

STAY SHARP:
***“MAKE DISCIPLES . . . ALWAYS
BEARING WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL”***

**EFCA Allegheny District
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INTRODUCTION



An Expression of the spirit of the Age

1. Expressive Individualism/Who Am I? (theological anthropology), cf. Augustine, *Confessions*
2. Immanent Frame/Despair Doomscrolling, catastrophizing, apocalypticism
3. Apathy
4. Dopamine
5. Happy, cf. the lyrics below.
6. Victim
7. Dechurching and Nones
8. Syncretism or hobby-horse-ism
9. Natural law
10. Christianity is Negative

THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS



[The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus](#) (late 2nd century apology for the Christians and the Christian faith [ca. 130-200] written by a disciple [mathetes] to Diognetus, a tutor of the emperor Marcus Aurelius):

Chapter V - The Manners of the Christians

- ▶ For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.

- ▶ They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives.

- ▶ They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

Chapter VI – The Relation of the Christians to the World.

- ▶ To sum up all in one word--what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded by the visible body, and Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it, though itself suffering no injury, because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures; the world also hates the Christians, though in nowise injured, because they abjure pleasures.

- ▶ The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and [loves also] the members; Christians likewise love those that hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet preserves that very body; and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle; and Christians dwell as sojourners in corruptible [bodies], looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens. The soul, when but ill-provided with food and drink, becomes better; in like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Penguin Classics, p. 4).

- ▶ “*Order*. Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next, make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is. Worthy of reverence because it really understands human nature. Attractive because it promises true good.”
- ▶ **True**: “not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect”
- ▶ **Beautiful**: “make it attractive . . . and then show that it is. Worthy of reverence”
- ▶ **Good**: “attractive because it promises true good”

EFCA STATEMENT OF FAITH

Our Convictions Relate to the *Evangel*, the Gospel



Evangelical Convictions: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America, “Introduction,” pp. 20-21.

- ▶ Our goal in formulating this Statement was to set forth “sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God,” which he has now entrusted to us (1 Tim. 1:10-113). We believe that our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel.
- ▶ What is the gospel? The Apostle Paul describes this good news concisely as the declaration that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This certainly is the heart of the message, but when we proclaim this message, we say much more than this. In a sense, the ten articles of our Statement unpack this simple message of good news by setting forth our central theological convictions in a way that follows the logic of the gospel itself.

- ▶ First, we recognize this as God's gospel, inasmuch as it comes from God and not from any human source. This message begins with God's eternal purpose to redeem a people for himself, a purpose flowing from his own nature.
- ▶ Second, this gospel is "according to the Scriptures," as Paul declares, and it comes to us authoritatively through God's Word in the Bible.
- ▶ Third, because it deals with our sin, God's gospel alone can address our deepest need.

- ▶ In Articles four through six we contend that this gospel is revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ, is accomplished through the work of Christ and becomes effective in and for us through the application of Christ's work by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Seventh, in our union with Christ by the Spirit we are joined to a new community of fellow believers in the body of Christ, the church.
- ▶ As asserted in Article 8, the new life which the gospel imparts to us compels us to live in a new way. We are to love God and our neighbor and bear witness to the gospel in word and deed.

- ▶ This is our calling until God's saving purpose is fulfilled in the glorious return of Christ, until which time we give ourselves to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission and (Article 9).
- ▶ Finally, in Article 10, we affirm that this coming of Christ will bring with it not only the judgment of the world but also our bodily resurrection and the renewal of all things in the new heaven and the new earth. This is God's gospel, and this good news requires a response. We are to turn to God in repentance and faith, receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

- ▶ Thus, the various topics covered in our Statement—God, the Bible, the Human Condition, the Person of Christ, the Work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Christian Life, the Return of Christ, and the Response and Eternal Destiny—reflect this logical unfolding of the gospel.
- ▶ Our Statement of Faith is an expanded statement of the gospel. We do not claim that, to be saved, a person must understand and believe all that this Statement contains, but we do believe that it contains the truth that makes our salvation possible and the truth that tells us what our salvation means.
- ▶ We contend that such a connection to God's saving work in the gospel ought to be the primary means of determining the core doctrines of our faith.

- ▶ **Matthew 28:16-20:** “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- ▶ **Romans 8:29:** “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”
- ▶ **2 Corinthians 3:18:** “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”
- ▶ **2 Corinthians 4:5-6:** “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”
- ▶ **2 Corinthians 5:14-17:** “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

- ▶ **Galatians 4:19:** “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”
- ▶ **Colossians 2:6-10:** “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

The Great . . . (μέγα [*mega*] not MAGA)

1. The Great Creation (Gen. 1:1)
2. The Great Condemnation (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23; 5:12-21; 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:22)
3. The Great Covenant (Gen. 2; 12; 15; 2 Sam. 7; 2 Cor. 1:20)
4. The Great Christ (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 9:6-7; 52:13-53:12; Dan. 7:14; Matt. 1:21-23; Acts 2:36; Rev. 19:16)
5. The Great Conversion (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36; Jn. 3:3, 5; 2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 3:1-8)
6. The Great Conviction/Commitment (Matt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34-38; Lk. 9:23-26; 1 Thess. 1:5)
7. The Great Community (Acts 2:1-13; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 7:9-14)
8. The Great Commandment (Matt:22-37-39; Mk. 12:30-31; Lk. 10:27)
9. The Great Compassion (Matt. 9:36; Lk. 19:10; Heb. 10:34)
10. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20; Lk. 24:46-48; Jn. 20:19-23; Acts 1:4-8)
11. The Great Commendation (Matt. 5:3-12; 24:46; 25:21-23; Lk. 12:37; 19:17; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Rev. 22:14)
12. The Great Consummation (Rev. 21-22)

EFCA STATEMENT OF FAITH:
ARTICLE 8: CHRISTIAN LIVING



- ▶ We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

“In obedience to Christ’s commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.”

1. Obedience
2. Christ’s Commission
3. Make Disciples
4. All People
5. Bearing Witness
6. Gospel
7. Word and Deed

1. God's justifying grace must not be separated from his sanctifying power and purpose.
2. God commands us to love him supremely.
3. God commands us to love others sacrificially . . .

“The righteous shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17).

4. . . . and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed.
5. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil.

III. THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE

- ▶ The gospel gives us solid grounds for great joy in this life, but the Apostle Paul, who himself urges us to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4), often wrote of the hardships he endured (see esp. 2 Cor. 11:23-29). In describing one experience he lamented, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself” (2 Cor. 1:8). We can never forget that we are called to follow in the footsteps of a crucified Messiah. As Paul’s experience illustrates, the Christian life involves struggle and conflict. Jesus promised no less. He told his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). Paul urges his young protégé Timothy to “fight the battle well” (1 Tim. 1:18) and to “Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3; cf. also Phil. 1:29-30). Being a follower of Jesus means that we will be engaged in a struggle, a fight, a battle.

A. Our Duty: To Combat the Spiritual Forces of Evil

- ▶ Our responsibility is clear: we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil in the world. The reality of this spiritual opposition, centered in a personal devil, is assumed throughout the Scriptures. Peter urges us, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). . . . Though Satan’s power is great, as followers of Jesus we must oppose him and all that he stands for.

B. Our Means

- ▶ To fight this battle we must be properly armed. “Put on the full armor of God,” Paul writes, “so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph. 6:11). Since this is a spiritual battle, we must use spiritual means— “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world” (2 Cor. 10:4). Our Statement lists three of the most powerful resources the Lord has put at our disposal.
 1. God’s Word
 2. The Spirit’s Power
 3. Fervent Prayer in Christ’s Name
 4. We Do Not Fight Alone

C. Our Confidence: In Jesus Christ Our Victory Is Assured

- ▶ Although the spiritual battle in which we are engaged is demanding, we should never become discouraged. The gospel declares that our victory is assured, for Jesus has won the decisive battle through his sacrificial death and his glorious resurrection. Satan, the accuser, can accuse us no longer, for “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). God has “disarmed the powers and authorities” and has “made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15). Though not totally destroyed, the devil is a defeated enemy, for Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. “In this world you will have trouble,” Jesus said. “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). As Revelation reminds us, though Satan accuses believers day and night, we overcome by holding fast to the saving blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:10-11). We have this assurance: greater is he who is in us, than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

IV. THE GREAT COMMISSION: WE ARE TO MAKE DISCIPLES

- ▶ As we fight *against* the spiritual forces of evil, we are also contending *for* the cause of Christ and the kingdom of God. As followers of Christ we have been commissioned to engage the world with the gospel and to make disciples of Jesus Christ among all people.
- ▶ Our marching orders as believers have come from the Lord Jesus himself. His final words to his disciples as recorded in Matthew's Gospel make this clear: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). Luke and John record their own versions of this Great Commission (cf. Lk. 24:45-48; Acts 1:8; Jn. 20:21. The longer ending of Mark (which is probably a later addition) also includes this commission (Mk. 16:15).) We have been given an assignment of eternal significance, and we stand under a divine command—we are to go and make disciples.

