

SERMONETTES VOLUME 9

Vincent Cheung

Copyright © 2016 by Vincent Cheung
<http://www.vincentcheung.com>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted without the prior permission of the author or publisher.

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

CONTENTS

1. THE WORST TEXT FOR CESSATIONISM	4
2. FAITH OVERRIDE.....	9
3. ALL THINGS ARE YOURS	16
4. CHRISTIAN HEATHENISM: THE GOD OF THE HILLS	23
5. CHRISTIAN MASOCHISM: FOR THE GLORY OF MAN	28
6. NO PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD	29
7. THE CHRISTLESS MODERATE	33
8. THE EXTREME FAITH TEACHER	39
9. GOOD GIFTS FROM THE FATHER.....	54
10. SCRAPS FROM THE PREACHER'S TABLE	63
11. TRUE SABBATH.....	70
12. VAIN REPETITION VS. FAITH REPETITION	71
13. GOD'S "AUDIBLE VOICE" TO CESSATIONISTS.....	72
14. CESSATIONISTS AS MASS MURDERERS.....	73
15. SPIRITUAL PHYSICS	76
16. WHERE THERE IS A PROMISE, THERE IS A WAY	77
17. HEALING AND GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY.....	80
18. TWO VIEWS ON GOD'S WORD.....	81
19. THE EDGE OF GLORY	83

1. The Worst Text for Cessationism

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:8-12)

Cessationists often appeal to this text to support their doctrine. This is strange, because it is one of the worst texts for this purpose, and it is one of the strongest texts for the ongoing manifestations of the Spirit. It implies the exact condition in which each gift will cease, and because it does this so definitely, it also guarantees that each gift must continue until the condition becomes reality.

Verses 9 and 10 say, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." The attention is often focused on the meaning of "perfection." Cessationists claim that the perfection refers to the completion of the Bible, and because the completion of the Bible has come, this means that prophecy has ceased.

Paul's Assumption

The apostle has in mind an assumption as to how the gifts will cease, and his statement is an application of this broader principle. He places prophecy under the category of knowledge. He says that it is partial knowledge, not complete knowledge, and it would naturally cease when complete knowledge has come. A gift of the Spirit offers a part, a token, or a foretaste of something that belongs in its category. Since prophecy comes under knowledge, it offers a little knowledge. Once we have received the reality of complete knowledge, we would not need a foretaste of complete knowledge.

Thus a gift ceases when the effects that it produces have been delivered in maximum and permanent form. A gift ceases when we have received more than what the gift can offer in that category. A gift ceases when we have as a natural and permanent possession what the gift offers as a miraculous manifestation. A gift ceases when its function has become redundant and meaningless. Thus the time after the cessation of the gifts is a time of more of everything offered by the gifts, not less of everything. This is the evident assumption behind Paul's statement.

Maximum Effect

An essential point of this assumption is that a gift ceases when we have received the maximum effect of what that particular gift can offer. So Paul does not say, "Now we

prophecy in part, but when we have received total health, prophecy ceases." And he does not say, "Now we minister healing here and there, but when we have received total knowledge, healing ceases." He stays in the same category. He says that the manifestation of partial knowledge ceases when the manifestation of complete knowledge arrives.

In other words, the coming of complete knowledge can end only those gifts that come under knowledge. It tells us nothing about the gifts that come under other categories. We add to this the fact that nothing in the text suggests that gifts in different categories must end at the same time. The result is that even if we pretend that the "perfection" refers to the Bible, the only gifts that the Bible puts to rest are those that come under knowledge. It tells us nothing about the gifts of healing, miracles, faith, and so on.

This is so obvious from the text that it is embarrassing having to point it out. If you are poor and short, giving you all the money in the world would not make you taller. Your begging for money would cease, but your losing at basketball would continue. Even if we have received the fullness of knowledge, so that prophecy ceases, it does not mean the gifts that produce other kinds of effects have ceased, because the fullness of knowledge does not render them meaningless or redundant. When will healing cease? When we have received a resurrection body, when we have received immortality, and when sickness has become irrelevant. Healing would then be pointless. If the gifts have ceased, you would have the maximum of all that they represent.

Total cessationism would occur when we have received in permanent form the maximum effects of all the gifts in all the categories. You could eat radioactive waste for breakfast. You could walk on water as if it is cement. You could probably overpower an angel. These would not be miracles, because they would be your natural abilities. Whatever Jesus could do with his body, you could do, because you would have the same kind of body. You would have total access, total wisdom, total health, total power.

At that time, the gifts would indeed seem like child's play (v. 11). Compare this to our present condition. They say we have cessationism now? This is all that we have after the gifts have ceased? Then this is how much cessationism undermines our redemption. This is how they urinate on the blood of Christ, as if it is some worthless and ineffectual thing.

Return to Prophecy

Paul uses prophecy to illustrate his point. He says that prophecy is partial knowledge, and it will cease when complete knowledge arrives. Cessationists want this to mean the completion of the Bible. However, the "perfection" does not mean just anything that is perfect, or even anything that is perfect that conveys knowledge. Jesus was perfect, but when he arrived as a man, he brought more prophecies and miracles. The Holy Spirit was perfect, but when he was poured out on God's people, he brought even more prophecies and miracles than when Jesus was here. The Bible is certainly perfect, and if we believe what it teaches, it is God's written testimony to bring prophecies and miracles to all the generations and all the nations of the world.

What does Paul mean when he refers to the perfection? He writes, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." What is the maximum effect of redemption in the area of knowledge, of which prophecy is only a foretaste? It is "face to face" knowledge. We will "know fully." The meaning of "know fully" is not just anything we want it to be. It is made definite by "even as I am fully known." When prophecy ceases, you will have "face to face" knowledge with God. You will know in the same way that you are known.

Paul does not refer to a potential knowledge, but an actual knowledge, as actual as we are "fully known." As perfect as the Bible is, we do not even know fully the Bible. It takes an extraordinarily delusional person to think that he already knows fully, even as he is known fully. A "face to face" knowledge should not need exegesis, reading, revision, debate, and research. If the way I will know fully is the way that I am known fully, then unless God himself needs to perform exegesis, revision, and debate in order to know me, "face to face" knowledge cannot refer to what we possess at this time. Thus if a person insists on his cessationism on the basis of this text by sheer determination, although even then it can apply only to prophecy, he loses his God, and so his salvation as well.

Worse than the Charismatics

By their use of this text, the cessationists necessarily place us in a time after the resurrection, but in reality we live in a time before the resurrection. Even the worst heresies in eschatology usually seen in charismatic circles do not amount to this. The only way for a cessationist to prove that he is not a heretic is if he is more charismatic than the charismatic — a billion times more, a trillion times more, not only in doctrine, but also in power and experience, so that in the areas of prophecy, healing, miracles, and such things the charismatic only has a tiny token of what the cessationist has as his natural possession.

Many cessationists love to talk about the redemptive-historical approach to Scripture. The principle is sound, but their application is sinister. It is often used as a tactic to divert attention from what the text plainly asserts. They throw "Christ!" in your face so that you would feel like an unspiritual loser if you point out what the text teaches about faith, healing, and other benefits of redemption. Listen, unless a text says what it says, it cannot serve any overarching purpose. If a text that describes how a woman received healing by faith is mainly supposed to teach us something about Christ, then it at least also teaches us that we can receive healing from this same Christ by faith. They even criticize people for using the story of David vs. Goliath to encourage faith. It is all about Jesus, not about you. Jesus is our champion. Jesus defeated the devil for us. Great! But David himself was not Jesus, was he? WAS HE? ANSWER ME!

Anyway, in the name of the history of redemption, they accuse those who teach that we can receive the benefits of redemption by faith as failing to grasp the "already/not yet" distinction in Scripture. However, many of these benefits are promised to the "already" and means nothing in the "not yet." Something like healing is given in this life (Psalm 103:3, Matthew 8:17, James 5:15), and means nothing in the time of the "not yet," because by then we will not have healing, but immortality. So when can we have healing? Apparently,

never. They accuse people of teaching triumphalism, but if we teach triumphalism, if we declare that we possess the benefits that belong to the "not yet," we would not teach prophecy or healing — not even perfect prophecy or perfect healing — but we would claim complete knowledge and invincibility.

The truth is that cessationists are heretics because they declare that the next stage of God's plan has arrived, while we are still living in this stage, and they make the claim without much triumph to show for it. They wish to use the progress of redemption to discard miracles, but the progress of redemption ensures miracles at this time, because Paul's doctrine pinpoints the exact condition in which the gifts will cease, and the completion of the Bible simply does not match. The Bible is perfect, wonderful, and complete, but it is not what he is talking about. They have created a theological monster. It is an intellectual catastrophe and has produced incalculable damage over the centuries.

Worse than the Corinthians

The Corinthians were divided and competitive. So Paul instructed them to grow up and to walk in love. Some of them who operated in certain kinds of ministries looked down on those who were involved in other kinds of ministries. So Paul told them not to be ignorant about spiritual things. He said that there are different ministries, but the same God. There are different gifts, but the same Spirit manifests them through various people for the common good. The church is like a body. Every part has its function, and every part is important, so one part should not look down on another part. Instead of competing against others, we should value and support all ministries, all gifts, including those that appear less important or glamorous. This is what it means to walk in love in the context of the operation of spiritual gifts.

So charismatics tend to recognize and respect all gifts, whether it is teaching, prophecy, healing, or giving. On the other hand, cessationists do not even acknowledge the existence of probably more than half of the ministries Paul lists in his letters. Immature charismatics might say to some, "I am better than you!" or "I don't need you!" They need to grow up and walk in love. But cessationists say, "You should not exist!" Cessationists use 1 Corinthians 13 to teach that we should walk in love instead of the gifts, but Paul's purpose is for the Corinthians to walk in love while they walk in the gifts. Thus cessationists reject both the gifts and the love that the apostle teaches. Paul says, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts" — he says to eagerly desire the gifts, not eagerly deny the gifts.

If you walk in love, you will support the ministry of healing, even if you are stronger in prophecy yourself. If you walk in love, you will support the ministry of teaching, even if the ministry of giving comes more naturally to you. This is the kind of love that the apostle has in mind. This kind of love does not make a profession out of exterminating whole categories of ministers. Cessationists miss the whole point of 1 Corinthians 12-14. They are children, just spiritual kids. They are even more childish than the Corinthians. They said, "I am better than you!" and "I don't need you!" But the cessationists say, "I must end you!" Therefore, cessationists represent a most heretical and immature section of the church.

Cessationists are cancers in the body of Christ. But Jesus can cure cancers, or he can cut them out entirely.

Summary

This is the worst text for cessationism for at least the following reasons. First, it does not really support cessationism. One might as well use Genesis 1:1 to prove atheism. Second, the passage in fact guarantees the continuation of the gifts of the Spirit by specifying a condition that coincides only with the resurrection. Third, its use illustrates that the cessationists lack intelligence and integrity, so that their other efforts should also be examined. They are scammers, not scholars. I would not trust them to read a recipe for instant coffee, let alone the Bible. There should be a comprehensive backlash against their abuse of Scripture. There should be total war.

Fourth, their use of this text makes a mockery of redemption in a way unsurpassed even by Satanism. Paul teaches that the gifts will cease when their maximum effects have been received, but the cessationists declare that they have already ceased, suggesting that our present condition is all that Christ has attained for us. Fifth, to use this passage for cessationism implies that, to know us fully, God himself must study us in the way that we study the Bible. This is blasphemy and a rejection of the Christian God. It reveals that cessationism is a non-Christian religion. Sixth, it commits the cessationists to a heretical eschatology. Seventh, it exposes the cessationists as people who show even less love and maturity than the Corinthians.

2. Faith Override

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (Matthew 15:21-28)

Plastic Religion

There is the complaint that much of modern preaching is shallow. It addresses man's needs and desires, but neglects God's majesty. It is man-centered, not God-centered. If we mean it correctly, then there is some truth to this, but most of those who state the complaint make a wrong analysis, and some of the things they attack are in fact teachings that come straight from the word of God. Then, although they are satisfied that their solution corrects the issue, the truth is that it continues to misrepresent the biblical religion, only in a different way, in a way hidden from their bias.

A truly God-centered theology would ask God to tell us what it means to be God-centered, but this is not what we are presented by those who claim to be the most God-centered in their theology. If you ask man what it means to be God-centered, then the product is only a seemingly God-centered religion founded on a man-centered foundation. It is a man-centered opinion on what it should mean to be God-centered. It still ignores what God thinks about himself. It still ignores how God wants us to relate to him. So it is still a man-centered religion, but more hypocritical. What we need is a God-centered religion on a God-centered foundation.

Those who claim to provide a God-centered theology are often proud of their theological prowess, but in reality their solution is superficial. They are not much better than those they complain about, but they are the more vocal, more bitter, more arrogant counterpart. They represent the other side of man-centered religion. There is no theological depth and maturity. For this reason, they seem to think that God-centered religion usually stresses God's transcendence. God himself does not think so. That is not how he presents himself in Scripture. That is not how he tells his own story. A God-centered theology listens to

what God says about himself, and in his narrative, he stresses both his transcendence and his immanence.

He could be aloof, but instead he is closer than your own heartbeat. He could forget about you, but instead he counts your hairs. He could let you fend for yourself, but instead he feeds you and heals you, and works miracles for you. He could be too important to have anything to do with you, but instead he wants you to have faith in him and ask from him. He is so spiritual that he does not even have a body, but he promises he will strengthen yours. He is so transcendent that he created the world, but he is so immanent that he walked and talked with Adam. He is so transcendent that he could destroy Sodom, but he is so immanent that he engaged Abraham to negotiate with him. He is so transcendent that he could wipe out Israel, but he is so immanent that he allowed Moses to stand in his way and stop him. This is how he wants you to know him. This is God-centered theology.

I do not say that we should find the right balance, because it is not a matter of balance. It is not a matter of finding the right point on a scale, but a matter of right or wrong doctrine. Jesus was the most God-centered person who ever walked the earth. He was God himself, but more than anyone in Scripture, he was also the one who told us to pray for our needs and ask God for what we want. The "God-centered" people declares, "God is not Santa!" and they think that this is God-centered theology. It is true that God is not Santa, but this is because he is far better than Santa. Jesus said he is our Father, and it is his pleasure to give good gifts to his children. He does not bring us gifts only once a year, but Jesus told us to ask for our daily bread. They say, "God is not a cash machine!" It is true that God is not a cash machine, but this is because you only withdraw your own money from a cash machine. Paul wrote that God supplies all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. This is God-centered theology, because it listens to what God says about himself, rather than shoving divine transcendence back in his face no matter what he says.

They declare that God is for all of life, but then in one way or another suggest that it is unspiritual to ask him for health and wealth by faith, while it is spiritual to attain these same things yourself by effort, under some sort of cultural mandate. Do you see it? This is man-centered religion, hidden under the facade of divine transcendence. In effect, it pushes God away from our lives. They proclaim "The God Who is There" (not here?), but he is also "The God Who has Ceased." Theologically, he is a heuristic principle. Spiritually, he is a psychological crutch. He does not really do anything. He is decoration. He produces actual effects only in hidden providence, where we cannot tell the difference anyway. What is this? It is fake religion. It portrays itself as God-centered, but it is phony and shallow. It is plastic faith.

Here we have a woman who asked Jesus for healing, to remove a demon from her daughter. There were no platitudes about submitting to the will of God or suffering for the glory of God. Do you think that people back then did not know to say these things? Of course they did. They could sound religious too. They could keep up with the best of them. But this woman did not say these things. There was something wrong with her daughter and she wanted her fixed! And she did not sit on her theological pedestal and stay home to make fun of the preachers on television while her daughter rolled on the floor and foamed at the

mouth. That would have been really holy, as long as she slaps "for the glory of God" on whatever she was doing. Alas, she was not that sophisticated. There was a demon in her daughter and she wanted it gone!

She wanted healing for her daughter. She came for that one thing, not something else. And she asked Jesus to show mercy. Nowadays some people think that it is entirely legitimate to seek healing, as long as you do not expect to get it from God by faith, because that would mean you follow a gospel of health and wealth. This kind of religion is grotesque like no other. Can we even ask for mercy now? Be careful, or you might get healed. And that might get you excommunicated. Someone did in Jesus' day, and that still happens today in fine "Christian" churches. So refined. So orthodox. So demonic. The woman was a Gentile, but she was not a Buddhist pretending to be a Christian. She was not so "God-centered" that she lost all sense of self. She thought it was just fine to ask for things. She wanted miracle healing from Jesus. Give ME. Help ME.

No. No. No.

Jesus denied her three times. At first, he did not even acknowledge her. She could have given up. If he was going to heal her daughter, he would have responded immediately like he did with other people. The Messiah, God in the flesh, decided not to answer her. She should have accepted this as the will of God, and she should have retreated. Correct? What would you have done? But she refused to be ignored and persisted for a significant time, so that the disciples were annoyed and asked Jesus to send her away.

So Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." He was sent to Israel. She was a Gentile. He was not sent to her. Therefore, no healing. It was an argument from covenant theology. This answer was stronger than a simple "No," because he included a reason for his denial that the woman could not refute. His argument was correct, and so he left no room for negotiation. His meaning was clear, and he left no room for misunderstanding. If you take his words seriously, you know he was not going to do it.

She should have given up, right? Jesus not only denied the request, but he offered a reason. He hammered a nail right through her hope for a miracle. How many Christians who persisted through the silence would now continue even in the face of this explicit theological and irrefutable rejection, in defiance to the word of God, straight from the mouth of the Son of God? You assumed that when he does not grant your request, he usually just does not answer, and eventually you stop pestering him about it. But now he speaks to you directly and audibly, and even stated a reason for the denial, a reason that you cannot refute, based on a condition that you cannot change. Would not every Christian tradition, even if it comes short of condemning her audacity, urge the woman to submit to the will of God? But she refused to accept even this verbal rejection. She did not answer his argument, but insisted, "Lord, help me!"

Jesus replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." Christians today would call him a racist and leave. The more aggressive ones would try to damage his reputation on social media or even send him death threats. It is interesting how theologians

address this. Some of them claim that he was only using a term that was common in his day. So what? Would they find it acceptable for me to use a racial or religious slur that is common in my day? Right to the woman's face? In front of a crowd? During ministry time? Some of them say that Jesus was testing the woman's faith. With a racial slur? Should I do this when someone asks me to pray for him? Is this kind of speech "seasoned with salt" and offered with "gentleness and respect"? Or do the theologians have no idea what Paul and Peter had in mind? This is speculation in the first place. Jesus could have been testing her faith, but his words constituted an explicit rejection. His intention was irrelevant to whether the denial was genuine. Most importantly, all his points were theologically correct and irrefutable. He expressed no intention to perform the request. She could have left based on what he said.

If Jesus was testing her faith, then why don't Christians follow the woman's example, and insist that their faith is being tested in the face of silence and rejection, and insist on taking what they want from God no matter what? Instead, they give up and hide behind "the sovereignty of God." Even without a verbal and audible denial, they resign so fast that even those impatient disciples would have been disappointed. And they are the ones who keep screaming "COVENANT!!!" every chance they get. Dumpster-grade scholarship. Their idea of a covenant with God is weaker than even the covenant between heathen tribes. Otherwise, there is no way they would not believe in health and wealth, and all kinds of signs and wonders, along with eternal life, for all times that the covenant remain effective. They have no clue as to what it means to have a covenant with anyone, let alone the Almighty, or they would be deliriously happy all the time as they encourage one another to have faith, to serve God, and to receive all his benefits, both spiritual and material.

So Jesus could have been testing her faith, but I don't care, and the woman didn't care. We must deal with what he actually said. It was another covenantal argument, and it was even stronger than before. The first one was a positive statement that implied her exclusion, but this one was a negative statement declaring that it was "not right" to give her what she asked. He just clenched the nail on the other side. But it was even stronger than that. Mark's account tells us that he said, "First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (Mark 7:27). The plan was for his disciples to bring the gospel to the rest of the world — but not now (Acts 1:8). Thus he added a redemptive-historical dimension to the covenantal argument. At this point in God's plan of redemption, in the unfolding of his will in history, it was not time for the covenant to be bestowed upon the Gentiles. He was sent to someone else, not to her. It was not right to give to her what belonged to someone else. And even if she could get it, she could not get it now. He was entirely correct in his theology. There was no way to refute any of this.

But I Say Yes

He said no. He said no in three or four ways. There was the silent treatment. There was the positive covenantal argument. There was the negative covenantal argument. And there was the redemptive-historical maneuver.

Imagine what you would have done. He was not just ignoring you, he was saying no. He was not just saying no, he was schooling you in theology. You were defenseless because he was correct, and he was the Son of God. It is a standard Christian assumption that we can pray, but God will do what he wants anyway. The unspoken heresy is that God will do what he wants regardless of what he has promised, because he is "sovereign." Somehow he was not sovereign when he made the promises, but he is sovereign when he breaks his promises. Or he was sovereign when he made the promises, because even then he intended to break them. This is theology. It is brilliant. No wonder people hate it.

But now he is not just unresponsive, he is saying no to you in person. What would you have done? The Angel told Jacob to release him. What would you have done? Jacob said, "Not until you bless me." God said he would wipe out Israel. What would you have done? Moses said, "Don't you do it." Elijah prayed six times, and nothing happened. What would you have done? How would your theology handle this? The prophet prayed again, and God sent a heavy rain.

The woman did not accept the denial as "the will of God," but she pressed on. Jesus asserted a covenantal argument. Then he asserted a redemptive-historical argument. He was correct theologically. What could turn this around? It was the simplest and rarest thing in the world. The woman asserted an argument from faith. She hijacked the Lord's metaphor and insisted on getting something from him that was not intended for her and that did not belong to her, and that he said was "not right" to give to her. Faith made it right anyway. She had no covenant, and it was not her time, but she still got what she wanted. What's your excuse?

Jesus kept saying no, and the woman kept saying yes. And she received what she asked. Nowadays God keeps saying yes, and Christians are the ones who keep saying no. Instead of arguing with God out of faith to obtain blessings from him, Christians argue with God out of unbelief to refuse blessings from him, as if these things, stained by the blood of Christ, are some dirty, filthy things. Is this the pinnacle of God-centered theology? Is this the product of covenant theology, and a redemptive-historical approach to Scripture that finds Christ on every page? Which Christ? Apparently, not the one in this passage.

No wonder non-Christians laugh at us. We do not even believe our own God. We make up all kinds of very complicated reasons to reject his benefits — pushing it into the past or into the future, to another race, to another covenant, or up into heaven, or into another dimension, anywhere but here, anytime but now. And then we tremble with indignation when the atheists want to take away our Nativity scenes. We will get rid of our own God, but don't you mess with our politics and homeschools! But why am I saying "we"? I am not a part of this mess. I will disown these weirdos. I will preach the Christ of the prophets and the apostles, not the Christ of the religious phonies.

Primal Orthodoxy

Jesus made a covenantal argument. He made a redemptive-historical argument. And his theology was correct. But then she made a declaration of faith, and that finished the whole

exchange. There was no more rejection, and no more argument. Faith shut down every opposition, every reason to refuse, even from Christ himself.

Faith trumps everything. Faith is immune to even correct theological arguments. This is not because faith could contradict sound doctrine, but because faith in God is the first sound doctrine. Faith in God is the primal orthodoxy. Thus we do not say that faith would contradict correct theology, but that correct theology could never contradict faith. Even when a doctrine comes straight from the word of God, so that there is no room for refutation, it will always leave room for faith, because faith comes first. No covenant? No problem. Stuck in the wrong spot in redemptive history? Who cares? Faith always reaches God directly.

Of course I care about theology. I care so much that I am accused of extremism and rationalism. And I will outmatch those who wish to argue. But many people do not want to argue — they just need God to help them. Some try to resist unbelief, but they lack the cunning to outwit the sophistry of the theologians, if they can understand their complicated gibberish in the first place. I want to tell them that even when they are faced with a correct theological argument that denies them, and even when Jesus Christ himself states the argument, they can still get help from God by faith, because faith reaches God directly, and faith trumps everything. How much more should they receive from God, when all the arguments that deny them now are in fact heresies!

Cessationism is not only a false doctrine, but it is also an irrelevant doctrine. If I have faith, then the doctrine makes no practical difference. This is because the gifts of the Spirit constitute only one mode by which spiritual manifestations occur. And if it includes other modes, it still makes no difference. Even if cessationism is correct, I can still receive and minister by faith everything that the doctrine denies to me. Cessationists are pointless. They don't matter at all. Even if all the gifts have ceased, I would still be able to perform all their functions by faith.

