential use as a textbook
- Qualifications for writing the book
- Endorsements
- The manuscript finish date
- Permission for using copyrighted materials
- Author maintaining a copy of manuscript
- Sample Chapters

John F. Woodward

*Illuminating the Shadows*

Dear Editor,

My name is John F. Woodward and this is a proposal for a non-fiction work about deeper spirituality. This is my first book written for publication. I am a candidate for the Doctorate of Ministry at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. I also hold a Master's Degree in History from Iowa State University and have twenty-three years of experience in "spiritual guidance" as a campus minister and ten years working for missionary organizations, all within the Restoration family. I have also taught mission classes at Nebraska Christian College (Omaha). I am proposing a book titled, *Illuminating the Shadows: An Invitation To A Deeper Spiritual Life Within God's Word*.

During my years of ministry to university students from Restoration backgrounds, I learned that something vital was missing from their Christian lives. Though equipped with tremendous Bible knowledge, they lacked a real connection with their Savior and an understanding of spirituality, resulting in a sense of spiritual emptiness and hunger. The historical and philosophical context of the founders of the Restoration movement created a mindset that contributed to a lack of language or insights into the divine-human interaction. Using the movement's greatest strength of being Bible-focused, this text will seek to broaden one's understanding of Scripture that will allow for broader insights into God's involvement with humanity and his promises of abundant spiritual life today. My goal is to provide insights from the Bible that will invite Christians to move into a more active spiritual life promised and desired by God.

Thank you in advance for the time to review the chapters included in the proposal. I look forward to working with you and learning from you through this process of bringing to our brotherhood (and, hopefully, to many beyond) tools to help Jesus' followers find the spiritual nourishment that they have longed for all their lives.

Sincerely,

John F. Woodward

## Book Proposal

### Title

*Illuminating the Shadows: An Invitation to a Deeper Spiritual Life Within God's Word*

### Author

John F. Woodward  
7812 S. 161<sup>st</sup> Street  
Omaha, NE 68136  
email: jwoodward@georgefox.edu

### Vita

---

#### Areas of Expertise

Mission History	Global Leadership
Cultural Intelligence	Missionary Work / Preparation
Restoration History	World Religions
Discipleship	

---

#### Education

2016	<b>George Fox Evangelical Seminary</b> , Newburg, OR <i>Doctorate of Ministry in Leadership and A Global Perspective</i>	September 2012- December
------	---	-----------------------------

---

	<b>Iowa State University</b> , Ames, IA Masters of Arts in History. Emphasis on European History	September 1986- May 2001
--	---	-----------------------------

---

	<b>Western Michigan University</b> , Kalamazoo, MI Bachelor of Arts, English Education with Minor in Religion	September 1976- May 1980
--	--	-----------------------------

---

#### Work Experience

Present	<b>South Pacific Christian Mission</b> , A ministry of New Missions System, Fort Meyer, FL  Executive Director Elect – Recruiting and training missionaries	2016-
---------	--	-------

---

	<b>For God's Children International</b> , Council Bluffs, IA Associate Director – Romania and Lakota Sioux mission	2008-2016
--	---	-----------

---

	<b>Nebraska Christian College</b> , Omaha Nebraska Adjunct Mission Professor – Taught history of missions	2012-2013
--	--	-----------

---

	<b>Campus Christian Fellowship</b> , Ames, IA Campus Minister and State-Wide Director	1985-2008
--	--	-----------

---

	<b>Taking Christ to the Millions (TCM)</b> , Heiligenkreuz, Austria	1983-1985
--	---	-----------

Staff, Support work of churches behind the Iron Curtain

---

<b>Thunderbird Trucking</b> , Alton, IL Dispatcher, Accounting, Logistics	1981-1983
<hr/>	
<b>Edwardsville Community Schools</b> , Edwardsville, IL English Teacher	1980-1981

---

### **Stated Purpose**

This book rests on the claim that there is a large number of Restoration Church members who are experiencing spiritual malnourishment, while finding within our tradition few resources to stem this hunger. This book then proposes:

- To inform readers of the cultural and historical context that has contributed to their lack of spiritual language and encouragement
- To help readers rediscover a broader view of the Bible, thereby giving a fuller view of God and salvation necessary for deeper involvement and connection with Jesus
- To ultimately invite Christians to enter into a more robust spirituality

### **Table of Contents**

#### **Introduction: How It All Began**

#### **Part I: Why We Are Stuck in the Shadows?**

Chapter One: A More Spectacular View

Chapter Two: Our Particular and Peculiar Lens

Chapter Three: Just Out of Sight

#### **Part II: Illuminating the Shadows: Finding a Way Out**

Chapter Four: A More Spectacular View of the Bible

Chapter Five: A More Spectacular View of God

Chapter Six: A More Spectacular View of Salvation

#### **Part III: Living in the Light**

Chapter Seven: Exhibiting the Gospel and Embodying Love

Chapter Eight: Participating in the Body

### **Conclusion**

### **Target Audience**

The target audience is any Christian who senses a hunger for a more experiential connection with the Lord Jesus Christ, but especially those who have grown up with a

Restoration background who studied Scripture and are absolutely assured of salvation, but who never experienced Christ's presence in a real way. This book is for believers who know the Truth cognitively but lack experiential understanding of that Truth in their lives.

### **Uniqueness in Market Place**

Many books on spirituality are rich in the language and concepts that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable for most in the Restoration movement. Within the Restoration Movement, few books address biblical spirituality or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For traditional Church of Christ members, there is little on the market that provides help to move forward into a deeper spiritual awareness. This book is about creating the grounds for spiritual formation for our specific tradition and mindset, providing biblical insights and language that will give invitation for moving believers into a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit and spiritual life with Jesus.

### **Idea suitable for College Press Publishing**

The Holy Spirit, spirituality, and divine-human involvement are especially relevant for the Restoration Churches, as the historical context left little room for the experiential involvement with all things spiritual. It is desperately needed in our churches to rediscover aspects of the Bible that tell of God's desire and tenaciousness to make real connection with his creation. It is also important to understand aspects of salvation that have been lost, especially the life-changing indwelling presence of God. As a publisher for Restoration Churches, your organization is perfectly placed to reach those captured in our particular mindset, who need a richer, more vital life with Jesus.

### **Potential use as a textbook**

This book is primarily for popular consumption. However, for pastoral or spiritual formation classes, this book could find use in the Bible college classroom. It would provide discussion material on contextualization, history and culture, spiritual formation, soteriology, and hermeneutics. This book would also provide a case study in the process of biblical interpretation and application to real life.

### **Qualifications**

The foundational qualification for writing this book is my own personal struggle to know Jesus more deeply. Being deeply cerebral, I have had a long and frustrating road to know God experientially. My struggle was shared with hundreds of students who came through my campus ministry, who similarly struggled to truly know this Jesus that we knew intellectually from the Bible but whom we had never personally met. Through twenty-three years of seeking, struggling, and learning with college students, my journey culminated in the opportunity to focus on this subject in a doctoral program with George Fox Evangelical Seminary. In my dissertation, I was able to clarify my conclusions of what is needed to truly come to know God for so many people just like me.

### **Endorsement**

The research for this book was guided by two dynamic scholars. Dr. Jason Clark is the director for George Fox Evangelical Seminary's Leadership and A Global Perspective

Doctoral Program, and was a key mentor in my dissertation program. Dr. MaryKate Morse, also at George Fox and a published author and brilliant scholar, was my advisor for my dissertation. A second reader for my dissertation and the chapters enclosed in this proposal is Jim Eichenberger, who has editing experience with Standard Publishing.

**The manuscript finish date**

Five chapters of the book are completed. The final three chapters will be completed by February, 2017.

**Permission for using copyrighted materials**

As a popular book, there will be no major use of copyrighted material.

**Author's Copy**

The author maintains a copy of the chapters sent to College Press, and gives permission for copies to be destroyed if rejected.

## SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

I entered the Leadership and Global Perspective program with the intention of researching spirituality for missionary preparation. This was due to years of persistent interaction with missionaries as a campus minister and as an associate director for a mission agency. Within my tradition of the Restoration Movement, there was little encouragement for spiritual formation for preparing individuals for the mission field. Early in my studies, I learned that the lack of spiritual formation was a major contributor to missionary burnout, discouragement and attrition. Through Dr. MaryKate Morse's insights, I became aware that a great deal of research and information was readily available on this subject.

I therefore turned to a far more fundamental issue underlying the issue of spirituality within my tradition. It surfaced with two important questions, the first being more foundational than the one that I had set out to research: Why was there a general lack of spiritual focus within my tradition? Why, within the Restoration Movement, are spiritual matters little talked about and spiritual formation rarely encouraged? As I began to dig deeper into the history and background of the Restoration Movement in my research papers each semester, this became the one major question that I kept returning. But, this led to a second question: How does one move into a deeper spirituality from a tradition lacking both spiritual language and focus?

These questions came as a wonderful discovery, as these were the very questions that I had been personally struggling with for over twenty-five years working with young Christians on the college campus. It was no longer just an academic exercise for me, but it was a very personal search for why the students I worked with and cared deeply about



had no sense of Jesus as a friend or a person they had joined their lives with. More importantly, it gave me a chance to discover what was necessary to move a person with this background into a deeper relationship with the living God.

The challenge for me was the proverbial tendency to throw the baby out with the bath water. It is easy to criticize a tradition, but it was also important to recognize that (as in most critiques) something extremely valuable is present that has been merely mishandled or misdirected. This requires one to recognize and highlight the good in that tradition, while critiquing the missteps that caused that good to lose its potential and positive force. The question that I had to wrestle with was whether one could use the strengths (i.e. the “good”) of the Restoration Movement as a building block for a deeper spirituality. Was there within the Restoration mindset and worldview helpful tools and positive practices that could provide Restorationists a familiar and less radical way to discover the joys and insights of a more relational Christianity? In my research, I found little contemporary help for this dilemma. My research also indicated that changing one’s mental processes and worldviews is both challenging and very disruptive, creating resistance and kickback. Was there a way forward that did not require a radical change in one’s foundational thinking?

Clearly, the major focus on Scripture and the importance placed on conversion are by far the strongest elements within the Restoration lexicon. These, I believe, could provide a platform to build a renewed vision of what it means to be in Christ. This meant taking one’s traditional foundations (the Bible and salvation) to create a much grandeur and more relational view of God and a fulfilling Christian life.

The Track 2 project provide a wonderful opportunity to flesh out in very practical ways to move forward into that promised abiding with Jesus. This then fulfills my heartfelt desire for helping friends, ministers and future missionaries to experience the presence of Jesus as a real person in their lives and to understand that God, who is essentially relational, seeks to connect in a real way with his creation.

The three areas that I wish to pursue further, that I only scratched the surface in my dissertation (finding limited space within the 25,000 word perimeters), includes, first, Old Testament insights into the relational nature of God. As I read the Old Testament with new eyes, I find in Hebrew Scripture an abundance of reflections on the compassion and longsuffering of the Lord for his people, and his persist desire and efforts to renew relationship. Second, I would like to study more the mysterious disconnect I found in some of the great Restoration theologians (like Jack Cottrell and Evertt Ferguson), who, when writing on God, beautifully highlight his essential relational nature, but do not apply these insights to their writing on conversion and the Christian life. Why is it that God's highly relational nature clearly articulated by these authors rarely come into play in their writings on the life of the Christian? Finally, I would like to develop an even more interactive workbook, as suggested by Jim Eichenberger, which is a very appealing and practical idea deserving attention.

Over the last year, as I've had opportunity to share my research with many minister friends from my tradition, I have been amazed at their instant recognition and affirmation of the problems and the issues that my research addresses. This suggests that spirituality is a deep concern among many ministers and missionaries in my tradition who are likewise struggling to provide a way forward for the people they have been called to

work with. They have expressed great interest and encouragement for me to finish a book from the chapters presented in Part II that might be a source of help, strength and encouragement to those who know the Bible but still have yet to fully know Jesus as friend and ever present Spirit.