A. What Is a Disciple?

- ▶ Our English word “disciple” commonly translates the Greek word *mathêtês* (this term occurs in the New Testament only in the Gospels and Acts. The noun occurs 246 times (and the verb form occurs four times—Matt. 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21).), which comes from a verb which means “to learn, or to be instructed.” A disciple, then, is a pupil or student. Jesus uses the word in this sense when he says, “The student [*mathêtês*] is not above the teacher” (Matt. 10:24). A disciple of Jesus is one who learns from him. This student/teacher model, however, can be deceptive if we think of it simply in our modern Western sense, for it involves more than simply the passing on of information. In the Jewish world in which Jesus taught, a person became a disciple by attaching himself to a teacher in a relationship of loyalty and submission, and what was learned was more than mere facts or skills, but a way of life. Again, Jesus refers to this when, after saying that “The student [that is, disciple] is not above the teacher,” he continues, “It is enough for students [disciples] to be like their teachers” (Matt. 10:25).

- ▶ We might use the word “apprentice” to capture this idea. An apprentice attaches himself to a master craftsman. He carefully observes the craftsman as he demonstrates his skill, and he listens to his instruction and does what he says under the craftsman’s watchful eye so that, over time, the apprentice can become like him. So a disciple of Jesus is a follower of Jesus who humbly learns from Jesus so that he may become like Jesus in a process that takes a lifetime and will only be brought to completion when we are glorified with Christ.
- ▶ A disciple is not a special kind of Christian. One does not become a Christian and then later become a disciple. “Disciple” is the term used in the Bible for anyone who is a Christian (cf. Acts 6:1-2,7; 9:1,19; 11:26). To become a Christian is to attach oneself to Jesus and to become a lifelong learner, an apprentice of Jesus Christ—with the goal of becoming more like him. All Christians are called to be disciples, and all are commissioned to make disciples.

1. We are to Make Disciples Among All People.

2. We are to Make Disciples by Bearing Witness to the Gospel in Word and Deed.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ “[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Tim. 1:9). The same grace of God that takes away our sin also gives us new life—a life that reflects a new desire to love God and love our neighbor, to enter into the spiritual battle and to obey Christ’s Great Commission. God’s gospel, by its very nature, compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.

- ▶ What is a disciple? How do we “make” them?
- ▶ How can we always bear witness to the gospel in word and deed, especially when there are so many headwinds that threaten to divert us? (The headwinds we have in mind are politics in an election cycle, worldly philosophies that attract and confuse, and distorting trends arising from within our midst.)
- ▶ How do we always stay centered on the gospel when so many things threaten to knock us off course?

MAKE DISCIPLES . . . ALWAYS BEARING WITNESS

Literary Structure of Acts, Witnesses, the Propagation of the Gospel, and the Expansion of the Church Among All People



- ▶ **Acts 1:8:** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
- ▶ **Acts 6:7:** “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”
- ▶ **Acts 9:31:** “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”

- ▶ **Acts 12:24:** “But the word of God increased and multiplied.”
- ▶ **Acts 16:5:** “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.”
- ▶ **Acts 28:23-24, 28, 30-31:** “When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. . . Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

- ▶ **Acts 2:36-41 (Jews):** “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

- ▶ **Acts 8:14-17, 25 (Samaritans):** “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. . . Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.”

- ▶ **Acts 10:44-48 (Gentiles):** “While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.”

WITNESS, WITNESSING, TESTIMONY



Witness, Witnessing (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed. (2017), 941-942).

- ▶ A “witness” (*martys*) is “one who testifies” (*martyrein*) by act or word a “testimony” (*martyrion*) to the truth. This act of testifying is called a “testimony” (*martyria*). In ancient days, as at present, this was a legal term designating testimony given for or against one on trial before a court of law. In Christian usage the term came to refer to the testimony given by Christian witnesses regarding Christ and his saving power. Because such testimony often means arrest and scourging (Matt. 10:18; Mark 13:9, exile (Rev. 1:9), or death (Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13; 17:6), the Greek was transliterated to from the English *martyr*, meaning one who suffers or dies rather than give up one’s faith.
- ▶ Of theological significance, first, are testimonies meant to establish the incarnation and truth of Christianity . . .

- ▶ The pattern of Christian missionary and evangelistic activity is set in the NT. Several principles emerge.
 1. Witnessing is the universal obligation of all Christians (Luk 24:48; Acts 1:8). . . .
 2. The testimony to be given centered on the facts and meaning of Jesus' earthly ministry (Acts 10:39-42) and saving power (Acts 10:43). . . The primary message was this Christian "tradition" (paradosis; 1 Cor. 15:1-3).
 3. Christian witnesses were to be faithful without regard to personal safety or comfort (Matt. 10:28).
 4. Christian testimony was attended by the Holy Spirit's ministry and the manifestation of God's presence and power (Heb. 2;3-4).

Testimony/Witness (*New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2000), 811-812).

- ▶ Testimony to God's unfolding purpose to bless the nations is carried forward by John the Baptist, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the apostles (see Mission) and the church. The church's mission consists of worldwide witness to God's decisive act in Jesus; this witness is thus foundational for New Testament thought.
- ▶ There is continuity and progression between Israel's testimony to the God of Israel as revealed in the OT and the church's testimony to the God of Israel as revealed in Jesus: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1-2)... Words of testimony are no less a demonstration of God's activity than are miraculous deeds (1 Cor. 2:1-5; cf. Mark 13:9-11).
- ▶ Testimony is closely related to confession in the NT, where a confession is a public proclamation of one's beliefs about, and relationship with, the person of Jesus Christ.

- ▶ A defining characteristic of witnesses is the willingness to confess Jesus Christ in the face of disbelief, opposition, persecution and even martyrdom. The exemplar for martyrdom is Jesus himself, the “faithful witness” depicted as the slain lamb (Rev. 1:5; 5:6). . . In the NT, therefore, a martyr is someone who dies not as an advocate for a cause, but as a witness for Jesus Christ. Paul recalls how the blood of God’s witness (*martys*) Stephen was shed (Acts 22:20). Antipas of Pergamum was executed on account of his testimony to Jesus, and the call to church members to face martyrdom is a crucial theme of Revelation (2:13; cf. 6:9; 11:7; 12:11; 20:4).
- ▶ “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you instead of God. For we cannot keep from proclaiming what we have heard and seen” (Acts 4:19-20, author’s translation). From this it follows that testifying to the work of God in Jesus Christ is not an option but an obligation for his disciples.
- ▶ The task of bearing urgent witness passes from the NT church to succeeding generations of disciples, some of whom have performed well, and some badly. But even where human witness falters, divine witness does not: “If we are faithless, [Jesus] remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). The risen Jesus remains the faithful and true witness; the Holy Spirit abides as a witness through, and to, every generation of believers; the inspired Scripture stands as a written testimony to God’s redemptive activity. The church is indeed endowed with a divine testimony that employs but surpasses human testimony (1 John 5:9).

DOUBLE LISTENING, DOUBLE REFUSAL, DOUBLE TASK



John Stott, *The Gospel: God's Word for Today* (IVP, 1991, rev. ed., 2019).

- ▶ I believe we are called to the difficult and even painful task of “double listening.” We are to listen carefully (although, of course, with differing degrees of respect) both to the ancient Word and to the modern world, in order to relate the one to the other with a combination of faithfulness and sensitivity.
- ▶ What is needed is a Christian mind that is “shaped by the truths of historic, biblical Christianity and also fully immersed in the realities of the contemporary world.”

Double Refusal

- ▶ Trevin Wax [summarizes](#), “First, we refuse to escape from the world. We must not become so absorbed in our Bible study that the Word never comes into contact with the world. Second, we refuse to conform to the world. We must not become so enamored with contemporary events, trends, or theories that we fail to judge the world by the Word (or, worse, start to judge the Word by the world’s standards). This double refusal means refusing the path of escapist retreat and the path of syncretistic conformity.”