I have never looked for someone with a gift of healing when I needed healing. I have always received healing by faith or commanded the sickness to leave. And I have never needed to think about any gift of healing when I prayed for the sick. I have always ministered to them by faith. Perhaps the gifts manifested sometimes, or many times. But I don't care. Do you mean that if you are sick, I should not pray for you and expect something to happen unless I think I have a gift? Do you mean if you have a need that is best met by prophecy or some other ability, I should not pray for you and just watch you suffer? That approach is void of both faith and love. No, I am going to have faith and take it anyway.

Do you think the gifts of the Spirit have ceased? I don't care. Do you think that signs and wonders have passed away? I don't care. Do you think that certain blessings belonged only to certain peoples and at certain times? I don't care. You would be wrong about all of this, but even if you are right, I don't care, and I don't need to care. I am going to have faith and take it all anyway. If anything have ceased, or slipped, or leaked, they are gone only for you, because you do not have faith.

If God is silent, or if God appears to say no, and if there is even a sound theological reason for him to say no, you can still say yes. If you have faith, you can still have it. You can still press for it. You would not be working against God. He likes faith. Faith is God's "Yes" in your heart. Most of us are not really asking for something wrong, but the religious charlatans want to take even that away. Don't be afraid of them. Don't be bullied. Have faith, and take it anyway.

This woman came closer to the heart of Christ than many Christians, and her orthodoxy surpassed most of the heroes of the faith. Think about it: Would Calvin and Spurgeon have stood in Jesus' face and demanded to take what they wanted? I will not answer for you. What about the famous theologians and preachers of our day? Would they have insisted despite the Lord's repeated, explicit, and correct denials? When Jesus said no, would they have said yes? Or would they have retreated to their cute little Latin phrases long before the silent treatment was over?

The more knowledge we have, the more faith we ought to have. I am talking about the kind of faith that this woman had. It is the kind of faith that Jesus approved. But it seems that most people lose faith as they gain knowledge. This is the opposite of what should happen. It does not matter how much they study. They are not assimilating the Bible correctly. The more they study, the more they become estranged from God. They have become slaves to their own theories and traditions.

When knowledge does not increase a person's faith, it only increases his ability to pretend. Just because someone takes it upon himself to handle an "adult" doctrine does not mean that he is mature spiritually and intellectually. You can let an infant drive a car, but he will probably crash it. Putting him in the driver's seat does not make him an adult. Likewise, most theologians are spiritual kids, although they handle adult doctrines. They are just pretending. They play around with divine sovereignty, the covenants, the history of redemption, and so on, but when they drive — when they formulate, teach, and implement these doctrines — they wreck faith. They are just kids doing adult things to make other kids look up to them. A mature theologian will master more than the typical obnoxious prose and jargon, but he will grasp faith, mercy, justice, and these things will pervade his doctrine and ministry.

Faith trumps everything. It overrides all theological objections, even valid ones. It wipes out all covenantal restrictions and redemptive-historical concerns. Theologians might want to nitpick over this, but I can nitpick better than they can. If you know me, you know that I can nitpick with the best of them, and I will win. So I am not interested in a nitpick contest. This is not much of a boast, because it is not hard to nitpick. But do you have faith? Rather, I want to make it easy for someone who is in need, or who wants something from God, and to give him a defense against those who would "strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." I want him to know that God can help him. Have faith in God. If you have faith in God, you can receive from God. Jesus said, "If you have faith when you pray, you will be given whatever you ask for" (Matthew 21:22, CEV). It is that simple.

3. All Things Are Yours

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did — and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did — and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:1-11)

The World of Magical Theology

What is called "biblical theology" structures its study according to the chronology or history of redemption, whereas "systematic theology" structures its study according to a logical or topical order. In connection with biblical theology, the redemptive-historical approach takes Scripture as the divine record of the unfolding of God's redemptive plan in history, with its main focus on the revelation of Jesus Christ. Among other things, this approach is supposed to prevent the reader from reducing the Bible to a mere collection of moral lessons, much like how Aesop's fables are used. The various biblical passages are supposed to offer revelations of Jesus Christ, instead of moral lessons like "be humble," "be frugal," "be positive," "be kind," and so on. This is correct in principle, and when done correctly, this approach to Scripture can yield wonderful insights. But as usual, in the hands of scholars, it often becomes a tool to preach a different gospel, and a different Christ than the one the Bible presents.

A well-known pastor and professor was teaching a group of children something about biblical theology. They came upon a passage in which Christ performed a healing miracle. The pastor persisted with one of the children until the poor thing finally surrendered to the interpretation that the passage was not about the healing miracle, but about Jesus Christ. But the passage was already about Jesus. Why did the pastor forbid the child's initial understanding? The advocates of biblical theology and the redemptive-historical approach are fond of boasting that they find Jesus on every page of the Bible. The problem was that this particular page revealed Jesus Christ the healer, and as one who would heal those who ask by faith. You see, this is what the theologians resent. This is the thing that the pastor and professor refused to permit. He had to destroy it before faith in this Jesus grew in the

heart of the child. He had to murder this Jesus before he could take root in the next generation. And so he did it. And then he wrote a book and boasted about it. But Jesus said that someone like this should go kill himself (Matthew 18:6).

He claimed a miracle is only a "sign" that points to Jesus Christ. But which Christ? What does the sign tell us about this Christ? Does the sign "Christ is a healer" point to a Christ who is not a healer? Does the sign "Christ heals those who come in faith" point to a Christ who does not heal those who come in faith? How do you pull this off? Magic! What would a sign have to say to actually tell you that "Christ is a healer" and "Christ heals those who come in faith"? You just won't let it happen, will you? You will allow Christ to be only that one thing about him you still believe in and nothing else. You will let Christ be only as big as your microscopic faith, instead of increasing your faith to embrace all of Christ. When the Bible reveals a Christ that is bigger than your faith, you cry heresy. This is what you mean by Christ-centered, but you make everything, including Jesus himself, centered on what you decide.

We see this kind of thing done over and over again in the name of biblical theology, in the name of the redemptive-historical approach to Scripture. Oh, of course we don't want to "moralize," right? That would be terrible! But they end up allegorizing every passage into a lesson about Jesus Christ, and only the Jesus they allow. They have made up their minds about what Jesus Christ is like and what he is permitted to be or do before they engage the text. They have made up their minds about what kind of Christ they will allow in their lives, and in yours. If a passage reveals Christ as healer, they will allow it to reveal Christ, but either not as healer, or only as a spiritual healer, a healer for your soul. Regardless of what God says, the result is the same. Everything is forced through their filter to eliminate undesirable aspects of Jesus Christ. No matter what a text says, they refuse to let it mean anything other than what they have decided. The Bible calls this a demonic stronghold.

They are always going on about "Christ-centered" this and "Christ-centered" that. But this is not Christ-centered interpretation. This is voodoo. This is a bait-and-switch scam. The theologian first shows you a passage and tells you to focus on it. He makes you think that he is about to give you a Christ that comes from that same passage. He mumbles something about history, drama, revelation, unfolding this or that — sometimes adding an incantation in Greek or Hebrew for good measure — and then from all of this emerges a Christ that is different from the one the passage talks about. If a passage shows that Jesus Christ heals someone because of his faith, it is somehow a wrong interpretation to think that he will do that for us too, but that the correct interpretation is that he will not do that for us. The text is making another point, a point that is apparently even in contradiction to the words of the text. No matter what the text says, they allow it to unfold only the Christ that they have decided, not the Christ that is in the text. This is essentially a liberal approach to Scripture, and an approach that rejects divine inspiration. It is an approach of the demonic cults. The difference is that the bias is — we hope — not as extreme, so that the result still retains part of what the Bible reveals about Christ, but never more than what they allow you to see. It is magic.

A Christ-centered approach does not only see Jesus Christ on every page, but it sees Jesus Christ as he is revealed on "that" page. Who is the Christ in this passage? How do we deal with this Christ, or this aspect of Christ? If it reveals a Christ who dies for sinners, so that they can become righteous before God, then that is the Christ we see. We should believe in him and receive righteousness. If it reveals a Christ who heals the sick, so that they can come to him by faith and receive healing for their bodies, then that is the Christ we see. We should have faith in him and receive healing. If it reveals a Christ who baptizes his people with the Holy Spirit, so that they can become his witnesses by preaching the gospel and healing the sick, then that is the Christ we see. If it reveals some other aspect of Christ, some other perfection that he possesses, or some other blessing that he provides, then that is the Christ that we believe and preach. This is Christ-centered interpretation. This is Christ-centered preaching. A Christ-centered approach to the Bible will listen to what the Bible tells us about Christ.

The Principle of Direct Application

The redemptive-historical approach to Scripture is correct, but we must read what the text actually says, and see Christ as he is revealed in the passages. There is only one Jesus Christ, but the wisdom and grace of God are "manifold" (Ephesians 3:10, 1 Peter 4:10), and you might notice that a passage shows you an aspect of him that you did not know before. Good! You just learned something. The knowledge might demand you to expand your perception and increase your faith. Rather than shrinking from it, and forcing every passage to reveal only the things about Christ that you already accept, submit to the text and let it tell you what Christ is really like, what this Christ is telling you, what this Christ will do for you, and what this Christ wants from you.

If God reveals himself through the story of history, then a correct interpretation involves grasping both the reasons for the story and the facts of the story. It will respect why he is telling us the story as well as what happened in the story. So when the Bible tells us a story in which Jesus healed someone, the reason for telling the story about healing is to reveal Jesus Christ, but the story itself is still about healing. Then, although the reason for the story is to reveal Jesus Christ, one reason to reveal Jesus Christ is so that we would believe in him (John 20:31). And if the story reveals Jesus the healer, then a reason for telling us about Jesus the healer is that we should have faith in him and receive healing (Acts 14:9). This obvious approach enables us to appreciate the redemptive aspect of the passage, that it tells us about Christ, and at the same time it makes a direct application to ourselves, that it tells us what this Christ wants us to know and how he wants us to live.

A proper use of Scripture includes "moralizing" the text. We can call it something like "direct application," but we will continue to say "moralizing" just to make scholars cringe. Paul refers to the people of Israel in 1 Corinthians 10. He indeed takes a redemptive-historical approach to Scripture. God provided water for them out of a rock and they drank from it, and Paul says that the rock was Christ. But then he applies the same incident to us as a moral lesson: "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" (v. 6). We take their history ("these things occurred as examples") and make moral lessons out of them ("to keep us from setting our hearts on evil

things"). Then the apostle makes several direct applications from their lives: "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.' We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did — and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did — and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel" (v. 7-9). In other words, "They did this, and God punished them. So we should not do this."

This is a straightforward and outright simplistic moralizing of the text, and Paul sees no problem with it. He does both things with the same text — he centers the text on Christ, and within this Christian context, applies the text to us. This is the way to use a text. If the moralizing application is done in a Christian context, or under the assumption that we are dealing with Christian Scripture, then it becomes what Christ wants to say to us through the text. The moralizing would not be a neglect of Christ, but a truly Christ-centered use of the text would listen to what he wants to tell us by the text, as in what he wants us to believe and how he wants us to behave. The whole thing is assumed to be Christian Scripture, not fables or moral lessons from men, but history, revelation, and lessons from Christ.

In this sense, we must moralize. We must take the historical events as revelations of Christ, as sources of doctrines, and as examples and lessons for living. We must do all of this, and we must do it repeatedly and constantly. Instead of saying that we should not moralize, we should say that we must moralize, and we must moralize correctly. The way to moralize correctly is to read it as Christian Scripture, not as a collection of independent events and stories. What we draw from each text must agree with the rest of Scripture. Thus we stress the importance of systematic theology. Once you grasp the Bible as a coherent whole, you are free to apply the Bible to yourself and others directly, and you would be unlikely to make a mistake.

Other biblical writers do the same thing. James writes, "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered." People love this. Although James applies the experience of the divinely inspired prophets directly to us, no one complains about moralizing, shallow preaching, or anything like that. Why? Because it is about suffering, not healing. It is about pain, not joy. It plays into their religious bias about what it means to serve Christ, and so their usual inhibitions fly right out the window. Then James continues, "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (James 5:10-11). We can always count on Job to give us an excuse to talk about our suffering. This is excellent, until we look up "what the Lord finally brought about" — health and wealth. God gave Job healing, long life, and double the wealth. James calls this God's "compassion and mercy." He says this even right after he condemned certain rich people — he is against their character, not their money. So it does not turn out as the religionists want, but it illustrates that James takes the prophets and makes a direct application to us.

There is more. Several verses later, James writes, "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops" (James 5:17-18). Now he is moralizing like there is no tomorrow. Elijah? The context is first about praying for healing. James says that when we pray for the sick, God will heal them. Then he broadens the lesson to prayer in general. He says that the prayer of a righteous man is effective. If you are going by your own righteousness, you will never make it, and your prayers will fail. I am not going by my own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. I am righteous because Jesus is righteous, and I am righteous in him. So when I pray in the name of Jesus, I pray as a righteous man. God hears me just like he hears Jesus, and my prayer is effective. In any case, James finds it appropriate to directly apply Elijah's example to the Christian. He does not say that we can never be like the prophet, but he says that Elijah was already "just like us." He compares Elijah's prayers for miracles to the Christian's prayers for miracles. Elijah also performed miracles of healing, but James chooses the prophet's miracles of nature, and applies them directly to us. God wants us to expand our thinking and increase our faith.

Now if the theologians have any problem with the above, they should be kicked out of every church and seminary. This is not some theory or trick, but a direct observation of how the Bible interprets itself. But if the theologians accept the above, then our disagreement ends, and it means they confess that they have been spewing nonsense all this time. Christian moralizing is not only acceptable, but mandatory, not only when it comes to suffering and patience, but also health and wealth, miracles of healing, and miracles of nature, and not only when it comes to the "spiritual" blessings in the New Testament, but also the physical, material, and supernatural blessings in the Old Testament. I mention this last point because some allege that the emphasis changed between the Old and the New. But if James applies the prophets, Job, and Elijah to us directly, then we can have all of the Old and the New. Again, the theologians invent distinctions to excuse their unbelief.

Thus we reinstate all instances of moralizing that they have rejected. Some Christians, thinking themselves more theologically informed, make fun of how popular preachers use the story of David and Goliath to encourage faith. While all the others stayed behind in fear, David went against the giant in the name of Lord and obtained victory. Afterward God's people were encouraged and followed David to pursue their enemies. Of course this is a picture of Christ. While we were helpless in sin, and cowered in fear before the devil, Jesus Christ went against him and obtained victory for us. He overcame the devil. He is our champion and our leader. Now we follow him to pursue the forces of darkness. But preachers are mocked when they say that the story should inspire our faith to confront our problems in the name of the Lord. This is moralizing. It is man-centered, seeker-friendly, motivational preaching. It is bad interpretation. No, it is not. It is an excellent use of Scripture. It is exactly what the Bible is written for. It is appropriate to moralize the text this way as long as it is given a Christian interpretation. In other words, the text does not encourage just anyone — the non-Christians would be standing on Goliath's side. For Christians, on the other hand, the story teaches us to face life with faith and courage in the name of Jesus.

All Things Are Yours

The stories in the Bible are there for you — for history, for doctrine, to warn you, and to inspire you. You can call it moralistic, exemplaristic, or something else, it doesn't matter. The Bible is for you, and you can apply it to yourself directly. There is indeed a wrong way to do it, so just learn the right way to do it. The main principle is to read them as Christian stories, not as mere human stories. As a Christian, all the characters and examples in the Bible belong to you. All things are yours. Whether Moses or Elijah or Paul or Christ, all are yours. They are your inheritance in Christ.

Moses' rock belongs to us. Job's suffering belongs to us. Elijah's power belongs to us. David's victory belongs to us. How much more should we directly apply the biblical examples of those who received from Jesus by faith? Jesus said, "I am willing" to the leper and healed him. Apply that to yourself. Jesus said, "Your faith has healed you." He said, "It will be done according to your faith." This is for you too. Jesus said, "All things are possible to him who believes." When you have faith, all things are possible to you. Of course the healing miracles are signs that reveal Christ. They are signs that reveal a Christ who is willing to heal us and who heals when we believe him. They are signs that reveal a Christ who thinks that all things are possible to us when we have faith.

Leave the school of magical theology. If a sign reveals something more than what the sign says, at least it cannot reveal something other than or even opposite to what the sign says. If a Christ who heals reveals a Christ who saves, it still reveals a Christ who heals. Don't let the magician deceive you. Don't let him show you a text and then give you something else. Don't let the theologians and preachers lie to you, and convince you that it is an abuse of Scripture to directly apply to yourself the examples of faith, healing, miracles, and all kinds of blessings. You would be abusing Scripture if you do not apply them to yourself. Apply them directly. Apply them forcefully. Apply them often. Apply them all day and all night. Apply all of them.

Take responsibility for your faith. Don't be a victim. And if you must be a victim, at least don't complain to the person who tells you the truth. Paul tells the Corinthians, "For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough" (2 Corinthians 11:4). What about you? The theologians teach a different Jesus. The preachers deliver a different gospel. Do you put up with this? Do you look at this with academic detachment, or with mere religious interest? Tell me, do you put up with this? If you do, then you share in their sin. You are guilty like them.

Some of you curse up and down, turn over tables, and go on parades — parades! — when people mess with your politics. But when someone shoves another Jesus down your throat, you want to discuss it like gentlemen. Why aren't there riots at churches and seminaries to protest cessationism, or some other satanic religion? Why aren't there sit-ins, walk-outs, sleep-overs, or whatever people do nowadays? The least you can do is to object with some

force instead of just talking about it politely and endlessly. You engage in perpetual discussion to pretend that you are doing something about it, but in reality to avoid any change as you keep flattering the theologians about their contributions despite their unbelief. You are so corrupt.

There are those who think that I am too harsh with the theologians and preachers. Look, if you can refute me, then I am wrong anyway, and it makes little difference if I am harsh, that I communicate in a way that you can actually GET IT. But if I am right, then I am not the one you should be talking to. It is amazing that some people admit that I am right about all of this, and still I am the only one they complain to. You should be joining me, not lecturing me to be nice. Even if you have no faith, no courage, no sense of justice, and no loyalty to Christ, at least have a little shame. Until you have done your part to attack unbelief, you should be too embarrassed to judge how I do it. Crawl back into your hole. The truth is that I need to be doing this a thousand times stronger before I can make up for your compromise.

I see right through you. If someone preaches another Jesus or another gospel to you, you put up with it, and you blame me for speaking up because you are exposed as well. You are that kind of person. You pretend to be nice when talking about theology, even when someone crucifies Christ afresh by their tradition and unbelief. But wait until someone insults the brand of smartphone you use! Now you are the Lion of Judah! Now you call down fire upon his head! Anyone can take away your Jesus, and you will nod and smile, answering with "gentleness and respect." But Satan himself is too afraid to make fun of your soccer team, lest you adorn the full armor of God and smite him with the force of a thousand angels.

Still, even when you are like this, even though you are so disgusting and hypocritical, God remains true to himself, and if you can accept the truth, all things are yours. Still, they are yours. Whether Moses or Elijah, whether Paul or Christ, whether healing or prophecy, whatever is in the word of God, if you are a Christian, and if you have faith, then they are yours through Jesus Christ. They are your inheritance, and no one can take them away from you.

4. Christian Heathenism: The God of the Hills

The king of Israel advanced and overpowered the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses on the Arameans. Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, "Strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again."

Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they. Do this: Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with other officers. You must also raise an army like the one you lost — horse for horse and chariot for chariot — so we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely we will be stronger than they." He agreed with them and acted accordingly.

The next spring Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside. The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD.'"

For seven days they camped opposite each other, and on the seventh day the battle was joined. The Israelites inflicted a hundred thousand casualties on the Aramean foot soldiers in one day. The rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek, where the wall collapsed on twenty-seven thousand of them. And Ben-Hadad fled to the city and hid in an inner room. (1 Kings 20:21-30)

The Reformed tradition is a human tradition that is based on the Christian faith. Like Catholicism, Mormonism, and a number of others, the Reformed tradition uses the Christian faith as a template to make up their own system. On some things it is exactly correct, but in many aspects, the resulting religion is unlike the actual Christian faith, the God is unlike the actual God, or the Christ the actual Christ, the gospel the actual gospel. It is something that looks similar and sounds similar enough to deceive many people, but it is not the same. It distorts some doctrines and discards others to make the system accommodate the people's weaknesses, prejudices, and evil urges. This is why the Reformed tradition embraces cessationism among the other heresies that it endorses. It cannot accept the Scripture as it is written. It refuses to believe the gospel as it is preached. It condemns Jesus Christ as he has been revealed.

One of the most blatant lies from followers of Reformed theology is that they believe God is for all of life. The truth is that they regard him as God in fewer areas than many of those who do not make such a claim or even those who have not considered the issue. There are

territories that they do not allow God to touch. Although they pretend to allow God to speak about those areas, they twist his words to accommodate what they wish to believe. So they construct opinions and policies on major issues using Christian terms, but these opinions and policies are often not truly Christian, and then they do not believe that God would actively, obviously, and miraculously involve himself in any area of life. Their God is a God of hidden providence.

Followers of the Reformed tradition believe that God is for all of life the least, although they claim to believe it the most, and they persecute those who behave as if God is for all of life. If someone prays to God for a parking space, they laugh at him. They belittle his faith as trivial and selfish. We can agree that finding a parking space is far less important than finding an eternal salvation, but this is what makes it an excellent illustration. If God is for all of life, then why can't we have faith in him for both things, for all things? What is so terrible about this? These Christians act as if God is for all of life, and it is so much a part of their faith that they would behave this way without boasting about it. As for those only boast about it, their faith is a sham.

If God is too great to answer my trivial requests, then why in the world is he keeping track of my hairs (Matthew 10:30)? He started it, so why can't I go along with it? Ah, the problem is not with God, or with me, or with charismatic fanatics, but with the religious phonies who claim to believe that God is for all of life, but in reality oppose it to the uttermost. They say he is a God of forgiveness and holiness, of conversion and sanctification, but to them he is not a God of healing, of prosperity, of protection, of revelation, of miracles, of happiness, of glory, of success, both in this life and in the life to come. They worship a pagan deity. They preach a pagan gospel. They persecute the God of the Bible, who blesses his people in all things. And they persecute those who worship this God, those who follow the Christian faith.

Their God can speak to you about health, but he is not going to do anything for you when it comes to health, at least not miraculously as the Bible promises. Their God gives you a theology of health and medical care, but you will have to help yourself when it comes to actually getting health and healing, just like the pagans. They even encourage the pursuit of health as long as you do it through natural means and do not claim that you can get it by faith in God, because that would mean adopting a gospel of health. But the God of the Bible says that the prayer of faith will heal the sick (James 5:15), that Jesus took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses (Matthew 8:17). The God of the Bible will miraculously remove the sickness and restore the person.

Their God can speak to you about wealth, but he is not going to do anything for you when it comes to wealth. Unlike the God of the Bible, this one does not give you "power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). Their God gives you a theology of work and economics, and might even endorse your capitalism, but you will have to help yourself when it comes to actually getting wealth and prosperity, just like the pagans. They even encourage wealth-building as long as you do not claim that you can get it by faith in God, because that would mean adopting a gospel of wealth, a prosperity gospel. But the God of the Bible says that if you will seek first the kingdom of God, then "all these things" that come under Mammon

will be added to you (Matthew 6:33). He does not mean spiritual wealth, but he promises all the things that "the pagans run after" (v. 32). The God of the Bible can miraculously increase material resources, and even likes to make too much (Mark 8:18-21). The God of the Bible is a God of prosperity, a God of more than enough.

Their God is an idol derived from an anti-"health and wealth" heresy, fueled by the Catholic notion that pain is piety. These are two examples, but there are others. They are preferred because the Reformed are so against the gospel of health and wealth, but they are often more obsessed with these things than the people they criticize, only that they refuse to get them through faith in God, but pursue them by human and natural means. Here is one more: They say that God is for all of life, but when they want to change the world, they seek the God of Politics. The God of this kind of theology is not the God of the Bible. This is a limited God. This is a compartmentalized God. This is a philosophical God that serves as a heuristic principle for you to talk about everything in life, but that does nothing about anything in life. This is a God of the hills, and not a God of the valleys, or anywhere else. This is the God of the Reformed, the God of the Evangelicals. This is the God of heathenism. This is the God of cessationism. The God of the Bible is bigger, stronger, and more generous with all things than their ability to believe, and so they invented another God — a tiny God, a stingy God, a "spiritual" and hidden God, an idol in the form of a golden calf — and then they declare in triumph, "This is the God who brought you out of Egypt!"