**APPENDIX 1:  
ARTIFACT MANUSCRIPT CHAPTERS**

# ILLUMINATING THE SHADOWS:

An Invitation to a Deeper Spiritual  
Life within God's Word

by

**John F. Woodward**

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction: How It All Began</b> .....	95
<b>Part I: Why We Are Stuck in the Shadows</b> .....	101
Chapter One: A More Spectacular View .....	101
Chapter Two: Our Very Particular and Peculiar Lens .....	114
Chapter Three: Just Out of Sight .....	123
<b>Part II: Illuminating the Shadows: Finding a Way Out</b> .....	132
Chapter Four: A More Spectacular View of the Bible .....	132
Chapter Five: A More Spectacular View of God.....	151
Chapter Six: A More Spectacular View of Salvation .....	n/a
<b>Part III: Living in the Light</b> .....	n/a
Chapter Seven: Exhibiting the Gospel and Embodying Love .....	n/a
Chapter Eight: Participating in the Body .....	n/a
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	n/a
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	160

## **Introduction: How It All Began**

### ***Story #1: Rebecca's Tale: A True Story***

*I remember the day when it all became clear.*

*At the time I was a campus minister. On this particular afternoon I was meeting with a student in the Student Union. The quiet lounge had overstuffed sofas and large windows that looked central campus. It was a relaxing and comfortable place where college students hungout and studied. The student I was meeting, Rebecca, was an active member of my ministry who had also been a regular conversation partner for close to two years. Our weekly visits were usually a lively hour of theological, philosophical, and political discussions...when they didn't turn into monologues concerning Rebecca's latest personal crisis. Most of our meetings made my brain hurt. Today I knew would be no different.*

*Let me tell you a little about Rebecca. She was a farm girl from a strong Christian family. Her family was overly blessed with the intelligence gene. Rebecca, the oldest of three children, was brilliant...I mean, way above average! Her sister must have inherited the same genes, as she would go to Harvard and then on to Columbia to study law. Rebecca's intelligence could be intimidating. She often rubbed people the wrong way because she did not just think she knew it all, she actually did know it all and was not afraid to let others know. Much of our time together involved dealing with the collateral damage from her brash personality and her lack of relational skills. Ministering at a university of science and technology, I had befriended many students like Rebecca, who were on the path to becoming brilliant engineers, scientist, and architects. In fact, I actually enjoyed working with "Rebecca-type" students, because I knew that*

*behind their brash, awkward, and often melancholy façades were beautiful people wanting to be loved and affirmed.*

*But Rebecca was unique in that she applied her keen intellect to her faith. She was nothing if not dogmatic in her beliefs. In fact, as a teenager, she had better Bible knowledge than I did. She had grown up in a strong Christian family, attended a Bible church that lived up to its title by encouraging a thorough understanding of the Bible, while teaching its members the unalterable rightness of their tradition based firmly on Scripture (unlike other churches). Sermons were simple and clear exegesis of a New Testament passages that always ended in an alter call, with the expectation that God's Word would cut someone to the heart. For fun, the church encouraged the teens to participate in Bible knowledge competitions. In this Bible-drenched atmosphere, Rebecca became a staunch defender of her church's "true" and indisputable interpretation of God's Word and the Christian faith.*

*She was also vocally critical of Christians whose theology and practice didn't line up with her church's thinking. She felt unquestionably secure in her positions on theological issues and in her assurance of salvation, with extensive Bible backing for her beliefs and a good grasp on the supporting literature to argue intelligently with her detractors. Her Christian upbringing gave her confidence in her faith but, sadly, did not make her a fun person to be around. She often burnt bridges with fellow students over theological (as well as social and political) issues, especially when it came to her more liberal church friends.*

*In short, Rebecca was a staunch, Bible-believing Christian who had all the answers, and was not afraid to let you know.*



*But something was missing. Rebecca was not happy. Nor would anyone consider her warm or loving. In fact, most found her hard to get to know, or just plain hard! She tended to be standoff-ish, if not superior. Though she had all the knowledge of Christianity down pat, there seemed little evidence of love or grace in her life. Even more troubling to me was that Rebecca herself sensed something was wrong. In spite of all she knew about Christianity, she sensed some disconnect, some missing piece that seriously troubled her and would not let her go. This unease in her life was often our topic of conversation, for which I had no ready answer. This only made her more depressed and even more contentious.*

*I was struggling to figure out how to help. It made no sense to me. How could someone be so knowledgeable about Jesus and the Bible and yet be so depressed and conflicted? How could someone who grew up in a Christian home, who had more knowledge of the Bible than me (a “professional” minister), who could defend the faith in no uncertain terms, be so sad, so relationally challenged, and exhibit so little fruit of the Spirit? What was wrong with her idea of Christianity that left such a void? I had no idea!*

*On this fateful day at the Student Union, sitting on the over-stuffed sofa across from poor, sad Rebecca as she verbally danced around her latest personal struggles, a light suddenly came on. I can't tell you where it came from, but it is as if the clouds parted and the glare of the sun blinded me! I saw in that moment the missing piece as clear as day. I also knew that I had to proceed with caution. The best way to approach Rebecca was not directly, but slowly, with probing questions. I would let Rebecca affirm whether my insight was correct or not (which she was only too happy to do!).*

*I interrupted her ramblings to ask: "Rebecca, can I ask you a strange question?"*

*She looked at me quizzically (a look I was all too very familiar with).*

*"Sure."*

*"I am not sure how to phrase this, but let me try." I could now sense she was worried about what I was going to ask her. "Do you have any concept of what it means to have a relationship with Jesus?" I paused to regroup. "I mean, have you ever really met Jesus in the midst of your life?"*

*Then there was silence (a rare experience with Rebecca, who was never at a loss for words). I waited to let the question sink in. I could tell I had hit a cord. Rebecca looked stunned...then thoughtful. After a few minutes of silence, I saw tears coming to her eyes (also a rare experience for Rebecca). Finally, in a soft whisper, she said, "Honestly, I have no idea what that means."*

*There it was...the missing piece. All these years, Rebecca had studied her Bible, heard hundreds of Bible sermons and read hundreds of books, to the point where she knew what she believed and could argue her faith with the best of them. She knew what was true. She was secure in her salvation. But, in spite of all this knowledge and assurance, she had never understood the central point of Christianity: meeting Jesus! She knew about Jesus; knew about His death and resurrection; His grace and forgiveness; and she knew how to be saved from her sins. But, she had completely missed the very purpose of Christ's incarnation and work on the cross. All that knowledge had not helped her to know Jesus personally and his passionate love for her. Nor had she ever experienced His very real presence. She did not understand how precious she was*

*to Jesus. No wonder Rebecca's life was so sad and empty...it was! Her Christianity lacked Jesus!*

Are you in any way like Rebecca?

You might have grown up in a great Christian family, in a theologically sound church with great Bible teaching, with an unshakable confidence in your salvation, but you too have always sensed that a vitality or joyfulness was missing in your life. In the midst of doing Christianity, somehow you've never met the lover of your soul, whose cares so passionately for you that it led Him to a cruel death on a cross. If, in spite of knowing it all, you somehow never really found Jesus or experienced His presence and you frankly don't understand what that even means, then this book is for you. My goal is to help you to understand not only what you are missing, but why are you missing it. It is my prayer that the following chapters will show you why you are stuck in the shadows, captured within a narrow view of the Christian life. I hope to lead you out of the shadows and into that place where you can fully know and experience the love and presence of Jesus Christ in a real and transformational way.

*Where to begin?*

It all begins by discovering a more spectacular view of what it means to be a Christ-follower. You will learn all about a wondrous and glorious faith you've been missing out on and how very close it actually is. In fact, it can be found in the same Bible you are already reading. You will be challenged to read the Bible with new eyes, to see things you've never seen before. As you develop a more spectacular view of God, salvation and the Christian life, you will be invited to move into that deeper relationship with Jesus that you've always longed for. To get there, you will need to learn why you

have been missing out on all that Jesus has for you. By understanding your church's DNA, which is formed at a church's historical inception, you will begin to see that the way you read the Bible, and the parts of the Bible you focus on, are a result of your upbringing in your church, your family, and even your social setting. Once you understand how your church culture has influenced your thinking and reading of Scripture, you can step out of the shadows and into a wider and more informed reading of the Bible. In this new light, you will see a more dynamic and glorious portrait of the Jesus of the Bible, who not only seeks to save you from sin and death, but to love you and indwell your life; to walk with you and transform you from within and to bring you unspeakable joy and peace. This joy and peace you have been missing will come (and can only come) as you experience Jesus living in the very midst of your life.

This book is an invitation to the Christian who has not really met Jesus. I hope you will come along on this wonderful journey to find what you have been missing ...which is oh so very close!

**PART I:  
WHY WE ARE STUCK IN THE SHADOWS**

**CHAPTER ONE:  
A MORE SPECACULAR VIEW**

***Story #2: Getting What You Pay For***

*On a recent trip to China, I got to travel to the top of Victory Peak, a 552-meter mountain that soars out of the harbor of Hong Kong. From this vantage point, a person gets a spectacular view of one of the most densely populated, modern, and stunningly beautiful cities in the world. With so many new, architecturally innovative, and enormously tall buildings spreading across the entire line of vision, you are literally overwhelmed, unable to take it all in. If you have ever been to Hong Kong, you know it is not only a magnificent city, it is also unsettling. The sheer number and the size of buildings so tightly clustered in such a tiny area is hard to take in. The city is literally crammed between the mountains and the sea. One gets claustrophobic by the very sight. To look down on this sea of architectural wonders set in between the blue water and green mountains gives new meaning to the term breathtaking.*

*To get to the best view requires ascending to the observation deck at very top of Victory Mountain, which naturally will cost you extra. Getting to the top alone is a challenge. You can take either a vernicular train or a bus that deposits you at a lower level arrival point. From there, you are required (as with any good tourist sight) to wind your way by foot through a series of shops, restaurants, and hotels before joining a long queue that leads to a ticket booth. Here you must pay a considerable sum to actually walk up the final staircase and out to the observation deck. Only then can you witness this spectacular view in all its majesty and glory.*

*However, there is another option. Like most modern tourist places, before you get through the line, there is a photographer available to take your picture. The picture will be of you and your family in front of a large mural of the Hong Kong skyline—the very skyline that is just a few feet away—outside! In other words, instead of paying the high cost of seeing the actual, breathtaking view of Hong Kong, you can save yourself the extra cash and get your photo taken in front of a two-dimensional, nice but ultimately cheesy mural of Hong Kong. Even though you are only a few feet away from seeing this most spectacular view, experiencing first-hand the awesome vista, and personally taking in one of the greatest sights you would ever see, you pass up the real thing and settle for a second-hand and pretty lame two-dimensional representation.*

This story sadly represents the same choice that so many Christians have made concerning their faith. They have accepted a much reduced, and frankly pretty lame Christianity, when they are so very close to something that is truly spectacular and breathtaking. Though it will cost more, and it will require extra time and effort to get there, the difference between a mere two-dimensional, second-hand faith and the magnificent and awe-inspiring experience of actually meeting the God of the universe and enjoying His presence in your life is as great as the difference between a mere photo of Hong Kong and standing in the midst of a thoroughly heart-stopping and stunning sight.

The problem is simply this: most Christians frankly don't realize what they are missing or just how close they really are! They have been led to believe that the mere snapshot *is* the full reality of what is available. They believe that flimsy photo, quite lovely in its own way, was as good as it gets. The reason they believe this is that those

who told them this false tale have never experienced for themselves the full reality of God's abiding presence. No one told them that the real thing is just a few steps away and is more wonderful than one could ever imagined.

My goal is to share with you a much more spectacular view of what it means to be in Christ. I am here to lead you up those last few steps to give you your first glimpse of a Christian life that is so spectacular, so awesome and transformational, you will never again accept a second-hand snapshot. My hope is to give you courage to go the extra steps by reminding you that this spectacular view comes from a source you know so well and is close at hand...which is the very Word of God. The promises of God found in Scripture demonstrate clearly that throughout history God has been preparing for you to enjoy a relationship with the Himself. And He made this possible through Jesus. The real story of Christianity is all about meeting and knowing Jesus for real.

Come and walk with me these last few steps and see what you've been missing!

*We don't look so good—or why we are nearsighted*

The first question you are probably asking is: "Why didn't I know about all that I was missing?" In other words, why have I failed to see what is supposedly right in front of me? Why have I, like Rebecca, failed to meet Jesus when I thought I was being so true to His Word and living a good Christian life? How did I miss Him when He was right there all along?

The main reason for our nearsightedness is that we have been taught to see our faith in certain way. Through our very particular church upbringing, we were taught to view Christianity in a way that ultimately blinded us to this more spectacular view.

But, you argue, we only follow the Bible. How can you possibly say we don't see clearly when all we do is read and obey God's Word?

Let me explain about our capacity to miss important insights by way of an illustration. A popular video appeared on YouTube several years ago. It showed a typical men's basketball team on a basketball court running drills in a seemingly random pattern. The viewer is asked to count the number of times team members passed the ball to each other during the short video clip. Those who participate in this experiment find themselves intently focusing on each pass of the ball as the team members ran all over the court. It requires extreme concentration to keep the correct count.

Because the viewer is instructed to maintain this narrow and concentrated focus on the ball passing, what most viewers miss is the entrance of a man in a gorilla suit, also wearing basketball shorts and a jersey. This ridiculous and humorous gorilla, clearly out of place on the basketball court, enters a few moments into the video, runs back and forth, jumps up and down, waves and clowns around between the players. He then quietly exits near the end of the video. Most who view this video, never see the gorilla. That is until they replay the video. After the viewer is made aware of the gorilla, they can't believe that they could have actually missed him. It is rather unsettling to be shown that you have completely spaced off on something so obvious.