Double Listening

- ▶ We need to listen to the Word of God with expectancy and humility, ready for God perhaps to confront us with a word that may be disturbing and uninvited. And we must also listen to the world around us.
- ▶ We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolved not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathize with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it.

Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of Love*, in [*A Christian View of the Church: The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer, vol. 4*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 193-94

- ▶ The Christian really has a double task.
- ▶ He has to practice both God's holiness and God's love. The Christian is to exhibit that God exists as the infinite-personal God; and then he is to exhibit simultaneously God's character of holiness and love.
- ▶ Not His holiness without His love: this is only harshness.
- ▶ Not His love without His holiness: that is only compromise.
- ▶ Anything that an individual Christian or Christian group does that fails to show the simultaneous balance of the holiness of God and the love of God presents to a watching world not a demonstration of the God who exists but a caricature of the God who exists.

THE BIBLE'S STORY

Redemptive History



- ▶ **Order of salvation (*ordo salutis*):** “the acts of God and the response of the individual in salvation. God calls us, produces regeneration in us, so that we respond with repentance, faith, and obedience. . . The *ordo salutis* is not concerned with a temporal sequence of events, but with a logical order.”
- ▶ **History of Salvation (*historia salutis*):** “the historical events, in space and time, through which God rescues his people.”
- ▶ **Transformation in Salvation (*transformatio salutis*):** the experiential reality of being in Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit, who not only applies the finished work of Christ in our lives, by faith, but he also conforms us into the likeness of the Son.

The storyline of the Bible, God's unfolding plan of redemption, or the salvation historical flow, can be summarized in the following way:

- ▶ **Creation:** Genesis 1:26-28
- ▶ **Fall:** Genesis 2:16-17; Genesis 3
- ▶ **Redemption:** Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
- ▶ **Transformation:** Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18
- ▶ **Consummation/Renewal (Glorification):** Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 21:5

WORLDVIEW

James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*,
6th ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020).



A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being (p. 6).

Eight Basic Questions: If a worldview can be expressed in propositions, what might they be? Essentially, they are our basic, rock-bottom answers to the following questions (pp. 8-10):

1. *What is prime reality – the really real?* To this we might answer: God, or the gods, or the material cosmos. Our answer here is the most fundamental. It sets the boundaries for the answers that can consistently be given to the other six questions.
2. *What is the nature of external reality (that is, the world around us)?* Here our answers point to whether we see the world as created or autonomous, as chaotic or orderly, as matter or spirit; or whether we emphasize our subjective, personal relationship to the world or its objectivity apart from us.
3. *What is a human being?* To this we might answer: a highly complex machine, a sleeping god, a person made in the image of God, a naked ape.
4. *What happens to a person at death?* Here we might reply: personal extinction, or transformation to a higher state, or reincarnation, or departure to a shadowy existence on “the other side.”

5. *Why is it possible to know anything at all?* Sample answers include the idea that we are made in the image of an all-knowing God, or that consciousness and rationality developed under the contingencies of survival in a long process of evolution.
6. *How do we know what is right and wrong?* Again, perhaps we are made in the image of God whose character is good, or right and wrong are determined by human choice alone or what feels good, or the notion simply developed under an impetus toward cultural or physical survival.
7. *What is the meaning of human history?* To this we might answer: to realize the purposes of God or the gods, to make a paradise on earth, to prepare a people for a life in community with a loving and holy God, and so forth.

Earlier editions of this book listed only seven questions, but these do not adequately encompass the notion of a worldview as a *commitment* or a *matter of the heart*. So I am adding the following question to flesh out the personal implications of the rather intellectual and abstract character of the first seven questions.

8. *What personal, life-orientating core commitments are consistent with this worldview?* Within any given worldview, core commitments may vary widely. For example, Christians might say to fulfill the will of God, or to seek first the kingdom of God, or to obey God and enjoy him forever, or to be devoted to knowing God or loving God. Each will lead to a somewhat different specific grasp of the Christian worldview. Naturalists might say to realize their personal potential for experiencing life, or to do as much good as they can for others, or to live in a world of inner peace in a world of social diversity and conflict.

The question and its answers reveal the variety of ways the intellectual commitments are worked out in individual lives. They recognize the importance of seeing one's own worldview not only within the context of vastly different worldviews but within the community of one's own worldview. Each person, in other words, ends up having his own take on reality. And though it is extremely useful to identify the nature of a few (say, five to ten) generic worldviews, it is necessary in identifying and assessing one's own worldview to pay attention to its unique features, the most important of which is one's own answer to this eighth question.

- ▶ Within various basic worldviews other issues often arise. For example: Who is in charge of this world – God or humans or no one at all? Are we as human beings determined or free? Are we alone the makers of values? Is God really good? Is God personal or impersonal? Or does he, she or it exist at all?
- ▶ The fact is that we cannot avoid assuming some answers to such questions. We will adopt either one stance or another. Refusing to adopt an explicit worldview will turn out to be itself a worldview, or at least a philosophic position. In short, we are caught. So long as we live, we will live either the examined or the unexamined life. It is the assumption of this book that the examined life is better.

WORLDVISION, WORLDVIEW, AND WORLD-AND-LIFE VIEW



Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), trans and ed by Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock (first aired in an address in 1904, and subsequently published, with a 2nd edition published in 1913). What I stated about Sire, a point that has recently been added, is why I like Bavinck. He captures a worldview as a world-and-life view, consisting of both objective and subjective, head and heart.

- ▶ *worldview*: it is an attempt to unify the self, the head and heart, on the ground of a primary agreement between religion, science, and philosophy. A *world-and-life view* means, in brief, faith seeking understanding. It is important to note that Bavinck's preferred term is world-and-life view, rather than merely *worldview*. In a world-and-life view, the term *world* refers to the objective domain, reality outside the self; the term *life* refers to the human subject, the consciousness and its needs, desires, knowledge, and affections. A unified world-and-life view seeks justification for the unity between the subjective and objective. (11-12)
- ▶ A world-and-life view means that, over time and in engagement with reality as it presents itself, one has arrived at a basic, primary answer to the fundamental religious and philosophical questions of existence: What am I? Where did I come from? How does my mind relate to the world outside me? Do I, and how can I, know? How should I act? And what is the point of life? To where am I going? (17)

J. H. Bavinck, *Personality and Worldview*, edited and translated by James Eglinton (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023).

James Eglinton, [Everyone Has a Worldview, and Almost No One Has a Worldview](#) (April 24, 2023).

- ▶ J. H. Bavinck makes the paradoxical claim that worldview is both everywhere (“Everyone has a worldview”) *and* nowhere (“Almost no one has a worldview”).
- ▶ How can both these statements be true? . . . J. H. Bavinck’s answer lies in a novel conceptual distinction between worldvision (which all humans have, by necessity) and worldview (which drives entire cultures, while being possessed by very few people). While we all begin life with a worldvision, a proper worldview is a momentous achievement. Few individuals move from one to the other.

- ▶ To provide you with a short introduction to this distinction, a worldvision is a set of intuitions about the world formed in all individuals by their family and home environment, their teachers and education, and the broad culture within which they live. It is also closely bound to the idiosyncrasies of an individual person's temperament. That particular combination provides a workable (albeit limited) frame of reference with which to live from day to day. Indeed, it is possible to spend the entirety of your life only looking at life and the world through the single lens that is your worldvision. In the same sense, it is possible to spend an entire life navigating the streets of New York City only in a first-person perspective, never seeing a map of the city (and all that lies beyond it) or climbing a skyscraper in order to move from the limitations of your individual vision of each street to a more capacious view of the whole city. Worldview relates to worldvision in that sense. It elevates the limitations of first-person vision to the breadth of a bird's-eye view. An individual vision within the world is a necessary starting point, certainly, but it should not be confused with a capacious view of the world. Every individual has a worldvision, but few have a worldview.

- ▶ Despite this, worldvision nonetheless becomes problematic when it is made a permanent abode rather than a starting point. A worldvision shows you one way to live in the world on the basis of all manner of untested assumptions, and as such, it is utterly subjective. It is an assumption—but not the truth—about the world. It is life lived on autopilot by a passenger who as yet sits passively and unquestioningly. When a person remains in this state forever, worldvision changes from good and limited to life limiting. That person’s unwillingness to ask, “What if my assumptions aren’t true?” is, in effect, a self-imposed house arrest. His home coordinates become his prison because he lives without hunger for the truth about life, the world, and God. In light of that position, *Personality and Worldview* equips readers to think in deeply appreciative but also profoundly critical ways about worldvision. It offers a creative and somewhat experimental attempt to improve the conversation around worldview.