The Reformed, Evangelicals, and cessationists are "Christian" heathens. They condemn a gospel of health and wealth. Such a crude gospel is unworthy of the Most High, they say. But then they turn around and worship the God of Medicine and the God of Finance, in order to obtain the same blessings that they denounce in the gospel of health and wealth. The difference is that instead of looking to the Christian God for all things for all of life, they look to a separate deity for each item they desire, using their own talents and efforts as offerings. Thus the anti-"health and wealth" gospel is in fact a non-Christian religion. These religious frauds still want all the things that they claim God ceases to offer, and they pursue them from other sources. Cessationism becomes polytheism. Cessationism is modern heathenism.

When they are exposed in such clear terms, of course they would resist. Heresies hide in ambiguities. Their doctrines and the implications are evident, but these people suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They love their system of religion, where each God stays in his own place, and they could go to each one to satisfy a different desire. With them, if you need forgiveness, seek the God of the Christians, but it is heresy to have faith in him for health and healing, especially if you expect him to do it regularly and miraculously. Although he has promised it, don't you dare "name it and claim it," because somehow a respect for divine sovereignty means that you must leave room for God to break his word. For healing, you will have to fornicate with the priests of evolution before the altar of science, dieting, exercise, medicine, and insurance. With them, if you want holiness, come to the God of the Bible, but it is heresy to trust him for wealth and prosperity, especially if you want more than what you need to survive. For that, you will have to worship at the temple of education, labor, capitalism, and investments. And with them, if you seek the

other kinds of miracles that the Bible promises, like visions, dreams, prophecies, tongues, and various sign and wonders (Acts 2:17, 1 Corinthians 14:26), then you must be a horrible person, because everybody knows that when the apostles died, the Holy Spirit died with them, and those things have come under Satan's domain. Of course, the Reformed are not the only ones that practice this kind of idolatry and polytheistic religion, but they are the most hypocritical, because they boast most loudly that the God of the Christians is for all of life, when the God of the Reformed does not do much in most areas of life, except by hidden providence.

There is only one God. This is the God of the Christians, the Trinity. Cessationism entails a revival of ancient paganism and polytheism. However, the pagan deities either did not exist, or they were demons. They were localized or specialized, or both. Their knowledge and influence extended over only certain geographical areas, or a limited number of topics and needs. Whether your God is Reformed, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Calvinist, Arminian, or something else, if it is a cessationist God, it does not exist. There is no such God as a cessationist God. People made him up to accommodate their phony piety, and to excuse their idolatry. There is no such gospel as a cessationist gospel. People made it up, reducing the true gospel into something that they can live up to without genuine faith, and to excuse their polytheism.

The God of the Bible, the God of the Christians, the only God, is alive, active, obvious, speaking to people and working in people, often in miraculous ways. This is the God who saves, who heals, who prospers, who blesses, and who judges. This is the God who takes away the suffering of life that we have been redeemed from, because Jesus suffered in our place. Jesus broke the curse of the law, a curse that included sickness and poverty, and a curse so strong that it could break a nation (Deuteronomy 28). Don't you see, morons? The gospel can save a whole nation's health and wealth, if the people would have faith in God. Jesus Christ is the hope of all nations, for all of life. To reject this, or even to reduce it slightly, is to undermine the work of Christ. It is to become anti-Christ. But you idiots are all worked up over cars and houses and vacations — over a few dollars? seriously? — and you persecute those who are in fact closer to the truth than you are. If they are wrong, then you should do better, but you are doing much worse. If you have more knowledge, then you should have faith for much more, not less. Or will a few extra bucks totally devastate your relationship with God? Then you do not have what you think with God in the first place. Why can't a decent Christian handle a couple of million dollars? Why? Are you really that easily swayed by money? And you dare to lecture people about it? You wish to correct others, and you pretend to be a defender of the faith and of true piety, but you have nothing. You are fake. You are a poser.

If there are errors in those who affirm a gospel of health and wealth, or a prosperity gospel, the Reformed, Evangelicals, and cessationists are not ones who can say a word about it, because they cannot do it without becoming anti-Christ. I can, but they cannot. Their tradition and prejudice, and their lack of faith, have disqualified them. They want to wipe out everything that makes them look bad, and if they must get rid of God, Christ, and the gospel to make this happen, then so be it. I can correct the errors without attacking Christ himself, and offer a purified account of what the Bible teaches and promises, but since a

significant part of their displeasure is in fact directed against what the Bible affirms, they cannot say a word without committing blasphemy. You stupid pretentious religious brats, let the people have their expensive clothes and houses, and let them have their cars and jets, as if God thinks these things are a big deal, as if God is unwilling to give them even more (2 Samuel 12:8), but you ought to find out what Christ has done for us and what faith can do before you criticize people who know better than you, although you look down on them, and end up attacking the gospel in the process.

Then, this is also the God for whom we endure legitimate suffering, not the phony suffering that anyone can experience just by laying down and doing nothing. The kind of suffering that the Bible honors comes from difficulties in fulfilling the commission of Christ, and from persecution for the sake of Christ. It might mean getting stared at or talked about, or it might mean getting cut in half or lit on fire. For many people, this kind of suffering comes most often from those religious charlatans who oppose the gospel that God delivers and blesses us in all of life, that good things come to us through Christ for every area of life. All teachers of the so-called health and wealth gospel that I have heard believe in this kind of suffering, and many of them experience this more than the Reformed, Evangelicals, and the cessationists that I know, often as they preach in less developed countries — sometimes in their expensive clothes and jets, sometimes not — while their high-minded critics write scathing monographs about them in the comfort of their university offices. It is their message of faith that enables them to endure both the assassination attempts from local shamans and the murderous writings of the religious intellectuals.

And this is the same God who will damn people to the lake of fire for their unbelief and idolatry. In hell, those who are so against a gospel of blessing, of health and wealth, and of miracles, will not be bothered with any of it. Finally, life will be exactly as their religion declares it should be.

5. Christian Masochism: For the Glory of Man

Suffering is a fetish to Christians. The romanticization of unnecessary suffering, including suffering that God has promised to reduce or remove in this life, has long been a feature of the Reformed and Evangelicals, and especially the cessationists. Their theology almost becomes an eroticization of sickness and poverty, and they love to wallow in suffering for the glory of man. Even what is called Christian Hedonism represents only a psychological adjustment when it comes to suffering, instead of faith in God to overcome and change circumstances. Even if there is a difference in perspective, there is no essential difference in the doctrine and effect. When it comes to suffering, it is still a form of religious masochism.

Phony Christians are religiously aroused by unnecessary suffering. This is not the legitimate suffering that comes from believing and preaching the gospel; in fact, suffering for Christ is often not in view at all. Rather, they are enamored with the suffering that comes from everyday living, including those difficulties that God promises to reduce or remove, and that he instructs us to conquer by faith. For them, suffering is a religio-spiritual fetish. Their doctrine is a narcissistic and deviant anti-gospel. It is a grotesque and pornographic theology. It is a self-centered and self-abusive heresy. It is their way to experience a religious euphoria without possessing the faith to overcome circumstances or to receive blessings and miracles from God, and without having to do anything that might incur the kind of suffering that the gospel truly honors. All they need is to be losers in life, and do nothing, and their theology of suffering would catapult them to glory and ecstasy. They are religious sickos.

The perverts of cessationism are commended just for being victims. It is the easiest and laziest of fake religions. They are praised just for being sick. They are praised just for being poor. And they get extra points if they attack those who have faith that God can make their lives better. They claim that they endure for the glory of God, but no glory goes to God, because they are showing us nothing about God, but only how they are putting up with him for mistreating them. All we hear from them is how they have been faithful to God even though God appears to be unfaithful to them. This religious masochism is all for the self, for the glory of man. Their whole life is a religious scam to secure human approval. Indeed, they succeed in this. People admire their endurance, their fake piety. This is their reward, and it is all the reward they will get.

6. No Place to Lay His Head

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

Poor Jesus had no place to sleep. Even the animals had it better than he did. This is what the religious phonies want you to think. They claim that Jesus said he was homeless. And since he was homeless, he was poor. And since he was poor, we should be poor too. All these points are fraudulent.

Jesus was not homeless in the sense that the anti-prosperity preachers claim. First, presumably he had a home in Nazareth. He could have returned to his mother and brothers. They wanted to take him home anyway, because they did not believe in him and thought he had lost his mind (Mark 3:20-21, Luke 8:19-21, John 7:5). Second, disciples welcomed him into their homes. Peter had a home, and Jesus healed his mother-in-law there (Luke 4:38). Lazarus and his sisters had a home (John 11-12). Jesus even had dinner with them. Think about that. He even had food to eat. Amazing. Third, strangers welcomed him into their homes. He did not even need an invitation, because he would invite himself: "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). If we are talking about shelter, Jesus had more places to stay than we do. He could eat anywhere he wanted. He could sleep anywhere he wanted. As he said, "No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

He had hundreds of places to eat and sleep. So his statement had nothing to do with lacking shelter. The context shows the intention and the meaning. Someone said to Jesus in the previous verse, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go" (v. 19). Jesus was telling the man to consider what he was saying. The Lord had no long-term residence, not because he was poor, but because he was involved in an itinerant ministry. He was constantly traveling. Anyone who followed him had to be prepared to lead the same kind of life. He did not mean that everyone who followed him spiritually or who believed in him had to lead this kind of life, and could not settle down, get a job and a home, and so on. He meant that anyone who followed him physically would have had to adopt the same traveling lifestyle.

Jesus could have been rich or he could have been poor, but his statement had nothing to do with it. It had nothing to do with what God has promised when it comes to prosperity or what can be obtained by faith for everyday living. On several occasions, I had no place to lay my head for many hours, because I was stuck in an airport while traveling — in business class. He had "no place to lay his head" by choice, and he was telling the man to think before making the same choice. Those who use Jesus' statement against a prosperity gospel are extremely stupid and biased, because there is no direct relevance to the topic. Perhaps they have been indulging in such luxury themselves and so removed from useful ministry

that they cannot conceive of anyone living with any sort of inconvenience unless he is poor. They cannot fathom willingly walking into uncomfortable situations for the sake of ministry. They cannot get in touch with reality even in their imagination, and they have so much time and interest to make pretentious judgments against people.

Paul called himself "homeless" in the same sense (1 Corinthians 4:11). It happened by choice, just as he was "brutally beaten" by choice (v. 11) — not in the sense that he asked to be beaten, but in the sense that he put himself in that situation for the sake of ministry. He was suffering as a servant of God under persecution, and not suffering as a victim of life under everyday circumstances as a result of a lack of faith. He also suggested that his experience was extraordinary (v. 10). It is a gross injustice to seize an example of severe persecution due to heroic ministry to justify everyday suffering due to feeble faith and character. The religious hypocrites wish to make the apostles unique in everything, but in this one thing where the Bible suggests that they might be different, these people want to make their experience universal. This is how unbelief works. This is how demons use the Bible. Don't be a self-righteous schmuck. Shut up and go do some real ministry. Now if you are going to follow Jesus in having no place to lay his head, although he had hundreds of places to stay, then also follow his miracle ministry of healing, and his example of multiplying food for the hungry. If you hate prosperity so much, you don't even have to enjoy any of it. Just do it for the sick and the poor.

Jesus was "homeless" only in the sense that he was traveling, and that by choice for the sake of ministry. And the fact that he was "homeless" in this sense does not tell us whether he was rich or poor. There is often no place to lay your head in the VIP lounge at the airport. In any case, money was never a problem for Jesus, because he did not even need money. He would multiply food, and he would make more than necessary (Mark 8:19-20). After he reminded his disciples of this, he asked them, "Do you still not understand?" (Mark 8:21). For all their flaws, the prosperity preachers understand this, but their high-minded critics still do not get it. It seems they don't even realize there is anything to understand. You see, with God, money is never a problem. He can give you more than enough, and he doesn't mind you having more than enough. Understand? But some of you still don't get it. Some of you still think that's wrong. You think God is not Christian enough for you. When he's all "honey and locust," you think he's weird, and when he comes healing and blessing, eating and drinking, you think he's a health and wealth heretic (Matthew 11:18-19).

Jesus did not need money to survive, but he definitely had some money, and probably more than most people imagine. Among other indications, the Bible lists some women who followed Jesus and his disciples (Luke 8:1-3). Some of them were probably among the wealthy and powerful, such as "Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household." The women were helping "to support them out of their own means." They were workers and financial backers, and there were "many others" in addition to those listed. The ministry took in enough money to finance a staff of more than twelve people. This is a conservative way to put it. There were the "many" women we just mentioned. And did the ministry support at least some of the seventy disciples it sent out? The ministry had enough money that there was a "money bag," and Judas was the treasurer. There was enough money that Judas could steal from it (John 12:6). There was enough in it so that he

was not immediately caught by the other disciples, and he remained the treasurer. There was enough money to support a sizable operation, and on top of that to give to the poor (John 13:29). There is no need to think that Jesus lived in luxury, but he did not have nothing.

Even if Jesus was not drowning in money, he was not nearly as poor as some people want us to believe. If we must portray him as poor, the most we can claim is that he was poor in a relative sense, that is, compared to his preincarnate state. However, it still does not mean that we should be poor, because Jesus was not just a teacher or a prophet, but a redeemer who came to save us by suffering in our place. Evangelicals should know this, but it seems that in their conspiracy against success, and in their demonic obsession to attack health and wealth, they would throw Jesus himself under the bus in order to make their point. The truth is that Jesus was much poorer than his preincarnate state, but much richer than most religionists claim. Thus he suffered poverty in our place and modeled prosperity for his people at the same time. This is the genius of the life of Jesus Christ.

Jesus had "no place to lay his head," but he could sleep anywhere he wanted. It was not a matter of wealth, but a lifestyle by choice. People refer to his example, severely misrepresenting it, because they want an excuse to be poor. They don't want to have faith in Jesus. They just want to use him. They refuse to make his suffering a foundation for their faith, but they wish to exploit his suffering to excuse their failures. But you don't need an excuse to be poor. You can be as poor as you want. You can starve yourself to death if you want. You can suffer as much as you want, in as many gruesome ways as you want. You can be a deviant and masochist if you want. Just don't interfere when other people have faith in God's promises, that God is for all of life, that God can make their lives better in every way, that he will bless their family, their community, and their nation as they have faith in him — and along with that, persecution, probably from you (Mark 10:30). You are such a religious sicko not because you are holy, but because you have too little faith and too much pride. If you must be this way, if you must harden your heart (Mark 8:17), at least let God's people have a chance to be better. Let his people go. Let them have faith in him and worship him.

Nevertheless, if you must chase down God's people to make them slaves again, you must improve your methods, because right now you are wasting everybody's time. If you want to bash the prosperity preachers, then learn what they are really saying. You don't care about the truth. You just assume that they are wrong about everything you don't like, no matter what. You often misunderstand and misrepresent them. More importantly, learn what the Bible says. You bash people for teaching unbiblical doctrines, when half of the time they are in fact more biblical, and the other half of the time you are unbiblical even when they are also wrong. Before you rape the Bible, read it. The Bible might surprise you.

What is happening? You pretend to occupy the intellectual high ground, but you are intellectual frauds. You are not any smarter or any better. Your expositions are not more accurate, but only more complicated and convoluted, more deceptive. You are not more honest, but you are just running a different scam. With so much more training, although your training comes from people who are like you, you are not better theologians and

interpreters. You accuse people for using a proof-text method, as they take verses out of context to make their point, but you do the same thing. (The proof-text method is in fact not wrong, and the Bible itself uses it frequently. However, one must not distort the meaning of the texts he uses.) Sometimes you do not even read the whole sentence before you throw a verse at people. You do not correct other people's mistakes, but you only replace them with your own errors. Other people do not pretend to be Bible experts, and they are not as interested in attacking you as you are in attacking them. This is why you have been left alone.

The Pharisees pretended to obey the word of God, but they concocted all kinds of schemes in order to do the minimum, and when they could not, they replaced it altogether with their tradition. They did this by nitpicking over the details, pretending to be precise, but really seeing how much they could get away with. When God commanded, "Love your neighbors," they said, "Ah, so we can hate our enemies!" and "Well...who are our neighbors anyway?" Jesus said, "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24). You are like them. What they did with God's commands, you do with God's promises. When the word of God promises healing, you say, "Yeah...but it doesn't say when." It does. Jesus already took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses, and you can receive it by the prayer of faith (Matthew 8:17, James 5:15). When it promises food, you say, "Yeah...but it doesn't say how much." Jesus always made too much, not just barely enough for people to survive (Mark 8:17-21). When it promises clothing, you say, "Yeah...but it doesn't say shelter." It does — hundreds of places of stay "in this present age," but with persecution from religious psychos like you (Mark 10:30). It promises that God will add to his people all the material things that the pagans run after (Matthew 6:32), and they run after a lot of things.

You have a "Yeah...but" theology. You are Satan's "Did God really say?" (Genesis 3:1). You are the hiss of the serpent. Why do you nitpick at God's promises? Why do you reduce them to the minimum? Does he need you to hedge for him? No! You are hedging FOR YOURSELF! Always for yourself. Rather than judging your experience by the word of God, you judge the word of God by your experience. Instead of changing your life by faith to match the promises of God, you are changing the promises of God to match your life. You reduce God's promises to the minimum to make it easier for your tiny faith to handle, and to make your unbelief less obvious. In contrast, a person who desires all of God for all of life would believe for the maximum, even if he must stretch and grow to attain to it. Even if he is wrong on some things, he is already a better man than you are, and if he is willing to change, he will become even better.

7. The Christless Moderate

~ from email ~

The Bible teaches that God prospers his people, but I know someone who cites Proverbs 30:8 to claim that believers should not be rich. The verse says, "Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." How should I respond?

Proof-Text

This is a case of proof-texting gone wrong. It is hypocritical that the same people who claim that we should not pray like Jabez would say that we should pray like Agur, even though the Bible praised Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Jabez prayed that God would bless him and increase his territory. God approved and answered.

Your friend rejects the context of the verse he uses from Proverbs and he rejects what other parts of the Bible say on the subject. Then he sets himself up as a model of modesty and moderation. He is a religious phony. Someone like this should be exposed and condemned.

Proverbs itself teaches the way to prosperity, written by someone who possessed ridiculous prosperity, and who associates wisdom with health and wealth.

Proverbs 3:5-10 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." Health and wealth.

Proverbs 3:13-16 says, "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor." Proverbs maintains the same priority as other parts of Scripture. Of course wisdom is more valuable than silver and gold. But wisdom is holding...health and wealth.

Proverbs 4 :20-22 says, "My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. " More health.

Proverbs 8:1, 18-21 says, "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? ...With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better

than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing wealth on those who love me and making their treasuries full." More wealth.

Proverbs 22:4 says, "Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life." Health and wealth in your face.

Look at the commentaries. You will see that when scholars run into verses on health and wealth, they almost always attempt to weaken them. They will appeal to genre, context, experience, the history of redemption, other parts of Scripture, and when nothing seems to work, resort to raw rebellion and refusal to accept what is written. But when they run into verses that they claim to endorse sickness and poverty, they do not ram them through the same reduction machine. And they never do it with verses that talk about love, hope, peace, and such things, regardless of the genre or where these appear in the history of redemption.

Why? They already had their minds made up apart from the Bible, and when they open the Bible, they are only looking for words and phrases to justify their existing beliefs. When the Bible contradicts their beliefs, they sidestep, qualify, and neutralize. They attack others for handling the Bible this way, when they do it at least just as often. In any case, any strategy used to crush one set of verses must also be used to crush the other. If you throw out Solomon, Agur goes with him. So all the verses become meaningless and everybody goes home. Nevertheless, the techniques they use often strengthen the verses that they wish to destroy, such as when we examine the context of the verses.

When they attack the prosperity preachers and television evangelists, they portray themselves as taking the intellectual high ground. Even when they are wrong, they would use their convoluted scholarship to cause misdirection. They cannot do that with me. I am not someone they can bully. I know their tricks and I am not fooled by them. I have demonstrated that I understand their positions clearly, clear enough to completely decimate their orthodoxy, showing that their cherished creeds and doctrines often cannot even amount to a basic theism. And I also understand the positions of those they attack, and slander.

I have produced enough materials to make me immune to the criticisms against the prosperity preachers and television evangelists. Since I have refuted the scholars on their own pet doctrines, and I have differentiated myself from their targets, they cannot dismiss me with a simple wave of the hand. I am on to them, and I can expose them, that they are heretics, blasphemers, and charlatans. These terms that they throw against others return to themselves, sometimes with greater force.

Context

We can consider the places in the Bible where God's glory is revealed in riches, where God's extravagance is exalted, where God's abundance is promised, where prosperity is portrayed as good and received by faith. No one who reads through the Bible can avoid them. The issue is whether he will accept them, interpret them fairly, and integrate them

with an informed understanding of the rest of Scripture, or whether he will hold on to his unbelief and tradition, suppress his conscience, and explain away God's word. In any case, these areas in the Bible are readily discovered. Does your friend address them? If he disagrees, does he refute them? Or does he cite this one verse in Proverbs and assume that it overwhelms everything else in the Bible? This is how cults use the Bible.

Proverbs 30 contains the words of Agur. Has your friend even read the other verses in this chapter? Verse 8 says, "Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." He loves this verse. But if he uses verse 8 to justify his moderation, then he must also admit verse 9 as his reason for moderation, because verse 9 is the reason for verse 8. And verse 9 says, "Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."

In other words, your friend confesses that if he has a lot, he will turn away from God, and if he has too little, then he will steal from other people. Such a man is likely not a Christian. Paul said, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12-13). He had experienced both poverty and prosperity, but because his heart was fixed on Christ who empowered him, he was unaffected by his financial situation either way. In contrast, your friend declares that his whole relationship with God is determined by whether he has too much or too little, by how much money he has. If his situation goes too far either way, there goes his faith. Bye-bye, God.

Something goes well, he becomes an apostate. Something goes wrong, and now he becomes a criminal. As for the rest of us, "Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17, NLT). I trust in God, not money, and this is why I will remain steadfast whether I have a lot or a little. God, whom you should trust, richly gives you things, which you should not trust, to enjoy. Thus just because you should not trust in something does not mean you cannot have a lot of it. In fact, the fact that you do not trust it is the reason you can afford to have a lot of it. So what I have, I thoroughly enjoy. But not with this guy — just a little too much or too little, he abandons God! And he is probably trying to sound all "cool" and "above it all" by referring to this verse. People like this reek of self-righteousness. They attack a prosperity gospel, but they are the ones completely obsessed with money and controlled by money. Their very souls hinge on the amount of their wealth. This is why I despise this kind of religious phonies so much. Spiritual garbage pretending to be gurus.

Is there only one verse in the Bible? Or is there only one sentence in Proverbs 30? Did you read the rest of the chapter before you asked me about this fellow? Why not? Agur wrote, "I am weary, O God; I am weary and worn out, O God. I am too stupid to be human, and I lack common sense. I have not mastered human wisdom, nor do I know the Holy One. Who but God goes up to heaven and comes back down? Who holds the wind in his fists? Who wraps up the oceans in his cloak? Who has created the whole wide world? What is

his name — and his son's name? Tell me if you know!" (Proverbs 30:1-4, NLT). But I know. Agur, let me tell you about him. His name is Jesus. He is my life. He is the author and finisher of my faith. He preserves me by his decree and power, so that I can remain faithful whether living in plenty or in want. He taught me that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). Without him, money would be useless to me anyway, because even if I live, I would be a walking corpse. I am not just being pious, because I lived like that once. But I am not without Christ. I can do all things through him who strengthens me, and I am not going to abandon my faith or become a thief because of slight fluctuations in my bank balance.

Agur makes a passing, although no doubt genuine, acknowledgment of the word of God in verses 5 and 6. But if he did not speak like the apostle because he was learning and struggling, what excuse does your friend have, after the coming of Christ and the words of Paul? If he has read the letter to the Philippians, does he still identify with Agur, who was "too stupid to be human," more than Paul, who could do all things through Christ? Since Christ has come and the gospel has been preached all over the place, the most direct explanation is that this man has a wicked and unregenerate heart who trusts only in wealth. And he dares to tell you how a Christian should think?

Agur said, "Who but God goes up to heaven and comes back down?" But I am a Christian: "The righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart'" (Romans 10:6-7). The word of God is in my mouth and in my heart, and I have the answers that Agur was seeking. Agur said, "I am too stupid to be human." This describes your friend perfectly. But because I am a Christian, "I have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Jesus is my wisdom, my righteousness, my redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Pretext

Don't trust him with ministry or with money, because he would abandon God the moment he gets too much. I am serious. Don't trust him with your possessions, because he would steal from you the moment he doesn't have enough. Either he is lying when he uses verse 8, or he is liable to commit theft at any moment. If he is in a position where he deals with large sums of money, he should be reported. He should be fired. He has already made a confession, that he intends to steal when he thinks he doesn't have enough for himself. And surely, don't ever trust him with the Bible. He only picks out words here and there to justify himself.