How is it that people miss seeing the gorilla? What causes people to be blind to this obviously ridiculous dancing ape? It is our human ability to see only what we are looking for! It is that simple. Because we are so focused on the ball being passed between team members, we block out everything else as unimportant and insignificant, even when it is something so obvious as a silly dancing gorilla in a basketball outfit.



This same tunnel vision happens in all areas of life. Consider the husband who fails to notice his wife's new haircut or outfit. Or the child who is blind to the fact that their scattered toys do not constitute a "picked-up" room. Or the car bumpers that are dented because of the urgent text message that averted a driver's focus even for a moment. What we choose to focus on will also distract us from seeing many unpleasant things, like the poor and homeless on the street, or the abuse and suffering all around us. We are always focusing on something, which then determines what it is that we will ignore.

Most of us are unaware that everyone has a unique lens that they view life through that determines what they focus on and what they ignore. Where does our particular lens come from? This lens is the result of a vast number of influences: the traditions of our community, our family, and our church that inform our particular set of personal beliefs and preconceptions. It is also our social, economic and cultural context, and our educational background, that influences in the way we see and interpret the world. All of these factors teach and train a person on how to view all aspects of life, providing a lens that helps to filter, catalogue, and understand ideas and information. It is how we make sense of the world and how we are kept from being overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information and stimuli that we are bombarded with every moment of every day. These numerous influences to determine what we focus on.

Your lens for viewing the world is unique. It is very different from most other people. The differences depend on a person's church, their culture, and their life experiences. For example, take the idea of snow. How would a person from the tropics view and catalog the idea of snow? How vital would extensive understanding of snow

and its effects be for a person living in Hawaii? For the tropical islander, there would be little need to process or concentrate on such information. How different would it be from an Eskimo, whose culture and environment necessitates a vast vocabulary and great insights for understanding snow? Their life would require a greater focus and understanding of snow.

Consider now the difference between a child viewing a cartoon like Bugs Bunny compared to an adult. Where the child's limited understanding (nearsighted view of life) leaves them clueless why dad is laughing so much, the adult's lens is much further developed to understand the humor found in the cartoon that the adult can't stop laughing at. His lens allows him to see and understand the hidden jokes that go right over the head of the child, where the child's limited lens leaves him confused.

Our lenses then determine what we see and how we receive information that is the result of age, culture, education, religion, economic and family factors. This means that certain things will mean more and speak more strongly to you (like snow) than other things. For those with a very similar background, there is often strong agreement on how the world is viewed and understood. This is why families and small communities often share the same lenses, and often can't understand why outsiders don't see things their way.

Here then is a reality that most Christians have never confronted: All Christians view their faith and read their Bibles through a well-developed and very narrow lens. Most church members believe that they are merely reading the Bible without prejudice or interpretation, that when it comes to reading the Bible, they have no lens! But, as Leonard Sweet suggests, what is needed is "the humble acknowledgment that there is no

unmediated gospel or uncorrupted faith. Every “good news” is run through the “software” of the cultural context. No theology exists outside of a historical standpoint and cultural context.”<sup>1</sup> Though most Christians believe they are simply following the clear and obvious truths of the Bible, they fail to understand that their church training and family influence, their social and cultural background, as well as their life experiences, have taught them how to view God and how to understand Scripture.

The reason for this lack of awareness is that our family, culture, and environment are like the oxygen that surrounds us: it is very present but we don’t perceive it, unless the wind blows. If we stop for a moment, pay attention, stop breathing for a few minutes, we will sense the air is very much there. The same too will happen if we stop for a moment and look beyond our particular view of the world, we will see that there is indeed much in our background that influences our thinking. And this includes how we approach the Bible and the questions we bring to our faith. In fact, the lenses for viewing our faith are especially powerful, because, for Christians, our understanding of the Bible and matters of faith are so consequential to salvation and eternal life. So, our belief lenses will be highly developed especially as we read and study Scripture. These lenses then determine what we home in on as we read the Bible. They will also determine what we miss—or merely ignore (like the gorilla in the video).

*All churches have traditions*

Everyone has been influenced by their specific cultural, social, and religious environment. These influences determine their thinking and their approach to all aspects of life, which becomes one’s “worldview.” Christians are not immune to having a

---

<sup>1</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 171.

worldview. Knowing this should help explain so many confusing realities about Christianity, like why there are so many different theologies, denominations, and understandings of basic faith issues among Christians who all read the same Bible.

The place to start then is to admit that our church—yes, your church!—has a traditional mindset based upon its historical and cultural founding that they have passed on to you. The instructions you've received from your church have been very helpful in emphasizing certain aspects of the Christian faith. These fundamental truths passed down to you were the central concerns for the believers at the time your church was founded. These deeply held concerns became your church's particular faith-lens. Like the passing of the ball in the video, your church's faith-lens is the key principals or essential concepts that everyone is taught to concentrate on within your church community. By preaching and teaching, through church camps and small groups, this particular way of viewing the faith was gradually passed on to you until it became your faith-lens too.

But because of the unique focus of your particular church, you missed many vital insights or aspects of the Christian faith that were not of central concern. These other insights are the gorilla...what you missed because you weren't looking! They are truths that are clearly in the Bible, but because of our faith-lens, we are simply not seeing them because we are looking elsewhere. They are right there, but we tend to miss them because our focus leaves them in the shadows. Some of those insights that you have been missing, I believe, contribute significantly to your lack of joy, your empty spiritual life, and your failure to meet and know Jesus.

Not there yet? Do you still question the truth about traditions and culture causing near-sightedness? Ponder for a second the religious leaders in Jesus' day. (Yes, this problem goes back to Jesus' day!) Did you notice that the wise and learned Jewish leaders did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Have you ever wondered why? Today, there seems little question as to Jesus' divine origin and nature, based on the clear evidence of numerous Old Testament prophecies. In fact, we are dumbfounded to understand how the smartest people in Jesus' day (the Pharisees and Sadducees), who knew their Bible better than anyone, could have missed that Jesus was God, the promised Messiah, and the Hope of Israel. Where did they go wrong? Simply put, their faith-lenses failed them. They weren't looking for a "Jesus-like" Messiah. They grew up under Roman oppression, were fed on the teachings about a powerful political and military leader who would overthrow Rome's rule and return Israel to earthly glory. They were so focused on a new Moses or David, a strong leader and king, so much so that they completely missed the arrival of the real Messiah...because Jesus wasn't what they were looking for.

Did you hear that? The best Bible scholars missed Jesus!

Their very specific focus on a mighty, political king caused them to ignore the clearly messianic passages throughout the Bible concerning a suffering servant and sacrificial lamb (see Isaiah 53). When Jesus came, their preconceived ideas caused them to reject Jesus, even as Jesus pointed to the Old Testament again and again as evidence of His divine appointment (see Luke 4:16-19). In spite of the abundance of Scripture that describes the Messiah as the Sacrificial Lamb, the Good Shepherd, the Man of Sorrows, and the advocate for the poor and the widow, these religious leaders chose to concentrate

their attention on the conquering Messiah that fit their immediate need for a political revolution.

If the greatest minds of the Hebrew faith could miss the Messiah so well documented in Scripture, then shouldn't I be concerned about what I might be missing in my own study of Scripture? Would I be wise to think that I am immune to missing important insights about God because of my own superior knowledge? Remember, the Jewish leaders had all the information they needed to see the Messiah right there in the Scriptures, but because of their narrow faith-lens, they missed the metaphorical gorilla right in front of them.

Let me give you another example. Consider how many churches today hold vastly different understandings of theology. Have you ever heard a passionate debate between a staunch Calvinist and a dedicated Arminian? Here are groups of Christians who read the exact same Bible, have unquestionably devout faiths in Jesus Christ and trust in Him for their salvation, yet they have two very different ideas about theology. How is that possible? Why are they so far apart in questions of God, salvation, and conversion? It is because of their particular perspective that they bring to the Bible. Though they look at the same Bible, their preconceptions about God, faith and life—based on their unique historical and cultural origins—cause them to emphasize different aspects of faith and God that leads them to focus at times on different parts of Scripture. It also causes them to overlook aspects of Scripture that are simply less significant to their particular way of thinking (like the “suffering servant” was little help for the oppressed Israelites in Jesus' time). Because they are so thoroughly trained and practiced in looking one way, they often miss the dancing ape in their midst that others see so

clearly. In other words, like all of us, they are taught what to look for and they see only what they set out to see. As a result, they miss a lot (as the opposing side will gladly point out).

What this means is that, because you have grown up in a particular church tradition, you have been given a unique set of lenses to view and understand your faith. It is imperative to first acknowledge that you have a very particular and very limited perspective—that you are indeed myopic. You need to recognize that your nearsightedness is a result of years of training, through countless sermons, perfect attendance in Sunday school classes, church camps, reading approved authors, and even in your family devotions. And because your church involvement has primarily included a particular group of Christians within your own church tradition, you probably grew up unaware of any other ways of seeing Scripture or understanding the Christian faith.

In your church community and in your family, you learned a very specific way of viewing what is essential to the faith. This includes an understanding of who Jesus is and what God is like, what it means to be saved,; how one does church, and what it really means to be a Christian. This indoctrination for many young Christians often is so complete that young people who venture off to college and meet for the first time Christians from other traditions are sent into a crisis. Their absolute faith and comfortable worldview is thrown into confusion. They can't make sense out of the idea that people who call themselves Christian can think differently from them. Have you ever experienced this?

When we read the Bible with our particular faith-lens, what we do most often is to find justification and documentation for our given beliefs or focus. We see in the Bible

(because we have been trained to see it) what our tradition holds as sacred and central. We focus only on what we hold as essential to our faith. This then provides us with a deep sense of rightness about our beliefs, as we find in the teachings of Jesus and in the writings of the Apostles exactly the central teachings and practices that our church holds as nonnegotiable. Because we are looking through our church's lens, only those aspects of Christianity that fit our particular view of Christianity are visible and clear. In fact, it is in those particular passages that best promote our views that we spend the most time, which reinforces our given point of view.

In this process of focused Bible reading, we rarely perceive that we might be missing out on a whole array of insights that could lead to a more spectacular faith. We don't know that the gorilla is even there. In this sense, we are no different from the religious teachers of Jesus day. We are merely seeing the Jesus we are looking for...the Jesus our church has given us and taught us to see. But we might be missing *the Jesus who really is*.

This is why it is important to begin by asking: "How do you look?" I believe that Rebecca's problem stems from her inability to see the real Jesus in the Bible because of the specific faith-lens that her church gave her. There is nothing essentially wrong with her beliefs about Jesus or the Christian faith. It is merely incomplete, shortsighted, myopic. Because she was taught to view Christianity in a certain way, her lens was set to miss out on so much of what Jesus had to offer her. She was so close to that spectacular view, being right there in God's Word, but because of her limited lens, she was only given a snapshot, a second-hand picture of Jesus and the faith, when God was offering her something so much greater!



A narrow view of faith is a danger we all face. It takes great effort and great humility to confront our own blind spots and those of our church. But it is essential to see that our traditions and church's teaching, as well as family and social influences, contribute significantly to how we view the Bible and how this might stand in the way of experiencing the fullest life of faith that God has to offer. Many are so close because they know and love the Word of God, but they also perceive that they might be missing something. It is going to require us to take that step up and outside, to look afresh at God's Word with new eyes, to begin to see what it is we've been missing.

## **CHAPTER TWO: OUR VERY PARTICULAR AND PECULAR LENS**

Every church or denomination has a particular perspective or faith-lens, including your church. Most church members aren't aware that they view their faith through a given lens. Like the air we breathe, our faith-lens is very present and vital to our survival, but we are usually unaware of its presence. It is something we have grown up with, that comfortably envelopes us such that we simply assume that all Christians think like us. Our faith-lens is ultimately the contribution of our church's rich history and contextual foundation that determined her specific theological leaning and interpretative practices. Through years of practice, education and enculturation, a coherent and familiar way of understanding faith was established and passed on to you.

Have you ever wondered why there were ten churches within blocks of you that all followed the same Bible, but have decidedly different ideas about most things like worship (Pentecostals vs. Presbyterians), interpreting the Bible (Methodist vs. Lutherans), when to worship (Seventh Day Adventist vs. everyone else), and even the essentials for salvation (Catholics vs. Church of Christ)? Why are these churches so different from my church if we all study the same Bible and follow the same Jesus? This is the question we want to explore in this chapter: Where do these traditions come from and what specifically influenced my particular church's faith-lens?