William R. Edwards, J. H. Bavinck, Personality and Worldview, Review, *Westminster Theological Journal* 85/2 (Fall 2023), 371-375.

- ▶ A worldvision may pose as a worldview but is reductionistic, uncritically adopting a starting point through which it unsuccessfully attempts to comprehend the whole. . . All people possess a worldvision, Bavinck argues, often formed uncritically through the circumstances of individual lives as well as through inward dispositions. A worldview, in contrast, is the attempt “to climb up toward the objective” (p. 34). However, worldviews are difficult to develop, and worldvisions are difficult to let go. Worldvisions are deeply personal, whereas worldviews aim to conquer the self (p. 36). According to Bavinck, a worldview allows us “to leave the maze of subjective inclinations and climb up to the height of the life that is grounded in the truth” (p. 37).
- ▶ Bavinck concludes that “no worldview” arising from humanity “overcomes the worldvision that slumbers inside a person as an unconscious assumption” (p. 173). Instead, only the “gospel offers us a worldview that smashes a person’s worldvision” (p. 37). Bavinck’s review of various attempts at worldviews exposes a prejudice that discloses “our own deepest tendencies” (p. 173).

- ▶ The Christian worldview, in contrast, depends on revelation. In various places, Bavinck describes a universal revelation that envelopes humanity throughout history, to which God adds his spoken word (p. 153). Contrary to worldviews that are limited by a person's worldvision, in which "personality becomes its own norm" (p. 171), inevitably leading to relativism, the Christian worldview is "thought of by God and is given to us from God" (p. 37). For a worldview to be complete, it cannot be of ourselves but "must be given to us, must be spoken to us" (p. 158). And in this revelation, we learn the true nature of the human dilemma, which is not foremost intellectual but moral. The inability to fathom the fulness of the world and our experience in it is because we are separated from God by sin and guilt, which inevitably leads to imbalance in all our attempts. For this reason, "his soul's compass always proves defective because he does not want God, because he is at enmity with God" (p. 158).

- ▶ I like his distinction between worldvision and worldview. My sense is that the biblical and catechetical gap we experienced the past few years among numerous Evangelicals is that they confused their worldvision, concluding it was biblical, for a worldview. We may chastise them for that, but as Bavinck points out, all have a worldvision, and it is not inherently bad. It is a place to start, but it is not a place to end. For too many, it was a place to end. This is where discipleship comes in. A worldview is both everywhere *and* nowhere. And as Eglinton notes, a “worldvision becomes problematic when it is made a permanent abode rather than a starting point.” Added to this, as noted by Edwards, “worldviews are difficult to develop, and worldvisions are difficult to let go.” A Christian worldview depends on God’s revelation, the gospel!

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE



Tim Keller writes (Foreword in Jake Meador, *In Search of the Common Good: Christian Fidelity in a Fractured World* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 1.),

- ▶ “today my church, like so many others, is sharply divided, despite the fact that its ministers can agree on a very long and detailed doctrinal statement, the Westminster standards [Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Directory of Public Worship, and the Form of Church Government]. So why all the conflict? *It is not as much over doctrine as over what our relationship to the culture should be.* And as I look around, I see this same division roiling Christian denominations and organizations everywhere.”
(emphasis mine)

H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951; cf. D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008)).

- ▶ Christ Against Culture.
- ▶ The Christ of Culture.
- ▶ Christ Above Culture.
- ▶ Christ and Culture in Paradox.
- ▶ Christ the Transformer of Culture.

James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (2010).

Three dominant modes of cultural engagement in American churches.

- ▶ Defensive against.
- ▶ Relevance to.
- ▶ Purity from.

These are inadequate to the calling of Christian mission, so he proposes a fourth approach.

- ▶ Faithful presence within.

Aaron M. Renn, [The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism](#) (February 2022). Cf. also *Life in the Negative World: Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024).

- ▶ Where once there was a culture war between Christianity and secular society, today there is a culture war within evangelicalism itself.
- ▶ These divisions do not only represent theological differences. They also result from particular strategies of public engagement that developed over the last few decades, as the standing of Christianity has gradually eroded.
- ▶ Within the story of American secularization, there have been three distinct stages:

- ▶ **Positive World (Pre-1994):** Society at large retains a mostly *positive* view of Christianity. To be known as a good, churchgoing man remains part of being an upstanding citizen. Publicly being a Christian is a status-enhancer. Christian moral norms are the basic moral norms of society and violating them can bring negative consequences.
- ▶ **Neutral World (1994–2014):** Society takes a *neutral* stance toward Christianity. Christianity no longer has privileged status but is not disfavored. Being publicly known as a Christian has neither a positive nor a negative impact on one's social status. Christianity is a valid option within a pluralistic public square. Christian moral norms retain some residual effect.
- ▶ **Negative World (2014–Present):** Society has come to have a *negative* view of Christianity. Being known as a Christian is a social negative, particularly in the elite domains of society. Christian morality is expressly repudiated and seen as a threat to the public good and the new public moral order. Subscribing to Christian moral views or violating the secular moral order brings negative consequences.

- ▶ Renn summarizes the response of evangelicals in the first two worlds as follows: “For the most part, evangelicals responded to the positive and neutral worlds with identifiable ministry strategies. In the positive world, these strategies were the culture war and seeker sensitivity. In the neutral world, the strategy was cultural engagement.”
- ▶ To the third stage, he writes, “Although evangelicals have not yet developed a negative-world ministry strategy, the transition to the negative world has had major consequences for evangelicalism. The shift has put different types and degrees of pressure on different evangelical groups. As with politics, these pressures intersect with different social groups and strategic positionings, producing conflict and realignment within the evangelical world.”
- ▶ Renn then gives examples of various attempts by Evangelicals to navigate that third stage, the negative world, writing, “Evangelicalism is in flux, and its future as a coherent movement is in doubt. In part, this crisis has resulted from the failure of evangelicalism to develop strategies designed for the negative world in which Christians are a moral minority and secular society is actively hostile to the faith. The previous strategies are not adequate to today’s realities and are being deformed under the pressures of the negative world.”

Brian Mattson, [What the Negative World Framework Gets Wrong: Review: 'Life in the Negative World' by Aaron Renn](#) (February 12, 2024).

- ▶ For example, he mentions Tim Keller's treatment at the hand of Princeton Theological Seminary as evidence we've arrived in the negative world. I wonder what he makes of that same Princeton's treatment of J. Gresham Machen in the 1920s—back in the supposed positive world. How is it he can casually mention that the U.S. Supreme Court escorted God to the door of the public school in 1962—the heyday of the positive world—and not notice it's in tension with his thesis? Were elite American institutions generally positive to the kind of evangelical piety represented at the Scopes trial back in the halcyon days of 1925? Not hardly. Why do some at the center of one of [his leading examples](#) dispute his interpretation of the events?
- ▶ But the negative world isn't unknown territory or a "fundamentally unknown world." It's not true that we're groping around in the dark by way of trial and error and false starts. The entirety of the Bible—every word of it—was written to people living in the negative world; it describes that world in painstaking detail and tells believers explicitly how they should live in it. Renn's book is long on sociological models and pragmatic, prudential, and utilitarian propositions but short on normative, biblical ethics.

Brad East, [Once More, Church and Culture](#) (April 18, 2023).

- ▶ The church has four primary modes of faithful engagement with culture. They are inevitably overlapping and essentially non-competitive with one another. Which mode is called for depends entirely on context and content. Rare is the time when the church would forego any of them; typically they are all at work simultaneously, whether in the same community, in different communities, or in individual members of the larger church. Each mode applies in every possible historical and political context: premodern and postmodern, established and disestablished, privileged and persecuted.

Resistance

- ▶ “The church is always and everywhere called to resist injustice and idolatry wherever they are found. It does this whether or not it has any social power or political prestige to speak of. It lives ‘against’ or ‘in spite of’ the existing powers that be. . . . Even when the regime is friendly to Christians—even when the regime is formally Christian—the task of resistance remains...Sometimes all it requires is sheer perseverance. Sometimes that is enough.”