He probably does not know Christ, because otherwise he should not feel this way. Although he seems obsessed with money, so that he admits that his very faith and virtue depend on it, I would not debate him on what the Bible says about money but would first talk to him about Christ, because I do not perceive a born again spirit by his use of this verse. In fact, I would refuse to discuss money any further until I become confident that he is converted. He doesn't need to believe in prosperity when he doesn't even believe in Christ.

The matter is extremely serious. The Bible says, "Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor" (Proverbs 3:16). If Wisdom is intended as a personified image of God like the Word in the Gospel of John, even Christ himself, then this shows that health and wealth are in fact integral to the nature of God. Thus a gospel that undermines health and wealth is also a gospel that is anti-Christ. It is a different gospel. It preaches a different God and a different religion. The glorification of unnecessary suffering, disease, and poverty is demonic. Any doctrine that makes the Lord an accomplice to this is a damnable heresy.

The religious phonies like to talk about the prosperity preachers and television evangelists. But why should I care about them? Why mention them at all? This is a smokescreen. Since my teachings are different, I don't need to answer for other people. I am referring to what the Bible teaches about health and wealth, and what the Bible teaches about the nature of God. They are using these people as a pretext to attack Christ. They cannot distract me with a stupid trick like this. They cannot throw me off their trail.

Forget the prosperity preachers and television evangelists. I have produced more than enough to differentiate myself and to make me immune to being identified with their errors and abuses — that is, where they are truly wrong, since they are often slandered. The prosperity preachers, no matter their faults, cannot be used as a pretext to attack me. Anyone who tries is a liar, and betrays his own incompetence and dishonesty. So I am still looking straight at these religious phonies. They cannot brush this aside with their usual tricks. God will hold them accountable to what the Bible teaches about health and wealth.

To this man, I say:

You want to sound pious and humble, but the same verse you abuse also exposes you as a religious fraud. Stop using the Bible — sit down and shut up — and start learning the Bible. You are twisting that verse in the Bible to make an excuse for your mediocre and pathetic life, and to cover up your obsession with wealth and dependence on money. You wish to make mediocrity into modesty, failure into faith, and selfishness into sacrifice. But your attempt backfires, because it exposes you as someone who would abandon God at the drop of a hat, all because of a little money. Examine yourself, and see if you are in the faith. Get back to the basics of the gospel, the milk of the word, if you have heard it in the first place. Don't try to flaunt your phony piety or make yourself look religious to others. It is more important that you don't burn in hell.

If you are so afraid of money, you are already in love with it. The fear of money and the love of money are two sides of the same coin, which is the worship of money. You think too highly of money, although you pretend that you don't. Money has a grip on your heart even before you get very much of it. When God blesses you with wealth, the money is for you. It is for you to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). But it is not only for you. It is also for you to rescue the poor and finance the gospel (1 Timothy 6:18). But you are all like, "Oh don't give me too much or too little, because I might lose my faith or rob a bank!" So you have no compassion for the poor. You have no ambition for the gospel. Money is all about you.

If you have more money than you need, and if you don't want to enjoy the surplus as the Bible teaches, then GIVE IT AWAY. Listen, GIVE IT AWAY. It is not stuck to you unless you hold on to it. If money is such a problem, give all of it away. Wait...don't do that, because then you will become a thief. But give away as much or as little as you want. We live in a time after the Great Commission has been given, with churches, ministries, desperate people, all over the world, and this option never occurs to you? So with all the teachings on what to do with money, you go right to Agur? Man, you are worse than an unbeliever.

Get off your pretentious and self-centered attitude about money. Don't be a worthless piece of human meat. Don't be a cliché. By Christ, overcome this tiresome fear of success and fear of money. That's for the pagans. They are without God and without hope in this world. Everything is a problem for them. Success ruins them. Failure ruins them. Without Christ in your life, you are at the mercy of your environment. If you have Christ, you can stand having a lot of money, and if you have Christ, you can stand losing all of it, because if you have Christ, he will be your treasure. When you become a Christian, you will understand. You can proof-text your way to mediocrity, and even all the way to hell itself, or you can have faith and move into the blessings of God in Christ (Hebrews 4).

You see, "The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it" (Proverbs 10:22). God's blessing is wonderful. One preacher owns a commercial cargo ship and uses it to transport tons upon tons of food and supplies to people in undeveloped nations as he tells them about Jesus Christ. Certain oppressive regimes offer him special access because he provides free aid to their people.

Prosperity gospel? Of course it is.

Thank God it is.

8. The Extreme Faith Teacher

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." (Matthew 21:21)

The Greater Works

A short time before he was arrested, Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). The statement is so clear that it should not need explanation, unless one wishes to explain it away. As expected, Christians regard what Jesus said as unimportant, because they would not allow God to teach something different from what they believe. Thus the consensus is that Jesus did not mean that his disciples would perform greater miracles, but he was referring to works like preaching and charity, not miracles, and he was referring to greater results in terms of quantity, not quality or degree of power.

Some Christians are eager to condemn what they call a "little gods" theology, often associated with the "faith teachers" of the "faith movement" or "word of faith" theology. These faith teachers are careless individuals whose doctrines are even more carelessly interpreted, often fraudulently twisted, so that the biblical but unwanted elements in their teachings might be condemned along with them. However, long before the movement appeared, Christians had regarded the apostles as "little gods," not because of how Scripture describes them, but so that the Christians would not have to follow their model of faith. If we must attack a "little gods" theology, we should first aim straight at the Evangelicals, the Reformed, the Baptists, the Catholics, and those who have made the faith of Jesus Christ into the worship of apostles. They are the original "little gods" heretics, only that they dare not consider themselves little gods, but attribute the status to other men. It is like the Buddhist doctrine of the Eighteen Arhats, or Louhans.

Among other things, this heresy has produced a self-inflicted burden on an essential doctrine like biblical inspiration. If the apostles were unique in the way these people claim, and this enabled the apostles to write Scripture, then they have made all the portions of Scripture written and compiled by those who were not prophets and apostles vulnerable. So they add that it also counts if someone was closely related to a prophet or apostle. Why? Who made up this rule? And how closely related? They would make things up as they go along until they have everything covered, or until people stop asking. It is a patchwork approach to theology and apologetics, and they have never covered up all the holes.

They have made up a false theory that backed themselves into a corner, and then they could not find a way to get back out. They told one lie, and now they must tell another to cover the problem produced by the first one, then another, then another. These Christians self-destruct even before the unbelievers utter a word. They are the chief enemies of the inspiration of Scripture, and then they dare to correct other people. What a brood of self-

righteous incompetent hypocrites. On the other hand, I say that God alone wrote and compiled Scripture. It was so much a direct production that we should say he breathed it out of himself (2 Timothy 3:16). Although he used people in the process, including prophets and apostles, he could have used anyone or anything to do it. Even now, he is the one who continues to preserve his word.

Portraying themselves as the best kind of Christians, these people claim that they are God-centered, and that other believers are self-centered, constantly talking about healing, prosperity, blessing, and happiness. They refuse to acknowledge that these self-centered Christians are also constantly talking about preaching to the lost and giving to the poor, much more than the critics, and they do these things, some of them daily. Pay attention to the kind of bias that influence the mainstream interpretation of Scripture. How do the people think? What are their assumptions such that they would mishandle Scripture in a particular way? They are much more self-centered than those they criticize. Their interpretation shows that they think that if you do something in ministry, the power comes from you, and the credit goes to you. They would complain that this is a misrepresentation, but this is because they are too stupid to know what their own teaching implies. Their use of Scripture betrays them. You see, to them the greater works can never mean greater quality or degree, because it would mean that the men have become greater than Jesus, since men are the ones who perform the works and receive the glory. Regardless of all their song and dance about God-centeredness, about seeing Christ on every page of Scripture, this is the true face of their theology and the true condition of their heart. It is a religion of men and a theology of self.

Although they regard the apostles as little gods, as a superior class of believers, utterly unique, they suppose that even these demigods could not have performed greater works than Jesus did in terms of quality or degree, but only in quantity and scope. Since even the apostles could not have wielded greater power, and Jesus was not only talking about the apostles, but "anyone who has faith in me," it becomes even more certain that he meant greater in quantity and scope, and that he was mainly referring to preaching, charity, and the like, rather than miracles. This interpretation makes sense in a religion of men and a theology of self. If my religion concerns the glory of men, then my doctrine would not exceed how much glory I would ascribe to men. If my theology is centered on the self, then my interpretation would forbid anything that I would not ascribe to the self.

The Christian scholars tell you that one of the first principles of biblical interpretation is to read a passage in its context. Do not extract isolated words and phrases, and then infer what you want out of them. However, they follow this principle only when it is convenient for them, when the result does not contradict their theological tradition. Just before verse 12, Jesus said, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (v. 11). Even if we translate this as "works" instead of "miracles," it remains that Jesus performed miracles, so his works would include miracles. In addition, the fact that he said they could "believe" due to these works suggests that he mainly referred to his miracles. And just after verse 12, Jesus said, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father"

(v. 13). Then he said it again: "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (v. 14).

Consider how worthless the scholars are. Jesus twice referred to something that you "ask," leaving almost no room for something like preaching or charity. Then, he said that he was talking about something that "I will do," making it impossible that he meant something like preaching or charity. Verse 11, 12, 13, and 14 all refer to miracles. So verse 12 means that Christians -- not apostles, but "anyone who has faith in me" -- would do the miracles that Jesus did, and that Christians would do even greater miracles than those Jesus did. You scream blasphemy: "How can men perform greater miracles than the Son of God?" And...I got you. If your response states or assumes anything like this, you are finished. You have a religion of men and a theology of self. The text says Jesus would do these things -- not the apostles, and not you. Jesus said that he would do greater and greater works, only that he would do them through his people, through those who have faith in him. It was never about you, but in your fake humble theology, you have made it all about you, and only about you. Your scheme backfires, because it shows that you only have yourself in mind all along, and the necessary implication of your doctrine is that even God himself can never do greater works than those he performed under the ministry of Christ. This makes you a blasphemer.

Now instead of acting all intellectual, all stuck-up, pretending to be a defender of the faith, and anointing yourself to police the Christian world, when I speak, sit down and shut up. You cannot even read. You cannot even read one sentence before or one sentence after the verse under discussion. So shove those Latin phrases back up where they came from. You call people out for preaching faith, for preaching health and wealth, and for receiving blessings from God? You attack people for their motivational preaching, for their self-centered theology? Man, LOOK AT YOURSELF! You are a complete fraud. You are a Ph.D. that should be sent back to reading class, and you want to "contend for the faith." You want to act so concerned, so engaged with culture. You bark out religious slogans that you do not believe. So pious. So zealous. And such an expert. I am laughing so hard at you.

The greater works in John 14 refer to greater miracles, and the meaning of greater must include quality and degree of power. Jesus would be the one performing these greater miracles. His disciples would do them in the sense that they would be the ones representing him and looking to him to perform the works. Thus the lamest thing that you can say to justify unbelief is to whine, "But you are not Jesus. You are not an apostle." This tiresome excuse backfires. According to the Lord's own statement, the fact that I am not Jesus is exactly what guarantees the possibility that I would do even greater miracles in his name. It is meaningless whether or not I am an apostle. It depends on who Jesus is, not who I am.

Nevertheless, for the moment, let us assume the false doctrine and pretend that Jesus meant that we would do greater works only in terms of quantity -- more in number and scope. But there is no relief. Even then, he first said that those who have faith in him would do the same works that he did. Again, this exposes the anti-Christ and anti-gospel nature of the theology of unbelief, a theology that is common to almost all Christian schools of thought. Those who have faith would do the same works he did, and he did all kinds of miracles --

miracles of healing, miracles of nature, miracles of prophecy and knowledge, among others. So even if we were to reject what Jesus said about stronger miracles, and permit only greater works in terms of number and scope, it would still mean that Christians should be doing more miracles of healing, more miracles of nature, more miracles of exorcism, more miracles of resurrection, more miracles of prophecy, more of everything he did.

This was Jesus' idea of basic discipleship. Don't forget we suspended the second half of this gospel doctrine for a moment, and we must put it back. Jesus said that believers would not only do the same works, but even greater works. Many charismatics would not admit to the greater works, and could barely believe him about the same works. This is why I do not identify with the charismatics. If you call me a charismatic, you underestimate how extreme my doctrine really is. It is as extreme as what Jesus said. What am I then? I am "anyone who has faith" (John 14:12). The designation is incalculably more powerful than all other labels combined, but only those who affirm the most extreme theology is worthy of it. In any case, as if to add insult to injury, human tradition has enshrined in the creeds their failure to have faith, and the cessationists make it a test of orthodoxy to spit even the "same" works back in God's face. Satan weeps with gratitude.

Jesus said that those who have faith would do the same works he did. And he said that those who have faith would do even greater works. What should we do if our experience does not live up to this basic gospel doctrine, this basic gospel commission? The chief solution in church history has been to throw Jesus under the bus and make roadkill out of him. Just completely flatten the Lord and move on with our religion. Pretty theology, so dignified and satanic, steamrolling over Christ for five hundred years. This is not the way. The solution is not to condemn the doctrine, but to assert it even stronger, more and more and more.

Those Christians who claim to care so much about theology and orthodoxy, when they find themselves behind in knowledge, they do not say that the solution is to give up on knowledge. No, they turn the whole church experience into one big theology class. It is an excellent idea, if only their theology is correct! When they perceive that they are falling short of the biblical standard of holiness, they do not say that the fruit of the Spirit must have been reserved for the apostles. No, they preach about it even more, over and over again, in different ways, on the radio, on television, in books, and even make posters about it. What they care about, they talk about constantly, even when they do not yet live up to their doctrine. When it comes to education, capitalism, democracy, even film watching and beer drinking, you will never hear the end of it from these "God-centered" people. Oh! You cannot get them to stop. They are so interested. They keep on and on. They are such experts. They have such strong opinions. But when it comes to power from heaven, and when it comes to taking Christ's healing to people, or his prophetic direction and encouragement, or his other benefits, they harden their hearts.

When we study and teach, we find that our knowledge indeed increases. When we declare God's word in the face of contrary circumstances, we find that we indeed make progress. What should we do then, if our experience falls short of what Jesus promised? I will throw the theologians under the bus and make roadkill out of them. I will completely

flatten them and move on in faith. I will talk about faith, healing, miracles, and all that Jesus said about these things more and more, over and over again, in different ways, and all over the place. Commit to Jesus' doctrine even more. Invest everything into it. This is the way. Many preachers and theologians should dedicate their lives to offer extraordinary prominence to this aspect of Jesus' teachings, in order to combat centuries of anti-Christ orthodoxy, and its denial of this aspect of the gospel. Then God's people can move forward in truth and power. We should exercise a comprehensive ministry, but no ministry is complete, and no theology is authentically Christian, unless it teaches something so basic to the gospel that it applies to "anyone who has faith."

If You Have Faith!

We are discussing John 14:12 and Matthew 21:21 together because they can clarify and reinforce each other.

Jesus had said to a fig tree, "May you never bear fruit again!" (Matthew 21:19), and the tree died. When his disciples asked about this, he replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done."

John 14:12 refers to miracles, and it teaches that "anyone who has faith" can do the same miracles and even greater miracles than those that Jesus performed, because "anyone who has faith" can ask Jesus to do them, and he would do them. Matthew 21:21 offers a complementary teaching. John 14:12 states a broad principle that implicates all of Jesus' miracles, and Matthew 21:21 states a concrete example that implicates the same principle. The principle is that anyone who has faith can do the same miracles, and greater miracles.

Here we are clearly talking about a miracle. Jesus said that "if you have faith," you can do the same miracle, and "if you have faith," you can do a greater miracle. He was not talking about preaching. He was not talking about charity. He was not talking about greater quantity. He was not talking about wider scope. He was not talking about longer duration. He was not talking about more advanced technology. Christians have used all these excuses, but they cannot apply in John 14:12 and Matthew 21:21.

He said the one who has faith can do the same miracle of commanding a tree, and a greater miracle of commanding a mountain. The context is miracles, and only miracles. The miracles are done by faith, and only by faith. The Bible shoves this in your face. There is no place for you to turn. You will either take it and like it, or you must renounce Jesus Christ, and renounce the Christian faith, and confess that you reject the gospel. Do it now. Take a side. Commit yourself to Christ or Satan. Commit yourself to heaven or hellfire. You have no other choice.

Stop using this or that doctrine to excuse your lack of faith, such as the sovereignty of God or the completion of the Bible. God sovereignly tells you in his completed Bible that, if you have faith, you can do the same miracles that Jesus did, and even greater miracles. Jesus told the disciples to cast out demons. When they failed, he did not say that it was not

God's will to heal and to deliver. Jesus himself commissioned them, but he said they failed because of their lack of faith (Matthew 17:19-20). Jesus told Peter to walk on the water. Peter could do it at first, but then he started to sink. Jesus did not say that it was not God's will to grant the miracle, but he said it was because Peter doubted (Matthew 14:31). He consistently reduced these things to a matter of faith, and not a matter of God's will, or calling, or dispensation. He was so irritated when people did not have a strong and steady faith for miracles. God is absolutely sovereign, but he teaches us to think about these things in terms of faith.

You who love to complain how modern preaching focuses too much on comfort, healing, achievement, instead of sin, you feel really good about yourself, don't you? You feel so righteous. Good, let us talk about YOUR sin. Let us talk about your sin of unbelief. How much do you think we should talk about sin in our preaching? That much? Good, then let us spend that much time talking about your sin of unbelief. You claim to believe and preach God's word, but you do it only when it is convenient for you, and only when God happens to say something that agrees with your church tradition. Let us talk about that for the next twenty, thirty, forty years, as long as it takes. Let us blast you in every sermon, in every book, in every prayer, and in every song. We will not relent, until you repent. I feel more righteous already.

There are numerous places in the Bible that talk about the power we possess through faith, and about all the possibilities that open up when we have faith. Over and over again, the Bible talks about the miraculous powers that we can exercise through faith, and about the wonderful things that are possible to those who have faith. These things are plain to those who call themselves Christians, because God has made it plain to them since Genesis, and has stressed it with increasing force all the way to Revelation, so that they are without excuse. But Christians suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Like the unbelievers, they do not magnify the God of miracles or have faith in him to work miracles. They have exchanged the glory of faith in Christ for creeds and traditions made to look like pious doctrines. They not only continue to do these things, but also approve of those who practice them. They follow the pattern of reprobates. Indeed, cessationism and other doctrines of unbelief are nothing other than different forms of religious atheism. They formally acknowledge God, but they refuse to deal with him beyond the point of their unbelief and wickedness.

They delight in debating this forever. As long as they are talking about it, they appear to have an interest in arriving at the truth and doing what is right. But it is a scam. It is religious theater. This is an excuse to endlessly postpone faith, to put off committing to what Jesus said and doing what he taught. The Bible is clear. It leaves no room for debate, and no room for excuse. If anyone does not actively affirm what Jesus said in John 14:12 and Matthew 21:21, just as he said it, then he denies that Jesus Christ is God and that Scripture is inspired. He should be removed from every position, and kicked out of every fellowship. Decide now. Any delay is rebellion. We can discuss it as much as we want after we agree, so that we may become stronger, but not discuss it until we agree, so that we may never begin.

You Will Have What You Say

When the disciples asked him about the tree, Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." Let's not rush this. He talked to a tree. He was not talking to God. He was not talking to a man or a demon, but a tree. He practically told it to die, and it died. You say, "Of course, that was Jesus. He was the Son of God!" You didn't read it. Let's try that again. He talked to a tree. He told a tree to die, and the tree died. Then he said that "if you have faith," you can do the same thing -- you can talk to a tree and tell it what to do. And then he said that "if you have faith," you can do even more -- you can talk to a mountain and tell it what to do, and the mountain would do it. You can do this "if you have faith," not if you are an apostle, not if you live in the first century.

He was not using figurative language. He did not say that if you have faith, you can overcome a difficult situation by tremendous effort and determination. He killed an actual tree, a physical tree, and he did it by speaking to it. He used that to teach you what you can do. If you have faith, you can also kill a physical tree, move a literal mountain, and you will do it by speaking to it. In this operation of faith, you will do it by talking directly to the tree or the mountain, or some such thing, and not by talking to God about the tree or the mountain. You say, "But that was Jesus!" Good, so you know who it was that said, "If you have faith...you will have what you say" (Matthew 21:21, Mark 11:23). Yes, that was Jesus, but you are a Christian, aren't you? You have faith, don't you? Or is this the real problem, that you are not really a Christian, and that you have no faith? This is one of the most clearly stated, widely attested, and commonly demonstrated principle in the whole Bible. If you reject it, you also reject Jesus Christ and the Scripture. You should be excommunicated.

Jesus Christ is the founder of the faith movement. He is the author of the "word of faith" theology (Romans 10:8). This is a faith that speaks what you want and receives what you want. The Bible shoves this doctrine in your face. You will take it and like it, or shut up and GET OUT!!! Stop calling yourself a Christian. You attack the "word of faith" preachers to excuse yourself. Perhaps you can bully them theologically, because they are indeed wrong on a number of issues, but you cannot bully Jesus Christ, and this doctrine came from him. To deny the doctrine makes you worse than the faith teachers. You use them as a pretext to attack the chief theologian of "faith confessions," Jesus Christ. The faith teachers deserve criticism, but not from you, because you do not even believe in Jesus. And if you do not believe in Jesus, you are not even good enough to wash their cars with your tongue, let alone correct them on anything. Make sure you are a Christian first before you open that stupid mouth.

Most Christians find this basic gospel doctrine very strange. Just weird. In fact, except for those associated with the "faith movement" or "word of faith" theology, it seems almost all Christians would consider this biblical doctrine outright wrong. In other words, it appears almost every person who calls himself a Christian also considers Jesus Christ a false teacher. From the intellectual perspective, and when it comes to concern for orthodoxy, the

teaching is highly revealing. The controversy shows that the critics affirm an essentially non-Christian worldview. Any worldview that disagrees with the "faith confession" doctrine is not a Christ-view, and contradicts Christ's view of reality. Thus it in fact qualifies as one test of orthodoxy.

Jesus did not think it was strange to tell a tree to die, or to rebuke a fever or a storm. This was his view of reality, and it makes perfect sense to me. It is normal for me to tell a sickness to get out or to tell a body part to change a certain way. And if someone is willing to accept it, I can do it for him. It seems rather funny to me, in fact, that a person could call himself a Christian and not live this way. This is an ordinary aspect of the Christian worldview, and anyone who calls himself a Christian should take this for granted.

If I do not experience perfect results, I do not discard Jesus' doctrine to make myself feel better. I would assume that I need to improve. I would invest in this doctrine of faith even more. Suppose you say to Jesus, "I told this sickness to leave, but it didn't." Given what he said in the Gospels, how do you think he would respond? He would not say, "Don't be a fanatic. Don't be weird. How can you cure sickness by talking to it? Just accept the will of God." Instead, we are sure that he would say, "What's the matter with you? How long have you been a Christian? Don't you have any faith? Stop messing around and tell that thing to get out!" He behaved this way with his disciples.

We know what Jesus was like. The issue is which Jesus you want. Will you take the Jesus in the Bible, the one who talks to things and tells you to do the same? Or will you take the Jesus from your theological heritage, or from your denomination? Will you take the real Jesus in history, or the fake Jesus in tradition? Does your favorite theologian believe that you can have what you say by faith, or does he attack the doctrine? If he does not teach it or if he criticizes it, then he does not even have a Christian view of reality. And he is your idol. What does that make you?

What is really strange, what is really weird, is that the Christian critics want to make this into a teaching from the cults. But if this is true, then these critics must be worse than the cults, because the doctrine came from Jesus. They want to make the faith teachers into scapegoats for their unbelief. The faith teachers indeed say some things that are wrong, and if the critics can pin this doctrine on the faith teachers, then they can destroy Jesus along with the faith teachers, and appear heroes while doing it. But not everyone is deceived by a scheme like this. I really don't care about the faith teachers, or the eastern religions, or anything else that you want to associate with Jesus' doctrine. I look at Matthew 21:21 -- "if you have faith" -- and then I look at you. I look at Mark 11:23 -- "he shall have whatever he says" -- and then I look at you.

These are just several passages that state the doctrine this way (Matthew 17:20, Matthew 21:21, Mark 11:23, Luke 17:6, among others). There are others that teach or demonstrate the doctrine, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, in different ways. Together, they show that it is the uniform and pervasive testimony of Scripture, and a basic tenet of the Christian faith that, if you have faith, you will have what you say. I don't care what false religions and cults teach. I am looking at the Bible. Perhaps they teach a counterfeit, but so

what? The Bible still teaches it. If you disagree with the doctrine, it just means that you are worse than a counterfeit. You are worse than the cults. So the more you put down the faith teachers, the more you put down yourself.

