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# The Heritage Journal Editors

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# Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Quite some time has elapsed since the publication of the last issue of *The Heritage Journal*. This is only the second issue that has been produced this year. With this, we hope to begin 2023 stronger, reaching our goal of releasing four issues—one per quarter. To mark this renewed effort, and to better fit the design and aims of this publication, we are also changing the name of *The Heritage Journal* to *Old Paths*.

This second issue of *The Heritage Journal* focuses on Westminster Confession of Faith chapter four, “Of Creation.” In this issue, we focus on the doctrine of creation, and especially the issues that relate to it today. Notable among these is the current debate surrounding the importance of holding to a literal six-twenty-four-hour-day view of Genesis 1. Rev. Michael Myers writes helpfully on this important matter. Of significance in this area is also the creation of man. On this topic, I seek to defend the value of human life from conception from Psalm 139, not merely because it is living, but because it is made in the image of God.

We pray you enjoy reading this issue of *The Heritage Journal*, and that God would be pleased to encourage you to behold him as the great Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, as we confess in the Creed.

Warmly,

**Taylor Sexton**

*Editor, The Heritage Journal*

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## Ancient Paths

*“Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16).*



“Ancient Paths” stands at the beginning of every issue of *The Heritage Journal*. It contains an excerpt from an old writer that either has been notably impactful for the editors or is relevant to the theme of that particular journal issue.

If God who is the eternal and all-blessed being has created the world through His will, the question naturally arises: *why* and *to what end* did He do it? In order to find an answer to this question, science and philosophy have constantly attempted to make the world a necessity and as such to deduce it from the being of God. Again, two possibilities offered themselves. Some presented the matter as though God were so full and so rich that He could not command the situation, that He lacked power over His own being, and that the world consequently flowed out of Him as a stream from its source, or as the water flows out of a vessel that is over-full. Others took the very opposite position that God in Himself was poor and empty, possessed of a hungry desirous will, and that He accordingly brought the world into existence in order to fill Himself out and to supply Him in His need. According to either of these two views, the world was a necessity for God, be it to relieve Him of His superfluity or to compensate Him for His need.

Both representations are incompatible with Scripture. Scripture takes a very different and diametrically opposed point of view. According to those two positions, the center of gravity has been shifted from God to the world, and God exists for the world. God is the lesser being, and the world is the greater, for the world serves to redeem and to save God who is wretched by reason of abundance or inadequacy. Even though this thought is still held by thinkers of repute in our time, it is never-

theless a blasphemous idea. Scripture, which is the word of God, and which from beginning to end takes God's part, declares plainly and powerfully and loudly that God does not exist for the world but that the whole world and all its creatures exist for God, for His sake and for His glory.

God, surely, is in Himself the all-sufficient and the all-blessed. He does not need the world nor any creature in any way for His own perfection. Can a man be profitable unto God? Is it any gain to the Almighty that thou art righteous, or that thou makest thy ways perfect? (Job 22:2–3). The righteousness of man is no advantage to Him, nor does human transgression impoverish Him. He is not worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things (Acts 17:25). Hence it is that Scripture so strongly emphasizes the fact that God has caused all things to be by an act of His will. There was no such thing as force or necessity in the being of God which caused Him to bring the world into being. Creation is in its entirety a free act of God. It cannot be explained as the inevitable consequence of the righteousness of God, even though His righteousness also is manifested in it, for to whom could God possibly owe anything? Nor can the creation be deduced from His goodness or love, even though both of these, too, are manifested in the world, for the life in love of the triune God required no object of love beyond Himself. Indeed, the cause of the creation is simply

and solely the free power of God, His eternal good pleasure, His absolute sovereignty (Rev. 4:11).

This is not to say, of course, that the creation of the world was an irrational act, a thing done arbitrarily. In this, as in much besides, we must rest in the sovereignty and good pleasure of God as the end of all contradiction, and we are exercised in this by a quiet confidence and childlike obedience. All the same, God had His wise and holy reasons for the act of creation.

Scripture proves this to us in the first place by presenting the creation to us as an act of the triune God. When God makes man, He first takes counsel with Himself, and says: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Gen. 1:26). So it is that all works of God rest on a Divine deliberation. Before creation He consulted with wisdom (Job 28:20ff. and Prov. 8:22ff.). And in time He created all things through the Word which was with God in the beginning and which was God (John 1:1-3),<sup>1</sup> and He created them in the Spirit who searches out the depths of God, gives life to His creatures, and garnishes the heavens.<sup>8</sup> Therefore the Psalmist cries out: How manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches (Ps. 104:24).

In addition, the Holy Scripture teaches us that God has created all things and that He sustains and rules them for his own honor. The purpose for which the creation was made cannot lie in that creation itself, for the establishment of the purpose precedes the means. Scripture generally teaches, therefore, that just as everything is from God, so also everything is through Him and to Him (Rom. 11:36). And the Scriptures develop this more particularly when they report that the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1), that God glorifies Himself in Pharaoh (Ex. 14:17) and in the man blind from his birth (John 9:3), that He grants all the favors of grace for His name's sake (Isa. 43:25 and Eph. 1:6), that Christ has come in order to glorify the Father (John 17:4), and that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess His glory (Phil. 2:10). It is God's good pleasure to bring the excellences of His triune being into manifestation in His creatures, and so to prepare

glory and honor for Himself in those creatures. For this glorification of Himself, too, God does not need the world, for it is not the creature who is independently and self-sufficiently exalting His honor; rather, it is He Himself who by means of the creature or without him glorifies His own name and revels in Himself. God, therefore, never seeks out the creature to find something there that He is lacking. No, the whole world in its length and breadth is for Him a mirror in which He sees His excellences at play. He always remains resting in Himself as the highest good, and He remains eternally blessed by His own blessedness.

#### Notes

1. See also Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; and Heb. 1:2.

**Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 149-151.**

# Articles

*“Whatever things were written before were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4).*



## The Importance of the Doctrine of Creation

REV. MICHAEL MYERS

*“Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker”  
(Psalm 95:6).*

The doctrine of creation affects every area of life. We breathe created air, live as created image bearers, walk upon created ground, and look for the new creation to come. In this realm of creation, God’s glory was first revealed to His creatures, and upon this created world, the drama of redemption has unfolded. A biblical doctrine of creation “strengthens peoples’ faith, confirms their trust in God, and is a source of consolation in their suffering; it inspires praise and thanksgiving; it induces humility and meekness and makes people sense their smallness and insignificance before God.”<sup>1</sup> Sadly, believers find the biblical account of creation under attack today, sometimes even from professing Christians. Some make creation an object of ridicule and doubt, claiming that God either did not make the world or that He could not have made it in six days, as the Bible records. Can believers concede ground in the creation debate? We must answer this in the negative, for compromising the doctrine of creation has far-reaching effects on life and faith. This article will present five reasons related to the importance of creation while encouraging the reader to stand unashamedly upon the truth of the Word of God.