Repentance

- ▶ “The church is always and everywhere called to repent of its sins, crimes, and failures. Which is to say, the injustice and idolatry the church is universally tasked with resisting is reliably found, first of all, within the church, not without. Judgment must begin at the house of God. Here the command of Christ means to live ‘against’ or ‘in spite of’ the corruptions and wickednesses of Christ’s own body, which often enough finds acute expression in its leaders. . . . The credibility of the gospel is rarely threatened by the church’s failures so much as by its unwillingness to admit them—or, what is most scandalous at all, its readiness to cover them up.”

Reception

- ▶ “The church is always and everywhere called to receive from the world the many blessings bestowed upon it by God. For God is the universal Creator; the world he created is good; and he alone is Lord of all peoples and thus of all cultures. . . . Put plainly, the world is full of vital knowledge and priceless artifacts that in no way have their source in Christian faith (though their ultimate source is in Christ, as Paul teaches). Believers ought never to be naïve or uncritical, but in such cases the only thing to do is stretch out one’s hands in humble reception, before giving thanks to God.”

Reform

- ▶ “The church is always and everywhere called to preach the gospel, which is the word of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ. . . . When God’s word is announced it is a comprehensive address. It speaks to heart, mind, body, and soul. It concerns merchants and magistrates no less than peasants and servants. It commands righteousness among the people of God and justice among the nations. It recognizes no walls of separation. Where life is not in accord with God’s will, it expects change. The gospel, in a word, reforms. It generates adjustment in the way things are with a view to what they shall be in the kingdom of Christ. . . . When and where the time is right, when and where the Spirit moves, the proclamation of the gospel cuts a culture to the bone, and the culture is never the same. Ever after, it walks with a limp.”

COMBAT THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL



C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, “The Existence of the Devil”:

- ▶ “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), “Satan and Demons,” pp. 412-433: **The Activity of Satan and Demons**

1. Satan was the originator of sin.
2. Demons oppose and try to destroy every good work of God.
3. Yet Demons are limited by God’s control and have limited power.
4. There have been differing stages of demonic activity in the history of redemption: (a) in the Old Testament; (b) during the ministry of Jesus; (c) during the new covenant age; (d) during the millennium; (e) at the final judgement.

Our Relationship to Demons

1. Demons are active in the world today.
2. Not all evil and sin is from Satan and Demons, but some is.
3. Although Christians cannot be demon-possessed, they can be influenced/impacted/attacked by demons or what is referred to as demonized.
4. There are ways to recognize demonic influences.
5. Jesus gives all believers authority over demons in his authority.
6. There is appropriate use of the Christian's spiritual authority in ministry to others.
7. We should expect the gospel to come in power to triumph over the works of the Devil.
[Remembering the “gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). And we should also expect that Satan will do all he can “to steal and kill and destroy” (Jn. 10:10) its advancement”]

Great Dragon, Ancient Serpent, the Devil, Satan, the Deceiver of the Whole World

- ▶ **Genesis 3:1, 4-5:** “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" . . . But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
- ▶ **John 10:10:** “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”
- ▶ **1 Peter 5:8–9:** “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.
- ▶ **2 Corinthians 4:3-4:** “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

- ▶ **2 Corinthians 10:3-6:** “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.”
- ▶ **2 Corinthians 11:3:** “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”
- ▶ **2 Corinthians 12:7:** “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.”
- ▶ **Ephesians 4:26-27:** “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”
- ▶ **Ephesians 6:10-13:** “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”

- ▶ **1 Timothy 4:1-2:** “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.”
- ▶ **Hebrews 2:14-15:** “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”
- ▶ **Revelation 2:10:** “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
- ▶ **Revelation 12:9-11:** “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world-- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

- ▶ **Mark 8:33** (cf., Matt. 16:23): “But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” As Christians and as the church, in what ways may we be setting our minds on the things of man, not on the things of God?
- ▶ **1 John 5:21**: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” As Christians and as the church, what may be identified as the idols of our age?

ALWAYS BEARING WITNESS: IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD



- ▶ **John 17:14-17:** “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”
- ▶ **1 Peter 4:17:** “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

- ▶ What do you think are the most critical biblical, theological, missiological, moral/ethical/bioethical, cultural issues facing us as we consider making disciples and always bearing witness to the gospel at the moment?
- ▶ What might be some issues on the horizon, the trends and trajectories, “the main theological issues facing us,” as we consider making disciples and bearing witness to the gospel in the next 3-5 years?
- ▶ Based on these issues, what might this mean for us in the EFCA? How do we equip pastors and teachers to serve the people of God in the local church? How do we disciple God’s people?

PASTORAL COUNSEL: SAME-SEX “WEDDING”



Alistair Begg and Bob Lepine, [‘The Christian Manifesto’ Interview](#) (September 1, 2023). What counsel would you give a godly grandmother about attending her grandson’s “wedding” to a transgendered person?

- ▶ And in very specific areas this comes across. I mean, you and I know that we field questions all the time that go along the lines of “My grandson is about to be married to a transgender person, and I don’t know what to do about this, and I’m calling to ask you to tell me what to do”—which is a huge responsibility. And in a conversation like that just a few days ago—and people may not like this answer—but I asked the grandmother, “Does your grandson understand your belief in Jesus?”
- ▶ “Yes.”
- ▶ “Does your grandson understand that your belief in Jesus makes it such that you can’t countenance in any affirming way the choices that he has made in life?”
- ▶ “Yes.”

- ▶ I said, “Well then, okay. As long as he knows that, then I suggest that you *do* go to the ceremony. And I suggest that you buy them a gift.”
- ▶ “Oh,” she said, “what?” She was caught off guard.
- ▶ I said, “Well, here’s the thing: your love for them may catch them off guard, but your absence will simply reinforce the fact that they said, ‘These people are what I always thought: judgmental, critical, unprepared to countenance anything.’” And it is a fine line, isn’t it? It really is. And people need to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. But I think we’re going to take that risk. We’re going to have to take that risk a lot more if we want to build bridges into the hearts and lives of those who don’t understand Jesus and don’t understand that he is a King.

- ▶ Owen Strachan, [Unrighteous Wedding Invitations: A Loving Response to Alistair Begg](#) (January 18, 2024).
- ▶ Robert A. J. Gagnon, [Here Is Why Alistair Begg Should Repent of Encouraging Attendance at a “Gay” or “Transgender” Wedding](#) (January 24, 2024).
- ▶ Carl R. Trueman, [Can Christians Attend Gay Wedding?](#) (January 25, 2024).
- ▶ Bethel McGrew, [Matching actions and words: We cannot attend pagan rituals in the name of love](#) (January 26, 2024).
- ▶ Daniel Ritchie, [American Family Radio Drops Alistair Begg Program: Begg’s comments regarding LGBTQ issues recently resurfaced, sparking controversy](#) (January 26, 2024).
- ▶ Bob Smietana, [Alistair Begg Stands by LGBTQ Wedding Advice with Sermon on Jesus’ Compassion](#) (January 31, 2024).
- ▶ Steve Kneale, [Whether to Attend Weddings, How We Should View Alistair Begg’s Comments and Matters of Wisdom](#) (January 29, 2024).
- ▶ Anne Kennedy, [Alistair Begg and the Loving Thing: A Moment of Grief in the Tide of History](#) (January 30, 2024).
- ▶ Al Mohler, [Should Christians Attend the ‘Wedding’ of a Same-Sex Couple? What About If It is the Ceremony of a Family Member?](#) (February 2, 2024).
- ▶ Russell Moore, [Alistair Begg Meets the Politically Correct: How to love our LGBTQ family members is a difficult issue. But mob mentality is always a betrayal of Christ.](#) (February 2, 2024).
- ▶ Stephen McAlpine, [Collision: Alistair is Dug in While Doug Begg to Differ](#) (February 4, 2024).
- ▶ Gavin Ortlund, [Christ and Cancel Culture: A lesson from the Alistair Begg controversy.](#) (February 13, 2024).

Michael Foust, [Alistair Begg Addresses His 'Transgender Wedding' Critics during Sunday Evening Sermon \(January 30, 2024\)](#).