Don't look at them. We are not talking about what the faith teachers believe. We are not talking about what the cults believe. We are talking about what YOU believe. Throw them all to hell, and you still need to answer for what you believe. The doctrine might indeed sound like "strange fire" to someone from a non-Christian religion or worldview. But this is not the faith teachers' fault. It is not the cults' fault. It is YOUR fault! You! YOU are the problem. Your worldview is non-Christian. You are the wolf in sheep's clothing.

This is a worldview issue. What kind of world or reality is this? Is it one in which, if you have faith, under Christ, you can speak to something by faith -- something like a bonsai, or a river, or a cancer -- and it would do what you say? Jesus said this is exactly that kind of world or reality. If you do not agree to this, exactly this, then your worldview is non-Christian at the metaphysical level, at the level of basic reality.

Let me say a little more about "faith confession." There are other terms that we can use, but this one is more commonly associated with the faith teachers, so we will keep using it just to annoy the Christian critics of Jesus' doctrine. A confession is an affirmation, a declaration, or a statement. A faith confession is a declaration or statement that comes from faith in God, in his word, or something along this line. It can take the form of a command, like "Peace, be still," or "Come out of him!" It can take the form of an affirmation, like "The girl is not dead, but sleeping," or "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." The Bible is full of faith confessions. They are so pervasive that the religious hypocrites would sing out faith confessions from the Psalms in the same service that they blast the doctrine: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want....Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." They sing it, but they do not believe any of it. And then they criticize the charismatic songs for making vain repetitions. What a brood of oblivious self-righteous morons.

After Jesus said that if you have faith, you can command a tree like he did, and even a mountain (Matthew 21:21), he added, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22). And after he said that if you believe that whatever you say will happen, and it will happen (Mark 11:23), he added, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). Thus the teaching comes under the category of prayer. Then, after he said that "anyone who has faith" will perform the same miracles he did, and even greater miracles (John 14:12), he added, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13-14). In his own ministry of miracles, before he commanded, "Lazarus, come forth!" he looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me" (John 11:41). He said that he did not have to mention this (John 11:42). He did not have to address the Father right then, but he said it for the benefit of the people there. He could have made the command only, and he usually did it that way, but the connection to the Father was assumed (John 14:10-11).

Faith confession is a form of prayer. Confessing in faith is praying without hedging. That's all it is. To hedge is to make room for failure. It is to prepare for the possibility that what you pray for will not happen, probably so that you will not look bad or feel bad when it results in failure, which is really what you expect anyway. Most Christians hedge more than they believe when they pray. They do not assume that God has heard them, and then command that thing to come about by force. They have no faith, and so they fail. They hedge even more next time. And they hedge even more after that, until prayer is more about submitting to circumstances, or what they call the will of God, than it is about receiving what you pray for in the first place. Prayer is now more about changing yourself, when Jesus showed that it could be about healing the sick, casting out demons, stopping a storm, or moving a mountain. Christian prayer has become Buddhist meditation. Then someone who does not hedge comes along, and these people cannot wait to crucify him in the name of Christ!

Faith confession is a form of prayer, practiced by God's people throughout the Bible. It is a definite expression of faith in God's mercy and power, of faith in our covenant with him, of faith in our place in Christ. This is when you have such confidence that you take command of the situation. It is not because you have faith in your words, but because you have faith in God. By faith, you affirm a certain state of affairs or command a certain set of results because you believe that God has answered you, that the thing is as good as done. Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stand still. "So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped" (Joshua 10:13). He said this "to the LORD in the presence of Israel" (v. 12). Even though he addressed the objects directly, he was looking to God's power to make it happen, and he said it in a definite manner, in the presence of the people. He was praying without hedging. He spoke by faith, and performed greater works than Moses did. The Bible says that nothing like this had happened before, and nothing like this had happened after, at least up to the time the event was recorded. It was "a day when the LORD listened to a man" (v. 14).

Likewise, when you tell a crippled man, "Get out of that wheelchair, we are going for a walk," you are not thinking that you have some power in yourself to heal him. In yourself, you have nothing to offer. You are not going to make a miracle happen. You are not going to make anything happen (John 15:5). But you have faith: "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, because you always hear Jesus, and I pray in his name." You are counting on God to work a miracle, and you are praying without hedging. This is what Jesus taught at the entry level of discipleship. But we train up theologians to chase this nonsense right off the cliff! Jesus repeated the teaching over and over again until the time of his arrest. But we write books and hold seminars to exterminate the faith heretics! Then, as if faith to move mountains was not enough, Jesus promised "power from heaven" on top of everything (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8). This is only a small indication of the frightening level of miracle power he would unleash through his people. The Bible teaches much more. How do we repay him? We call his doctrine the counterfeit gospel! "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Um...maybe?

Update the Maps!

You whine, "But what about the abuse?" What abuse? I am not aware of any excessive supernatural deforestation or terraforming of the planet. If you know people who have been yelling at forests and killing all the trees, or moving mountains into places where they should not go, perhaps destroying marine life and even causing tsunamis, let me know. Tell me right away. I will give them a stern scolding! Let us do some of your "apologetics" on them! Come to think of it, even if we stick to the things Jesus usually did, I am not aware of anyone who has been performing too many miracles of healing so that he is single-handedly threatening to eradicate the very idea of sickness for generations to come, thus rendering a whole aspect of the gospel irrelevant. Imagine preaching on a text and the listeners think, "Sickness? What is that? Can you eat it? Or is it something people wear?"

If this is not the kind of abuse you have in mind, then what are you talking about? If you have a problem with the doctrine itself, then why are you speaking to me? Go challenge Jesus directly. Go condemn him. Go call him a cult leader. He is the one who said, "If you have faith, you will have what you say." The main source of abuse so far is you. You pretend to be so righteous. You pretend to worry about abuse and heresy. What about your unbelief? You have been a Christian long enough that by now you should be a teacher and defender of this doctrine, but somehow you need to hear this most elementary point of faith again.

When you put up an objection like this, do you really agree that you can speak to a cancer and make it leave, or tell broken bones to repair themselves? Do you agree that, if you have faith, you can command food to increase? This is Jesus' doctrine. If you believe it, start teaching it and start doing it. And then we can talk about how some people have contaminated it. If there is abuse, then why don't you teach it correctly? Why don't you use it correctly? The truth is that it is irrelevant whether there is any abuse, because you do not believe the doctrine at all. The truth is that you reject Jesus. To cover this up, you take it upon yourself to talk about the abuse of a doctrine that you do not even believe. You are the problem. You are a religious charlatan, worse than any televangelist that you criticize.

You do not care about abuse. You care about your feeling and your image. And even though you criticize me, you do not really care about me either. The one you hate is Jesus Christ, because this doctrine came from him. He is the one you cannot tolerate. He is the one you want to destroy. He is the one you want to tear limb from limb. Isn't that right? Admit it. If you love him, you would agree with him, that if you have faith, you can have what you say. But you hate him, so you hate anyone who teaches anything that resembles his doctrine.

You say, "But what if someone believes he will get five hundred mansions?" It is remarkable that I hear about mansions and such things mostly from those who reject the doctrine. They jump to this right away. Those who believe what Jesus said usually apply it first to healing the sick, prosperity to provide for themselves and to give to the poor, including supernaturally restoring barren lands in destitute areas, and things like these to benefit themselves and other people, and to advance the kingdom of God. Then they might think about having faith for other things. Nevertheless, so what if someone has faith that

he will get five hundred mansions? If he really has this faith, then he will get five hundred mansions. So what? Where is the abuse? Since you do not even have faith for a cardboard box, maybe he will give you one of his mansions.

Why are we talking about mansions, when you do not even believe the doctrine? If you want to correct abuse, do you at least believe that the doctrine of faith applies to healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, the transmutation and the multiplication of material substance? Jesus himself did these things, and he said that those who have faith could do the same works, and even greater works. So these must be proper applications of faith. This is what Jesus said. If you do not agree with this, how are you even a Christian? But if you agree, then why don't you start doing these things before you criticize how other people use their faith? You are not qualified to talk about abuse, because you do not believe any of this. You are an outsider to faith. You do not want to "balance" what people do with Jesus' teaching. You want to erase what Jesus said. You claim to fight for truth and correct error, but more than anyone else, you are the enemy of the gospel.

In any case, if you want to be a good Christian apologist and refute Jesus himself, you need to be smarter. Joshua spoke to planets, and they stopped for him. Jesus spoke to a tree, and it died. Then he said that Christians could even speak to a mountain and command it to move. So...why are we making a big deal out of mansions and such things? Do you mean that it is more outrageous to have faith for five hundred mansions than to have faith to raise the dead or stop the sun? There are already more than five hundred mansions in this world, and it is a matter of economic arrangement to transfer ownership to someone. You do not even need to build new ones. There is nothing logically absurd about it. You want to make up an outrageous example, but you cannot even do that properly. Lack of faith makes you stupid.

We draw attention to what Jesus said about prayer, like "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22) and "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (John 15:7). Right away, you smirk and say sarcastically, "Lord, give me a sports car." But this is not a refutation. Do you have faith for a sports car? You think you are exposing a false interpretation by making fun of it, but you are making fun of Christ, and exposing your own irreverence and unbelief. You are not interested in abuse. You want to sidestep the doctrine by making up something that seems to be absurd. But you are too stupid to do it properly. If there is something too absurd for faith, it must be at least greater than stopping planets, killing trees, moving mountains, and raising the dead. Even then, it might be within the realm of faith. The issue is not what we demand, but whether we have faith for it. Do you have faith for five hundred mansions? Then why are we talking about this? Let's first talk about whether you have faith to heal the sick and raise the dead. Do you have faith for anything we see in the Bible at all? Can you do anything, besides wasting my time?

You whine again: "But what if it doesn't work?" It is remarkable that this is the first thing that many Christians say when we mention Jesus' promises about faith, prayer, healing, and such things. I first heard it from a man who had been a Christian probably two to three times as long as I had been alive. I mentioned something about laying hands on the sick,

and that was the first thing that he said: "What if it doesn't work?" I had not met many Christians, so I was surprised at the unbelief. At the time, I did not know that most Christians did not have faith, that most Christians did not believe Jesus. It would be nice to hear, "Then there is hope for my friend," or "This will lead many people to Christ." But instead we get, "Watch out!" and "What if it doesn't work?"

"What if it doesn't work?" What if your mother is a hippo? Or, what if the spine straightens and the pelvis rotates back into place right in front of you? What if the X-rays show that your friend has received a new heart? What if the cancer dies at the roots like the tree that Jesus cursed? But so what if it doesn't happen? Examine your faith, then do it again. Don't hedge. When Jesus ministered to a blind man, and he was not completely healed, Jesus did it again, and then the man could see clearly. When nothing happened after Elijah prayed six times, he prayed again, and there came a heavy rain. One farmer liked to go hunting sometimes, but he would come back with rashes all over his body because of contact with poison ivy. So he confessed by faith that Jesus Christ had set him free from the law of sin and death, and that his body would no longer react that way. The next time he came back with rashes all over his body again. And again. And again. But then one time he came back with clear skin. No rashes. He became immune to poison ivy. From then on, he could use poison ivy for toilet paper if he wanted. He could eat it like spinach if he wanted. This is the Christian worldview.

And now what if your mother is not a hippo? What if you have some faith? What if all of this works?

Jesus to the Max

Jesus was the most extreme faith teacher. He said extreme things, and he did them. Then he said that his disciples could do even more extreme things, if they would have faith. And they would make these things happen by speaking what they wish. This is gospel. This is orthodoxy. Miracle faith is normal faith, and extreme miracle faith is the only orthodoxy. Mainstream Christianity rejects these points. In other words, mainstream Christianity rejects Jesus Christ. And then they dare call those who at least try to teach what Jesus said heretics, gnostics, false teachers. This makes them worse than heretics, gnostics, and false teachers.

They want to blame it all on the charismatics, and especially the faith teachers. But the charismatics, the faith teachers, and the "word of faith" movement are not the most relevant. Jesus Christ is their problem. The only reason the faith teachers seem to be a problem is because they bring attention to what Jesus said about faith, healing, prosperity, miracles, the Holy Spirit, and such things, although admittedly with impurity. This makes traditional believers look very bad, because it exposes their defiance against Christ and their rejection of the gospel. To them, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not the unpardonable sin. Making them look bad is the unpardonable sin.

Throw all the faith teachers to hell, and you still need to deal with Jesus. Throw all the charismatics to hell, and you will need to deal with someone even more extreme than all

of them put together. Throw all the "word of faith" teachers to hell, and you still need to come up with something better. Given what the Bible teaches, the only way to come up with a better doctrine is to come up with a more extreme doctrine. If your theology of faith is not as extreme as Jesus stated it, then it is by definition not a Christian theology of faith. The critics of faith theology, the heresy hunters, should be hunting down their own kind. They should spend all their time ruining their own lives.

The theology of Christ is a theology of extreme power. Anything else is not a Christian theology. Jesus not only taught it, but he also did it. If Jesus said I can have the moon, I am not going to say that a preacher is too extreme for teaching that I can have a marble. What excess? What heresy? The error is that his teaching promises too little. And yours is even worse.

Some people can endure only so much Jesus. Too much Jesus and they start to cry. They get angry. They want Jesus to be their religious mascot. They want a Jesus that is smaller than what they can believe, not bigger. They want a Jesus that they can exploit to impress people with their scholarship, but not a Jesus that is more impressive to people than their scholarship. They want a Jesus that can give them materials to make funny images and sarcastic comments on social media posts. That's all he is good for. They do not want a Jesus who will rebuke them for having too little faith. They do not want a Jesus who tells them to talk to trees and mountains, to rebuke sickness to remove suffering, to proclaim prosperity to feed the people. They do not want a Jesus who tells them that they can have what they say, so that it is their fault when they experience defeat.

You think I am talking about someone else? I am talking about you, the Calvinists, the Presbyterians, the Reformed. I am talking about you, the Baptists, Methodists, the Anglicans. I am talking about you, the Pentecostals and the Charismatics. I do not care about your label, or the venerable history of your corrupt tradition. The test is, if you do not believe that you should talk to a tree, or a cancer, or a demon, and tell it what to do, then I am talking about you, because you have a non-Christian worldview. You are intellectually delusional. You want to test people with your stupid creed? I will test you by Matthew 21:21 and crush your creed. You want to cite your idol theologian? I will slap his head off with Mark 11:23. Change your creed to agree with Jesus. Throw your theologian into the dumpster if he does not teach this kind of faith. If Jesus is not your Lord but just your mascot, you will die in your sins and burn in hell. Your church will not save you. Your seminary and denomination are themselves under judgment. And you will die in your sins. Unless you have faith, you will die in your sins.

Most Christians hate Jesus with a passion. The Jesus of the Bible is not the Jesus they want. They do not want to face him. They do not want him in their church or in their theology. They have itching ears for unbelief, for sickness, for suffering, for defeat, and they refuse to hear about God's promises for life, for victory, for power, and for blessing. They want a Jesus who talks about sin, but not about faith, about suffering, but not about healing, about sacrifice, but not about victory. Jesus indeed talked about sin, suffering, and sacrifice, but not in the way they think about these things. And Jesus also talked about faith, power, healing, and miracles, but they do not want to hear about these at all.

It is impossible to be too extreme about faith. It is possible to be wrong about it. It is possible to mistake presumption for faith, which is dangerous. The proper way to combat presumption is to teach about faith correctly, so that people can develop genuine faith in God. But it is impossible to be too extreme about it, because Jesus said everything is possible for someone who has faith (Matthew 17:20, Mark 9:23). Theologically, the most realistic pitfall is the apparent inevitability that our doctrine of miracle faith would never become extreme enough.

Those who want "balance" are liars. There is no reason that you can offer, and no verse or doctrine that you can produce, that can balance out Matthew 21:21 in a way that overturns what it says. This is because Jesus actually did what he described. He talked to a tree, and the tree died. It is too late to neutralize it, because it already happened. And then he said that, if you have faith, you can do the same thing and more. You cannot balance it out because he spoke to an actual tree and it died. You cannot balance it out in a way such that Jesus did not mean you can talk to a tree and make it do what you want, because he did it himself and said you can do the same.

These people are not interested in balance, whatever that could mean in this context, but they want the total denial of the doctrine. They never say, "Jesus did not really mean you can command a mountain, but it was just a dramatic way to tell you that you can heal the sick, walk on water, transmute and multiply material substance, and things like that." This would be wrong, because Jesus indeed said that you can command a mountain, but these people would not even accept this weaker version. They never say, "Stop that fanatical talk about moving mountains. Why can't you stick to raising the dead like everybody else?" They never say this. When they are through, they always leave you with nothing. To them, faith is trust in God that becomes a mindset to endure suffering or to attempt difficult tasks. That's supposed to be faith. They say that by faith you can have a little peace, a little holiness, and that's it. Can't you see that the extremists are much more biblical and orthodox? And even they are never as extreme as Jesus was.

The only correct doctrine of faith is an extreme doctrine of faith. An orthodox doctrine of miracle faith must be more extreme than any heresy. Let us become more extreme in faith, both in the formulation of doctrine and in the demonstration of power. Let us become obsessed with faith. Jesus obviously thought about it more than we do. We need to think about it day and night. We need to constantly talk about this faith that can move mountains, that can offer relief to the sick and the poor, and that can perform the same works Jesus did, and even greater works. As for the "Christian" critics of the doctrine, they affirm an essentially anti-Christ worldview. Their view of reality is contrary to the Christian faith. Their gospel assumes another kind of universe altogether. We must address them, therefore, with the kind of preaching designed for pagans, such as the approach Paul demonstrated in Acts 17.

9. Good Gifts from the Father

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11)

Shadows of a Pagan God

Prayer is a tricky business in certain pagan fables. We will make up a modern version to illustrate. A man prays to his god for money, so that he can pay his mother's debts. The god complies by killing the mother in a horrific accident, and the man receives more than enough compensation from the insurance company to pay for the medical fees, funeral arrangements, and of course, the debts.

The deity grants the man's request, but at the same time renders the transaction futile, because in gaining the money to help his mother, he also loses his mother. The man asks for something good, something innocent, and the deity uses the occasion to make a mockery of his life and piety.

Ah, but our man is a theologian, an expert, and so he knows what he is dealing with. He prays that this god would give him money to pay his mother's debt, but in securing the cash, the god must not hurt his mother, or him, or anyone. Soon he receives money from winning the lottery and pays the debts. Nobody is harmed. Her mother has been working several jobs to pay back the money, but now she stops working and takes to drinking. One night she drives home while intoxicated and crashes to her death.

This is why the pagans are afraid of "the will of god." You are dealing with a deity that is capricious and self-serving. You never know what he is going to do. It makes no difference even if he has made promises, because it is hard to tell if you are interpreting them correctly, and he is probably going to do whatever he wants anyway. But if you ignore him, he might get angry.

Should I even pray? If I do not, what tragedy will he send my way? If I ask for what I want, how will he twist my request? Will he make my life much worse? Prayer is a dangerous gamble. It would be better if he does not know you exist. And if you really want something, you should go make it happen by yourself.

The pagans drown in a sense of oppressive terror, although the devout ones would prefer to call it reverence. Their relationship to the gods is one of suspicion. There is no way to win. You can only try to appease them, probably with vows and deals, sufferings and sacrifices. You never know when they will bless you beyond measure, and you never know when they will take it all away.

Of course, the pagan gods are false. They either exist only in people's minds, or they are demons. It makes our point even more significant; that is, the pagan notion of deity is uncomfortably similar to the idea of God that Christians have affirmed and defended, sometimes viciously, through the centuries. If I change the above from "pagan" to "Christian," and if I adjust the tone to give it a positive spin, it would become orthodox Christian doctrine. As I preach it, murmurs of "Amen" would resound and church members would applaud my insight and humility.

This pagan god haunts Christian theology. He appears everywhere – in our sermons, our prayers, and our conversations. However, this is not the God of the Bible, and not the God of the Gospels that Jesus declared to the people. In fact, Christians often teach the opposite of what Jesus said about God. Now God is the one dumping snakes on his children, perhaps to teach them something, and Satan is the one giving them bread, and all kinds of wonderful treats. Now God is the one making people sick and poor, and Satan is the one healing them and prospering them.

Here is a less boring version of traditional orthodoxy, and a more honest one. We are even supposed to ask for snakes now. If you ask for bread and fish, you are materialistic, and probably believe a prosperity gospel. So we ask for snakes, and even then we might not get them, because God is still going to do whatever he wants. Regardless of what he has promised, and regardless of what a person asks in prayer, God will decide on a case-by-case basis. If he wants to give him a radioactive kangaroo, guess what? The man is getting a radioactive kangaroo. Then, as he melts away from the radiation, he sings, "All things work together for good."

This is not authentic Christian theology. It is masochistic heathenism. Some tribal religions have the people do strange things to deform their bodies. This is part of their worship and culture. Christians do the same thing, but they do it in their hearts. Their theology is grotesque, and they are as deformed in their spirits as the pagans are in their bodies. They call themselves Christians, but they are pagans at heart, because the pagan deity is the only kind of God they know.

So when God sends someone to preach that they can have bread, they demand a stone! When he sends someone to tell them that they can have fish, they demand a snake! And then they will suffer "for the glory of God." It is not that they live by faith in God's promises, and then they endure or overcome the suffering that comes because of persecution. This is the kind of suffering that the Bible endorses. No, they glory in the kind of suffering that has nothing to do with living for the gospel, and even the kind of suffering that the gospel has delivered us from. This is considered holy. It is considered God-centered. It is a very odd religion. It is certainly not the Christian faith.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ liberates us from the bondage of false tradition, from religious teachings invented by men. Their God is a sovereign liar and a slave driver. People already have difficult lives. Instead of teaching them that God will help them, they say that God might

make them suffer even more, even when it has nothing to do with persecution for the gospel, and that this is supposed to be good for them. Religious masochists become more and more excited, but sane people become suspicious.

Jesus sets himself against this kind of people and their religion. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). This is what the gospel is supposed to accomplish, but much of Christian ministry has returned to the school of the Pharisees. Still, Jesus has not changed. His burden is still light. He will still give you rest.

Jesus sets us free to believe good things about God. He tells us that God is our Father. He is a Father who gives us good things when we ask, and the "good things" are the very things that we ask, not things that are supposed to be "better" for us but that are in fact much worse. God takes our prayers seriously. He does not play foolish games with us and make a mockery of our lives. When you pray in faith for money to pay your child's college tuition, he will not answer by dropping a crane on your parents so that you can collect the inheritance.

The Bible says, "The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it" (Proverbs 10:22). There is no need to second-guess God or to outwit him. When he answers, he does not play tricks. He does not make things worse for you and then throw Romans 8:28 at you to make you shut up.

The text is secure against the tricks that Christians use to explain away teachings that promise us good things in this life. The meaning of "good" gifts must be consistent with the immediate context, which is the Sermon on the Mount. Thus it must include food and clothing, and even "all these things" that the pagans run after (Matthew 6:25-34). It must also be consistent with what Jesus gives people in the Gospels. Jesus is a revelation of God, a perfect representation of the Father. This is so much the case that he says he and the Father are one, that the Father in him performs the works, and that to see him is to see the Father. There is no basis to think that the Father would behave differently than the way Jesus does in the Gospels.

The Gospels present Jesus as a total savior. He saves the whole man, and not only the spiritual aspect of him. He forgives, teaches, heals, and even feeds the people. When someone asks for knowledge, he gives knowledge. When someone asks for healing, he gives healing. The meaning of "good" is what ordinary people would consider good – forgiveness, healing, food and clothes, and such things. We can ask for these good things, and expect to receive these good things.

Jesus gives the same thing that a person asks. When someone asks for healing, Jesus does not give him cancer and then claims that it is better. He gives the man healing. Thus the Father God behaves the same way. Many Christians have the idea that whatever you ask for in prayer, God will give you what he wants anyway, and you are supposed to call it "good" no matter what it is. This does not fit the text when it is read in the context of how

Jesus behaved in the Gospels and in the context of the promises given to us in the Bible. The teaching is intended to encourage faith in asking for good things, not to guilt us into calling everything "good" regardless of how catastrophic it really is.

The traditional teaching on prayer presents itself as one that promotes the sovereignty of God and the sanctification of man. In reality, it is a thinly veiled attack on the fatherhood of God. It makes God worse than human parents, who are sinful. It is a religiously pretentious doctrine that is anti-gospel, and it places a heavy burden on God's people, who cry out to him partly because they need relief from precisely this kind of religious burden in the first place.

There is the doctrine that amounts to portraying God's promises as meaning the opposite of what they say, that a man will either never receive what he asks, or he will get something much worse than what prompted the request, only that he must call it good anyway. Christians who believe this have a dysfunctional relationship with the Father, to say the least.