### Creation teaches man about his origins.

One of the worst effects of amnesia is that people forget who they are. While we are more than the sum of our memories, the knowledge of

birthplace, parents, upbringing—even our names—all serves powerfully to shape our identities. In light of the widespread antagonism both the world and the church have shown toward the biblical account of creation, is it surprising that one of today’s most heated controversies focuses squarely on the topic of identity? So many are severely confused about who they are, and the answers the world holds forth are increasingly destructive.

The Bible calls us to a better way, for the sacred Word tells mankind both who we are and how we came to be. The glorious “Let there be” called forth and fashioned light, the seas, the earth, plants, and all living things. Yet with man God does something different. “Let Us make man in Our image,” God said (Gen 1:26). More than that, Genesis 2:7 teaches that the Lord God fashioned man from the dust of the ground, molding him in unsearchable wisdom. When He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man became a living being (Gen. 2:7). Created in God’s image, the newly fashioned body-soul creature knew and loved his God and Father (Luke 3:38). God’s provision of a bride for Adam from his own rib sweetened this glorious vocation (Gen. 2:22). There man and wife lived in holy bliss, communing with God and one another in perfection.

Here is enough to fill the poorest man’s soul with nobility and to lay the most prideful man low in humility. Below we will discuss more of the moral implications of being an image bearer, but first, consider the significance of being made in the likeness of God by His own hand. Man is no soulless creature, no evolved entity, but a fearfully and wonderfully fashioned person made to know and serve God in His presence (Psa. 139:14). Man was made to relate with God, with the capacity to worship and commune with Him. As such, he is just a little lower than angels (Psa. 8:5). Yet who can

boast of being made from dust, dust which was made of nothing? Who can boast whose very existence is derived from another? Practically speaking, people may be greatly confused about who they really are, but if this doctrine is received as it ought, the mist of confusion begins to clear. Men and women are no animals, but humans, made “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism 1). Anything less than that falls far short of God’s good design.

### **Creation calls man to believe that God is truthful .**

The biblical account of creation has received many assaults over the course of man’s rebellious history. Can believers stand firmly upon it, or does the world have a point? Ultimately there are only two competing perspectives concerning creation: supernaturalism versus some form of naturalism.<sup>2</sup> In other words, either God is eternal and brought matter into existence by a distinct act of His will, or matter is eternal, and God’s Word is untrue. Which is it?

The Scriptures themselves acknowledge the place of faith as we consider the doctrine of creation: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3). It is important to recall the teaching of the Westminster Confession at this point. WCF 14.2 says, “By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word.” The word this refers to the product of the gracious operation of the Spirit in the heart of a believer. That faith not only looks to Christ alone for salvation but also believes what the Word of God says about everything to which it speaks, creation included. John Brown of Edinburgh wrote this about Hebrews 11:3: “God has given us a revelation on this subject, and our knowledge rises out of our belief of that revelation.”<sup>3</sup> Here is a simple question: What is the plain meaning of the text of Genesis 1:1-2:3?

Not only did God speak all things into existence, but He also fashioned and formed the universe into perfection in the space of six days

(Exod. 20:11). Through a combination of societal pressures, desire for academic standing, or fear of being called a fundamentalist, many believers have faltered on this particular point. But consider: if it is too difficult to believe God is able to create the universe in six days—and that He actually did—what about the more “difficult” doctrines God teaches? If a believer concedes the clear reading of the text concerning creation, what will he do with the resurrection? Some claimed the resurrection was incredible (Acts 26:8), and others mocked Paul for believing it (Acts 17:32). Yet Christians believe this, not because reason can uncover the ground for doing so, but because God’s Word declares it to be true. John Owen even connects these two themes in his commentary on Hebrews 11:3: “In particular, faith well fixed on the original of all things as made out of nothing, will bear us out in the belief of the final restitution of our bodies at the resurrection.”<sup>4</sup>

The doctrine of creation calls man to believe in both God’s Word and His work. Do not be ashamed of it. Do not doubt. Remember, “our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases” (Psa. 115:3).

### **Creation teaches man that he is accountable.**

People have different reasons for doubting the biblical account of creation, but foremost among them is something that often lies beneath the surface of the objections. I remember reading an article about a Christian science professor at a public university some years ago. He would befriend the Christian freshmen he met and attempt to encourage them through their first year. He related that about halfway through the year, some of these students would begin questioning whether God did in fact make the world. Instead of going into the arguments, he would ask them whether they had been maintaining sexual purity. The answer was often no.

What does this have to do with creation? Everything. Image bearers have a God with whom they have to do. They are accountable to Him. When God created man, He created him in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Ecc. 7:29; Eph.

4:24; Col. 3:10). In other words, in the Garden, Adam and Eve knew their Lord, were morally blameless, and were capable of serving before Him in sacred love. By sinning against God, the knowledge that once pulsed with love became poisoned by fear, and their righteousness and holiness were sullied. Yet their obligation as creatures before God remained.

Fallen man still bears God's image. Among other things, this means each person owes God personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience (Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1). To this solemn requirement, the heart of the rebellious tragically cries, "We will not have this God to reign over us." How corrupted and twisted has fallen man become! Those who bear the image of God, who were made as the crown of creation, are now responsible for the subjection of this world to futility. Worse, we have all engaged in an impossible war against God, fueled by the spirit of rebellion. How great an evil is sin! John Murray wrote, "The higher is our conception of man in his intrinsic essence, the greater must be the gravity of his offence in rebellion and enmity against God. If we think of depravity as enmity against God, the more aggravated must be that enmity when it is man in the image of God who vents it."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the more dignified the creature, the more heinous the sin.