- ▶ “My response to one grandmother whom I have never met was not in any way a blanket recommendation to all Christians to attend LGBTQ weddings. . . In that conversation with that grandmother, I was concerned about the wellbeing of their relationship more than anything else -- hence, my counsel. Don't misunderstand that in any way at all. If I was on the receiving end of another question about another situation from another person and another time, I may answer absolutely differently. But in that case, I answered in that way, and I would not answer in any other way no matter what anybody says on the Internet as of the last 10 days.” [“But the fact of the matter is, I'm not ready to repent over this. I don't have to.”]
- ▶ “I've lived here for 40 years and those who know me best know that when we talk theology, when we talk stuff, I've always said [that] I am a little bit out of sync with the American evangelical world. [That's] for this reason: that I am the product of British evangelicalism, represented by John Stott, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Eric Alexander, Sinclair Ferguson and Derek Prime. I am a product of that. I have never been a product of American fundamentalism. I come from a world in which it is possible for people to actually grasp the fact that there are nuances in things. Everything is not so categorically clear that if you put one foot out of this box, you've got to be removed from the box forever.”

- ▶ “Now, understand that this grandchild was an enemy of the gospel, an enemy really in the family circle by dint of her lifestyle, an enemy. And Jesus says: You're supposed to love your enemies. Now, we can disagree over whether I give that grandmother good advice or not. Not everybody on the pastoral team thinks I gave very good advice. And as I said, you know, on another occasion with a different person in a different context, the advice may be very different. But at least let's acknowledge the fact that what we're doing is we're wrestling with biblical principles. . . . What if the grandmother's gift was a Bible?”
- ▶ “You've got a problem with the grandmother showing up sitting on the front row in a context that she absolutely despises, and sitting on her lap, nicely wrapped with beautiful paper, and a bow around it, is her gift -- the gift of a Bible for a granddaughter she knows, has no interest in the Bible? But because she believes that the entrance of God's Word brings light, she is prepared to trust the Holy Spirit to do the work.”

- ▶ “What happens to homosexual people, in my experience, is that they are either reviled or they are affirmed. The Christian has to say, ‘We will not treat you in either of those ways. We cannot revile you, but we cannot affirm you. And the reason that we can't revile you is the same reason why we can't affirm you -- because of the Bible, because of God's love, because of His grace, because of His goodness.’”
- ▶ “I will go down on the side of compassion with people actually accusing me of just weakness, rather than go down on the side of condemnation, which closes any doors of opportunity for future engagement with those who know exactly what we believe about the Bible and about Jesus.”
- ▶ “Pharisees had nothing to say to sinners. Phariseeism is alive and well in all of our hearts. We have to guard against it. The motivation for purity and holiness of life and circumspection and so on is absolutely unquestionable. The real challenge comes when we are confronted by issues that don't just fit our clean little categories. What distinguishes Jesus from the Pharisees . . . was in a word, Grace, the divine initiative, which seeks and then saves the lost sinner.”

Robert A. J. Gagnon, [Here Is Why Alistair Begg Should Repent of Encouraging Attendance at a “Gay” or “Transgender” Wedding](#) (January 24, 2024).

- ▶ I. Not an Agree-to-Disagree Issue
- ▶ II. The Misguided Justification of Future Evangelism
- ▶ III. The Best Analogy: Attending an Incestuous Wedding
- ▶ IV. What If the Participants in an Incestuous Wedding Were Both Unbelievers?
- ▶ V. Is an Incestuous Wedding or a “Gay/Transgender” Wedding Worse?
- ▶ VI. The Next-Best Analogy: Attending a Ritual Celebration at an Idol’s Temple
- ▶ VII. Wedding Attendance as Intrinsic Affirmation
- ▶ VIII. Conclusion Evangelical leaders who seek to persuade fellow believers that it is permissible to attend a “gay wedding” or “transgender wedding” should be ashamed of themselves.

LAUSANNE COVENANT



Lausanne Covenant (1974)

- ▶ 4. THE NATURE OF EVANGELISM: To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world. (1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Acts 2:32-39; John 20:21; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:5; 5:11,20; Luke 14:25-33; Mark 8:34; Acts 2:40,47; Mark 10:43-45)

5. CHRISTIAN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and Man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead. (Acts 17:26,31; Genesis 18:25; Isaiah 1:17; Psalm 45:7; Genesis 1:26,27; James 3:9; Leviticus 19:18; Luke 6:27,35; James 2:14-26; John 3:3,5; Matthew 5:20; 6:33; 2 Corinthians 3:18; James 2:20)

6. THE CHURCH AND EVANGELISM: We affirm that Christ sends his redeemed people into the world as the Father sent him, and that this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world. We need to break out of our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society. In the Church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. The Church is at the very centre of God's cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the gospel. But a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross. It becomes a stumbling block to evangelism when it betrays the gospel or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or scrupulous honesty in all things including promotion and finance. The church is the community of God's people rather than an institution, and must not be identified with any particular culture, social or political system, or human ideology. (John 17:18; 20:21; Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 1:8; 20:27; Ephesians 1:9,10; 3:9-11; Galatians 6:14,17; 2 Corinthians 6:3,4; 2 Timothy 2:19-21; Philippians 1:27)

- ▶ “World evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.”
- ▶ “World evangelization requires . . . the whole gospel, the whole church, the whole world.” (Lausanne Theology Working Group, 2010 in preparation for Cape Town 2010, The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization

10. EVANGELISM AND CULTURE: The development of strategies for world evangelization calls for imaginative pioneering methods. Under God, the result will be the rise of churches deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture. Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. Because men and women are God's creatures, some of their culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because they are fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. Missions have, all too frequently, exported with the gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture. Christ's evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God. (Mark 7:8,9,13; Genesis 4:21,22; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Philippians 2:5-7; 2 Corinthians 4:5)

12. SPIRITUAL CONFLICT: We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil, who are seeking to overthrow the Church and frustrate its task of world evangelization. We know our need to equip ourselves with God's armour and to fight this battle with the spiritual weapons of truth and prayer. For we detect the activity of our enemy, not only in false ideologies outside the Church, but also inside it in false gospels which twist Scripture and put people in the place of God. We need both watchfulness and discernment to safeguard the biblical gospel. We acknowledge that we ourselves are not immune to worldliness of thought and action, that is, to a surrender to secularism. For example, although careful studies of church growth, both numerical and spiritual, are right and valuable, we have sometimes neglected them. At other times, desirous to ensure a response to the gospel, we have compromised our message, manipulated our hearers through pressure techniques, and become unduly preoccupied with statistics or even dishonest in our use of them. All this is worldly. The Church must be in the world; the world must not be in the Church. (Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 4:3,4; Ephesians 6:11,13-18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 1 John 2:18-26; 4:1-3; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2; John 17:15)

Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Vol. 4 (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), pp. 551, 553-554:

- ▶ But in and through its evangelistic mission to the world, the church is to enunciate and implement the revealed principles that God addresses to the human race by exemplary Christian leadership to the whole realm of public affairs. Social justice is not simply an appendage to the evangelistic message; it is an intrinsic part of the whole, without which the preaching of the gospel is truncated. Theology devoid of social justice is a deforming weakness of much present-day evangelical witness...Marxists make a hurried leap from the economic needs of the poor to forced redistribution of the property of the rich. However indefensible this revolutionary alternative may be, it can hardly be challenged and stayed if evangelicals are indifferent to the necessities of the poor as well as the neglected responsibilities of the rich...

- ▶ Jesus did not limit the signs of his coming triumph only to those who responded to the gospel. Of the ten lepers healed, only one returned to acknowledge his mercy, but this one thereby became the rumor of hope for all the leprosy. Jesus became the hope of a new day so that wherever he went some sought him for healing. Not every loaf of bread given to the starving prepares the way for evangelistic commitment—nor need it, for feeding the hungry is a duty whether they respond to Christ in this life or not. They have been kept alive not only for the opportunity to find life's true meaning and center, but also for God's sake; unregenerate man bears remnants of the divine image, and God has a purpose in the world even for those who do not respond to the Redeemer. A part of that purpose is that Christians remind all mankind that the Christ that reigns tomorrow is not only Jesus of Nazareth who came yesterday, but is also the risen Lord of the church, who through his redeemed body of humanity signals the tidings that no one need permanently consign himself or herself to a living hell, whether here or hereafter.

Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947).