Jesus' doctrine is accessible and straightforward. Let us not dress up his teaching in phony pious language as if to excuse both God and ourselves from it. He says that human parents know how to give good gifts to their children, things like bread and fish. Then he adds, "How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" The giving is connected to the asking. Christians are accustomed to calling everything good with the blanket justification that it promotes character. This text does not allow this, because what God gives us corresponds to what we ask.

If you ask for healing, God is not going to make you more sick to "teach" you something. He teaches you by his word. If he disciplines you with experience, it is only to make you return to his word. And his word promises healing. Someone says, "Oh, but I don't want to waste my cancer." This idiot is already wasting everybody's time with that stupid religious nonsense. If he does not wish to waste his cancer, then why doesn't he receive miracle healing, so that all who learn about it would be amazed at the goodness of God? If cancer turns him to God, then why doesn't he believe what God says? Why doesn't he learn about miracle healing and start teaching it? Why doesn't he hold healing services to pray for the sick? This would be the most straightforward response given what the Bible teaches. Just which "God" does cancer turn him to? He twists the word of God to justify his approach to the situation. He has wasted his cancer. Don't waste your life. If God's word teaches something, then just believe it, and just do it. You do not need cancer to make you do it.

If you ask for protection, God is not going to put you in a car crash because it is somehow "better" for you. Christians who believe something like this want to sound intelligent and theologically astute, but it is utter foolishness. In a case like this, the scenario in which the person did not experience the crash never happened. Therefore, it is speculation to declare that what actually happened was better than what never happened. Just because something "good" happened after the car crash means nothing. To compare, the man would have to live his life out again without the car crash. Perhaps after the car crash, the man became more zealous in evangelism, and led ten people to Christ. But without the car crash, perhaps

the man would have become even more zealous for evangelism due to some other reason, and led ten million people to Christ.

Thus we cannot form a conclusion even by looking at what actually happened. It is impossible to compare one scenario that has happened with an infinite number of alternatives that never happened. We must consult the word of God to determine what is better. If God commands holiness, then holiness is better. If God teaches us to have faith for healing, then healing is better. If God promises protection, then protection is better. Don't say that sin is better just because you have done it. Don't say that sickness is better just because you are confronted with it. This would not be faith or holiness. It is a spiritual sickness. It is a psychological disorder.

Jesus did not condemn people for wanting healthy bodies and full stomachs. He affirmed their desires: "Father knows that you need them" (Matthew 6:32). However, he rebuked the people for putting these things first, or allowing them to become so big in their minds that they left no room for more important matters. He did not teach denial, but he wanted people to have faith and to prioritize. He did not say, "Seek only the kingdom of God, and forget about food and clothing." He said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you."

A preacher was asked in a television interview whether he believed that certain kinds of non-Christians would be sent to hell. He was accustomed to focus on the positive even when the Bible calls for judgment, and so he answered, "It is up to God." This is unacceptable, because although God is the one who decides, he has already decided, and he has revealed his judgment in his word. He will indeed send non-Christians to hell. The preacher answered as if God never said anything on the matter. Christians were rightly outraged at this, and considered the man a sellout. They did not compliment him on upholding the sovereignty of God or anything like this. They castigated him as one who compromised the gospel on national television.

However, these Christians do the same thing in almost all other areas of doctrine and life. Will God heal this person? "It is up to God," they shrug. Will God provide for this person, or give him what he asks? "It is up to God." God has made promises regarding physical healing, material provision, and many other things, but these Christians behave as if God has never said a thing. They speak as if there is no covenant, as if there are no promises. They pray as if they are spiritual orphans.

They condemn that preacher, but they do the same thing. The difference is that the preacher is known for encouraging people to believe the good things that the Bible promises to those who have faith. Of course, he indeed compromises when he fails to apply what this same Bible says about the judgment on unbelievers. On the other hand, these Christians who condemn him are ready to affirm judgment on unbelievers, but they refuse to believe the good things that this same Bible promises. They are also false teachers, only with different preferences.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

The parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke applies the teaching to asking for the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13).

It is conceivable that Jesus used the same imageries numerous times in his itinerant ministry, and made various applications. Differences with the passage in Matthew suggest that Jesus could have said the above on another occasion. For example, the egg and scorpion contrast used here is absent in Matthew. In our own theological reflection, it is appropriate to employ the same line of reasoning to anything that the Bible tells us we could ask from the Father. If your child asks for knowledge, will you give him deception? If your child asks for healing, will you give him sickness? How could you think less of your Father in heaven?

Jesus applies this to asking for the Holy Spirit. Asking for the Holy Spirit is asking for the Holy Spirit. He is not talking about asking for conversion or holiness. Christians who reject essential aspects of the gospel might force the text to mean these things. However, if I claim to become a believer without mentioning Christ but only by asking for the Holy Spirit, the same people would likely correct me (Romans 10:9). And if I were to evangelize by telling people to ask for the Holy Spirit instead of confessing Christ, they might say that it is not Christian evangelism at all. Jesus is talking about asking for the Holy Spirit, not something else.

Luke consistently associates the Holy Spirit with spiritual power – power for preaching, for healing the sick, for casting out demons, for prophetic utterances, for speaking in tongues, for visions and dreams, and for all kinds of miracles, signs and wonders (see Luke 4:18, 24:49, Acts 1:8, 2:4, 17-18, 10:38, among many others). The Holy Spirit is a person. He is God. When he comes, there is an infusion of power and manifestation of miracles.

Asking for the Holy Spirit is not the same as asking for inspired preaching. It is not the same as asking for theological acumen. It is not the same as asking for superhuman boldness. It is not the same as asking for healing. It is not the same as asking for prophecy, or tongues, or visions and dreams. It is not the same as asking for miracles, or signs and wonders. Asking for the Holy Spirit is asking for all these things – it is to take everything in one gulp. This is what asking for the Holy Spirit means in the Bible, and especially in the writings of Luke.

Christians who reject these aspects of the gospel warn about spiritual deception. Beware of false signs and wonders! There is a Chinese idiom: "Cut off the toes to avoid the sandworms." This is more like cutting off the head to cure the hiccups. It is the loser's solution. It is incredibly stupid. The Bible's solution against false miracles is not only to expose them with truth, but also to defeat them with overwhelming force.

Moses delivered the word of God to the people of Egypt, but he also defeated the nation's chief magicians in direct miraculous confrontation. Elijah preached the word of God to Israel, but he also called down fire from heaven and shamed the false prophets. Paul declared the gospel of Christ to the proconsul, but he also spoke judgment against the sorcerer and struck him with blindness. What? Is this not in your seminary's apologetics curriculum? In the Bible, this is basic discipleship.

I learned to stop witches by sheer spiritual force in the name of Jesus long before I learned that I could torture them first with infuriating arguments. They cannot function in my presence. If there are spiritual deceptions, and if there are false signs and wonders, why don't the heresy hunters stop the evil powers in the name of Jesus? A fortuneteller had an evil spirit and followed Paul around for a while. He said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" (Acts 16:18), and that was the end of it. Why don't the cult watchers do that? It is because they are like the sons of Sceva – all talk, no power (Acts 19:13-16). Their ministry is an echo of faith. They know nothing about spiritual operations.

The Fatherhood of God is the ultimate spiritual protection. If your son asks for a fish, will you give him a stone? If he asks for an egg, will you give him a scorpion? Why would you think any less of your Father in heaven? Jesus teaches us three things. First, it is good to ask for the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, and especially in Luke, this represents the whole spectrum of spiritual powers. You get everything. God wants you to ask. It happens when you ask. Second, the Father wants to give you the Holy Spirit. He is "much more" willing to give you the Spirit than you are willing to give your child good things. Third, when you ask for the Holy Spirit, you are getting the Holy Spirit. If you ask for the Holy Spirit, you are not getting an evil spirit, or something else. You can be certain of this, because God is a good Father.

The way to protect yourself from spiritual deception and from false miracles is to aggressively pursue the Holy Spirit, along with the spiritual powers that he brings, and all his operations and manifestations. Of course, the word of God protects us from deception, and in this case, the word of God tells us to ask for the Holy Spirit. How will the truth protect us, if we refuse to do what it says? Cessationists and other skeptics think that they avoid false doctrines and miracles, but because they refuse to accept what God tells them to do about such things, they are the most vulnerable. In fact, they have long been pawns of hell, stationed at the forefront of Lucifer's army to spread their own brand of deception.

Orthodoxy on a Trojan Horse

The theologians come to us with impressive credentials that they conferred upon themselves. They attempt to sneak pass our defenses with deep pious language. They cite their orthodox pedigree, even centuries of theological and ecclesiastical development. But within this highly refined system of religion, there is a deadly venom taken straight from the serpent of Eden. It was that deceiver who first hissed, "Did God really say?"

Their theology smuggles in assumptions that undermine confidence in God, and interpretations that destroy intimacy with the Father. It mangles people's faith until it becomes something grotesque, deformed, and repugnant. It makes people afraid of "the will of God," because they never know what awful thing he will do to them next, and they are required to call it "good" no matter what it is.

If they ask for good things, things that even human children could expect from their parents, then they are either terrible people, or they will receive something terrible. And again, they are required to call whatever it is better than what they asked for in the first place. If they ask for healing, it is likely that they will not get it, or they are more likely to become worse than to receive miracle healing.

This kind of theology is pervasive in the Christian world, but Jesus said that if we think like this, then we think that God is less of a father than sinful human parents. People can call this kind of theology whatever they want. Associate it with the most respected theological heritage, and it is still paganism.

Sometimes people complain about misrepresentation. "Straw man!" they cry. Listen, if I want to sneak a straw man pass them, they might not even detect it. If I use a straw man, I would be fantastic at it. The truth is that I understand their own doctrines better than they do, and I draw attention to the necessary implications that they are too embarrassed to see uncovered.

They are angry with me because I show that the things they cherish are ridiculous and heretical. They complain about a straw man because I am exactly correct about them, and they cannot accept how atrocious they have been all along, and how easily they are exposed and refuted. It is a defense mechanism. It is a last-ditch effort to convince themselves, even if they can no longer deceive others.

One Calvinist said that I misrepresented compatibilism when I refuted it, until I pointed out that I referred to his own seminary professor to define the doctrine. It was unfathomable to him that the whole thing could be destroyed in several paragraphs. The truth is that I can almost always refute something that I consider false in several words or phrases, but my explanations are often padded – I make them longer – to reduce the shock and to show a little effort.

Still, I am accused of misrepresenting my opponents. It is their way to sidestep spot-on criticisms, and to indefinitely delay correction. If I answer that they have misrepresented me in complaining that I have misrepresented them, then I will never have to correct myself even if I have misrepresented them. But then I would not be a servant of Christ. I would just be playing religious games like them.

Sometimes people see that I am correct, and the matter is so simple and obvious that they cannot believe their theology teaches something different, and so they conclude that they must have been misrepresented, although the doctrine that they claim to embrace is exactly as I describe. In effect, they want to adjust their testimony but retain the designation, or the

name of their position. Imagine a cessationist who could see that I am correct, and who is compelled to agree with me on at least a few essential issues, but he wishes to keep calling himself a cessationist. So he insists that I must have misrepresented cessationism. It is absurd, but I have come across this several times. This is what a religious spirit does to people. They care more about their religion as their personal culture and philosophy than as their worship and knowledge of God.

I have provided a correct account of what Jesus said, and an accurate assessment of those who believe something different. On the other hand, what they teach about God is the worst misrepresentation of all. What a cruel joke Christians play on themselves. But they like it more than the gospel that Jesus preached. People hate God so much in part because "Christians" like these have made things this way. And then they try to fix it with apologetics and politics. Get your gospel right first! Then see who still hates him. Now do your apologetics. And why do you talk so much about politics, when you have not been healing the sick and casting out demons? Do you want a different Jesus? You are still expecting a political Messiah (Matthew 11:2-6).

My interest is not for you to believe something bad about people, but to believe something good about God. Forget about people. Look at Jesus, and see the Father. Of course we must not crave our own welfare more than the glory of God and the progress of the gospel. However, this is not the issue at all, and to bring it up in this context suggests that one has missed the point. The problem is that false doctrine pressures people to honor suffering itself as spiritual, and to identify pain with piety, even when it has nothing to do with persecution from believing and preaching the gospel.

Jesus Christ sets us free from this heavy burden. He teaches us that, if we believe in him, then we can know God as our Father. He teaches us that it is a holy exercise to come to God in faith and talk to him about what you want. Do not be afraid that he will punish you for asking, or that he will give you something terrible and then force you to call it good. He is your Father. He is the deliverer, healer, supplier, your all in all. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). Have faith in God.

10. Scraps from the Preacher's Table

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." (John 6:12)

S09-001. Jesus Christ is alive. He possesses all authority in heaven and earth. He is the supreme spiritual leader. And he sets you free from false religion and phony piety, doctrines that people made up and added to his teachings, so that you would follow their prejudices instead of Christ. All that has no power over you. Learn the truth that is in Jesus, and shake yourself from human religion. It is fine to leave, but you must let go. Do not hold on to it, and do not be afraid. Follow Christ. He will never let you down. Those who have faith in Jesus will never be put to shame.

S09-002. Some people portray the Christian life as a miserable one. This is supposed to be a picture of holiness. Indeed, the Christian life involves sacrifice and opposition, because there is sin in this world. When you believe the truth and behave in righteousness, and when you love God, unbelievers will hate you. However, we can have a wonderful life in the face of this. Jesus said that he came to bring us an abundant life, not a miserable life. It is not a life in which problems never occur, but it is a life of victory over these problems. It is easy to be miserable, so easy that even unbelievers can do it. Just do nothing, believe nothing, be nothing, and you will be miserable. In the end, the one who suffers is you, and it is unnecessary. The Christian life is a wonderful life. It is a life of promise, of purpose, of power, a life of faith, of knowledge, of love and hope and unspeakable joy.

S09-003. Christian theology typically offers false comfort by allowing people to feel pious, even heroic, in their unbelief and defeat, and to even look down on those who affirm faith and victory through Jesus Christ. This is the theology of the ultimate loser and heretic. It is the reason unbelievers ridicule religion as a psychological crutch, because people who believe this false theology exploit God to make him into this. They think that suffering is romantic, but suffering is grotesque. It happens only because sin has contaminated the world. I do not say that a person suffers only as a direct consequence of a particular sin he has done. This might or might not be the case, but a person could suffer just because he lives in this world in which there is sin. Nevertheless, this does not mean that he must keep on suffering, whether or not he is suffering for his own sin. Jesus has suffered in our place, and we benefit from his sacrifice by faith. Faith wins. Faith overcomes. Even if it does not change the situation, you will not have your head down, but you will shout in joy in the face of overwhelming attack. But faith can indeed change the situation. Our victory is not only psychological.

S09-004. The confession of faith in Christ is not a vow of sickness, poverty, and defeat. The confession of faith in Christ is a declaration of identification with Christ, dependence on Christ, and victory in Christ. God does not mind healing people. The Bible shows that he would heal people whether their conditions are terminal or whether their conditions are mere inconveniences. And God does not mind prospering people. The Bible shows that he

would prosper people with much more than they need. It also teaches principles to increase and manage wealth. We should never value anything more than God, and we should use what we have to promote the gospel, but that is a separate issue from what God is willing to give us and what we are promised or allowed to take by faith.

S09-005. Forgiveness is impossible without making moral judgment, because unless you think that someone has done wrong, there is nothing to forgive. God thinks that people are wrong all the time. What he does about this is another matter. It does not always mean that he will punish the person. For his chosen ones, he has already punished their sins in Christ, and there is nothing left for his people to repay. If I take on the mind of Christ -- the God-view or Christ-view -- then I will also think like him. Thus I think that people are wrong all the time. It does not mean that I hunt them down and make them pay. God will hunt them down. Either God's grace will catch up to them, or his wrath will catch up to them. God will get them one way or another.

S09-006. The Jews wanted to make Jesus king by force (John 6:15). Some Christians are still trying to do that.

S09-007. Look at their theology. They attack those who have faith in God's promises for good things, and force the matter back on "the will of God." If they truly respect God's sovereignty, then they would listen to what he says and believe it. They think they are so humble when they sing, "Have thine own way, Lord." All I hear is, "I pay my own way, Lord." They want to appear above it all, as if they are spiritual and unworldly, but they are so full of pride that they would not come to God as little children and receive from him.

S09-008. A preacher said, "God is not here to solve your problems." Then who is going to do it? That preacher certainly is not solving anyone's problems. Some Christians have the idea that we are God-centered only if we are working harder for God than he is working for us. We are here to solve his problems, but he is not here to solve ours! But this is the opposite of being God-centered. It is the opposite of being covenant-minded. The Bible says he is not really served by human hands, as if he needs anything. From this perspective, even your ministry is something that God is doing for you. God can do everything by himself, but Paul says he wishes to be co-workers with us.

S09-009. Science is not God. It is not truth. It is not knowledge. It is not rational. Science is people.

S09-010. People who are so against a "health and wealth" gospel make it sound like they are above all these worldly things. The truth is that they still need the same things, and they still want the same things, sometimes much more than those they criticize. They still go after these things, only that they do it by their own effort instead of depending on God for them. They want to make it look like they are God-centered, but they are the most self-centered, because instead of having faith in God for these things, they are depending on themselves to get the same things. God has always been pleased with those who come to him and ask for what they want by faith. When you do this, you are treating him like God, and not like someone who needs your service.

S09-011. Science is people, and people are stupid. We obtain the science that we want, not the science that is true.

S09-012. People who attack the Bible's promises of health and wealth want us to think that they don't care about these things, that they are above it all. But they do care, often more than the people they criticize. The difference is that they don't have faith that they can get any of it from God, and so they strive to get the same things by their own effort. They call that the cultural mandate.

S09-013. "Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever" (Psalm 112:1-3). An inconvenient truth?

S09-014. One man told me that he associated with unbelievers because Jesus did it, and so that he might evangelize some of them. I asked if he ever preached the gospel to any of them when he went out to dinners, parties, and events. He paused, then admitted that he had never done it. Not once. It was just an excuse to play. Jesus associated with people that society hated, like tax collectors and prostitutes, not people like your peers, or friends and relatives. He also associated with people who hated him, like the Pharisees. Some of these people were wealthy, powerful, and educated, but they were not like your everyday friends with whom you enjoy playing games and watching movies. So don't compare the two. If you want to play, just play. Don't tell people it is ministry. It is not. The truth is that you admire non-Christians, and prefer worldly and unbelieving friends. You associate with them for your amusement, not for their benefit. Just do it, but call it what it is.

S09-015. Cessationism is the sunset of faith.

S09-016. The world sanctions its hatred and rejection of God in atheism. The church sanctions its hatred and condemnation of God in cessationism. Cessationism is "Christian" atheism.

S09-017. Since they are so wrong, and since they have been so abusive toward those who have faith, cessationists are fair game to anyone who wants to take shots at them. There should be no mercy and no sympathy. It is open season on cessationism. Show no restraint.

S09-018. The cessationist is the worst sinner and heretic. He hardens his heart against the Holy Spirit and speaks against his works. He also attempts to exterminate the Spirit in other people. The cessationist should have no place in the Christian world. In fact, the cessationist should have no place in God's creation, in any part of reality.

S09-019. Show no mercy to the cessationist intellectually. Slay him with the sword of the Spirit. Burn the corpse with the fire of the Word. Then cut him into pieces and send them back to the devil.

S09-020. There is no future in a tradition that does not believe all of the Bible. It might continue to exist, but it will just talk to itself, and it will hardly do the work of God.

S09-021. Jesus says, "According to your faith be it unto you." This is a death sentence to the cessationist, because his faith is so dark and pessimistic. It is his worst nightmare. It might mean disaster for his entire family. But to someone who has faith, this declaration would mean that he is getting everything that he has ever wanted.

S09-022. Cessationists are the enemies of Christ and Christians. In fact, they are the enemies of all humanity, including unbelievers, because their message attempts to steal God himself away from everyone through unbelief and deceit. They make it more difficult for unbelievers to come to Christ. They preach a God that is hidden, when God has been showing himself like he did in the Bible. God testifies to them that he has been working, but they suppress the truth in their wickedness. Those who support cessationists share in their condemnation. Every man and woman has a responsibility to rise up and destroy cessationism. Even non-Christians should join in.

S09-023. God seems foreign and wrong to someone who worships Satan. The fire of the Spirit will look like "strange fire" to someone who bears the torch of Lucifer. Is it because the fire of faith is not fire from the Spirit, or is it because the altar of unbelief is an altar for the devil? If his soul burns with nothing but hellfire, then any other kind of fire will appear strange to him.

S09-024. I do not endorse ministries that are dedicated to a negative function -- heresy hunters and cult watchers. If we must have them, then Christians should establish organizations dedicated to exterminating cessationism. This includes attacking cessationists, seminaries, and denominations that support the false doctrine. The heresy and cult of cessationism should have no place in this galaxy.

S09-025. Praying "if it be your will" or "your will be done" in a prayer of petition is almost always wrong. Most of the time, if you do not know God's will before you pray, either you do not know the Bible, or you do not believe it. You might think you appear humble, but it just means that you have hardened your heart against what God promises. You refuse to believe him. Do you criticize the charismatics for not finding God's will in the Bible? But when you pray, you throw it up to some unknown "will of God" instead of finding it from God's word. You are a self-righteous oblivious faithless religious hypocrite.

S09-026. Cessationism adapts Christian theology to match non-Christian experience. It reduces God into a heuristic principle. He guides ethics, but produces no actual and obvious effects. It is a stealth attack that seeks to neuter Christianity from within.

S09-027. Unbelief is a death sentence. There is no future in a church tradition that defines orthodoxy by it.

S09-028. As I have demonstrated a number of times, the main basis for healing, prophecy, miracles, and spiritual gifts is existing revelation, even ancient revelation. Thus to say that

these things have ceased is not to deny the occurrence of new revelation, but it is to deny all revelation, including old revelation. Cessationism does not prevent new revelation, but it attacks existing revelation -- all of it at the same time.

S09-029. Cessationism is not the end of miracles, but the end of God. The worst use of the doctrine of divine sovereignty is one that says because God is sovereign, he will no longer honor his word by performing miracles, that he could sovereignly cease to do what he has promised. This is worse than Arminianism and Open Theism.

S09-030. Cessationists have ceased having faith in God, in the Bible, in his power, and in his promises. They would still like to think of themselves as Christians, and so they turn this religion into a theoretical thing. They go through the motions and mumble some incantations. But they are religious zombies. They are corpses of faith. They attack and feast on others to sustain themselves. Their religious life consists of criticizing those who have life. They have no life in themselves, and so they must survive by tearing apart those who have life, and feast on their flesh.

S09-031. Both charismatic and cessationist frauds should be exposed, but all cessationists are frauds because their theology is false, and they have been given a pass for so long that most of the attacks should be focused on them for centuries to come.

S09-032. Don't you cringe when someone calls you "reverend" or "doctor"? But you like it. How come?

S09-033. I am not against medicine as such. I am against making anything into an idol, so that a man looks to it instead of to God. I am against depending on something to help us when God has promised that he would help us another way. I am not against medicine. I am for healing. I think that man ought to seek health, and he should first seek it by faith in God.

S09-034. Professional cult watching is not true orthodoxy. True orthodoxy is characterized by the power and mercy of Christ, resulting in forgiveness, healing miracles, and second chances (Mark 5:18-20). Then from gratitude gushes forth praise and truth about Jesus Christ. This is true orthodoxy.

S09-035. If you do not preach that God heals people by miracles, you are not God-centered. If you do not pray for the sick, you have no compassion. If it is spiritual to help the poor, the hungry, the orphans and widows, then it is at least as spiritual to pray for the sick to demonstrate God's power and concern, and to relieve the suffering of people. If it is spiritual to help the poor, the hungry, the orphans and widows as often as we can, then it is at least as spiritual to pray for the sick as often as we can. The most anti-Christ, anti-gospel, and anti-spiritual thing is to pretend to be a dedicated Christian, a defender of the faith, a watcher of the cults, but then do not make any effort to pray for God to work miracles to help people. To justify this by blaming it on God, and claiming that he no longer does certain things to help people, makes a person worse than an unbeliever.

S09-036. John 9:35-37. Healing shows that Jesus Christ is true, kind, and HERE.

S09-037. The healing ministry is established on a biblical basis that is a number of times larger than the biblical basis for baptism and communion combined. However, it demands genuine faith to produce success, whereas the other practices can be faked without faith. Therefore, Christians whose faith cannot rise above the level of ceremony refuse to practice the healing ministry and attempt to destroy it.