Here we arrive at the great mystery and glory of the gospel: God was manifest in the flesh. The eternal Word became man; the One through whom all things were made took to Himself a body and soul that were made (Heb. 10:5). This One to whom all image bearers are accountable took upon Himself the obligations of His people. "He was bruised for our iniquities" and not His own (Isa. 53:5). Clearly, to deviate from the doctrine of creation is not an error in isolation, for it affects so many things. Stray from the biblical account of creation, and many other things begin to unravel, including the exegetical basis for the legitimacy of the Second Adam living and dying in the place of sinners (Rom. 5:14).

### **Creation is the sphere in which man communes with God.**

After fashioning Adam from the dust of the ground, He put the man into the freshly planted Garden. There Adam's unfallen eyes would gaze upon perfection. With the river flowing through Eden to water it and the gold of Havilah near at hand, lush and fruitful Eden glistened in its primordial splendor. This was the setting in which the Lord God brought Adam into covenant with Him. This was the place of the first wedding. This was the place where the man and his wife were to walk with their Creator in the cool of the day.

The Lord God made the world good, providing everything necessary for body and soul. Combine this beauty with God's design of the Sabbath, and you will find the grand purpose of our existence: God created man for communion, and that communion occurs in the created world. After the fall and the sad ejection, man's greatest longing is to return to the rest and fellowship God provided there. Tragically, sin has so disordered the affections that, more frequently, man abuses creation in his quest to find that pleasure. Cain's city, Babel's tower, and Pharaoh's pyramids all stand as monuments to the length that man will go to find rest and communion apart from God.

The Lord's solution was far better. First, by promising a Seed (Gen. 3:15), then in a tabernacle, then by the temple, He demonstrated that all was not lost. His dwelling place would be with man. At the appointed time, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:14). Jesus became a true man and entered this creation to seek and the save that which was lost so that those found might live with Him forever (John 17:24). As the saints await the day of consummation, "the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs" (Rom. 8:22). On that Day, the One who sits on the throne will make all things new (Rev. 21:5). In the meantime, we live with the hope of Job, who said, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth" (Job 19:25). We look for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13). There and then, communion with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—will be

nbroken and undiminishing, for the saints “shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:4-5).

### Creation calls for man to worship.

Creation beckons us to worship. The angelic host shouted for joy as they watched their Creator fashion the cosmos (Job 38:7) and join with all creation in praising the name of the Lord, “for He commanded and they were created” (Psa. 148:5). In John’s vision of glory, the heavenly host return to this theme again, saying to the One upon the throne, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev. 4:11). The poetic account of creation in Psalm 104 begins and ends with calls to worship the Lord, who is very great and clothed with honor and majesty.

As a shepherd boy, David had spent many nights in the open field guarding his sheep. When they were bedded down for the evening, how often would the young “sweet psalmist of Israel” gaze up into the night sky and behold the starry heavens? One could imagine him doing the same after a long day of business as the king. Psalm 8:2-3 contains this reflection: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” Seeing such grandeur cannot but call the soul to a higher object of adoration. Which is greater: the stars or the One who hung them (Gen. 1:16); the towering mountains or the One who brought them forth (Psa. 90:2); the unsearchable deeps or the One who measures the waters in the hollow of His hand (Isa. 40:12)?

There is a direct link between creation and new creation, between this universe’s inception and its regeneration (Matt. 19:28). God, in his good pleasure and power, began it, and He shall complete it. How do we know that this shall be? The Lord has promised in His certain Word. It is the same Word

that describes for us how it all began. Do not be mistaken: you cannot concede one without undermining the foundation for the other. Believe the Word of God. Use creation for its intended purposes, and extend the doctrine to all relevant areas. Thomas Watson wrote, “The creation is the heathen man’s Bible, the ploughman’s primer, and the traveler’s perspective glass, through which he receives representation of the infinite excellencies which are in God.”<sup>6</sup> If this is true, then the redeemed must also take up the Book of Glory, not only to see the incomparable wonders of the God who made the world, but also through the testimony of Scripture know Him as their deliverer (Psa. 19).

#### Notes

1. Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2, 4 vols., Reformed Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 407-408.
2. “The doctrine of creation becomes a cross between the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing and the pagan doctrine of the chain of being.” Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2003), 37-38.
3. John Brown Edinburgh, *Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 490.
4. John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Evansville, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1979), 7:17.
5. John Murray, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 4 vols., Collected Writings of John Murray (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 38-39.
6. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 113.

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## He Saw Our Substance *Zygotes, Embryos, Fetuses, and the Bible*

REV. TAYLOR SEXTON

On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States of America overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the unconscionable ruling that, since its imposition on January 22, 1973, has led to the massacre of millions of unborn children.

Since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, the debate over abortion—its morality, legality, and practicality—has arisen with renewed vigor in the Church. Unfortunately, it has become more and more common for professing Christians to side with the world on such heated topics. One particular way this occurs is through the refusal of many Christians to recognize that human life begins at conception. “It is only a zygote,” some say. “The Bible never says anything about embryos,” say others.

What we intend to show in this essay is two-fold. First, we will show that much of the Christian debate surrounding abortion is based on the wrong question. The question is not, “Is this life?” The question is instead, “Is this an image bearer?” Second, we will show that God in the Scriptures considers the product of human conception, no matter what we label it (embryo, zygote, fetus, or even a “parasitic clump of cells”), to be a bearer of His image. If these two premises are true, it is incontrovertible that abortion at any stage is a grave sin.

### The Wrong Question

“Life begins at conception.” Such is the rallying cry of the Christian “pro-life” movement. The argument is good as far as it goes. The issue with this argument is that it is not based on biblical grounds.

The biblical ground for forbidding the act of murder is not the presence of life *per se*. In other words, Scripture never says, “You shall not murder

people because they are living things,” or something similar. For it to do so would be inconsistent. There are many instances where the Bible commends the killing of living things because they are living. For example, consider animal sacrifices. Consider also the reasons given for capital punishment (see Gen. 9:6 below).

The biblical ground for forbidding the act of murder is not the mere presence of life. It is based on a more profound and fundamental reality—namely, that of man as the image of God. Consider the Bible’s first prohibition against murder: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, / By man his blood shall be shed; / *For in the image of God He made man*” (Gen. 9:6; emphasis added). James makes a similar prohibition against cursing people, not because a man might hurt another’s feelings, but because he is God’s image: “No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, *who have been made in the similitude of God*” (Jas. 3:8-9; emphasis added).

Therefore, many Christians are asking the wrong question concerning abortion. They should not be asking, “Is this embryo a life?” That is not to say this is an unimportant question. After all, God certainly values life, especially human life. Moreover, to be human *is* to be in God’s image.