- ▶ Henry was writing when the sifting and sorting was happening among the Fundamentalists, with Henry and Kantzer, et al., becoming Neo-Evangelicals.
- ▶ Chapter 1 addresses “The Evaporation of Fundamentalist Humanitarianism” and chapter 3 focuses on “The Most Embarrassing Evangelical Divorce.” The embarrassment was the lack of any orthopraxy, the split between compassion and justice ministry and evangelism. The chapter begins (p. 27): “For the first protracted period in its history, evangelical Christianity stands divorced from the great social reform movements.”
- ▶ Henry concludes this chapter as follows (p. 40): “Fundamentalism is agitating today with two great convictions, the affirmation of which is necessary if Fundamentalism is to express the genius of the Christian tradition: (1) That Christianity opposes any and every evil, personal and social, and must never be represented as in any way tolerant of such evil; (2) That Christianity opposes to such evil, as the only sufficient formula for its resolution, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. It rejects the charge that the Fundamentalist ideology logically involves an indifference to social evils, and presses the contention that the non-evangelical ideology involves an essential inability to right the world order. It is discerning anew that an assault on global evils is not only consistent with, but rather is demanded by, its proper world-life view.”

EVANGELISM

He Gets Us vs. He Saves Us



- ▶ He Gets Us.: [Foot Washing](#) (video) and [What is foot washing and what does it symbolize?](#) (watch and read)
- ▶ He Gets Us.: [Who Is My Neighbor?](#) (video) and [Who Is My Neighbor](#) (watch and read)
- ▶ He Gets Us.: [Loving your neighbor is nearly impossible. How can we do it?](#) (watch and read)
- ▶ “Jesus Didn’t Teach Hate. He Washed Feet. He Gets Us. All of Us.”

- ▶ Joe Carter, [The FAQs: What You Should Know About the 'He Gets Us' Campaign](#) (March 2, 2023).
- ▶ The Associated Press and Joy Ashford, [Dallas ad firm is behind 'He Gets Us' Jesus Super Bowl commercials: A religious Super Bowl ad campaign created by a Dallas advertising firm promised viewers that Jesus "gets us."](#) (February 12, 2024). "The ads ran for a total of 75 seconds and together cost an estimated \$17.5 million, according to AdWeek."
- ▶ Solomon Missouri, [What those behind the 'He Gets Us' Super Bowl ads seem not to get about Jesus:](#) "Millions of dollars on Super Bowl ads promoting Jesus would have been better spent on housing those sleeping outdoors and feeding those who are hungry." (February 13, 2024).
- ▶ Kristine Parks, ['He Gets Us' Jesus Super Bowl Ad campaign welcomes criticism over polarizing ads: 'Very reassuring': 'He Gets Us' campaign aired two ads about Jesus during the 2024 Super Bowl](#) (February 13, 2024).
- ▶ Andrew T. Walker, ["He Gets Us" almost, but not quite: Super Bowl ad frames evangelism leftward, leaving out low-status sinners on the right](#) (February 15, 2024).
- ▶ Joe Rigney, [A tale of two ads: A response to the "He Gets Us" Super Bowl commercial does a much better job of pre-evangelism](#) (February 23, 2024).

Jamie Bambrick, [The Christian Super Bowl Ad They SHOULD Have Made: He Saves Us](#) (February 13, 2024): “A group known as 'He Gets Us' released an advert during the Super Bowl which, whilst perhaps well intentioned, failed to convey anything of the gospel to the hundreds of millions who saw it. Here's my take at what they should have done.”

- ▶ Kat Von D: “former witch”
- ▶ Josh Timonen: “Dawkins’ former right hand man”
- ▶ Mohamad Faridi: “former jihadist”
- ▶ Mike Burden: “former KKK member”
- ▶ Jeff Durbin: “former drug addict”
- ▶ Sebastian Stakset: “former gang leader”
- ▶ Kevin Whitt: “former drag queen & prostitute”
- ▶ Dr John Bruchalski: “former abortionist”
- ▶ Laura Perry: “former transgender”
- ▶ Brittni De La Mora: “former pornstar”
- ▶ Steven Bancarz: “former new age guru”
- ▶ Rosaria Butterfield: “former lesbian activist”

“Jesus Doesn’t Just Get Us. He Saves Us. He Transforms/Cleanses/Restores/Forgives/Heals/Delivers/Redeems/Loves Us. Such Were Some of You.”

A THEOLOGY OF GETTING FIRED

A Theology of Getting Fired: Where is the line you will not/cannot cross?

(Jonathan D. Christman, [A Biblical Framework for Deciding Workplace Moments of Conscience](#))



- ▶ **Abstract:** A well-known Christian intellectual and cultural commentator, John Stonestreet, has often publicly spoken of the need for Christians to develop a theology of “getting fired.” This call is not one for mass exodus of Christians from the workplace. Rather, this call recognizes that more and more Christians are facing moments of conscience in their workplace, when the obligations of a job—one’s current calling or vocation—come into conflict with one’s beliefs or convictions. Grounding both calling and convictions in Scripture, this article proposes an overarching framework and practical guide for analyzing, assessing, navigating, and deciding those workplace moments of conscience. Doing so entails both individual and corporate dimensions that are grounded in wisdom, humility, the means of grace, and life-giving community in the body of Christ.

1. A Theology of Calling
2. A Theology of Convictions
3. A Framework: The Table of Conscience
 - 3.1. Surrender Calling and Surrender Convictions
 - 3.2. Keep Calling and Surrender Convictions
 - 3.3. Surrender Calling and Keep Convictions
 - 3.4. Keep Calling and Keep Convictions
4. A Guide: Tools for Deciding Workplace Moments of Conscience
 - 4.1. The Individual Dimension
 - 4.2. The Corporate Dimension