The lens that a church now uses develops over many years, often the result of tremendous struggles and physical suffering that informed their view of faith and their approach to the Bible. It also forced them to clarify their particular understanding of the basics of Christianity, like salvation, the church, the nature of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit, ministry and service, even to the extreme of being willing to die to defend one's

view of faith. The history of any denomination will highlight clearly those issues that gave birth to their traditions and have had a continuing influence in the thinking and practices of that church for many years. The often deeply conflictive and divisive historical context (as in the birth of the Reformation and in most denominational splits) solidifies the faith-lens of a church.

These lenses seem at first glance to be limiting and even divisive. Do these lenses serve a larger, positive service? Faith-lenses are absolutely necessary for our limited human minds to grasp and give structure to complex and mammoth ideas and concepts. Religion is replete with these huge topics, such as the God of the universe or entire history of mankind crammed into a thousand-page book. It is human nature to create man-made structures to capture divine and eternal truths. But it must be remembered, these structures are naturally going to be limited and will distort as much as they will clarify one's views. The reality is that no system or faith tradition will ever fully capture something so magnificent or awesome (or, can we say, spectacular?) as God and His salvation. But our theologies and interpretative practice are there to help us begin to grasp aspects of God and Christianity within our small, finite human minds.

So, the question needs to be asked, what are the particular lenses that I have been given to view the Bible and to understand God that gives my faith coherence and provides a sense of assurance? And how might these lenses limit my faith to a mere snapshot or poor representation of something so rich and glorious?

For Protestants, our particular mindset was birthed out of the Reformation in the sixteenth century that brought new and powerful lenses that resulted in a number of innovative and influential theological perspectives. D. W. Bebbington traces these

Reformed traditions into modern times in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, where the mixture of modernism with a strong Reform tradition developed into what is today termed Evangelicalism. Bebbington contends that, “The Evangelical version of Protestantism was created by the Enlightenment”<sup>2</sup> and it continued to evolve over the next two hundred years with each new development in philosophy. Bebbington followed the growth of Christianity in England throughout the nineteenth century, where it developed four major ideas that marked Evangelicalism from the struggling mainline churches: Conversion, the Bible, service and mission. The two that are most influential and most resonate with the Restoration churches, whose birth is also tied to the Enlightenment, are the *Bible* and *Conversion*. So, how did the Restoration Church come to place its primary focus on the Bible and on conversion? Here is the story in short.

### **The Bible**

The Reformation began a renewed appreciation of the Word of God as the essential and only source for understanding faith and the church. Martin Luther, through his independent study of the New Testament, came to see that the church (which, at the time, was the Catholic Church—the only church in Western Europe) had drifted far from Scripture in its practices and teachings and especially in its views on salvation. Hundreds of years of Catholic tradition and practice, while preventing the Bible from getting into the hands of the common church member, made it possible for the Catholic church to develop a form of Christianity that had moved far afield from the original intent of Jesus and the first disciples and allowed for numerous abuses (such as indulgences—the clever

---

<sup>2</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York, NY: Rutledge, 1989), 74.

method of raising funds for church buildings by requiring substantial payments to reduce time in purgatory for friends and family) that eventually became the catalyst that drove Luther to seek God's instructions in the New Testament.

The Reformation was a call to return to the Bible, to the one true authority that would allow for a pure and unadulterated faith. God's communication to mankind in Scripture was given the predominate place in the new Protestant movements. Protestants further insured that God's Word got into the hands and the hearts of parishioners, securing the Bible as the central focus for the Lutherans, the Reformed, and other Protestant churches. This is best evidenced in the replacement of the Eucharist as the center of worship in Catholic churches with the preaching of the Word. The pulpit became the most significant focus of the sanctuary, replacing the alter where the death of Jesus was reenacted in the Mass each Sunday. So important was the place of God's Word in the early Reformation period that sermons would last more than an two—and often longer than three—hours, with most ministers giving Bible teaching and sermons several times a week. The printing of Bibles, commentaries, and sermons became a major industry, along with the translation of the Bible into the common language of people, which made the Bible accessible to everyone. During the Great Awakenings, weeks of intensive Bible teaching and preaching saw a revival in churches across America and England. The Methodists instituted study groups that made every person a student of the Bible, able to rightly divide God's Word. There was an absolute trust in God's Word as the power for salvation and the only true guide for all practices of the church.

This availability of the Bible, along with the individual's permission to read and understand God's Word without help or instruction, not surprisingly made for the wide proliferation of new ideas, new denominations, and new churches that sprang up all across America in the nineteenth century, all equally claiming biblical foundations for their practices and teachings. What these churches all had in common was the Bible. But in so many other areas, they differed tremendously. In fact, churches argued and split into numerous sects and new denominations based on their social, racial, philosophical, and theological differences. Though many new interpretations and practices flourished, the Bible continued to be the one common source of inspiration.

### **Conversion**

The second major focus in most Evangelical churches today is conversion. Before the Reformation, there was little question as to who was saved and who was not. What church you were affiliated with was often determined by place of birth. It was the prerogative of the king or prince to choose what church his people would follow. Prior to the Reformation, there was little choice, as there was only the Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East. After Luther opened the Reformation floodgate, the choices were far greater. However, the faith of the individual in the village continued for a long time to be determined by the lord of the territory.

The local church was the only source of understanding salvation. The individual was totally reliant on the church for assurance of salvation. And due to a lack of communication beyond one's territory, there was little reason to question those church authorities. Therefore, participation in and obedience to the territorial church assured that one was in line for salvation. All that was required was baptism at birth in the local

parish church, regular church attendance, tithing, obedience to one's lord, and burial in a consecrated grave.

It was Luther's rediscovery of the Bible that began people questioning church and territorial authorities and long held traditions. It put into doubt the question of who held the true keys to eternal salvation. Luther's issue with the Catholic Church at the time was its monopoly on salvation, which it used as a source of income and control. Luther, from his renewed study of Scripture, found biblical truths long overlooked and ignored. He discovered that it was not the church that had the corner on salvation, but God—that salvation was a gift of God, by faith; not by works or payment or even loyalty to a particular church or a prince or a king. This raised new questions, arguments, and debates on what actually constituted salvation. No longer was birth into a particular territory, or regular attendance, or generous tithing, or even consecrated burial plots enough to assure one of eternal life. Over the next few centuries, Christians in all traditions and practices would turn to Scripture to rediscover the true meaning and proper method to be saved.

Through the preaching of Great Awakenings and revivals in early America, as individuals came to read the Bible themselves, the established church leaders lost their monopoly on salvation and their authority over their members. The search was on for a new and authentic assurances of salvation.

What grew out of the revivals of the nineteenth century was a strong focus on the individual conversion experience. For the early Reformers, salvation required that the individual be cut to the heart with a sense of sin and shame, followed by a clearly defined experience of feeling God move in one's life. This personal experience of God's

movement was proof that the individual was one of God's elect. A person was required to testify that God's Spirit had given them an authentic conversion experience to the individual that testified to the fact that they had received saving faith. This faith came only as a gift from God. In the revivals, weeping and ecstatic laughter, speaking in tongues, and fainting all provided proof of authentic conversion.

Other churches moved in the opposite direction, fearing these highly subjective and scripturally suspect practices. They turned to a more rationalistic approach, as rationalism was becoming the major philosophical mindset of the time. This involved a more objective and intellectual approach, where the study of the Bible would determine the essential elements that God required for salvation. These elements, found clearly in the Bible and followed meticulously, would allow the individual to rest absolutely sure that they were saved. Why? Because the Bible—God's final Word—said so! Such assurance fell squarely back on our first foundation: the Bible.

Conversion then became the central focus of the Christian life. Having an authentic conversion experience continued to be the end all for many Protestants, which gave absolute assurance that eternal life was guaranteed, secure, and beyond doubt. Salvation was the individual's well-reasoned choice, received by acknowledging the finished work of Christ on the cross and responding by the obedient act of baptism. This salvation was based entirely on the authority of God's Word. Here the two Evangelical foundation blocks come together: the Bible and conversion. These then became the essential lens that now informs one's thinking about every aspect of faith, the church, spirituality, social concerns, and ministry. The "ball passing" that we find ourselves focusing on today then is two fold: the authority of the Bible and the conversion event.



This faith-lens has become so highly instructive in our lives that it determines most of what we look for, as well as causing us to miss the “dancing gorilla”—that is, important aspects of faith just beyond our view.

How then does our particular faith-lens of conversion and the Bible play out in our churches? Here are a few questions that will help illustrate how the Bible and conversion has taken center stage in our thinking and practices:

- Is the focus of your worship service the Bible-based sermon? Is the sermon the largest part of your worship service?
- Are you squeamish about any creeds or statements of faith not explicitly found of the Bible?
- Do all sermons lead to an altar call? Is there regular encouragement given to those in attendance at any church gathering to give their lives to Christ? Do the sermons seem directed more to the unbelievers in the audience than the believer?
- Are quiet-time and small groups exclusively about Bible study?
- Does your church encourage regular reading of the entire Bible once a year?
- Does your church have well defined steps necessary to be saved or reborn? Is there a clear divide between true Christians (those really saved) and those who might be churchgoing but are not real Christians based on some aspect of conversion?
- Does your church focus on individual conversion and baptism more than discipleship and service?

- Is the major task of all individual Christians to evangelize the lost? Are social services or acts of compassion overlooked or discouraged as less significant than sharing the gospel?
- Is there a sense that as long as a person is baptized, how they live or act is of little consequence?

If this sounds vaguely familiar to you, you probably grew up in a church like Rebecca's, where it was all about Bible and conversion.

But isn't following the Bible commanded by Jesus and pleasing to God? Didn't Jesus come to earth to save people and get them to heaven? The answer is yes! But the Bible and conversion are only part of the story. It is only scratching the surface of a much grander and spectacular story. So, what is it that we might be missing because of these powerful lenses we grew up with?

### **CHAPTER THREE: JUST OUT OF SIGHT**

By emphasizing the Bible and conversion, other important insights and truths are ignored or forgotten completely. This does not mean these truths are totally jettisoned; it merely means that they receive less attention or they simply slide off the radar of our

thinking. Concepts and ideas that are no longer in our sights might even make us a little squeamish simply because they are not part of our way of thinking or seeing.

***Story #3: Pastor Bob the Bible church minister***

*Meet Pastor Bob. To know Bob is to know that he never preached without a suit and tie and he never went anywhere without his large, black, and well-thumbed Bible. Whatever the issue he was confronting or the problem he was counseling, Pastor Bob was ready with his Bible for a quick quote and a straightforward answer. In fact, the Bible was pretty much his only tool in his toolbox.*

*Of course, the Bible sermon was the center of this pastor's church service, with all else taking a backstage. Most of the sermons sounded familiar, as they all led to a challenge to give one's life to Christ. Pastor Bob's role was clear: his job was to preach to that one person in the congregation who wasn't saved (which was not very helpful for the 100 parishioners who also had to listen to his sermons Sunday after Sunday). Because of his focus on getting conversions, Bob tended to spend a lot of sermon time in Acts and the Epistles, finding there the best defense for his view on baptism and the best material to lead into the necessary altar call.*

*This particular Sunday, at the end of the service, Bob was so pleased when a middle-aged man took Bob aside. The man was searching for answers. Pastor Bob prayed for him and set up a series of meetings to read relevant passages and to talk about how to be saved by Jesus. Over the next three weeks, Bob poured himself into this seeker, meeting several times a week, spending hours and hours going from one Bible passage to the next, until there was no question about what he needed to do. The gentleman was not only thrilled to learn the truth, but enjoyed the fellowship and new*

*friendship with Pastor Bob. Three Sundays later, the same man came forward during the invitation hymn to be baptized into Jesus. The church applauded and sang, “Now I belong to Jesus” with great gusto. Then it was over. The man went home redeemed. But, to the surprise of the newly converted man, Pastor Bob no longer seemed interested to meet with him. You see, once the man was baptized and secure for heaven, Pastor Bob moved on to the next potential candidate for conversation, leaving the newly baptized person saved but with little direction on what should now take place in his life. Since no one else in Bob’s church had received any instruction about what came next, so they too had nothing to offer him.*

In one of the churches I attended, this illustration is more true to life than I would wish. It was often the case that our minister was so focused on saving people that he had no time (nor, I was convinced, was he sure what to do) for those who were newly converted. What was most blatantly missing in Pastor Bob’s view of Christianity was any form of discipleship that should follow conversion or any interest in teaching about living a Christian life. Church was all about getting people saved! But with this perspective, so much of what Jesus had to offer the believer, the abundant life and possibilities of changing the world, were ignored and forgotten.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg of many missing concepts and truths that are left in the shadows because of this narrow, laser focus on conversion and the Bible. Let me just give you a few of the other important truths often overlooked:

- As the conversion event becomes the totality of what it meant to be a Christian, life after conversion—including the spiritual presence of Christ, the

gift of the Holy Spirit, and walking in Christ—are ignored and given little consideration.