Nevertheless, the question itself does not go far enough. The question that ought to be asked is, “Is this human embryo made in the image of God?” If it is, then the scriptural prohibitions against murder apply to embryos and fetuses with as much force as they apply to children, teenagers, adults, and the aged. The question that remains, then, is this: Does the Bible teach that newly conceived embryos are made in the image of God? This is the question to which we now turn.

### “Your Eyes Saw My Substance”

The Bible calls murder sin. No one disputes this. We have also seen how Scripture’s prohibitions against murder are based on the fact that human beings are God’s image, not merely because they are living. However, what has come up for

debate is whether the Bible teaches that human embryos are included in its forbiddance of murder.

The classic passage for this controversy is Exodus 21:22-25, which is as follows: “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Such a text appears to be *lex talionis* applied to injury to unborn children. If two men fight and injure an unborn child by their fighting, whatever damage is done is to be repaid to the offender with exactness, even up to the taking of “life for life.”

Many raise objections at this point. For one thing, it does not appear to be clear whether this passage concerns the unborn child, the woman, or both as a unit. Even if it speaks of the unborn child, it does not appear to be about an embryo. These are somewhat fair criticisms (criticisms we believe can be overcome). Nevertheless, we contend that there is a better passage that speaks much more clearly on the value of unborn children in the eyes of God.

Psalms 139 speaks of the intimacy with which God knows men. It begins with a thematic statement: “O LORD, You have searched me and known me” (Psa. 139:1). While the case laws of the Pentateuch are indirectly helpful in this discussion, we believe Psalm 139 speaks directly to the issue of the value of all stages of human life. Of particular interest are vv. 13-16: “For You formed my inward parts; / You covered me in my mother’s womb. / I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; / Marvelous are Your works, / And that my soul knows very well. / My frame was not hidden from You, / When I was made in secret, / And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. / Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. / And in Your book they all were written, / The days fashioned for me, / When as yet there were none of them.” Here, David speaks of God’s creating him in the womb of his mother. It is instantly apparent why such a passage would better suit the debate

surrounding abortion and the value of unborn human life. There are two notable statements in this passage. The first is in v. 13: “You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb.” The second (and more decisive) is in v. 16: “Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.” We will look at each in turn.

The word used for “covered” in v. 13 is the Hebrew word *sakak*, a primitive form usually translated as “knit” or “weave.” It occurs only twice in the Old Testament—once here and once in Job 10:11. When Job uses the term, it is again in the context of his being fashioned in his mother’s womb. He tells God, “Your hands have made me and fashioned me, / An intricate unity; / Yet You would destroy me.” (Job 10:8). He then asks, “[Did You not] Clothe me with skin and flesh, / And knit me together with bones and sinews?” (v. 11; emphasis added). There is no doubt Job here spoke of himself when he was yet an unformed human.

Several older commentators take note of the significance of v. 13. John Calvin comments: “When we were inclosed in our mother’s womb, [God] saw us as clearly and perfectly as if we had stood before him in the light of mid-day.”<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth-century Baptist theologian and Hebraist John Gill remarks: “The sense is, he protected and defended him in his embryo state.”<sup>2</sup> Presbyterian Matthew Henry is even more striking: “Under the divine inspection: My substance, when hid in the womb, nay, when it was yet but *in fieri*—*in the forming*, an unshapen embryo, *was not hidden from thee; thy eyes did see my substance...* The generation of man is to be considered with the same pious veneration as his creation at first.”<sup>3</sup> It is clear, therefore, that David here spoke of God’s intimate care even when David was an embryo in his mother’s womb.

And yet v. 16 is even stronger. The critical term here is the Hebrew word *golem*, translated in the NKJV, quoted above, as “unformed substance.” This is the only occurrence of this word in the entire Old Testament. Given this fact, it is difficult to offer any other passages for comparison to flavor the meaning. However, context can help us understand David’s intent in using this word.

Immediately after saying that God “saw [his] unformed substance,” he adds, “In your book were written, every one of them, / the days that were formed for me, / when as yet there was none of them.” David speaks of the comprehensive nature of God’s knowledge of him by emphasizing that God knew all his days *even before they existed*. In other words, even when David was an unformed mass in his mother’s womb, God had all his days written before there were any of them.

Consider also John Calvin’s remarks concerning this passage: “The embryo, when first conceived in the womb, has no form; and David speaks of God’s having known him when he was yet a shapeless mass, τὸ κῆμα [*to kyema*], as the Greeks term it; for τὸ ἐμβρυον [*to embryon*] is the name given to the foetus from the time of conception to birth inclusive...the whole method of his formation was well known to God.”<sup>4</sup> Gill gives helpful details regarding the vocabulary David chose: “The word for *substance* signifies a bottom of yarn wound up, or any rude or unformed lump; and designs that conglomerated mass of matter separated in the womb, containing all the essentials of the human frame, but not yet distinguished or reduced into any form or order; yet, even when in this state, the eyes of the Lord see it and all its parts distinctly.”<sup>5</sup> Matthew Poole, though more concise, agrees: “*Yet being unperfect*, when I was a mere embryo, a rude and shapeless lump, when I was first conceived.”<sup>6</sup>

Some may object at this point by saying we have only seen the comments of older commentators. However, it is significant to note that such remarks are not exclusive to them. Modern commentaries—some of which are not conservative—draw the same conclusions. In the Hermeneia series, Hossfeld and Zenger state concerning v. 16, “The translation ‘embryo’ is not at all wrong.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in the Word Biblical Commentary, Leslie Allen translates v. 16: “Your eyes saw my embryo.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the standard Hebrew lexicon gives the following as a gloss: “formless mass, incomplete vessel; Syr. [Syriac] galmā uncultivated soil.” It also notes that this word is an Aramaic loan word meaning “formless, embryo.”

It is clear, then, that the Bible does indeed speak clearly about the issue of human fetuses and embryos. It is *not* true that God “says nothing” about them. In Psalm 139, David speaks vividly and intimately about the degree to which God cared for him even when he was an “unformed substance,” even when he had no “frame.” In a word, God cares deeply for human embryos.