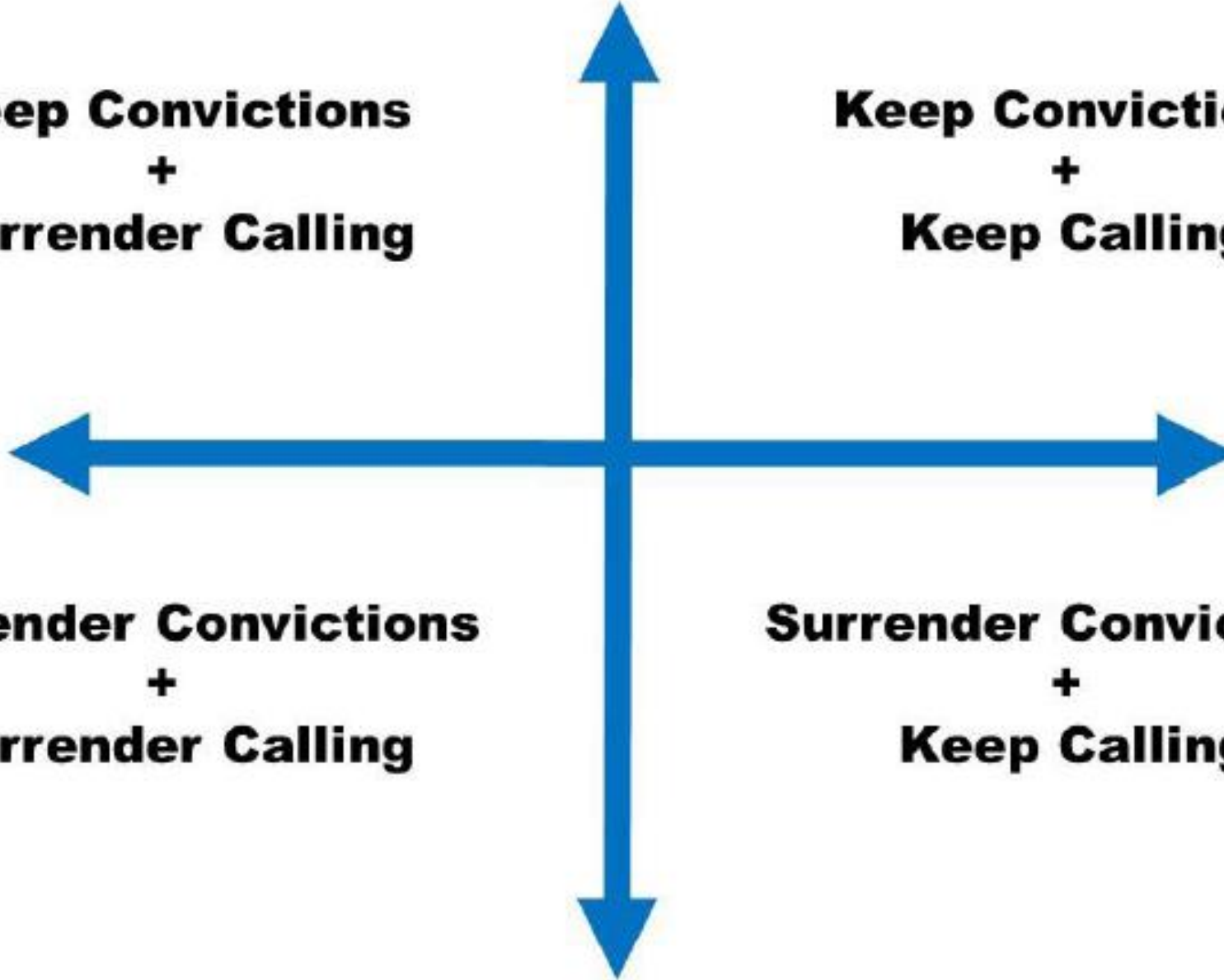
5. Conclusion

- ▶ The aim of this article, while modest, is nevertheless urgent for every working believer in America, especially those called to work within non-Christian employment settings—which represents most American Christians at this time. This article has sought to begin the establishment of a framework for such Christians analyzing, assessing, and deciding those workplace moments of conscience that believers are rapidly facing at increasing rates, and to lay certain theological groundwork for Christians to encounter, engage, and resolve those moments faithfully for the glory of God. To do so, a Christian's calling and convictions must both be informed and shaped by Scripture, and every Christian should pursue wisdom, prayer, Scripture reading, and humility in the midst of those moments. But no Christian should face these workplace moments of conscience alone for, as members of the corporate body of the church, they should seek the counsel of others, see their potential suffering as a help for others, and be assured that the church will support and uphold them (and their family) when standing up for the Lord in one's workplace causes financial strain, job loss, or worse.

convictions

**Keep Convictions
+
Surrender Calling**

**Keep Convictions
+
Keep Calling**



calling

**Surrender Convictions
+
Surrender Calling**

**Surrender Convictions
+
Keep Calling**

Al Mohler, [How Can Christians Teach and Work in a Secular Higher Education Context?](#) (February 23, 2024).

- ▶ I'm not saying that it's impossible right now for a Christian, a faithful, conservative, believing Christian to serve in any of these contexts. I'm answering the question. I think it's going to become more and more untenable and less and less likely moving forward. . . I have long stated that I believe there are certain professions that are going to be closed to convictional Christians in my lifetime. I am pretty sure that's absolutely certain. There are going to be some professions that are going to be more and more difficult, if not nearly impossible for Christians to enter because of the cognitive convictional price that is charged on the front end, or the ethos and the code of ethics and the rules of the organization once you're in. . .

- ▶ So, I'm often asked the question, "Should Christians stay in these jobs?" My argument is, "Well, that's one of the reasons why you need the local church to give counsel on that." I don't think you need counsel from someone speaking from a speaker on that, but I hope nonetheless, to speak the truth and to speak wisdom in this. That is to say, I think, we need to set up front, "Here's a line that I know I can't cross. I want to make that line very clear to myself. That's a line I can't cross, and I want to think about it often enough and pray about it often enough that I'm going to know it when it comes, and when that moment comes, I'm going to know that's the line that as a Christian I can't cross."

Daniel Strange, [Going Deeper](#), *Themelios* 48.1 (2023), 26, writes,

- ▶ Third, our challenge will be to go deep *historically*. . . . we are going to have to come to terms with being a minority (often a despised minority) in our churches with certain professions closed to Christians—professions like teaching and medicine from which, in the fellowship of churches of which I am a part, we have disproportionately drawn from. I think as non-conformist churches we have a particular contribution to make here if we can remember our history. . . . Let's draw on this heritage, learning what it means both to minister and to train in a hostile environment. It's been done before and it can be done again. Yes, it's going to be messy and 'sub-optimal', but it's where God has placed us at this time.

The Church Is a Family—The Cost of Conversion, The Care of the Community: 3rd Century (Joe Hellerman, [When the Church Was a Family](#))

- ▶ Sometime around 250 A.D., a marvelous thing happened in a small church, in the rural town of Thena, just outside the great Roman metropolis of Carthage in North Africa. An actor converted to Christ. We do not know the fellow's name, so in what follows I will refer to our actor friend as Marcus. Marcus's conversion created quite a stir in the church in Thena, and his story paints a delightful picture of the early church in North Africa functioning at its strong-group, family best.
- ▶ Theater performances in antiquity were typically dedicated to a pagan god or goddess, and the plays often ran as part of larger public religious festivals. Scenes portraying blatant immorality were commonplace. Some concluded it was acceptable to observe immorality on the stage as long as they did not engage in that behavior in real life. After all, the Bible did not say, "You shall not go to the theater." All this proved rather troubling to the early church. Christian leaders were quite outspoken in their opposition to the idea of Christians going to the theater. For example, Tertullian, rejected this sort of rationalization.

- ▶ “Why is it right to look on what it is disgraceful to do? How is it that the things which defile a man in going out of his mouth, are not regarded as doing so when they go in at his eyes and ears—when eyes and ears are the immediate attendants of the spirit? If you are going to forbid immorality, you’d better forbid the theater. If tragedies and comedies are the bloody and wanton, the impious and licentious inventors of crimes and lusts, it is not good even that there should be any calling to remembrance the atrocious or the vile. What you reject in deed, you are not to bid welcome in word.” (Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* [*On the Spectacles* or *The Shows*], 17).
- ▶ This is a strong condemnation against attending the theater. How much more strongly they would respond against those who made their living in the theater. In 3rd century Carthage, when an actor converted to Christ the first thing the church demanded was for the person to quit his profession and disassociate himself from the theater.
- ▶ In this situation, since the former actor needed to making a living wage, he began teaching acting by opening an acting school. This raised concerns for other Christians. Eucratius, the pastor of the church in Thena, was not certain what to do. How could this former actor now teach others to do what he himself was forbidden to do? And yet, he had already made a significant sacrifice to follow Jesus, which cost him his job. Should he be asked to do more? Eucratius wrote so Cyprian of Carthage, his spiritual mentor, to ask “whether such a man ought to remain in communion with us.” Cyprian responded in unequivocal terms:

- ▶ “It is not in keeping with the reverence due to the majesty of God and with the observance of the gospel teachings for the honour and respect of the Church to be polluted by contamination at once so degraded and so scandalous” (*Ep.* 2.1.2).
- ▶ Although this sounds harsh to the modern ear, there was a cost to personal holiness. However, Cyprian continues in the letter by suggesting a way Eucratius’ congregation can assist in this person’s walk. A call to holiness and losing one’s livelihood was matched by a genuine concern for those whose livelihoods might be adversely affected by the church’s demanding moral standards. The church, says Cyprian, should provide for his material needs.
- ▶ His needs can be alleviated along with those of others who are supported by the provisions of the Church—on condition, of course, that he can be satisfied with more frugal, and harmless, fare and does not consider that he ought to be bought off by means of a pension, so as to break away from his sins, for he is the one to benefit from such a break, not us. . . . Accordingly, you should do your utmost to call him away from this depraved and shameful profession to the way of innocence and to the hope of his true life; let him be satisfied with the nourishment provided by the Church, more sparing to be sure but salutary (*Ep.* 2.2.2-3).

- ▶ And if this is not enough, Cyprian concludes his letter by telling Eucratius that Cyprian's church will foot the bill if the rural church in Thena lacks the resources to meet Marcus's basic needs:
- ▶ "But if your church is unable to meet the cost of maintaining those in need, he can transfer himself to us and receive here what is necessary for him in the way of food and clothing" (*Ep.* 2.2.3).
- ▶ Cyprian made sure the church would serve as an economic safety net for any brother or sister whose finances were adversely affected by their willingness to follow Jesus (a theology of getting fired, or resigning by being asked to compromise truth). The reason was because the church was a family!

The Church Cares for Her Own *and* Others—Julian the Apostate: 4th Century

- ▶ In 363, Julian, Constantine's grandson, became emperor. Disillusioned by bloodshed within the family of Constantine, and a secret admirer of Hellenistic culture, he is to be known as Julian the Apostate. In 367 Emperor Julian is killed while fighting an army of the Sassanid Empire. Christians rejoice at news of his death and express their belief that Julian's death was the work of God.
- ▶ Julian the Apostate, “Letter to Arsacius” (360 AD) (emphasis mine): “*“Why then do we think that this is sufficient and do not observe how the kindness of Christians to strangers, their care for the burial of their dead, and the sobriety of their lifestyle has done the most to advance their cause? . . . For it is disgraceful when no Jew is a beggar and the impious Galileans [the name given by Julian to Christians] support our poor in addition to their own; everyone is able to see that our coreligionists are in want of aid from us.”*”