- As the focus of Scripture becomes narrowed to Acts and the Epistles, God's working out His promises and plans throughout the Old Testament and the life of Jesus in the Gospels are also overlooked.
- As conversion becomes the focus of most sermons, Bible studies, and Sunday school, there was little instruction in discipleship, perseverance, acts of compassion, or mission.
- As God speaks for the final time in the later part of the New Testament (Acts and Epistles), the work of the Holy Spirit gets relegated to understanding the Bible, which severely limits the activities of the Holy Spirit.
- With conversion as a one-time, completed act, a person is left with little to do but sit back and wait for heaven, leaving little reason for works of service, sacrifice, compassion, mission, or daily living one's faith.
- Conversion's blanket forgiveness provides little help with on-going personal struggles with sin, temptation, and pride that haunt the believer throughout all of life.
- Interpreting the heart of the Bible as salvation, there is little connection between the Word of God and issues facing people living in an exceedingly pagan and conflicted world. Church members receive little help or direction

for their troubled and chaotic personal lives, or with the mundane daily issues of life.

- Finally, if salvation is about removing sins and securing a place in heaven, it is no longer about actually meeting Jesus and sharing a passionate life of love and joy, or experiencing the privilege of sharing His compassion and healing with a hurting world.

Narrowing one's focus to such a small lens will severally limit the possibilities for life in Christ. The convert's life is reduced to an initiation event and a post-mortem hope.

***Story #4: Parable of a wedding crazed bride***

*An ecstatic bride has been collecting Bride magazines since she was thirteen, dreaming of the day when she would finally get to celebrate her wedding. She is now engaged and is totally focused on this special day. She has only one concern in life: to make this day absolutely perfect and memorable. She arranges the marriage ceremony, gets the wedding license, lines up her bridesmaids, arranges for dresses and tuxes, orders meals and the banquet hall, ministers, and musicians. And one other minor detail was not overlooked: she even found a guy to be her groom for the wedding. But for her, that was a very minor detail. Her focus is all about this one special day. For her, the wedding day is what it meant to be married. In fact, there is little or no consideration of life after the wedding...because, frankly, it was all about the wedding.*

*Then comes the day after the wedding. Now that the wedding is done, this young woman, exhausted, returns to her parent's home, back to her childhood bedroom and continues her single life as if nothing ever happened. She never again spends a single*

*moment with the man that she stood at the altar and share vows with before so many witnesses on that most special and memorable day. Now, sitting alone, night after night, she simply relishes the memory of that one special day, thumbing through her wedding album and replaying the video of her wedding. She got her wedding and she can now say she is married. Though perfectly happy with her wonderful wedding day, she no longer feels happy. In fact, she is sensing a deep loneliness. She senses that somehow she is missing something...something is just not quite right.*

The question we need to ask is this: Is this crazed bride really married? Does she even understand the purpose of a wedding day? If she never actually experiences the joy of her married life, living and growing in love with her husband, sharing intimately each and every day with the one she pledged her life too, can we really say she is married? She may have gone through all the motions of getting married, performing the legal requirements, even affirming “I do” before people, but if she leaves the ceremony alone and lives the rest of her life without companionship and love, without fulfilling her vows, we must question whether she is actually married! Obviously she has missed the whole point of getting married.

In other words, being married is not about a ceremony, or even about fulfilling state-sanctioned obligations. Being married is so much more than even the most glorious ceremony and festive reception imaginable. Marriage is about a relationship of love, commitment and life together! It is about growth and compromise, about sharing one’s body, mind and soul with another, and about generating new life to share the overflow of abundant love within that relationship. Going through a ceremony does not make a marriage! In fact, the wedding is only an initiation, the doorway into a new life where

two lives are joined together intimately by God, who to their vows and promises throughout life, until death do they part. Marriage is about experiencing and enjoying love and intimacy and partnership with another. It really has little to do with cakes, dresses, invitations, and gifts.

For many, being a Christian is just like being that crazed bride, in which the entirety of one's Christianity is that special day of initiation. For many Christians, they were baptized and welcomed into the family by well-wishers who attended their baptism, and they were told their place in heaven was now secure. Then they went home and have lived alone ever since, with little change from their old life. They had—like the crazed bride—a ceremony without a marriage.

Is being a Christ-follower only about the initiation into the faith? Is it simply about being baptized, fulfilling certain biblical obligations, and having one's sins forgiven? If your faith-lens focuses primarily on conversion, then the answer is yes! Conversion is the end all of Christianity. For many, this is how they think about the faith. There is a sense that as long as we have been through the "ceremony" my faith is complete...I have arrived! They are like the crazed bride, thinking it is all about that special day, the big event. Because of that narrow perspective, they are missing out on what should come after the ceremony, and, even more importantly, what the ceremony actually does that completely changes a person's life forever.

Doesn't Scripture suggest that being a Christian is like being married? Isn't being a Christ-follower about being in a relationship and experiencing real intimacy with Jesus? Being baptized into Jesus means, like getting married, joining your life with another. But, the one you are joining your life to happens to be *divine*. This means you can have



an even closer, more intimate relationship with Jesus than with any other person...even your spouse. With the gift of the Holy Spirit, the believer now shares life with the Lord Jesus Christ, who produces within us an overflow of love for God and a lifetime of joy unspeakable. It is a relationship of such love and joy that it overflows in compassion to others that is evidenced through service and sacrifice.

I am afraid that for many Christians, they are like this bride who has been through a lovely ceremony but today live alone (just like the new covert in Pastor Bob's church). If the entirety of our faith is focused on conversion as the central, one-time event (though significant and essential as any marriage ceremony), then chances are we are missing the rest of the story: the joyous and dynamic Spirit-drenched relationship that God wants with us every day of our lives.

Because of this Bible-centered and conversion-centered myopia, salvation becomes a done deal, a nice neat package all wrapped up and ready for delivery in heaven. But it gives little room for living a life of hope today and provides scarce insights for discipleship, spirituality, the Holy Spirit, or divine indwelling.

What we mostly miss, then, is Jesus. As Leonard Sweet suggests: "So many of our 'ways to God' lose God along the way because Jesus is something other than the Way. Here is my biggest ambition in life: Fall in love with Jesus, stay in love with Jesus, die in love with Jesus."<sup>3</sup> If Sweet's words make you squirm even slightly or they seem somehow odd, then you are seeing your faith through a very narrow lens that fails to see faith as this loving, passionate relationship with God. Let me put it this way: God is like that husband who is far more interested in living life with you than having you dwell on that long-passed and mostly forgotten wedding day! How we enter the faith is important,

---

<sup>3</sup> Sweet, 109.

but if that is our only focus, we miss out on knowing the lover of our soul. We miss out on a lifetime of love, joy and hope. We are that bride sitting alone with mere memories of a very special day that has made absolutely no difference in our life.

The issue is simply this: Are we missing or ignoring a more spectacular concept of God and His desire for our life? If we step back and broaden our view of both the Bible and salvation, we will see right there, in the very same Bible we've been reading all along, a much more spectacular view of what God has intended for each of us.

What are we missing? A lot! To learn exactly what we are missing will require us to widening our lens even slightly by reading the Bible with new eyes. This means first reading the whole of Scripture, not just the last chapters or sections of Scripture that focus on conversion. Second, it means asking other questions than the one question our church seems most concerned with, which is how must I be saved? It will require asking the questions that Jesus himself asked, like: "Who do you say I am?" When you ask the Jesus Question, you will begin to understanding that God is passionately concerned about you—not just your sins—but you! By asking new questions and broadening your perspective of His Word, you are going to find the Jesus you've been missing, and the Jesus you've always wanted to know. In place of a two-dimensional snapshot faith or a lovely (but ultimately empty) ceremony, you will find a spectacular vista of faith that includes a lifelong love relationship and life of meaning and purpose.

**PART II:  
ILLUMINATING THE SHADOWS: FINDING A WAY OUT**

**CHAPTER FOUR:  
A MORE SPECULAR VIEW OF THE BIBLE**

***Story #5: A Doctor's Devotion***

*A brilliant doctor lost a loved one to cancer. So heartbroken over her loss, she sets out to find a cure for this awful disease so others won't have to suffer the same excruciating suffering and hardship. Because of her personal dealings with this disease that was so horrible and disruptive to people she knew and loved, finding that cure becomes an all-consuming focus for that doctor. As every moment of her life is dedicated to understanding and seeking a cure for cancer, this doctor eats, sleeps, and lives for this one issue. In her search for a cure, she sacrifices family, friends and her own interests and concerns. She becomes totally oblivious to what is going on in the world around her, including politics, sports, and entertainment. She is so consumed with finding a cure that*

*she is even blind to the ongoing issues of her immediate family. She is so desperate to find the cure that she loses sight of everything else in life. Life is now completely devoted to understanding and overcoming this cancer. Nothing else matters.*

This same situation occurs with many Christians. The all-consuming disease is not cancer but sin. Overcoming the evil and the consequences of sin can become the all-consuming center of faith, which means the conversion and the salvation of those around us becomes our primary focus. All else fades in importance when we see that the whole of Christianity is this one issue: sin or separation from God. Because of God's holiness and our sinfulness, receiving the finished work of Jesus on the cross for forgiveness is absolutely essential. Without the redemptive work of Christ on the cross, there is no forgiveness, there is no heaven. Since sin is the essential issue that must be dealt with, we study all that is necessary to overcome that sickness: we know everything there is to know about Jesus' sacrifice, justification, baptism, atonement, and being born again. In fact, we have memorized those passages that most clearly help us understand our desperate need for salvation and the steps required to receive salvation. And salvation/conversion then becomes the totality of what it means to be a Christian.

Like the doctor, that one all-consuming concern will become the lens through which we then view every part of our faith. All else will be insignificant. If something doesn't fit into this particular focus, we don't have time or interest to deal with it. As the doctor jettisoned family, friends, community, and even concern for her own wellbeing, so many Christians too will find little concern for those things outside the lens of conversion.

If Christianity is only about overcoming sin...period...then we are missing out on a large part of the Bible, which does not directly reference or illuminate this topic. What is often lost is a fuller picture of who God is and what God is really concerned about. You will fail to see that our God is extremely interested and involved in every aspect of everyday life, be it family, work, interpersonal relationships, attitudes and actions, as well the larger issues of government, politics, war and peace. If we hold to a narrow conversion/salvation view of the Christianity, then we will be sadly missing out on a more spectacular view of God who is intimately and thoroughly relational and a life in God that is thoroughly life affirming and world influencing.

### **How our narrow view affects our study of the Bible**

Do we bring a narrow lens to our study of the Bible? How does one know?

This can be easily answered by a simple test. If you were asked to quote any five verses of the Bible, what five verses come immediately to your mind? If you are a normal evangelical that lived in the last three or four decades in America, I can guarantee that several of the following verses will quickly come to mind (and may, like me, be the only verses you have ever memorized). See if any of these would be found in your top five (or ten) list:

- John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.<sup>4</sup>
- Romans 2:12: For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.
- Acts 2:37-39: When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied,

---

<sup>4</sup> All Bible quotes are from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

- Isaiah 1:18: “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”
- Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.
- Romans 10:13: Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Look over these verses once again. Ask yourself what is the common theme of these particular passages? Why have you learned these particular verses and why are they so familiar? If you are like me, you learned these verses through evangelism programs that grew out of the 1980s and 1990s. For those active in college ministries, you probably picked up many of these passages in Campus Crusade (now CRU) tracts like the Four Spiritual Laws. And, if you attended a church like Rebecca’s, these verses would have would have concluded many sermons, calling people to respond to the gospel message. What these verses all have in common is their focus on conversion: sin, separation from God, the effects of sin and the need for repentance and salvation that is offered as a gift from God. If the few verses that we’ve memorized have this central theme, then it isn’t surprising that this is how we generally view the entirety of what the Bible story is about. The conclusion is that all of Scripture is summarized by these passages that center on sin, salvation and conversion. It is like saying that the entirety of the married life is about overcoming our singleness.

To understand how this narrow focus affects our study of the Bible, let's take a look at a couple of the more familiar passages. But, we will look at the passages with a slightly broader focus. Let's read the larger portion of Scripture that the passage is embedded in and ask what it has to teach us. See if this verse sounds familiar.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

This passage is absolutely central to our understanding of salvation. It reminds us that our salvation is a gift of God, based not on our works or on our own efforts. In fact, this kernel of truth in this passage was the foundation for the Reformation, rediscovered in Romans by Luther. There is no doubt this is a passage that deals directly with conversion, and is important for sharing the truth of the gospel. But, as familiar as this passage is, can you tell me what precedes these verses? What was Paul saying that led to this foundational passage? Is the entire passage focused on our conversion or is conversion secondary to what Paul is discussing in chapter two of Ephesians? Well, let's take a look. As we do, ask yourself not "what" but "who" is the real focus of the passage? What do you learn about this person?