S09-038. James 5:14-15 and other verses that teach and command healing miracles are just as authoritative as Romans 10:9, 1 John 4:2-3, and other verses in the Bible. Therefore, those verses can be used as tests of orthodoxy just as much as other verses. A pastor who refuses to pray for the sick with the intention that God would heal them by miracles should lose his position and his salary. If he does not keep his mouth shut but spreads unbelief in the congregation, he should be physically expelled from the community.

S09-039. Preachers are criticized for holding healing services, in which either the main purpose for the services is to preach on healing and pray for healing, or at least a significant portion of the time would be dedicated to praying for the sick. One complaint is that this seems to promise that God would perform healing miracles in these situations, when we should defer to God's sovereignty. A criticism like this exposes these people's unbelief and ignorance. Of course we should hold healing services. Of course we should tell people that God will perform healing miracles. Jesus himself had healing services, and God himself promised that he would heal people when we pray in faith. The problem is in the critics. If they believe in the faithfulness of God or the inspiration of Scripture, they are surely doing a remarkable job at hiding it.

S09-040. Even when we teach the doctrine of healing straight from the Bible, Christians often counter, "But God might not WANT to heal everybody." How intelligent. It is like we have never thought of this objection before. What does it mean? Does it mean that God heals only 99%? But they never say, "God might not want to heal everybody, although I have never seen him skip one yet." Somehow we are expected to run into the unlucky dude everywhere! And they never say, "It might not be God's will to heal everyone, but he always heals me. Always." No, when someone makes this objection, he usually means that God heals the 1%, if even that. Some of them do not really expect God to heal anybody -- 0%. They think this despite what God says on the subject. It is an excuse to hide their unbelief under what looks like respect for God's wishes, when God has already stated his wishes in the Bible. How does he know that God does not want to heal everybody? What does the Bible say? The objection is a scam. Even if God heals only 1%, it is irrelevant. Why should that matter to you, if you have faith? If God heals only one person today, why can't it be you? Let it be you. Let it always be you.

S09-041. Jesus said that healing was the children's bread. It belonged to the heirs of the covenant. A pagan woman, who had no covenant right to this, received a healing miracle for her daughter anyway by stating that she would take the crumbs that fell from the children's table. Jesus commended her faith and granted the request. Thus one who refuses

healing by faith or who teaches against healing is not a superior believer. He is worse than a pagan dog, barking madly outside the house.

11. True Sabbath

Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." There is one theological tradition that places heavy emphasis on keeping the Sabbath on Sunday. For more than twenty years, members of that tradition have not asked me what they should do on the Sabbath, but they have asked me whether they are forbidden to do this or that. They only ask me what they must not do. For them, the Sabbath is not a day to receive mercy and to show mercy, but a day to exhibit dedication in the form of enduring sacrifice, boredom, and inconvenience. In fact, this seems to be their view of the entire Christian life. Perhaps they do not think this way all of the time, but their faith is defective even if they think this way some of the time.

Assuming for the moment that their doctrine of the Sabbath is correct in the first place, instead of asking what you should not do on Sunday, ask what you should do. Do you teach people the word of God, to bring them close to him and to build up their faith? Do you pray for the sick, so that God may work miracles right in front of everybody? Do you exercise the power of prophecy, so that God may reveal the secrets of the heart, to comfort and encourage? Do you help the poor, the orphans and the widows, albeit as the Bible teaches, intelligently and not indiscriminately?

If you do not do these things, what good is it if you avoid reading the newspaper or shopping for groceries on Sunday? What good is it? If your church does not pray for the sick like Jesus did, why does it exist? Whose Sabbath are you honoring? What religion is this? Those who claim to revere the Sabbath the most are usually the ones who desecrate it the most. It is the easiest thing to keep the Sabbath with your body, and only for one day a week. Even many unbelievers do it. What the most vehement Sabbath pushers refuse to do, however, is to keep the Sabbath with their hearts, and to do it every day. To please God on Sunday and every day, start first with faith, mercy, and justice, not tradition or ceremony. Otherwise, you might as well do anything you want on Sunday, or any day. It makes no difference.

Jesus Christ gives us rest. Honor his sacrifice by teaching and receiving the mercy that he has obtained for us by his own blood. Enter into his covenant benefits by faith. These include fellowship with God, forgiveness of sins, holiness and integrity, knowledge of spiritual things, healing, prophecy, the miraculous manifestations of faith, the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, material provisions and blessings, and many more.

If you use the Sabbath to complain about politics, argue about philosophy, attack the ministry of healing and prophecy, or in one way or another, to justify and promote yourself, then just forget about it. Pack it up and go home. It is not worth the time or effort. You are like the Pharisees. It would be an improvement if you would forget about church altogether and just take your kids to a fast food restaurant. Have a good time. This would be much more holy than that sacrilege you call the Sabbath.

12. Vain Repetition vs. Faith Repetition

Know the difference between vain repetition and faith repetition. If someone does not pray to the Father through Jesus Christ, or if he does not pray with faith, then any repetition is meaningless. Repeating a prayer like it is a mantra or an incantation does not make it more likely to be answered. If you pray in faith, you can pray it again. If you pray in unbelief, even the first time is futile. The Bible says do not think that you will get anything from the Lord.

There are two legitimate types of repetition.

First, there is the prayer of dedication. Before Jesus was arrested, he prayed the same thing several times. He was not really asking for anything. He knew what he came to do and what was about to happen. He was preparing himself for a time of difficult ministry. If we wish, we may also include praise, worship, and thanksgiving in this kind of prayer. You ought to say, "Praise the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures forever." You may say that as often as you think of it. It is not vain repetition as long as you mean it. In this type of prayer, you embrace the will of God as you pray (Matthew 26:39, 42).

Second, there is the prayer of petition. Jesus told a story about a widow, who persisted with an unjust judge until he granted her the justice that she demanded. The story does not intend to say that God is like an unjust judge, but the point is that if even an unjust person would surrender to a widow's persistence, God is much more ready to answer our prayers when we come to him in an unwavering faith. In this type of prayer, you discover the will of God before you pray (1 John 5:14-15).

Christians often place every prayer under the first category. They make petitions using the principles of dedication. This is why they are weaklings and failures. Stop playing humble when God has already promised you victory and commanded you to move forward in faith (Exodus 14:15)!

The main issue in prayer is faith, not techniques or mechanics. Most prayers come from unbelief, and most repeated prayers come from repeated unbelief. If you have faith, you can pray once and receive, or you can ask again. If prayer is more than mere psychological release, and if you truly expect to receive what you ask, then you can press hard for something until you receive it, or keep pushing for further progress until you are satisfied.

Any Christian can improve if he will stop making excuses and correct his theology, and start praying and speaking in faith. This will often mean disowning his teachers and traditions, even condemning them. He will have to decide if Christ is worth more to him than these things.

13. God's "Audible Voice" to Cessationists

One cessationist preacher said, "If you want to hear the audible voice of God, just read the Bible out loud!"

OK, I think I will!

IN THE LAST DAYS, GOD SAYS, I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT ON ALL PEOPLE. YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS WILL PROPHECY, YOUR YOUNG MEN WILL SEE VISIONS, YOUR OLD MEN WILL DREAM DREAMS. (Acts 2:17)

FOLLOW THE WAY OF LOVE AND EAGERLY DESIRE SPIRITUAL GIFTS, ESPECIALLY THE GIFT OF PROPHECY. (1 Corinthians 14:1)

WHEN YOU COME TOGETHER, EVERYONE HAS A HYMN, OR A WORD OF INSTRUCTION, A REVELATION, A TONGUE OR AN INTERPRETATION. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

AND THE PRAYER OFFERED IN FAITH WILL MAKE THE SICK PERSON WELL; THE LORD WILL RAISE HIM UP. (James 5:15)

God should not have to shout very long for us to get the point. He speaks in an "audible voice" and tells us to expect – to even eagerly seek – prophecies, visions and dreams, revelations, tongues and interpretation, signs and wonders, healing miracles, and all kinds of spiritual gifts. Will the cessationist obey the "audible voice" of God? Or does he think the Bible is just thunder (John 12:29)?

This preacher pretended to honor the Bible, but the book was just noise to him. This piece of human garbage did not believe God's voice, but he wanted to sound clever when he put down those who have faith in what God promises about prophecies and miracles. He wanted to mock them to excuse his unbelief and to advance his own theological bias, but he ended up mocking God.

Is this the kind of trash that you want as your pastor? Should you pay him a salary to tell you things like this? If you invest in unbelief, you will reap unbelief. Someone like this should not be in the ministry. He has no authority to handle God's word or to teach God's people. Next time a preacher says something like this, feel free to stand up and heckle him with the "audible voice" of God. Even better, have friends join you from different parts of the building and hit that loser with God's voice in surround sound.

14. Cessationists as Mass Murderers

People sometimes argue against biblical healing by referring to cases of presumption. The claim is that some have insisted on receiving healing from God and refused medical assistance, and subsequently their conditions became worse, and some even died. But what does this have to do with the biblical doctrine of healing? How do we know that those people really had faith? In those instances that I examined, the people who were harmed never understood what was taught on healing, or they never practiced what was taught. In some cases, they were indeed taught an incorrect doctrine, but this is irrelevant, because they did not follow even the erroneous version. The people were provoked to think about the matter by what they heard, but they usually acted out their own ideas instead.

Those who argue against healing this way employ the same tactic as reporters who manipulate the audience by doing "human interest" stories, in which they focus on specific individuals to make a point about broad policies. These individuals might be drowning in problems supposedly due to ideologies and regulations that the reporters wish to oppose. Some reporters have tried to undermine biblical healing with this method. They use human interest stories in an attempt to manipulate public opinion, and if possible, Christian doctrine. The method attempts to bypass rational investigation and go straight for the emotional jugular. This trick is for the intellectual playground. It is for kids. Still, Christians fall for it, and they do the same thing. But Christians should not use underhanded methods to influence people.

A story might serve as an illustration along with an argument, but it is never a substitute for an argument. The reporters, heresy hunters, and cult watchers are eager to undermine the biblical doctrine of healing in the first place. They rarely try to understand what the Bible teaches on the subject, then try to appreciate what the targeted ministries teach about it, and then try to investigate whether the sick people truly grasped and practiced the teaching. Instead, they look for tragic results -- they hunt down stories -- seize on them, and then assign the blame to the preachers or doctrines that they wish to take down. This is supposed to be rational and scientific. This is supposed to be good reporting and good preaching.

If the doctrine of healing is wrong, then we do not need stories to reinforce the point. It would be wrong without tragic stories. However, if the doctrine of healing is right, and if it comes from God, then stories do not disprove it. In fact, if the doctrine is correct, then the first assumption ought to be that anytime it appears to fail, the person never believed it or practiced it. Shouldn't this be the starting assumption in each case, at least if you are a Christian? If there are more nuanced reasons, then we can still figure it out, but if you throw the whole thing out, you will never take the first step in understanding. It is an ostrich approach to theology. This is simple gospel reasoning. If a church member has been sent to hell, would the heresy hunters and cult watchers denounce the blood of Christ, and conclude that there is no such thing as salvation, or would they say that the person never

really believed in Christ, but that he only went through the motions of acting like a believer?

Suppose, with zero biblical warrant, you speculate that a person would have recovered if he had rejected the doctrine of healing, or if he had not claimed to have believed it (since he probably did not really believe it). Then, with much biblical warrant, I would declare that thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people would have survived if people like you had preached the biblical doctrine of healing, that Jesus Christ took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses, and that the prayer of faith shall heal the sick. You seize upon one result, and speculate about a whole doctrine, when the person probably did not believe or practice the doctrine, when the doctrine taught was probably different from the one in Scripture, or when the result might not even have anything to do with the doctrine.

On the other hand, I take the doctrine from God, and make a deductive application. If the Bible teaches repentance, and if you refuse to teach repentance to a sinner, then his blood is on your hands even if he would not have repented. Your dereliction of duty is itself sufficient basis to assign blame to you for the sinner's damnation. God himself explained this (Ezekiel 33:1-9). Likewise, if the Bible teaches healing, and if you refuse to teach healing to a sick person, then his death is on your hands even if he would not have believed or recovered. Your dereliction of duty is itself sufficient basis to assign blame to you for the sick person's death. From this perspective, cessationists are mass murderers. The heresy hunters and cult watchers who refuse to teach about healing and who undermine the doctrine of healing are mass murderers. This is a direct application of a biblical principle. It involves no speculation, because it is irrelevant whether any one of them would have been healed, since the sin is in failing to tell the people about healing and to pray for their healing.

Anyone who has the responsibility and opportunity to teach about Jesus Christ, but who does not teach on healing, or even teaches against it, is a mass murderer. And anyone who uses anecdotes to undermine the doctrine is a bloody religionist who exploits people's suffering to advance his theological agenda. He is the worst kind of scum. For every one who died because of a distortion of the doctrine, or because of something else unrelated to the doctrine at all, how many hundreds of thousands have died because Christians refuse to teach the doctrine, and to teach it correctly? Moreover, for everyone who died, how many have been healed, even called back from the edge of the grave, because some Christians preached on healing and prayed for the sick, as Jesus commanded? Anyone who brings up abuse in order to discredit the doctrine condemns himself. If distortions and misunderstandings have resulted in harm, then the solution is not to throw out the doctrine, but to teach it correctly and constantly.

Do you want to blame one death on someone who preached healing? Ten? Fifty? I will blame you and your kind for the deaths of thousands upon thousands upon thousands upon thousands upon thousands upon thousands of sick people that you could have helped with the true biblical doctrine of healing. If you do not like this kind of attention, then don't start a fight you can't win. Don't blame it on someone who preached healing. Perhaps the sick

person died because YOU did not preach healing to him! Even that was YOUR fault! And as long as you refuse the doctrine, I can blame you for every person who gets sick and die.

Before you say a word about Tom Jones from Florida or Megan Smith from Alaska, about how they have been deceived by Reverend Gimme Money, first dig yourself out from that mountain of corpses. What? You still want to argue? We cannot even hear you with all those dead bodies on top of you. For every case that you blame on the teaching on healing, I will blame you for every person who dies of a sickness because you have not done your part. Look, you just killed another one. And...there goes another. Their blood is on your hands. The Bible indeed teaches a doctrine of miracle healing. If you have not been teaching it, then you cannot afford to play this game. Get out, or get buried.

15. Spiritual Physics

Some Christians do not understand spiritual operations, but they do not want to appear inferior, and so they complain about mysticism. Mysticism is indeed wrong, if the term is used correctly. Some things have nothing to do with mysticism. If I punch you in the back of your head and you fall flat on your face, that is not mysticism, but physics. You might not know what happened, but I know. It is not unintelligible.

When Solomon dedicated his temple, the presence of God in the form of a thick cloud entered the building and prevented the priests from doing their work (1 Kings 8:10-12). Some people cannot understand this because they have made up their minds about how the things of God must function. If a manifestation seems to interrupt normal ministry, then it must be false. It must not be from God. This is not necessarily true.

A woman with an illness came to Jesus and touched his clothes. She was healed immediately, and Jesus said, "Who touched me? Power has gone out from me." He did not deliberately release this power, but he was aware of its movement when it was taken out of him by faith (Mark 5:30, Luke 8:46). This is marvelous, but it is not unusual for those who know about spiritual operations (1 Corinthians 12:1). It influenced how Jesus conducted ministry, and he asked about it when the power behaved a certain way. If this was not wrong or strange for him, then it should not be wrong or strange for us.

The same power operates in the Christian who has received the Holy Spirit after he has believed in Christ (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8). There are numerous practical implications for Christian life and work. Sometimes in ministry, we would say certain things, time certain actions, or behave in certain ways because we are consciously working with this power. It happens not only in the ministry of healing, but also in prophecy, preaching, counseling, writing, and debates. When we talk about such things, it is not mysticism, but "spiritual physics" and spiritual reality. If these things do not fit into your theology, then it is your problem. You have a bad theology.

After you have constructed your system of doctrine, if you find hundreds of pieces of the Bible left on the floor, you need to make a choice. You can focus on admiring your grand design as you discreetly shove the pieces under the table with your foot. This is what most theologians have done throughout church history, so you would be in respectable, even if corrupt, company. Since most of them do this, it is unlikely you would be discovered and confronted about it. Your cute little religion would remain intact until the judgment. On the other hand, you can stop lying to yourself, tear down the whole thing, and start over. This time, use all the pieces and connect them with logic.

16. Where There is a Promise, There is a Way

A Christian who teaches the truth about God's promises of healing for our bodies might face this objection: "If God heals, or if God promises healing, then why do you still have this disease or defect in your body?" The objection attempts to sidestep the word of God to argue from experience, from feeling and observation instead of faith. Non-Christians do not know anything, and we expect something like this from them, but the critics often claim to be Christians, and they should know better. They know the answer to this, but they are blinded by prejudice. They hate God so much for promising healing that they would discard elementary gospel reasoning to attack those who have faith in him. If someone were to make a similar objection concerning another aspect of the Christian life, they would smirk and quash the challenge in a few words. They should never need to argue from experience to settle the point. If the doctrine of healing is wrong, then we should be able to see this from the word of God without appeal to experience. But this objection often appears after the promises of healing have been presented. The promises themselves are cast aside as they bring up the point.

The Bible says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). There is always a way to escape temptation. There is always a way to avoid sin. However, I would not say to a preacher, "If God promises to change us, and if he promises to always provide a way out when we are tempted, then why do you still sin sometimes? The doctrine must be false!" I would never say this, and I would never reject the doctrine, because I am not a moron. I can read the Bible. I do not need to depend on the preacher's example. I am not saved by the sinlessness of the preacher, but by the sinlessness of Christ. If I can take advantage of God's promises, I can do better than the preacher who teaches them to me.

Do you still sin, ever? If God promises a way out, why don't you escape? Is the Bible wrong, or is the doctrine false, because you sometimes sin? God provides a way out of every temptation, but do you escape every time? Why not? Is it because the Bible does not really teach this? No, that is not the reason. You sin, because you want to sin! As the Bible says, ""But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). You sin, because you embrace the sin and go along with the temptation. Don't become even more despicable and blame everything on God, or attempt to deny his promises. And if you would not throw the blame on God, or if you would not deny that he provides a way out of every temptation, then why would you do it when it comes to sickness, when God has also made promises for your healing? Why would you do this, unless there is evil in your heart?

The same gospel reasoning applies to healing. I am not looking to the preacher for healing, but to God. A preacher who has not achieved perfect holiness can still talk to me about

holiness and pray for me to grow in holiness, so a preacher who has not received perfect healing can still pray for me to receive healing. We do not stumble over each other's flaws, because we are both looking to God in faith. The worst person is the one who denies that God makes a way to escape temptation just because a preacher has not reached perfection in holiness. More than a challenge to the preacher, this would be an attack on God's integrity. On the other hand, those who humble themselves under the word of God will use the doctrine to build up their strength. They know that there is always hope when they face temptation. To them, imperfect experience is not a basis to reject the promises of God, but to talk about them even more. Likewise, an incomplete experience of healing is not a basis to reject God's promises, but it is a reason to talk about them more and more, so that we may increase in faith and knowledge, and then in our experience.

You probably do not know how much God has already changed a person, and you are only seeing the flaws that remain. Of course you may still rebuke the man for his sins, but you may not rebuke God for making the promises. Rather than inciting the man to doubt the word of God, you should help him and pray for him, so that God's promises will continue to take effect in him. You would not urge him to embrace his sins just because he has been sinning anyway, but you would urge him to embrace God's promises, that he always provides a way out of sin. This is excellent gospel thinking. So why would you do the opposite when it comes to healing, when God has also made promises for the healing of the body? There is something wrong with you.

You probably do not know how much God has already healed a person. He probably had cancer on top of diabetes on top of arthritis when he first learned about God's promises on healing, but now the only thing left is a limp from injuries he received many years ago. Don't spurn the promises of God because of this. Don't put the man down. What's the matter with you? You should help him and pray for his complete healing, so that he will become an even better testimony of God's power and grace. You also might not know how many severe conditions that God has healed through him when he prayed for people.

You might not know something else. If you look at an old photo of someone who has a consistent confession of healing by faith in Christ, you might find that he has not aged for decades, or you might find that now he looks even younger than he looked twenty years ago. This could have happened to Sarah. At the age of sixty-five, she was so beautiful that even a king desired her and wanted to take her for himself (Genesis 12:14-15). When Moses was a hundred and twenty years old, his eyes were not weak and his strength was not gone (Deuteronomy 34:7). Caleb was as strong when he was eighty-five as when he was forty (Joshua 14:10-11), and he demanded to enter battle to seize what God promised him. No excuses. Just faith.

We are the children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ, and we have inherited the same promises. These are promises that can suspend time in the body, even turn back time. This becomes extra time to serve God and people, and time for you to enjoy the knowledge and blessing of God. But this will not happen for you if you keep nitpicking at those who preach about faith and healing from the word of God. You are only condemning yourself and

hurting yourself. Instead of embracing sickness, take the way out. Take healing by faith in God's promises.

Just because something is happening -- something like a temptation or a sickness -- does not mean that God wants you to go along with it. You need to find out what God tells you to do about it. Temptation happens, but God wants you to overcome it. He makes a way of escape, so that there is always a way out. You do not have to succumb to sin. God wants you to hate it and to fight it. Sickness happens, but God wants you to overcome it by faith. The Bible says that church leaders are supposed to fight it together with you. Do they? It says that the prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If someone stumbles and commits sin, you would not push him further in that direction, would you? You would, I hope, push him toward the direction of holiness. So when someone has an imperfect experience of healing, why would you use that to convince him that there is no healing for him, and push him toward the direction of sickness or surrender? You should push him harder toward faith in the healing power of God.

Thus the objection fails to undermine Christians who have not attained a perfect experience or exercised a perfect ministry, but instead it exposes the evil intentions of those who raise the point against the doctrine of healing. It shows that they attempt to sidestep an explicit biblical teaching, and it shows that they lack the ability to make basic applications from the gospel.

17. Healing and God's Sovereignty

When Christians refer to God's sovereignty in the context of healing miracles, it is usually to explain why healing rarely or even never occurs -- for them. The doctrine is almost always used to teach, not in these words but in effect, that God almost never answers prayer, or that God almost never gives you what you ask. God's sovereignty is a doctrine of constant and ultimate victory -- endless, overwhelming, spectacular triumph -- but it is too often used as an explanation for defeat. Why not say that God answers prayer, that he gives us what we ask from him, and because he is sovereign, no one can stop him?

I have never met anyone who says, "God is sovereign," and follows that with, "Therefore, when I pray for the sick, over fifty percent receive healing," or over ninety percent, or a hundred percent. Christians either accept defeat and blame God's sovereignty, or they seize victory and reject God's sovereignty. Why? Why not seize victory because we affirm God's sovereignty? "People receive healing when I pray in faith, and sometimes they receive healing even when I have no faith, because God is sovereign." Why not say that?

Instead, when someone says, "God is sovereign," it is often followed with something depressing. Even though the Bible tells him what to expect, he insists that he never knows what would happen. Perhaps one percent would get healed, or no one would get healed. He would say, "God is sovereign, so someone might not receive healing even when I pray in faith." Somehow the doctrine of divine sovereignty means that God never does anything good for you, or he rarely does. The Bible, on the other hand, tells me that God will do more than what I can ask or think. The doctrine of divine sovereignty empowers me to expect more, not less.

18. Two Views on God's Word

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (John 15:7)

Pay attention to the phrase "my words remain in you." This is almost universally construed as a limiter on the rest of the verse, and with a sense of relief. God's word indeed places restrictions against sin. For example, it says that you must not lust after your neighbor's wife. But is that the first thing that comes to mind when you read the verse? Then your pastor slams you down with the phrase and you cry, "Oh, shucks! Foiled again!" If this is where you are spiritually, then you do need a limiter. You need all kinds of help.

My complaint is that it is also used as a limiter on the blessings and attainments that are available to us. Somehow the word of God holds you back from things that the same word of God promises. Welcome to the insane world of Christian scholarship. It is a total madhouse in here. If you are new, let me warn you, it is going to be a rough ride. Here is a maxim that can save you from decades of confusion: "God is not schizophrenic, but the scholars are stupid hypocrites." Keep this in mind. It will help you make sense of a lot of materials in your studies.

Is God someone who holds you back? Satan convinced Eve of this, and for centuries Christians have fallen for the same trick and made it their official doctrine. God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the whole earth, and without demanding hard labor from them, he had food growing out of the ground for them, all over the place. Only one tree was forbidden, and Satan seized upon that as due to some weird insecurity in God, as if God did not want his people to have too much. God said that they could practically take everything, and the first thing Satan said to them was, "Um, so God said you cannot have this?" It is the same trick. It is the same thing! And Christians are falling for it all over again. Sure, now it has a Christian flavor to make it go down easy, and a self-righteous kick for the religionists who wish to get a little tippy on it, but it is essentially the same trick.