## Conclusion

In the debate over abortion swirling through Christian thought today, it is crucial to ask the right questions. Of paramount importance is the question that precedes heartbeats, kicking, brain activity, or movement of any kind. The question is this: Is the human embryo, the most diminutive form of the human being, made in God’s image? To answer this question, it is essential to go to the passages that speak most clearly about this issue. Psalm 139:13-16 seems to fit the bill. We contend that, according to this passage, human life in its earliest stages—even at conception—is of the most incredible value to the God of heaven. Just as God “saw” everything He had created and declared it good (Gen. 1), and just as God “looked upon” the plight of His people Israel and consequently came to their aid (Exod. 2:25), so God “sees” the unformed substance of every human being in their mothers’ wombs, and so God “looks upon” our frame, which is not hidden from Him.

## Notes

1. John Calvin, Commentary on Psalm 139:13.
2. John Gill, Commentary on Psalm 139:13.
3. Matthew Henry, Commentary on Psalm 139:13; italics original.
4. Calvin, Commentary on Psalm 139:16.
5. Gill, Commentary on Psalm 139:16; italics original.
6. Matthew Poole, Commentary on Psalm 139:16; italics original.
7. Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *A Commentary on Psalms 101-150*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia Psalms 3 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 542.
8. Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Revised, vol. 21,

Hermeneia (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), 317.

9. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 5 vols. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 1:194.

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## Catechism Corner

*“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13).*



The “Catechism Corner” is a small section containing a short commentary on a portion of the Westminster Standards.

### **Thomas Boston on the Nobility of Man’s Primitive State, and the Tragedy of Its Loss**

Ah! how are we fallen from heaven! What a lamentable change has sin brought on man! It has defaced the moral image of God, with which man’s soul was beautifully decorated in his primitive state, and rent in pieces that pleasant picture of himself which God set up in this lower world. This stately fabric lies now in ruins, and calls us to lament over its ruins with weeping eyes and grieved hearts. Now there is ignorance in the mind, instead of that knowledge of God and divine things, with which it was richly furnished in its primitive state. The understanding, that as a lamp or candle shone brightly, is now enveloped with darkness. The will, that was exactly conformable to the will of God, and naturally disposed to comply with every intimation thereof, is now filled with irregularity, enmity, and rebellion against God and his law. The affections that were all regular, holy, and pure, are now disordered and distempered, placed upon and eagerly bent towards improper and sinful objects, loving and doating upon what men should hate, hating what they should love, joying in what they ought to mourn for, glorying in what is shameful, abhorring the chief good, and desiring what is ruinous to them. All the members of the body that were subordinated to the upright mind, and entirely at its command, are now in rebellion, and mislead and enslave the mind and superior facul-

ties. And the creatures that were man’s humble servants, ready to execute his commands, are now risen up against him, and the least of them having a commission, would prove more than a match for him. Nay, it is with difficulty and much pains that any of them are brought to engage in his service. Ah! how dismal is man’s case! The crown is fallen from our head: wo unto us that we have sinned. Let us weep and mourn over our ruined state, and never rest till we get it repaired by faith in the Lord Jesus, the great Repairer of this spiritual breach.

How lovely are knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, wherein the image of God consists! They shine with a dazzling brightness, and should charm and captivate our minds. But, alas! by nature we are blind, and see not their beauty and excellency. O! let us endeavour, through grace, to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Try if this blessed change has passed upon you, if ye be now light in the Lord, be disposed to do his will, and are holy in heart and life. Study righteousness and holiness if ye would be like God. And beware of ignorance, unrighteousness, and impurity, which proceed from Satan, and make you so unlike a righteous and holy God.

Come to the Lord Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, and the beginning of the creation of God, who at first made man after the divine image, and can make him so over again, and will do so to those that come to him by faith, with this

addition, that the image of God which he will impress on the soul anew, shall never be lost any more. O come to him now, that ye may become God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

**Thomas Boston**, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion (The Doctrines of the Christian Religion; Comprising a Complete Body of Divinity)*, ed. Samuel McMillan, vol. 1, 12 vols., *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1980), 184-185.

# Book Reviews

*“Of making many books there is no end” (Ecclesiastes 12:12).*



**Trueman, Carl R. *The Creedal Imperative*.  
Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.**

To those of us who have grown up in Bible-believing Presbyterian churches, hearing references to the “Confession,” “Catechisms,” or more broadly, “the Standards” is a usual occurrence in the local church. However, to those coming to our churches from outside this tradition, the idea that a human document could stand alongside our commitment to the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice seems suspect, perhaps even unbiblical. After all, isn’t the Bible all we need? In one sense, this is true, but given the various denominations, churches, and even individuals on various social media platforms, all of whom would claim to be adherents of the Bible, how does one decide what is truly Biblical? Addressing this topic, Carl Trueman’s 2012 book, *The Creedal Imperative*, is a valuable guide, both to the new member of a Presbyterian church and to those who are very familiar with our Standards. Being a relatively short book, it is accessible and concise without being shallow.

Trueman’s principal idea is that all churches have a creed, whether or not it is public and “formal.” He argues that the problem is that many of the “no creed but the Bible” adherents do in fact have a standard or creed, but many of these are not often made public and therefore not open to debate or scrutiny. He asserts that this is quite unbiblical and detrimental to the life of the church. As a single example, he praises the many churches that would rightly believe in and defend the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, these same churches do not acknowledge that the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible. Neither do they recognize that their understanding of the distinctive Persons of Father, Son, and Spirit, All Three being One God, owe a substantial debt to our Christian fore-

fathers who authored the Nicene Creed and subsequent clarifications of the same, whether consciously or not. Honesty requires us to do so.

After explaining why our culture is generally hostile to the idea of creeds and confessions in chapter one, he devotes several chapters to reviewing church history and the production of creeds, both as positive statements of what the Bible teaches, as well as correctives and rebuttals to exclude what it does not. Creeds and confessions do both. His chapter on the 16th and 17th centuries, specifically in reference to the Protestant Reformation, is particularly useful because he shows that the Reformers were defending the same doctrines the ancient church had always believed and taught but were dealing with new problems and deviations, especially that of the Roman Catholic church and its many errors regarding our salvation.

Trueman spends one chapter on Confession as Praise, meaning theology is not merely an academic exercise but meant to help us worship God better, and concludes with the helpfulness of creeds in the life of the church, both for its officers and members. “Thus, one obvious advantage of having an open, public confession is that it makes transparent that which is practically hidden by evangelical claims to having no creed but the Bible: everybody has a creed; the only difference is whether you are prepared to be open and honest about that fact. Further, once you have acknowledged this and made your creed public can you then put into place a system that connects your church’s confession to Scripture and to the church’s government in a way that gives your church, her leadership, and her people a way of making sure that the confession stays subordinate to Scripture in a transparent, orderly, and public” (163).