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:1-10)

There is an extremely rich teaching here that would take an entire book to extrapolate all of its insights. But, if you stand back and ask *who* is Paul talking about, it becomes clear in verse 4, “But God...” Take a moment and look at what we are told about God from this one passage. Do you see it? God...

- is rich in mercy (v. 4)
- is great in love...He loved us (v. 4)
- makes people alive in Jesus Christ (v. 5)
- saves us by His grace (vv. 5, 8) as a gift (v. 8)
- raised Jesus to life (v. 6)
- shows the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (v. 7)
- is working in our lives, as we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works (v. 10)
- has prepared all this for us long beforehand (v. 10)

In this short passage, like in all of Scripture, we first are given tremendous insights into who God is, how God works, and what God is like. By opening up our viewfinder to incorporate more of the Bible (even by a few verses), we will ultimately bring God into the picture, and we begin to realize that in fact, so much of the Bible we’ve been reading is not about me, but about God. What we begin to see is that God is not just working at saving people, but He is about making people’s lives rich, grace-filled, and useful. We also gain a greater understanding of God’s larger purpose in the world in which our lives are now intimately connected.

Second, I would suggest that this passage provides insights into the nature of the world and our very real struggle with sin and evil. In verses 1-3, we learn that there are



two spiritual realities: one ruled by the “spirit of the air” that controls the world (v. 2), which explains the prevalent darkness and death in our world, and the other is “God” (v. 4) who is rich in mercy and grace, kindness, and life. It is helpful (and necessary) to understand that there is a real battle in our world between these very real forces and, depending on which side we wish to join, will determine whether we live “in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (v. 3) or we fulfill our God given mandate as “God’s workmanship” (v. 10).

Do you see the difference when we broaden our reading of Scripture? When we focus on conversion, our attention centers on *Me!* *My faith* then becomes the key to this entire passage. But when we focus on God, suddenly our entire perspective of the passage changes. The passage is now about the big picture. It is about a cosmic battle of real spiritual focuses. It is about a God who is working to bring about His purposes against a real world of evil and corrupt power. It is about the God of the universe who wishes for me to join His eternal project to bring all things under His Lordship. Daniel Henderson highlights what becomes clear with this broader lens:

It is beyond belief that the God of the universe desires to reconcile me to himself—that He found me, brought me to life, and drew me to His heart. God’s rich mercy brought me life not because of my works of goodness but because of the good and gracious work of Jesus Christ. It is all about the gift of God, and now He wants to work in me by His life to produce everything good in and through me.<sup>5</sup>

In short, God wants me to know Him and has graciously made that possible. But it is for His greater purposes. When we make our focus about God, then Scripture comes to illuminate all areas of life...big and small...because all of life belongs to God. If the

---

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Henderson, *The Deeper Life: Satisfying the Eight Vital Longings of Your Soul* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2014), 35.

Bible is merely a proof text for how to be converted, we miss seeing—and ultimately miss being awed by and drawn into worship of—God.

Let's take a look at another passage. Acts 2:37-38 is also a very familiar salvation passage, answering the question of what one must do to be saved. It reads:

Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NASB)

Again, we should ask the question of what comes before and after these two verses that are so central to our faith? Most would be at a loss to provide an answer. Twenty verses prior to these verses is Peter's brilliant synopsis of the Old Testament, highlighting the promises of God for a thrilling future that was coming for all mankind. Acts 2:14-24 reads:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

'In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” (NIV)

This passage greatly expands the idea of what it actually means to be saved. Let’s just touch on few of these important insights.

First, we see God as the center of an entire operation on which He has been working since long before Jesus ever came to earth. As proof, Peter quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel, who lived sometime before the fifth century BC. Peter also makes reference to King David, who long preceded Joel. In other words, God’s deep concern for reconnecting with His people dates far before Pentecost, and is reflected in numerous promises throughout Scripture. What He promised was that “My Spirit” (Acts 2:17)—that is, God’s indwelling presence—was going to not just be sourced out to a few lucky people, but be “*poured out on all people*” (Acts 2:17, my emphasis), unlike the Old Testament times when God’s Spirit was given to only a select few. And this promise was fulfilled through Jesus Christ’s life and death according “God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). Clearly, God has been at work for a very long time to bring about this new and glorious reality.

Secondly, this passage suggests that something pretty exciting would happen when the Spirit of God enters into the lives of people. It states emphatically that even the lowest person (in Joel’s day, this would be slaves, women, and the poor) will speak God’s Word, see things never before imaged, and dream great dreams (Acts 2:17)

because they all will have within them the infinitely powerful God. In fact, not only will believers experience amazing new things, but the entire world was poised to experience the reality of God now living and acting in the world through those who would receive His Spirit.

So much of this passage is poetic and hyperbolic, but it gives the sense that something phenomenal is promised to those on whom the Spirit is poured, which reaches far beyond the cancelation of sins. In fact, Luke argues for radical life change. Notice Peter's call at the end of his sermon to "save yourself from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40), suggesting that baptism into Jesus means a major realignment of one's life away from the world. And Acts 2:39-45 illustrates what a new life looks like:

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (NIV)

What does the new life (in contrast to the "corrupt world") look like? It requires devotion to the apostles' teachings, to fellowship, to breaking of bread and prayer; it involved sharing common life together, sharing one's possessions and wealth, and making absolutely sure no one has needs (vv. 42-45). This would suggest that Christianity does not end at conversion or at baptism, but only begins there.

The passage in its entirety demonstrates that God is interested in radically entering, changing and filling the life of the believer, bringing about a new and exciting existence. His desire is to move daily and powerfully in the midst of the believer's life in order to ultimately affect the lives of those around the believer in an equally powerful and compassionate way. In short, one's life after conversion will involve active separation from the evils of the world while exhibiting sacrificial and compassionate service to fellow believers.

Here we begin to glimpse the greater insights into this extravagant God who has long sought participation and relationship with His creation and is vastly concerned about a person's life well beyond the conversion experience. These insights that are often lost in the shadows that with a broader view of Scripture can again to see the light of day.

### *Two Keys to Broadening Our Focus:*

#### *A. Reframing Our Question*

The question that often guides our study of the Bible is the very same question that is on the mind of anyone who becomes aware of their awful state of sinfulness and the absolute holiness of God. This is the question that was asked in Acts 2:37: "Brothers, what shall we do?" This is the same question on the mind of the rich young ruler, who asks: "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16). Since these are the questions found in Scripture, we assume that they must be *the* very questions that we should be asking. However, they are *human questions*, questions that earthly, fallen, and desperate people are forced to ask. It is our nature to hope that our lives do not become extinct after we die, but we know intuitively that our sin against God requires no less. What we want then is assurance for the life to come.

If you line up Jesus' response to the rich young ruler with the response given by Peter to the crowd in Acts 2, what do you find? Jesus, on the one hand, says to keep the commandments and, shockingly, give away all your wealth (Matt. 19:17-22). Peter, on the other hand, says to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). (It is actually ironic that the people who weren't asked to give away their riches on Pentecost did in fact give away their wealth in response to God's saving grace, where the rich young ruler walked away rich and sad!) These are two vastly different answers. In fact, Jesus doesn't mention sin, baptism, or anything about faith. Even asking the simplest of questions about eternal security did not illicit easy or uniformed answers. It might suggest that there is something more going on here in this matter of salvation. It may also indicate that people were asking the wrong question!

I would suggest the better place to start is with the questions that Jesus, God, asked. What is the central question that He asked? That question is found in Mark 8:27, when Jesus asked His disciples: "Who do people say I am?" This very question brought forth the confession of faith by Peter that has guided the church for two thousand years. The answer that Jesus sought from His disciples came in Mark 8:28-29:

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." (NIV)

Peter was essentially saying that Jesus was the promised Christ. Matthew even adds on to Peter's statement: "the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16). The power of this statement was such that Jesus each time asked that they tell no one (Mark 8:30), as this one statement placed Jesus in grave danger by those who wanted to suppress this truth. Martha makes this same confession to Jesus before the resurrection of her brother

Lazarus as a response to Jesus' statement that He was the "resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). "'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world'" (John 11:27). As you can see, in all the Gospels, the key concern was the identity and nature of Jesus. What Jesus sought was the required admission that He was the Christ, the Son of God, which was to admit that He was divine; that is very God.

Why is this question so important and central to our faith? The identification of Jesus as God is central to everything that is Christianity! It is central to who God is and to salvation itself. Only if Jesus is God, is He also the resurrection and the life. Only as God can Jesus be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Only as God can He bring hope, healing, and new life. On the other side, if Jesus is not God, there is no salvation, no deeper understanding of who God is, and there is no hope. That is why this question is so significant, and why it is more important than "what must I do?" In fact, if we have faith that Jesus is God, what we must do is self-evident: we must come, follow and worship Jesus!

Without the understanding of Jesus as God, we miss out on several vital insights into what it means to be a Christ-follower. If Jesus is indeed God, then His very life illustrates for us what a holy, godly, and (need I say) Christ-like life looks like. The life of Jesus then is not just a prelude to our salvation or His death on the cross. Jesus' life and teachings are God's clear and undeniable message for living life as a disciple and a servant, as an ambassador and a friend of Jesus, who seeks to partner with believers to usher the kingdom of God into the world. Jesus' life is as much the message about a life lived in God as it is about salvation. We must then pay close attention to the entirety of

Jesus' life. The Gospels now takes on great significance for our lives, because there we learn about the person of Jesus and the best example of a life lived in love with God.

And we would learn more about God, as Jesus demonstrates God's character and heart.

As Jesus said:

If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:7, NIV)

When we reframe the question from *what must I do to be saved?* (the Conversion Question) to *who do you say I am?* (the Jesus Question), we are then required to broaden our focus far beyond the passages that just talk about salvation. This wider view given by the Jesus Question will begin to open up a world of wonder, as Jesus now becomes the heart of our study and attention, which now includes the entirety of the Bible.

As we look intently at the person of Jesus, who we are told is the very representation of God (Philippians 2), we discover that God is extremely compassionate about people who are hurting, suffering, lost, and alone. In Jesus, we further learn that God is concerned not just about sin, but about all aspects of life, from family relationships to weddings, from food to feasts, from failure to fulfillment, from farming to finances, from morals to religion, from weather to rest. He touches sick people, He cries for friends, He struggles with pain and fear, He expresses anger, He exhibits compassion, and He serves others in the most humble ways. If we become amazed and captivated by this person who lived a life of holiness, passion, reconciliation and love, then you will be even more amazed to understand that He is no less than God. We will be further amazed that God would wash dirty feet, experience sorrow and pain, die on a cross, and love even the worst of sinners. If that is all true, then the message I should hear in reading Scripture is that the Holy God of the Universe, the Creator, Almighty and



Powerful, is likewise a God of great compassion, reconciliation, and love. Why?

Because Jesus is no less than God! The message Jesus brings is that God is now absolutely approachable, compassionate, tender, full of grace and mercy and abounding in hope, yet strong and holy.

If Jesus becomes our focus, then we are able to put our salvation in perspective. Salvation becomes more about reconciliation than about sin; it is more about new life in relationship with this wondrous God than about dwelling on our past failures or a long past initiation event; it is about living life to the fullest now rather than sitting back waiting for heaven. Salvation is about meeting and knowing Jesus. And because knowing Jesus is so wondrous, salvation becomes about passing on the hope and joy that is Jesus to others who are lost and hurting! We will ultimately learn that the eternal life we long for is not some distant place or time. We now discover that eternal life is simply to know Jesus:

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3, NIV)

### *B. Finding Jesus Throughout the Entire Bible*

If our interest in studying Scripture is to know Jesus, then our search will take in all aspects of the life of Jesus. This will take us far beyond the few verses that focus on conversion and sin, redemption and eternal life. Since we want to know all about Jesus and take on His life and likeness (as we will discuss more fully later), then the Gospels must take on new and greater significance. In fact, Jesus' key questions provide a helpful way to process these many stories concerning Jesus' life and teaching, from the first chapter of Matthew to the last verse of the Gospel of John. His every action speaks about

a life lived fully in loving response to God. Therefore, whenever you pick up the Word of God, the question that should be most prevalent on your mind is what does this passage tell me about God (i.e. God the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit)? Approaching the Bible with God in mind will make relevant and astonishing every part of the New Testament.