Jesus did not say, "If you remember my restrictions, then you may select from the options that remain, and it will be given to you. Oh, wait, even then you might not get it, because God is sovereign. Enjoy." Thank you, Jesus? The usual interpretation implies that Jesus should have said it this way. Then we would not need the scholars to tell us that he meant to say this in the first place. But Jesus did not mean it this way. He intended to inspire faith, action, and victory. The next verse says, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit." God is glorified when we are effective, when we get results. This follows what Jesus said not long before this, that anyone who has faith in him would do the same works that he did, such as his miracles, and even greater works (John 14:12). In this same context, he added, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father" (John 14:13).

Jesus wanted to expand our thinking, not restrict our thinking. He said that his words should remain in us. What are some of his words? What are some of the things he said? He said that all things are possible to him who believes. He said that, if you have faith, you can speak to a mountain, and it would obey you. He said that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. He said that we will be his witnesses to all nations. God is not someone who holds me back. God is someone who has taught me things that I would have never thought of on my own. God is someone who has promised to do things for me and together with me that I never imagined, that I never thought possible, and that I never thought I would be permitted or qualified to participate in. I was trapped in a dark well, looking up through a tiny hole, but Jesus Christ dragged me up and placed me on the mountain of God, and displayed before me the whole panorama of divine promises and intentions. Then he told me to join in, and to be a co-worker with God. To me, this is what it means to have his words.

Pay attention to what someone draws out of a verse like this. You will discover whether he has conferred with the Almighty, or whether he is just someone struggling to tame a text according to his religious and cultural assumptions. Does he regard Jesus Christ as the Great Benefactor who has opened his eyes, or as some dude in the past who has become a liability to his religion, whose outrageous claims need to be fenced in, explained away, or at best acknowledged in a most patronizing fashion? God's word is not a limiting factor, but a liberating power, a faith building academy, and a mind-expanding experience. Jesus Christ is not a burden to me, but he is my life and my hope. He is not an embarrassment. He has said nothing too extreme, because no matter how awesome his statements, all of them are true.

19. The Edge of Glory

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. (Hebrews 4:1-2)

Abraham

God had called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt with "a mighty hand" (Exodus 3:19-20). The Lord would display his power with miracles, and he would fight against the Egyptians with signs and wonders. But to talk about Moses, we should first learn about Abraham. As I pointed out in several other places, the primary basis for miracles is existing revelation, even ancient revelation, and not new revelation. New revelation might be an additional reason to perform miracles, but it is a secondary and temporary reason. Ancient revelation is the primary and ongoing basis for miracles.

God initiated his rescue mission and performed miracles on the basis of his covenant with Abraham (Exodus 2:24). Since he did it on the basis of an existing revelation, he would have performed miracles even if he had no new revelation to add to the existing one. He would have performed the miracles to keep his word to Abraham, and not to authenticate new information. He sent Jesus to perform miracles and to make atonement also on the basis of his covenant with Abraham (Luke 1:73). Jesus said that he healed a woman on the basis that she was an heir of Abraham (Luke 13:16). In fact, he placed his entire ministry of miracles on this basis (Matthew 15:24, 26).

There were some individuals who stood outside of the covenant, but they received their miracles by their faith anyway (Matthew 15:27-28), because faith always has direct access to God. By faith, one can disregard his place in redemptive history and take from God whatever he wants. For faith, it is always the right time, because God accepts faith at any point in the unfolding of his plan. If we must speak in terms of the covenant, then the Bible also shows that the children of faith are in fact the true children of Abraham. They are the true heirs of the covenant (Galatians 3:7, 14). For this reason, Jesus said that those who appeared to be outsiders could turn out to be accepted, but those who appeared to be insiders could end up being cast out (Matthew 8:11-12).

The terms of the covenant have never changed. Those who have faith are the true heirs of Abraham, and God will still perform miracles to keep his word. Thus in the same context, the Bible says that God gives the Spirit and work miracles among those who have faith (Galatians 3:2, 5). This is directly associated with the ancient revelation to Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 14), and not to new revelation from Jesus or the apostles. The miracles did not happen just because there was new revelation, so the miracles would not stop just because the new revelation has been completed. The only way the miracles would cease is if God stops keeping his word to Abraham, that is, if God breaks his covenant. This is the blasphemy of cessationism.

Moreover, the fulfillment of this covenant does not apply only in a general or corporate sense to the children of Abraham, but it should be fulfilled to specific individuals, so that each person who has faith should expect to receive the blessings promised. Jesus healed an individual woman, stating that she had a right to it because she was a daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:16). Paul made a point of applying the covenant to individuals in order to address what appeared to be a lack of fulfillment on the corporate level (Romans 9). Christians would not think that God is keeping his word if people who have faith are generally being saved, that only some of them are saved, but not every individual who has faith is saved. They would insist that every individual who has faith is saved under the terms of the covenant, and if an individual is not saved, he does not have faith. Healing and various kinds of miracles are also included in the covenant under the same terms, so it is unacceptable to settle for a general fulfillment. There must be an emphasis on individuals.

Although God's purposes and benefits seem so closely related to Abraham, this is not because Abraham was someone great in himself. God sovereignly chose Abraham so that the divine promises could be installed on the earth. During the covenant ceremony, God put Abraham to sleep and walked between the pieces of animals by himself (Genesis 15:12, 17). Imagine a marriage ceremony in which you walk down the aisle by yourself, and you swear love, companionship, faithfulness, and protection to your partner, forever. There is no exchange of vows, but only a promise from you to the other person. Of course, if it is a genuine marriage, it would be a covenant and your partner would have to keep it. But in the ratification of the covenant, you assume the entire responsibility of the marriage on your own shoulders.

God made a covenant with Abraham, but performed the ceremony by himself. Abraham did not walk between the animals that were cut into pieces to symbolize the curse that would fall on the one who would break the covenant. God made the promises. God assumed the curse. Abraham was asleep. Was there even a curse on Abraham's end of the covenant? And by faith in Jesus Christ, we are joined to this covenant. Of course, God expected Abraham to keep the covenant (Genesis 17:9), and those who refuse to participate would be removed (Genesis 17:14). Still, the making of the covenant itself was one-sided. It was as if God was giving a covenant to Abraham more than making a covenant with him. The curse of the law came 430 years later under Moses (Galatians 3:17). It was an addition, not a substitute. After that, Jesus would absorb the full force of that curse. There is no curse in Christ (Galatians 3:13, Romans 8:1-2).

God even prepared his own sacrifice. Abraham was not required to sacrifice his son to God in order for God to sacrifice his Son for humanity. It was enough that Abraham was willing to do it, that he did not regard anything as more important than his covenant friend. God was the one who gave Isaac to him in the first place. Everything he had came from God, including his spiritual standing. God wanted Abraham to walk with him, but they did not split the bill. God paid for everything. So it was never really about Abraham, but about God and what he would do by Jesus Christ. Thus John the Baptist said that God could make children of Abraham out of rocks if he wanted (Matthew 3:9). No one ever made a sacrifice

that could appease God. He made a sacrifice by Jesus Christ to appease himself and for our benefit.

Moses

God appeared to Moses and sent him to confront Pharaoh. Although Pharaoh resisted, God was in control. It was time for God to astound all nations by wrecking the world's superpower -- without swords or soldiers, but with words and wonders only. He wanted to remind humanity that he was not like all the idols they worshiped. He was the only God, "majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders" (Exodus 15:11). This would also prepare the way for his people as they moved toward Canaan. Do Christians think that God wants something different today (Acts 5:5, 19:17)?

Pharaoh would have surrendered too easily. But he resisted, because over and over again, God hardened his heart even when he was about to give up (Exodus 8:15, 8:32, 9:12, 9:34, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:8; Romans 9:17). He explained to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the LORD" (Exodus 10:1-2). God pinned down Pharaoh and kept beating him in the face, and did not allow him to surrender. He had a list of plagues to run through, and he refused to be interrupted.

God did it all by himself. The people of Israel did not fight Egypt. They were passive. Even Moses did not have to take up the sword. He only relayed God's messages, and when God instructed him, he would point his staff over here, or over there, or stick it into the river, and so on. Moses did not fight. Israel did not fight. The significance will become more clear later.

The plagues culminated in the Passover. A standard formulation of the doctrine of election is that God "passes over" the reprobates to save the chosen ones. This is the opposite of what happened in Egypt. God did not pass over the Egyptians to save the Israelites, but he passed over the Israelites to kill the Egyptians. Paul wrote that God formed the saved and the damned "out of the same lump" (Romans 9:21). God decides to which group each person belongs. Both election and reprobation are active.

Then Israel left Egypt. They were liberated from slavery. They were free men and women. They followed Moses, who eventually had seventy elders to assist him (Numbers 11:16-17). At this point, they entered survival mode. God took care of their basic needs. He gave them more than enough, but not an overflowing abundance. It was waiting for them on the other side of Jordan.

Israel

From the Desert of Paran, Moses sent out men to explore the land of Canaan (Numbers 13). It was a reconnaissance mission in the land they were supposed to seize from existing inhabitants. From each tribe was sent one of its leaders. They returned after forty days to offer their report.

They announced, "It does flow with milk and honey!" It was excellent real estate. However, they added, the people there were very strong, and the cities were fortified. Caleb saw what was happening, and so he silenced the people and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." But the other leaders retorted, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." They judged the situation according to how things looked to them and how they looked to others. They walked by sight. The Bible says that they spread "a bad report" among the Israelites. They were afraid and did not want to invade the land.

The people were convinced by the bad report, and they rebelled against Moses (Numbers 14). They said that God brought them out there only to let them die by the sword, and that they would have been better off if they had stayed in Egypt. Joshua and Caleb made another appeal to the people: "Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them." The people hardened their hearts in unbelief, and they talked about stoning them.

Here were the two sides. They had the same divine promises, and faced the same circumstances. One side walked by sight and gave a bad report. Even though God promised the land to them, because they saw the strong warriors and fortified cities, they said, "No, we cannot take it." The other side walked by faith and gave a good report. Since God promised the land to them, even though they saw the same strong warriors and fortified cities, they said, "Yes, we can take it." Faith always has a good report, because faith does not walk by sight. Faith always speaks and behaves according to the promises of God, and from the viewpoint of power and victory. Faith always has a shout of triumph.

Then God appeared and announced his verdict: "In this desert your bodies will fall -- every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun." God left them to rot in the desert. He made them wander around for forty years until that whole generation died -- except Caleb and Joshua. This is why we must stress individual spirituality. The faith of one in a million will not only allow that one man to enjoy God's blessings in a world of unbelief, but even if the current generation is lost, this faith would translate into guidance for the next generation. In the other ten leaders, they had corporate spirituality, and it ruined the whole nation for forty years. Corporate spirituality is worse than useless if the people are spreading "bad report" all over the place. What good is it, if people come together, only so that God would leave them to die in their unbelief? Corporate spirituality serves its intended purpose only if it combines individuals who are driven by an indomitable faith.

The people panicked and said that they would go take the land. It was a worldly sorrow that led to death (2 Corinthians 7:10). Moses warned that God no longer supported them, but they went anyway. After rejecting the promises of God, they tried to take the same benefits by their own strength, and they were defeated (Numbers 14:39-45). This is a picture of the church. Christians have repudiated the promises of God and the power of the Spirit that would have given them victory. When their unbelief erodes their lives and societies, they try to gain the same benefits by their own strength. They resort to their politics, economics, and all kinds of efforts and schemes. And they get slaughtered. They call it the cultural mandate, but it is their substitute for the Great Commission, the supernatural program that they have rejected (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:46, John 14:12-14, Acts 1:8).

Joshua

We should not complain that it has taken us so long to reach Jordan. Joshua had to wait forty years. By now, Joshua had become the leader of Israel, and Caleb was one of the generals.

The nature of Joshua's mandate was different from the one Moses received. It was a second stage of Israel's experience distinct from and subsequent to their liberation from slavery. It was intended to be taken soon after their exodus, but it was delayed because of their unbelief. At the time of liberation, God did all the fighting. The people were passive. At this time of possession, they would fight to seize what God had promised. Now there would be full participation from the people. They would be God's fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9). Their victory was guaranteed, but they would have to fight. The land already belonged to them, but they would have to take it.

The first stage was liberation from their masters in Egypt. The second stage was eviction of their enemies from Canaan. They would not be escaping, but they would be attacking. Under Joshua's leadership, the people would have to fight. It was not to liberate their friends, but to exterminate their enemies. They would not be fighting for survival, but for prosperity. In fact, this was the reason they were taken out of Egypt in the first place (Exodus 3:8). Freedom was never the final end. They would take possession of God's promises, of the "milk and honey."

The Christian experience mirrors Israel's history. If crossing the Red Sea was like baptism into Christ for freedom (1 Corinthians 10:2), then the distinct and subsequent experience of crossing the Jordan could be taken as baptism with the Holy Spirit for power (Acts 8:14-16, 19:1-2). Centuries later, John the Baptist announced at the Jordan, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 3:11, Acts 1:8). This is no longer about salvation in terms of the forgiveness of sin. The blood of the lamb was applied back in Egypt. And it is no longer about maintaining a self-sufficient life, or the sanctification of the individual. They lived in this sufficient condition for forty years in the wilderness. Salvation in this sense was never intended as the final end.

Thus in Peter's first recorded sermon, or the first apostolic manifesto, he made believing in Christ itself as only a necessary step to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). And to him the Holy Spirit referred to miraculous and prophetic powers for full participation from God's people: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:16-18, Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8). All of God's people would have the Spirit (Numbers 11:29). All of God's people would have the power to speak and the power to act. This is not an ethical power, but a missional power.

Jesus

The gospel that was preached by Jesus and the apostles was the same gospel that was preached to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and Israel (Galatians 3:8, Hebrews 4:2, Luke 24:27, 1 Peter 1:10-12). And we have received the same gospel.

First, Jesus announced the message with mighty signs and wonders (Acts 2:22), as when Moses confronted Pharaoh. Then, he poured out his blood as our true Passover, and sacrificed himself to save his people (1 Corinthians 5:7). He said that those who would not believe were already condemned (John 3:18). Thus God passes over only those who have applied the blood, as in the time of Moses. And as in the Exodus, God was the only one who worked. His people were passive, and contributed nothing to save themselves. Jesus fought for them, and they did not have to fight. After this, the stage of liberation was complete. His people were no longer slaves, but free men and women.

Nevertheless, before he returned to the Father, Jesus said that there would be another stage in the Christian experience. When Moses departed, Joshua became the leader. Likewise, when Jesus ascended, he would send "another Comforter" to lead his people (John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). He said that when the Spirit of God arrived, they would receive power, and they would become his witnesses to all nations (Acts 1:8). He said that his people would be full of the Spirit of God to receive insight and power (John 14:16-17, 16:13-15, Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8). He said that anyone who would have faith in him could perform the same works that he did, and even greater works (John 14:12). Thus this next stage would be the stage of mission, the stage of possession of God's promises, the stage of eviction of our enemies (Matthew 28:18-20). As in the time of Joshua, it would be a time of conquest. There would be full participation from God's people (Acts 2:17-18, 1 Corinthians 12:14-25, 14:26).

Paul described the Christian life as a time of warfare (2 Corinthians 10:4). We are not fighting to attain salvation. Christ has liberated us from Egypt. We are free men and women. We are no longer slaves to sin. And God's wrath has passed over us a long time ago. Glory to God! We fight, but we fight as free men and women today. It is not a fight of liberation. Christ fought and achieved that for us all by himself. This is a fight of eviction, a fight to expel the enemy and seize the land, to possess what God has promised us. And these are promises that apply after we have been liberated from sin.

Paul wrote that we do not war as the world does, but we employ weapons with divine power to demolish strongholds. Certainly, we will never use violence to spread the gospel. We

wish to capture the hearts of men for Christ, and violence can only coerce the flesh, but it cannot change the heart. We do not war as the world does. We will use the spiritual weapons of prayer and persuasion, of words and wonders. This is to destroy the strongholds of Satan and to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts of men (Acts 4:29-31, 8:5-8, 19:17-20).

Today

The Letter to the Hebrews was written to Christians, or those who called themselves Christians. The writer does not call the people to come out of Egypt. Supposedly, they have done that some time ago (Hebrews 5:12). He is calling them to press forward in faith.

He wants to apply the Joshua scenario to Christians. In order to do that, he refers to Psalm 95, where the Holy Spirit says, "Today...do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." The Psalm alludes to several incidents, but they culminate in the Paran uprising, because the writer says he has in mind those whom God swore would never enter into his rest (Hebrews 3:18), which happened when the people believed the bad report from their leaders (Numbers 14:28-30). Then, he indicates that this period when he exhorts us to "encourage one another daily" is the period called "Today" (Hebrews 3:13). Therefore, the Paran incident applies to Christians, and to Christians in this life. Here it is not used to call people to believe in Jesus, or to refer to heaven, but it is talking about a life of promise that Christians enter into in this life, after conversion and before heaven.

What lessons can we derive from Paran?

First, Paran reminds us that there are two kinds of suffering. There is a kind of suffering that comes from having faith. Jesus said that the world hates Christians, because it first hated him. God has chosen us out of the world, and those who hate God will also hate those who belong to him. So they will want to give believers a hard time (John 15:18-19).

The Bible has some good things to say about those who face this kind of suffering with faith and gladness. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12). Likewise, Peter wrote, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Peter 4:14). What a marvelous thing it is to have the Spirit of glory rest on you! There must be nothing like it. Thus when we remind Christians about the precious promises that we possess in Jesus Christ, we do not deny that there is a legitimate type of suffering that they might face. This kind of suffering comes not because they have done something wrong, but because they have done something right.

What we condemn is the dishonest theology that assigns too many instances of suffering to this category. This is the kind of suffering that most people would like to think they are experiencing. It makes them feel better about themselves and excuses their inaction and defeat. However, for people in many parts of the world, this kind of suffering is rather rare,

and often very mild when it occurs. Even when it happens, we must not think that we are helpless: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). When someone faces this kind of suffering, he must respond with faith and power, not self-pity.

Then there is the kind of suffering that comes from lacking faith. Although Christians often wish to think that they suffer for their faith, many of them suffer only because they have no faith. Those who preach a gospel of suffering almost always glorify the kind of suffering that comes from having no faith and taking no action. They have in mind the ordinary circumstances of life that God teaches us to overcome by faith. The people of Israel did not suffer in the wilderness because they had faith. They experienced suffering, and prolonged their suffering, because they had no faith in the promise of God and did not fight for the blessing that belonged to them. Only Joshua and Caleb had faith, and they were the only two in that generation who entered the land God promised them.

The Israelites suffered not because of persecution, because they did not even face their enemies. They never went in to take the land. The problems that they encountered came from their environment and their own hearts, just like the problems that most Christians face today. As much as the world hates to "blame the victim," God always blames the victim if the man is a victim of his own unbelief. The person suffers not because there is no promise for his deliverance, and not because the promise is not for this life. There are so many promises that it seems no one knows them all, and these promises are for "Today." And today means today – this life, right now (Hebrews 3:13).

When Christians assign spiritual value to suffering that is unnecessary and worthless, they insult the Christians who are suffering from genuine persecution. Their theology is a self-righteous recasting of the narrative of their lives, making themselves into long-suffering heroes instead of unbelieving losers. We could have compassion on people with all kinds of suffering, but compassion toward most kinds of suffering often translates into harsh rebuke of their doubts and excuses, and the appropriate teaching for them to overcome the situation. Indulging in other people's self-righteous dejection is unproductive, and makes one complicit in their rebellion.

The self-serving exploitation of the doctrine of divine sovereignty has become the bane of Christian theology. This is when Christians wander around the wilderness assigning every problem they face to the sovereignty of God. Those who do this are not qualified to handle the doctrine, and most Christians who are obsessed with the doctrine abuse it like this constantly. Theologians usually inflict more damage than edification when they teach it. The sovereignty of God does not mean the capriciousness of God. Capriciousness is childish, dishonest, unpredictable. God is not these things. His sovereignty is consistent with his faithfulness, compassion, and other attributes. He keeps his promises, not because we force him to, but because he always decides to. When he keeps his word, he is being true to himself. It is in his own nature. This is divine sovereignty.

Faith matters. The mouth speaks what flows out of the heart (Matthew 12:34). If a person keeps talking about his struggles, his sicknesses, his sufferings, if he insists that he suffers

because of the will of God, who is afflicting him with this or that, and if he keeps refusing to receive deliverance by faith in the divine promises, or even denying that these promises belong to sound doctrine, then he will have what he says. "As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say. You will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you" (Numbers 14:28, 34).

For this reason, doctrines of unbelief such as the false application of divine sovereignty and the cessation of miracles and powers correspond to the experience of those who affirm them. Just as they have rejected God, God has rejected them. God will make them wander around the wilderness of life until all of them rot and die in their unbelief. They say this is what life is like in God? They say there are no miracles, healing, prosperity, deliverance and victory? God will make sure they never get any of it. Their punishment is that their doctrine will become true -- for them. This is the least that they deserve for stepping on the blood of Christ over and over again.

Second, Paran unmasks the people who have been holding back the church. They are the leaders who spread unbelief and the people who believe them. They are people who preach a bad report, a theology of unbelief, of tradition and ceremony, and of the cessation of miracles, healing, prophecy, and the power of faith. As Stephen said, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51).

Most Christian theologians, preachers, and believers are like the people at Paran. They do not experience miracles and blessings not because God does not give miracles and blessings, but because they say that God does not give these to them, and God is only giving them what they say. Out of spite? Exactly. He said, "Since you say that I am doing all these things to you, now you will really see what it is like to have me against you" (Numbers 14:34). They are going through the motions as worshipers, flaunting their piety and humility, even teaching others how to live like them, when all this time God is letting them rot and die out of spite for the things that they have said about him. What a miserable life.

This is why I say that there is no future in a tradition or heritage that embraces unbelief. It might continue to exist, but everything about it has become vanity. The Paran generation lived for another forty years, but they were walking corpses. For this reason, Christians should cut themselves off from a tradition or heritage like this. Even then, they might not be entirely unaffected. God told the people that they would wander for forty years, and their children would be delayed from entering the land because of them. He said, "They will suffer for your unfaithfulness" (Numbers 14:33). Joshua and Caleb were the only ones from the older generation allowed to enter the land, and even they were delayed by this. The people were held back as a group because of the unbelief of the leaders and those who followed them.

Faith can still win in a situation like this. Recall an earlier comment on individual spirituality. God's promises have two dimensions -- individual and corporate. And God's promises have two applications -- personal and missional.

Let us take healing as an example. Why do I face skepticism even among Christians when I preach that God will grant healing to those who have faith? It is because other people have been spreading unbelief. This places against the ministry a resistance that never should have existed. Without this, I could convey the same message with less effort and still obtain a better reception. The audience also suffers. If they have not been indoctrinated with unbelief, they would receive the basics immediately, and we could move on to discuss the matter on a deeper level or to cover additional topics. I can overcome unbelief in people, and have done it, but it takes more work, an extra effort that should not be necessary. Now imagine this situation not only with healing, but with everything the Bible teaches -- everything. Thus unbelief in the population might impede corporate and missional progress.

On the other hand, one can remain immune to the effects of corporate unbelief on his own individual progress and personal welfare. Using the same example, even if Christians in general are full of unbelief when it comes to healing, anyone who has faith can still receive from God directly. We see this in Joshua and Caleb. Although they were held back for forty years in the corporate and missional sense because of other people's unbelief, they still benefited from their faith on the individual and personal level. They outlived everyone else in their generation. More than that, they remained so strong that they were able to lead in both the planning and fighting aspects of the military campaigns. It was a testimony to the healing and renewing power of God in the mind and body (Joshua 1:6, 14:10-11). Even if other people have no faith, I can still receive from God by faith. Keep fighting for what belongs to you. Do not allow corporate disobedience to hold you back from your individual development. Refuse the kind of suffering that comes from a lack of faith. Refuse to take it. Glorify God by entering into his promises.

Who are those that have been holding back the church? Liberals? Fanatics? Anti-intellectuals? They may have done some damage, but the Christian critics of faith are far worse. They are those who want to "stone" people like Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:10). They have no faith to take what God has promised, and they attack those who speak in faith and spread a good report. The worst culprits are the theologians, preachers, and apologists of unbelief, and the people who follow them. God's verdict is that he will make them live what they say. He will leave them to rot and die.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Disown the messengers of unbelief. Cut them off! Cut them out of your life before God cuts you off along with them, to let you rot and die in your own cesspool of unbelief, false piety, and religious hypocrisy. "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:11). They offered a negative report, and God saw to it that they experienced what they said. Joshua and Caleb offered a positive report, a report of faith, and God saw to it that they also experienced what they said. Thus we can have success in life and work even when no one else does, if we will only have faith in God.