While Trueman writes about the necessity of creeds in the broadest terms, it is notable that being a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the book's applications and conclusions are particularly helpful for OPC members and prospective members to defend our church's practice and tradition as being practically valuable and ultimately Biblical.

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**Smith, Morton. *Systematic Theology*.  
Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary  
Press, 1994.**

In the plethora of Reformed systematic theologies today, Dr. Morton H. Smith's is likely the least known. In this reviewer's opinion, Louis Berkhof's classic manual still holds the dominant position. However, we contend that Dr. Smith's deserves a broader readership due to its remarkable qualities as a work of systematic theology.

"Systematic theology" is the biblical science that seeks to discern what the entire Bible says about any given topic. Systematic theology is distinguished from "biblical theology," which aims to determine what any part of the Bible says about a topic and how it develops throughout redemptive history, and "historical theology," which seeks to trace how the Church after the close of the canon dealt with various theological topics. Of course, systematic theology relies upon biblical theology and engages in historical theology, but the discipline is distinct.

There are two key features of Dr. Smith's *Systematic Theology*. The first is its comprehensiveness. Dr. Smith leaves no biblical stone unturned. He thoroughly explores every major locus (or "topic") of systematic theology—prolegomena, theology proper, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Even within each locus, he is meticulous, frequently giving lists of biblical citations to illustrate or prove his assertions. It would seem that there is hardly a topic of

theology concerning which an inquirer could not find sufficient meat to digest in this work.

The second key feature of this work is its brevity. Now, 800 pages might not seem brief. However, when one considers works such as Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, which weighs in at nearly 2,500 pages, or Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley's new *Reformed Systematic Theology*, which (even unfinished!) boasts almost 3,300 pages, Dr. Smith's *Systematic Theology* appears to be a mere pamphlet. And there is something to be said for brevity. In the preface to his *Concise Marrow of Christian Theology*, Johann Heinrich Heidegger remarked regarding the terseness of his work, "To be sure, we only know as much as we remember." The more information on the page, the harder it is to digest. Dr. Smith achieves a reasonable balance, ensuring each doctrine is fully expounded while also limiting historical controversy that can quickly bog down a work of this nature. In doing so, Dr. Smith has made his *Systematic Theology* complete yet accessible.

Regarding the doctrine presented in the two volumes, the reader will find no innovation. This is vanilla Westminster Presbyterian theology—faithful to Scripture and the Westminster Standards. If a reader is searching for some novel ideas to ponder, this is not the ideal source. We believe this is this work's most appealing feature.

The primary criticism of this work concerns its style. Of course, we recognize that it is difficult to make the subject matter of systematic theology thrilling. It has been done, however, in works such as Thomas Watson's *Body of Divinity*. While Dr. Smith's writing does not suffer from the dehydrated prose of Berkhof, his writing leaves something to be desired, especially if consumed in large quantities. Be that as it may, in a day when a tightly-formed, strictly Presbyterian theological thought is becoming more challenging to encounter, we highly commend Dr. Smith's *Systematic Theology* to the hungry student of God's Word.

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**Bridges, Charles. *The Christian Ministry, with an Inquiry into the Causes of its Inefficiency*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959 (original 1830).**

A slightly older contemporary of J. C. Ryle, Charles Bridges was a leading evangelical in the Church of England in the nineteenth century. He was well-known for his preaching and his writing. Some of his books include commentaries on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and expositions of other Scripture passages.

One of his most famous works is *The Christian Ministry*. As the title and subtitle suggest, this work seeks to define, defend, detail, and diagnose (alliteration not original to Bridges!) the Christian ministry. The book has five parts, each self-explanatory: I) General View of the Christian Ministry, II) General Causes of the Want of Success in the Christian Ministry, III) Causes of Ministerial Inefficiency Connected with Our Personal Character, IV) The Public Work of the Christian Ministry, and V) The Pastoral Work of the Christian Ministry.

From the outline of the work, its value is immediately apparent. While the book does not go into any matter in a tremendous amount of depth, the sheer breadth of topics discussed presents the reader—and especially the reader either in or seeking to enter the Christian ministry—makes this a must-read.

Above even the work itself, Bridges' humility was striking. When he begins to discuss the causes of ministerial inefficiency regarding the minister's personal character (Part III), he prefaces his remarks with the following disclaimer: "The material for remark which will now be detailed, is drawn rather from painful acquaintance with his own deficiencies and temptations" (105). This colors the entire book. Because of the writer's godly self-abasement, even though the sensitive reader may be hit with many blows to the heart, he should never despair, knowing that the warnings come from a man who has and continues to struggle with the same deficiencies which he enumerates.

While every section is a veritable goldmine for spiritual and ministerial profit, the most helpful parts to this reviewer were Parts IV and V (concerning preaching and counseling, respectively). His section on preaching is worth the price of the book. While not a textbook on the preparation and delivery of sermons, his counsel for the demeanor, approach, and focus of gospel preaching is a much-needed corrective for preaching that goes on even in many Reformed churches today. His sections on the distinction and compliance of law and grace are most helpful in preaching the gospel.

Part V, although much shorter, is a helpful little treatise on how to deal with various types of people—such as the infidel, self-righteous, backslider, needlessly wearied, and several others. This section would be a valuable supplement to a course or book on biblical counseling in pastoral ministry.

Charles Bridges' book *The Christian Ministry* has stood the test of time, coming up on the 200th anniversary of its original publishing. It will surely stand for another 200 years, should the Lord tarry. This book is of immense worth for every man already in or seeking to enter the Christian ministry.

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**Collins, C. John. *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.**

A conservative Christian would have no problem affirming what Dr. John Collins wrote in the conclusion of this book. He says, "The traditional understanding of Adam and Eve as our first parents who brought sin into human experience is worthy of our confidence and adherence." The problem with this statement is how it aligns with the preceding 121 pages. While trying to refrain from being unduly harsh and critical, we will first consider a basic summary of his argument and the terms he uses. Second, I will offer some critiques and

what I believe to be potential implications of his thought.