This is just as true for the Old Testament as well. Jesus argued that the Old Testament was available to shine a light on who He was. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples had a strange but significant encounter with the risen Christ on the Road to Emmaus. On that fateful journey, the disciples were instructed by Jesus Christ Himself (whom they did not at first recognize in His resurrected state) on how they might better understand and even defend His claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God.

Notice the basis on which Jesus Himself explains His life and ministry:

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27, NIV)

The Scripture to which He is referring was the only Scripture the Hebrew people had at that time: the Old Testament. It was the entire Old Testament story of God working through the people of Israel, beginning with Abraham, through Moses and the Exodus, all the way to the prophets that make up the later (often ignored) books of Old Testament, that Jesus used to explain "what was said...concerning himself" (Luke 24: 27). The story concludes after a meal together and the departure of Jesus who is now clearly recognized by the disciples.

They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32, NIV)

Do you hear the subtle message Jesus is telling His disciples? He is arguing that there is great value in the study of the Old Testament Scriptures, for they provide understanding and insights about Jesus—who He was, why He came, and God’s purpose for His earthly life. Without the Old Testament, there is little reason to believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be. But this rich documentation provided by God illustrates his consistent character and active involvement within humanity throughout history, as well as providing numerous promises and prophecies, all foreshowing the coming Messiah, giving hope for reconciliation and new life. We are then (like the disciples) are given with a solid foundation that brings greater assurance of the truth that Jesus is God.

Imagine being the disciples, having seen your beloved friend die a horrible death and thinking that hope itself had died. Then, out of nowhere, you not only meet the your resurrected friend and Lord Jesus, but He takes time to show you that all this had happened exactly as God had said it would. No wonder their hearts “were burning” (Luke 24:32) as it all became clear. Not only did they have the evidence of the risen Christ, but now they had thousands of years of testimony that affirmed their belief that Jesus was God and had indeed had come to reconcile the world to Himself.

Throughout Acts and the Epistles, there is a common theme that we should be aware of. That theme is the frequent references to the Old Testament. If you read through Peter’s first sermon in Acts 2, you will notice that it’s almost entirely made up of biblical quotes and references. The same is true of Paul’s deeply theological study in the book of Romans. Read through the Book of Hebrews and you will find a book drenched in Old Testament teaching. Each of these writers are simply helping the early church to better understand that Jesus didn’t just appear out of nowhere, but was the fulfillment of

God's plan and promises. They needed to understand who Jesus was and what it meant for Him to come into the world. The Old Testament was the place to gain that greater understanding. The same should be true for us: if we truly desire to better know who Jesus is, to understand that His appearing was not merely a fairy tale or clever ruse, but was God's very plan, based on His numerous promises given throughout hundreds of years of history. That plan culminated in this one person who was both God and man, who lived and died and rose again, that we might have life in abundance, and that all things might be restored under His Lordship.

If our goal then is to come to know Jesus, then we must not neglect the beginning of His story. In Genesis, we get our first hint to the existence of Jesus, as God said at the creation, "Let *us* make mankind in *our* image..." (Gen. 1:26). In the second chapter of Genesis, with the fall of man, came the first promise that God would send one who would defeat sin and evil, when to the serpent He said,

"And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
He will crush your head,  
And you will strike his heel." (Gen. 3:15, NIV)

Here, God was foreshadowing one who would experience hurt while giving a fatal head wound to the enemy that had brought conflict and separation between God and man.

This is the very action that Jesus took against Satan on the cross. The early promises of coming of the Messiah came to Abraham, who would bless all nations through his seed; through the Exodus of God's people out of slavery that foreshadows Christ's leading humanity out of slavery to sin to the promise land of freedom and renewed; through the Suffering Servant prophecies in Isaiah; to the promise of Bethlehem to be the town that

would welcome the Messiah; and the promised return of Elijah (witnessed in John the Baptist) who would announce that the Messiah had arrived. In other words, the entire Old Testament points to the entire life-story of Jesus.

As our next chapter will also demonstrate, the actions of God throughout the Old Testament illustrate the very character of God that is clearly found in the person of Jesus. We learn in the Old Testament of God's mercy, grace, longsuffering, and care for the poor and widows, the slave and the alien, which are the very characteristics mirrored in Jesus. A close study of the Old Testament will provide greater awareness that Jesus is indeed God, giving us a stronger foundation for our faith and further reasons for our hearts to burn within us. The entirety of God's story then is required to grasp the full breadth of God's passion, longsuffering, and self-giving for humanity that is clearly reflected in the character of Jesus, culminating in His very death on the cross. No wonder Paul gave high honor to this Hebrew Scripture, when he suggested that: "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness..." (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV).

By developing a wider view of God's Word as a source to better know and understand Jesus—to see the Bible as more than a proof text for how to be saved—the entirety of God's Word takes on much greater significance and importance. No longer is Acts our only go-to book. Now, on every page of the Bible, we find life changing, highly encouraging, and often times challenging truths. As we study more, asking what God's Word says about Jesus, we will not only come to gain a much wider and fuller understanding of God, but we will come to better understand God's love and passion for us, God's concern for all aspects of life, and God's hope for not only personal peace and

joy, but God’s hope for peace on earth. When we discover this God of love and compassion, who perfectly balances His holiness and His compassion, we will not be satisfied with a mere intellectual affirmation as the end all of salvation, but we will discover that our hearts are burning within us, our knees are weakened beneath us, our breath is taken away, our mouths are silenced. We find ourselves falling down in worship and humble submission. If we aren’t literally overwhelmed by God, who is rich in mercy and righteousness, hope and love, then we have not yet met Jesus.

### **CHAPTER FIVE: A MORE SPECTACULAR VIEW OF GOD**

There is nothing more important in life than knowing God. This is why I believe that Jesus asked the essential and foundational question of His followers: “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15; also Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20). This question concerns Jesus’ identity, which ultimately was a question about His divinity, His being God. It was a question about who God is and what God is really like. Jesus knew that how one perceives God determines everything about a person’s life: their actions, their hopes, and their basic beliefs, their commitments, and even how they use their time.

As Jesus claimed divinity, He demonstrated clearly what God is like. Our belief about who Jesus is should determine not only what we think about God, it will also determine how we live. “This belief shapes our identity, forms our sense of purpose, and determines our real values.”<sup>6</sup> I would also venture to say that a *denial* of God and Jesus similarly determines one’s path in life and one’s life-style. If you want to seriously develop your faith based on Scripture, then follow Jesus’ lead by answering *His* central

---

<sup>6</sup> Henderson, 30.

question. Jesus knew that there was no more significant question than this, because if people understand and came to know God through the lens provided by Jesus, then their lives and actions too would also begin to reflect God, especially His love, compassion, and sacrifice.

Jesus came into the world as the incarnation of God to clarify God for us once and for all, to tear down so many misconceptions about God and the false idols that religion and tradition has put in place of God, that sadly lead people away from the true God. That is why Jesus was emphatic:

If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. (John 14:7-10, NIV)

Jesus is making the clear claim that He is God, and that by looking to Him, we can see God Himself. This is the radical claim that Jesus is divine; that God has taken on humanity in the person Jesus! If God is Jesus and Jesus is God, then we have to ask, does our God—or our concept God—look like Jesus? For most Christians, if they are honest, their idea of God is nothing like Jesus. Why is this?

Let’s do a little test. If I were to ask you to describe for me God, what are the first words that come to your mind? For many Christians, what instantly pops into their brain are the words *omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent*. These words are, for most people, merely shorthand for *basic God characteristics*, which honestly are devoid of meaning for most people today. These are big and very antiquated words that highlight great concepts about divinity. They are terms we’ve all been taught to capture the

essence of *god-ness*. Indeed, God is powerful, knowledgeable, and He is everywhere. But why do we start there? Why is His mightiness and total otherness our first idea of God that comes to our mind? Why doesn't the image of Jesus instantly jump into our brain when we think of God? I would argue that this thinking about God's otherness is ingrained in us as a result of hundreds of years of philosophical arguments on the nature of God by theologians and preachers who sought to make sense of what is ultimately beyond mere words to comprehend. In seeking to clarify the basic nature of God, Western theologians and thinkers have turned not to the Bible but Greek philosophy for terms and categories to delineate the true otherness of God.

But, what most Christians don't understand is that these words are not in the Bible! They, in fact, are Greek concepts based on Greek ideas about their gods. I would argue that this terminology and the concepts behind them would neither resonant with nor be understood by the original Hebrew writers of the Bible. The reality is that these terms fit much more neatly in the pantheon of Greek gods found in mythology than they describe the God of the Hebrews, and even less the God found in the incarnate Jesus.

What is missing in the Greek concept of God? "To the Greeks, God is supernatural, omnipotent, and omnipresent. *This is who God is independent of his relationship to others.*"<sup>7</sup> For the Greeks, they view God without any reference to anyone or anything. God simply is. And God is other. No comparison or connection is necessary.

This is where many Christians begin their understanding of God as well. God must be one totally detached, above, beyond and totally incomprehensible to us. Because

---

<sup>7</sup> David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 165; emphasis added.



that is what it means to be God. Right? What this means then is that there is ultimately no basis for real connection or intimacy with God, because if God in His nature is so completely other, there is no possibility of real relationship between God and humans. If you search Scriptures for an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present God, you will find aspects of these characteristics scattered throughout the pages of the Bible. God really is ultimate and infinite and unlike us! But, at the same time, you will miss God as He is described and illuminated very differently in the Bible. Using the Greek lens to understand God will distort the richness of the inherently relational God of the Hebrews that both permeates the Old Testament and is fully realized in the life and teachings of Jesus in the New Testament.

So, how does the Bible view God? David Livermore is helpful here:

A Hebrew view of *God is relational in nature*. To the Hebrews, God is Creator, Judge, and Lord. He is called ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and our forefathers.’ Hebrew culture sees and describes reality in relationship to other people and things rather than describing objects in and of themselves. Paul refers to this approach as a ‘centered-set’ way of seeing the world. Things and people are described in relationship to other things and people.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the central (and most Hebrew) approach to understanding God is through relationships. God is not just other, alone, out there all by Himself. He is Creator. He not only created the world, He took walks in His garden and interacted intimately with its first inhabitants. God is the God who clearly associated with particular people throughout the Old Testament (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Joseph, Moses, David, and the people of Israel). God is not this powerful, arbitrary force (like the Greek gods or what we find in Star Wars), but God is essentially Love, which assumes a relationship with those who are being loved. Even God’s description as Holy and Righteous implies

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid; emphasis added.

not distance but active involvement in extending justice and mercy to others. Holiness is not as we often think it is, as simply being separate. It actually means being separated for a purpose of goodness. Instead of a God who is utterly other, unapproachable and unattached, we find a very different starting place for comprehending God in the Bible. It is a God of relationship.

From Genesis to the genuine leather the Bible tells the story of the Creator's desire for a covenantal relationship with humanity, not chaotic relationships or casual relationships but 'binding' relationship. The incarnation is the new 'binding'—God 'binding' himself to humanity not in stone or ink but in flesh and blood. God doesn't offer final answers, the manacles of modernity, but binding relationships.<sup>9</sup>

With a larger lens that now includes the entirety of the biblical canon from Genesis to Revelation, we are then presented with a stunning reality: God Almighty planned from the beginning and has continued to work tirelessly throughout history to return humanity to an intimate relationship with Himself. Beginning with a greater awareness of the Old Testament, we will see God's persistently relational and essential Hebrew character. Many of His interactions are described in intimately personal detail. One of the earliest descriptions given of God's charter emphasizes His gracious nature and His concern for justice:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (Exod. 34:6-7)

Psalms is a rich resource for the relational language of God. David was a deeply passionate follower of God, which is reflected in his prayers. In Psalm 42:1, David expresses his longing for God: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants

---

<sup>9</sup> Sweet, 116.

for you, my God.” In Psalms 42:5, he then asks, “Why, my soul, are you so downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” For David, his hope came from knowing not the “omni-” attributes about God, but the experience of knowing His very presence. David’s passion for God came from experiential awareness of God who was absolutely reliable, which we learn about in examining David’s life in First and Second Samuel. In poetry and songs—the genres of the heart and its longings—David demonstrates the possibilities of a vital relationship with God. David’s son goes even further, providing deeply sensual poetry of love and passion in Song of Songs that has been the source of spiritual insight for centuries. The prophet Zephaniah laid bare God’s passion and personal concern when he said: “The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). Even more than this, God’s delight and care for His children is stronger than that of a mother’s, according the Prophet Isaiah:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget,  
I will not forget you!  
See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;  
your walls are ever before me. (Isa. 49:15-16, NIV)

In the New Testament, that same relational focus is found in Jesus, who shares God’s deep concern for His people, as He laments over those who failed to receive His love:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. (Luke 13:34, NIV)

An equally intimate metaphor that is repeated in the New Testament is that of adoption.