### Summary of Content

In his introduction, Collins begins to lay the groundwork for his argument. His goal is to prove that “a version of the traditional view” of Adam and Eve is something that Christians must maintain. What does he mean by the traditional view? Borrowing from C.S. Lewis’ concept of “Mere Christianity,” Collins coins what he calls “mere historical Adam-and-Eve-ism.” Essentially, he is arguing for a basic conviction that Adam and Eve were real in one way or another. His intent is not to deal with sin, their original makeup (although he goes into a great deal of speculation about that in chapter five), or what the image of God is. Instead, he wants to show the necessity of a “historical” Adam and Eve by examining various areas of Biblical and extra-Biblical material. Collins uses the word version to appeal to those who may be unbelievers reading his book who deny any conception of Adam and Eve outright. Basically, he is saying that if you do not like the traditional view (and here, I think traditional view means the classic position), consider the possibility that there are different versions of it, and one of those versions might work for you. He also argues that we must approach the Scriptures thinking critically, though what he means by critically is not entirely clear (skeptically or analytically?). He says all of this after a troubling opening comment concerning those who hold to a relatively recent, six-day creation: “I agree with those who argue that we do not change the basic content of Christianity if we revise these views, even when the revisions are drastic.” Shortly after, he says, “May we not study the Bible more closely and revise the traditional understanding of Adam and Eve as well, without threat to the faith?” His implied answer to that question is a resounding “yes.”

Collins lists four possible ways of interpreting narrative in Genesis:

1. The author indented to relay “straight” history with a minimum of figurative language.

2. The author wrote about what he thought were actual events, using rhetorical and literary techniques to shape the readers’ attitudes toward those events.

3. The author intended to recount an imaginary history, using recognizable literary conventions to convey “timeless truths” about God and man.

4. The author told a story without caring whether the events were real or imagined; his main goal was to convey various theological and moral truths.

He advocates the second position, doing so based on a significant logical fallacy. Again utilizing Lewis, Collins appeals to a passage in *Mere Christianity* about hope. Lewis mentions different kinds of imagery used in the Scriptures, such as harps, crowns, gold, etc. These symbols are not necessarily literal but representative of greater and more exalted truths that Christians will encounter in heaven. A great error of many, says Lewis, is that they confuse this imagery with the reality. It is in this manner that Collins says that we ought to approach Genesis; the imagery is a “tool that helps me to picture something – without doubting that the images are about something real.” What is the glaring error here? Lewis is speaking about prophetic imagery, not historical narrative—and narrative is not prophetic imagery.

One theme that is very prominent throughout Collins’ work is what he calls “the biblical storyline.” Components include “a good creation marred by the fall, redemption as God’s ongoing work to restore creatures to their proper functioning, and the consummation in which the restoration will be complete and confirmed.” This is what he wants to preserve above all else. The purpose of this was to frame a worldview of the original hearers. To do this, the authors used different rhetorical devices to show (display the heart by action and speech) rather than tell (tell us explicitly what kind of person the character is). When he combines all the different features together (rhetorical devices, socio-linguistics, etc.), Collins says that the reader is no longer necessarily “limited to the actual words he uses.” The example he employs to illustrate this is that the word sin is not used in Genesis 1-3. That does not mean that sin is absent from the story, but

rather than the principle is expressed. His point is that the language of Genesis 1-11 describes events that are broader than the language employed.

Next, Collins seeks to redefine the word history. Actually, he prefers to use “historical account to mean the author wanted his audience to believe that the events recorded really happened.” Historical, then, “does not rule out all forms of figurative or imaginative elements, it is not necessarily complete in detail or free from ideological bias, nor is it necessarily told in exact chronological sequence unless the text claims that for itself.” Simply put, it is a way of referring to events. In light of this, and drawing from the background of other Ancient Near East myth-telling styles, he says that we can recognize these stories (including Genesis 1-11 apparently) as having “an historical core.” Therefore, it is not necessary that the account itself is history; what matters is whether it represents events that actually happened.

The largest section of Collins’ book deals with a survey of texts (Biblical and extra-Biblical) that mention Adam and Eve. While he does affirm that the whole of the Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish literature speak explicitly of our first parents, he does not take this to require their being literal historical figures. Here is one section representative of his argument. In dealing with Genesis 1-5, Collins discusses the similarities between Mesopotamian myths and the Scriptural account. His conclusion is: “This implies that, like those other stories, Genesis aims to tell the true story of origins; but it also implies that there are likely to be figurative elements and literary conventions that should make us wary of being too literalistic in our reading.” Although affirming references to Adam and Eve from Jesus, Paul, John, and other NT authors, his conclusions after each section are similar in their ambiguity. While he does not categorically deny the historicity of Adam and Eve, his language throughout this section is noncommittal at best. He uses many indefinite terms such as maybe, perhaps, implies, if, probably, etc. Nevertheless, Collins contends that he has still allowed for the truth of the Biblical story, including our origin, fall, and redemption.

His final section deals with the tension between scientists and the Biblical testimony. First, he argues that maybe Christians need to refine their Bible reading in light of recent discoveries and scientific consensus. In this chapter, he expresses some of his presuppositions. First, using Egyptologists who have studied the different dates for the exodus as an example, he claims that their findings have allowed him to “proceed, reasonably confident that the Biblical account has not been shown false.” He asks shortly after how we ought to view Genesis and science. His answer is: “We should begin by observing the literary conventions, rhetorical purpose, and original audience of the author of Genesis.” I contend that before considering those aspects, we ought to approach the Scriptures in faith and reverence for its divine Author.

Two final aspects are necessary to mention. First, Collins, if he had been staying somewhat close to something that resembled orthodoxy, completely abandons it at this point. He asserts death before the fall and animal predecessors for Adam and Eve. The second is Collins’ criteria for sound thinking. His four criteria are as follows:

1. To begin with, we should see that the origin of the human race goes beyond a merely natural process. This follows from how hard it is to get a human being, or, more theologically, how distinctive the image of God is.
2. We should see Adam and Eve at the headwaters of human existence.
3. The “fall,” in whatever form it took, was both historical and moral, and occurred at the beginning of the human race.

If someone should decide that there were, in fact, more human beings than just Adam and Eve at the beginning of mankind, then, in order to maintain good sense, he should envision these humans as a single tribe. Adam would be the chieftain of this tribe (preferably produced before the others), and Eve would be his wife.