Paul returns to this theme several times in his writing, highlighting the graciousness of

God that brought about this new familial relationship:

Rom. 8:15: The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to son ship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” (NIV)

Gal. 4:5-6: to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” (NIV)

Eph. 1:5-6: he predestined us for adoption to son ship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (NIV)

Here, adoption is not merely changing a person’s legal status; God gives Himself to the fatherless and offers full son-ship. To these adopted children, the Spirit of the Father is bestowed, bringing intimacy and abiding oneness between Father and son, which is witnessed in the heartfelt cry “*Abba! Father!*” This cry “represents a relationship of intense intimacy, an exclusive relationship with God.”<sup>10</sup> This heartwarming love of a father and child brightly illuminates the very nature of this new divine-human relationship that is ours in Christ.

Similar illustrations are found throughout the Bible for the relationship with God that is now available to the believer, including intimate images of marriage (Eph. 5:31; Rev. 21:9), the body (1 Cor. 12), and the home (John 14:16-18). Together they encourage genuine connection, indwelling, interaction and the common life that is now possible through the Holy Spirit. Taken as a whole, these concepts paint a rich picture of the astonishing reality of real union and participation offered and desired by God.

---

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1985), 85.

The question that must now be asked is how do *you* view God? If you start with God's otherness—His holy, powerful, unapproachable nature—it is natural to move instantly to conversion as the underlying focus of life. We are forced to ask “what must I do” to possibly obtain forgiveness when God is so perfect, so other, so powerful and so utterly holy, and we are so insignificant and shameful? We find ourselves utterly in despair if we see God only from this perspective. If, instead, we see God first and foremost through the person of Jesus, from a thoroughly Hebrew view of God, we find *not* absolute separation, otherness, anger or distance, nor do we find an utterly unapproachable God. Instead, we find a God who:

- Walked in the garden with His first creation.
- Is the Father that runs unashamedly to embrace His disobedient son.
- Humbles Himself to become a mere man, to seek us and save us.
- Is Love.
- Cares for us as a Good Shepherd, a Suffering Servant, a Mother Hen, a Friend.
- Was known throughout history in His intimate involvement with His people (the God of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, etc.).
- Keeps His promises and insistently makes plans to be reunited with His creation.
- Is long-suffering and keeps His promises or covenants even when we fail to keep our end of the agreement.
- Died on a cross that people could come to know His love and forgiveness and hope.
- Cares for the widows, orphans and aliens, and is concerned for all nations.

Widening your lens to include the entirety of the Bible will better position you to ask the essential questions about who God really is and will lead you to a more spectacular view of both God and what He has in store for your life. First, you will be amazed to see that God looks a lot like Jesus, and Jesus looks like God. Second, you see that God desires not just the removal of your sins. Though very important, this is merely a part of the process toward a much higher and more important goal, which is to bring you into an intimate relationship with God Himself. Third, in connecting with God, you are empowered to become all the God intended for you to be. This is what God has been planning and preparing for all humanity since the Fall and what He ultimately brought forth through the work of Jesus on the cross. And this is so much more spectacular than a just getting washed cleaned of our filth!

As we see God with Hebrew eyes, we must conclude that God is essentially relational. He is passionately concerned for His creation and is rich in mercy and love, just as we see in Jesus. Jesus didn't bring any change in God's character or change in His plan; He simply fulfilled in Himself all that God is and all that God promised. God in Jesus is who God has always been. And because God is essentially relational, we know we can receive more than just forgiveness of sins or eternal life. We can participate in a real relationship with God, because that is who God is and has always been. When we understand this, being a Christian now means no less than real connection and real intimate participation with God. It is a faith that is far more spectacular than we could ever hope for or imagine.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Peter. *Hearing God's Word: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2004.
- Allen, C. Leonard, "Roger Williams and 'the Restoration of Zion'." In *The Quest for the Primitive Church*, edited by Richard T. Hughes. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- . *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in A Secular World*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990.
- . *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and After) the Modern Age*. Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2004.
- Allen, C. Leonard, and Richard T. Hughes. *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988.
- Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity After Religion: The End Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013.
- Bebbington, David. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013.
- Billings, J. Todd. *Union With Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Blomberg, Craig. "We Contextualize More than We Realize." In *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization*. Edited by Matthew Cook, Rob Haskell, Ruth Julian, and Natee Tanchanpongs. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010.
- Blowers, Paul M. "Neither Calvinists nor Arminians, but Simply Christians: The Stone-Campbell Movement as a Theological Resistance Movement." *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 2000): 133–54. Accessed April 1, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Boulton, Matthew Myer. *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011, Kindle.

- Brooks, Pat. "Alexander Campbell, the Holy Spirit, and the New Birth." *Restoration Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (January 1, 1989): 149–64. Accessed April 1, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to the Philemon and to the Ephesians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984.
- Campbell, R. Anderson. "Realms and Redescription in Ricoeur: Discovering Fresh Metaphoric Networks for Spiritual Formation in a Postmodern Consumer Culture." DMin diss., [University Name Here], 2013. Accessed [date here]. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/45>.
- Cherok, Richard J. *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell's Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008.
- Childers, Jeff W. and Frederick D. Aquino. *Unveiling Glory: Visions of Christ's Transforming Presence*. Abilene, TX: Christian University Press, 2003.
- Childers, Jeff W., Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese. *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ*. Abilene, TX: The University of Abilene Press, 2002.
- Clanton, J. Caleb. *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013.
- Cottrell, Jack. *The Holy Spirit: A Biblical Study*. Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2015, Kindle.
- . "The Role of Faith in Conversion." In *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by William R. Baker. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002.
- . *What the Bible Says about God the Redeemer: The Doctrine of God. Vol.3*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1987.
- Doetsch-Kidder, Sharon. "Loving Criticism: A Spiritual Philosophy of Social Change." *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 444-473. Accessed January 27, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Downey, Michael. *Understanding Christian Spirituality*. Costa Mesa, CA: Paulist Press, 1996.
- Dreyer, Elizabeth. "How to Remain Faithful in a Consuming Culture and Is New Age Spirituality All That New?" *Religious Studies Review* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 1–8. Accessed January 27, 2014. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.



- Enns, Peter. *The Bible Tells Me So . . . Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014, Kindle.
- Evdokimov, Peter. *Orthodoxy*. Translated by Jeremy Hummerstone. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011.
- Ferguson, Evertt. *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996.
- Fluhman, J. Spencer. *"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth Century America*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978.
- Fung, Ronald Y.K. *The Epistle to the Galatians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988.
- Gorman, Michael J. *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015.
- . *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009.
- Griffith, Sidney H. "Mystics and Sufi Masters: Thomas Merton and Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15, no. 3 (July 2004): 299–316. Accessed January 27, 2014. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.
- Harrell, Jr., David Edwin. "Christian Primitivism and Modernization in the Stone-Campbell Movement." In *Primitive Church in the Modern World*, edited by Richard H. Hughes. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Harris, Randall J., and Rubel Shelby. *The Second Incarnation: Empowering the Church for the 21st Century*. West Monroe, [State?]: Howard Publishing Co., 1992.
- Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God: Being, Conscious, Bliss*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

- Heideman, Eugene P. "Syncretism, Contextualization, Orthodoxy, and Heresy." *Missiology* 25, no. 1 (January 1997): 37–49. Accessed October 11, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Hellend, Roger and Leonard Hjalmarson. *Missional Spirituality: Embodying God's Love from the Inside Out*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2011.
- Henderson, Daniel. *The Deeper Life: Satisfying the 8 Vital Longings of Your Soul*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2014.
- Heuertz, Phileena. *Pilgrimage of a Soul*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2010.
- Heuertz, Christopher. *Simple Spirituality: Seeing God in a Broken World*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2008.
- Hicks, Mark John. "The Role of Faith in Conversion: Balancing Faith, Christian Experience and Baptism." In *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by William R. Baker. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002.
- Hjalmarson, Leonard. *Introduction to a Missional Spirituality*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.
- Holbright, Thomas. "Alexander Campbell's View of the Holy Spirit." *Restoration Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1962): 1-15. Accessed April 1, 2015, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Holmes, David L. "Restoration Ideology among Early Episcopal Evangelicals." In *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, edited by Richard T. Hughes. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Houston, James M. "The Future of Spiritual Formation." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 4, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 131-139. Accessed January 27, 2014. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.
- Hughes, Richard. *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1996.
- Hughes, Richard, and C. Leonard Allen. *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988.
- Kaiser Jr., Walter, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978.
- Karkkainen, Veli-Matti, *Christ and Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013.

- . *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification*, Collegeville, MN: Unitas Press, 2004.
- Kelly, Thomas R. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1941.
- Keen, David. "Creation Spirituality and the Environment Debate." *Ecotheology: Journal of Religion, Nature and the Environment* 7, no. 1 (July 2002): 10. Accessed January 27, 2014. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.
- LaChance, Albert J. *The Modern Christian Mystic*. Berkeley, CA: NorthAtlantic Books, 2007.
- Langer, Rick. "Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 182-206. Accessed January 27, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Leech, Kenneth. *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 1985.
- Livermore, David A. *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Cambridge, MA: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1957, Kindle.
- McKinzie, Gregory. "Barton Stone's Unorthodox Christology." *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 31-45. Accessed April 1, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- McMillion, Lynn A. *Restoration Roots*. Dallas, TX: Gospel Teachers Publications, 1983.
- Mabry, John R. *Growing into God: A Beginner's Guide to Christian Mysticism*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2012.
- Merton, Thomas. *Contemplation in a World of Action*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.
- Moltmann, Jurgen. *Experiences of God*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971,
- Mulholland, M. Robert. "Spiritual Formation in Christ and the Mission with Christ." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, no. 1 (2013): 11-17. Accessed

- January 27, 2014. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.
- Nangle, Joseph. *Engaged Spirituality: Faith Life in the Heart of Empire*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.
- New American Standard Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Noll, Mark. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- . "Primitivism in Fundamentalism and American Biblical Scholarship: A Response." In *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, edited by Richard T. Hughes. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Olson, Duane A. "Contextualization: Everybody's Doing It." *Word and World* 10, no. 4 (September 1990): 349–55. Accessed October 11, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Oswalt, John N. *Isaiah: The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervans, 2003.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Christian Spirituality*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983.
- Peterson, Robert A. *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Powell, Mark E. "Canonical Theism and Theological Commitments in the Stone-Campbell Movement." *Restoration Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (January 1, 2009): 227–38. Accessed April 1, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Powell, Samuel M. *A Theology of Christian Spirituality*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Randall, Ian. "Recovering Evangelical Spirituality." *European Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (April 2010): 33–44. Accessed March 29, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Rhea, Rob. "Exploring Spiritual Formation in the Christian Academy: The Dialects of Church, Culture, and The Larger Integrative Task." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 39, No. 1 (2011): 3-15. Accessed October 30, 2015. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.
- Robertson, Palmer O. *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990.

- Rohr, Richard. *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- . *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013.
- . *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing, 2013.
- Schreiter, Robert J. "Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies." *Missiology* 12, no. 3 (July 1984): 261–73. Accessed October 11, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Shippo, Jan. "The Reality of the Restoration and the Restoration Ideals in the Mormon Tradition." In *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, edited by Richard T. Hughes. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Sitter, Gerald L. *Water From a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2007.
- Sweet, Leonard. *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and The Church*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007.
- Warren, Virgil. *What the Bible Says about Salvation*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1982.
- Westerhoff, John. *Spiritual Life: The Foundation for Preaching and Teaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 1994.
- Wiebe, Ben. "Cross Currents: Rethinking Atonement (with Reflection on Campbell, Stone, and Scott)." *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13, no. 2 (September 1, 2010): 187–202. Accessed April 1, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Willard, Dallas. *Divine Conspiracy: Discovering Our Hidden Life in God*. HarperCollins: San Francisco, CA, 1998.
- . "Spiritual Formation and the Warfare Between the Flesh and the Human Spirit." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 152-159. Accessed January 27, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Williams, A.N. "Mystical Theology Redux: The Pattern of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*." In *Spirituality and Social Embodiment*, edited by L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- Williams, D. Newell. *Barton Stone: A Spiritual Biography*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000.

- . “Disciples Piety: a Historical Review with Implications for Spiritual Formation.” *Encounter* 47, no. 1 (December 1, 1986): 1–25. Accessed April 1, 2015. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Williams, Rowan. “Interiority and Epiphany: A Reading in New Testament Ethics.” In *Spirituality and Social Embodiment*, edited by L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- Woodroof, Tim. *A Spirit for the Rest of Us: What Jesus Said about the Holy Spirit and How It Applies to Your Life*. Abiline, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2009.
- Yoder, John Howard. “Primitivism in the Radical Reformation: Strengths and Weaknesses.” In *Primitive Church in the Modern World*, edited by Richard H. Hughes. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995.