He concludes this chapter after dealing with some differing approaches to the interpretation of man’s creation by Derek Kidner, Denis Alexander, and C.S. Lewis. Having considered them and mentioning modern DNA studies, he writes, “As I

have indicated, my goal here is not to assess the science but to display how to keep the reasoning within the bounds of sound thinking. Nothing requires us to abandon monogenesis altogether for some form of polygenesis; rather, a modified monogenesis, which keeps Adam and Eve, can do the job.” Essentially, then, as long as a concept of “mere historical Adam-and-Eve-ism” remains, we have not lost anything.

### Critique

The first and most obvious problem in Collins’ book is the remarkable absence of exegesis. He mentions it and even calls some of what he does exegesis. However, every single aspect of his dealing with the Biblical texts is informed by the ideas and opinions of either scientists or the sphere of biblical criticism. Simply put, this was an eisegetical study, not an exegetical one. Second, and closely related to the first, Collins assumes the validity of these critics, if not over and above the authority of the Scriptures, at least on a level with them. This was especially clear in section 5.a, where he gives the example of the Egyptologists. It is a basic question of authority: shall we heed man or God? If a scientist claims that the human remains he found in Australia are 75,000 years old, does that mean we must change how we read the Scriptures? Of course not! This does not mean Christians ignore the claims of the world; however, they must study to give legitimate objections and responses to their claims. Third, he never really answers the question that forms the title of his book. In his conclusion, he claims that he has shown that holding to a traditional Adam and Eve is legitimate; yet he never says who they really were, nor does he present a strong case that it matters, nor does he end up with traditional Adam and Eve. They become a strange concept that may or may not be reflected by the account of Genesis.

Finally, consider this specific statement that he made near the end of the conclusion:

I, acting as an individual, hardly have the right to declare any part of Christian teaching so foundational that if you remove it you have destroyed the Christian faith. Paul, acting as

God’s messenger, can make that kind of pronouncement about the resurrection of Jesus. But it seems to me that Adam and Eve at the headwaters of the human family, and their fall, are not only what Jesus believed but also an irremovable part of the whole story.

Certainly, no mere individual determines the foundational doctrines of Christianity. What appears humble in this statement is in fact a concession. Any Christian, standing upon the authority of the Scriptures, must hold fast to its clear doctrines, whatever the world may say.

What Dr. Collins has been teaching at Covenant Theological Seminary for nearly thirty years is bearing fruit, not only in his own denomination but more broadly as well. Remarkably, his book received a fairly positive review published in the OPC’s denominational magazine *New Horizons* in March 2012. This kind of teaching is dangerous and unfaithful to Scripture. Particularly, it calls into question the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. Westminster Confession of Faith 1.7 summarizes this doctrine ably:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

If being formed from the dust of the ground really means that God imprinted His image on some creature that had evolved into something like man and then called him Adam, what does it mean that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day? It is not difficult to read and understand what the first three chapters of the Bible say. The real question is this: will you affirm what the words of the Bible say when the world mocks and derides? Here we must take our stand.

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**Carrick, John. *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002.**

There are dozens upon dozens of books on preaching from all different perspectives. Some books are beginning-to-end textbooks on the sermonizing process, others focus on the act of preaching itself, and yet others concentrate on hermeneutics. John Carrick's *The Imperative of Preaching* cues the reader to its purpose in the subtitle: *A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric*. This work seeks to explore the theology behind preaching—specifically Reformed preaching.

The thrust of Carrick's book is that true, gospel-centered, Christ-honoring, Reformed preaching brings the grand indicative of the person and work of Jesus Christ to bear upon the human soul through the imperative. In other words, faithful preaching has a grammatical motion from *the proclamation and explication of the reality of what God has done in Christ* (the indicative) to *the application of the implications of that reality upon the minds and hearts of the hearers* (the imperative).

In expositing this theme, Carrick criticizes two schools of thought regarding preaching. He criticizes mere moral preaching (i.e., preaching that is entirely imperatival) and "redemptive-historical" (i.e., preaching that focuses almost exclusively, if not entirely so, upon the indicative). Neither school, Carrick asserts, does justice to the examples of preaching we find in Scripture.

What we find in the Bible, instead, is pointed preaching that begins with the indicative (what has been done) and moves immediately into the imperative (what we must do). We can see this grammar of preaching in Jesus' first recorded words (and really his first sermon) in the Gospel according to Mark: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand [the indicative]. Repent, and believe in the gospel [the imperative]" (Mark 1:15). Peter preached the gospel of Jesus Christ (then immediately recent history) to the crowds at Pentecost, proclaiming the grand indicative of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. Only then does he apply the doctrine explicated to the

masses, who said in response, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

It is worth noting that Carrick deals with more than just the imperative. He shows the homiletical value of the interrogative (i.e., the question) and the exclamation. Sprinkled through each chapter are excerpts from Protestantism's greatest preachers—Samuel Davies, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Asahel Nettleton, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones—to demonstrate his points.

The book ends with a helpful critique of what has come to be labeled "redemptive-historical preaching" (RHP). RHP (the architect of which was Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder), as a movement, sought to combat the liberal preaching of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which tended to make biblical characters mere exemplars for behavior. There was clearly no gospel at all in such preaching. Carrick quite effectively argues that RHP swung the pendulum too far in the other direction, in many cases virtually removing *any* application whatsoever. In the most extreme forms of RHP, there is no imperative, only indicative. This, according to Carrick, is the equal and opposite error to moralistic preaching. We need preaching that powerfully proclaims what Christ has done *and* what men must do in response.

The Imperative of Preaching is not a book about crafting or delivering sermons. However, this book is of no less value for it. Reformed congregations all across America are suffering at the hands of preaching that is devoid of application, that is all indicative but no imperative. Being a deviation from all the preaching we see in Scripture, such preaching has been stripped of its power. All true preaching contains both the indicative (what Christ has done) *and* the imperative (what men must do in response). This book is valuable in the recovery of faithful gospel preaching.

*Taylor Sexton  
Pastor, Heritage Presbyterian Church  
Royston, GA*

# Admin Central

*“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).*



## ***Regularly Scheduled Events***

*Morning Worship:* Every Lord's Day (Sunday), 10:30am

*Evening Worship:* Every Lord's Day, 5:00pm

*Prayer Meeting:* 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of Every Month, 7:00pm

*Session Meeting:* 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of Every Month, 6:30pm

## ***Upcoming Special Events***

*January 8, 2023:* Guest Preacher Ian Hamilton at Heritage Presbyterian Church

*March 7-9, 2023:* Greenville Theology Conference (GPTS)