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FULFILLED!

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PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS OF FULFILLED PROPHECY AND LIFE IN CHRIST

CBV and IBV - Where do their paths part ways?



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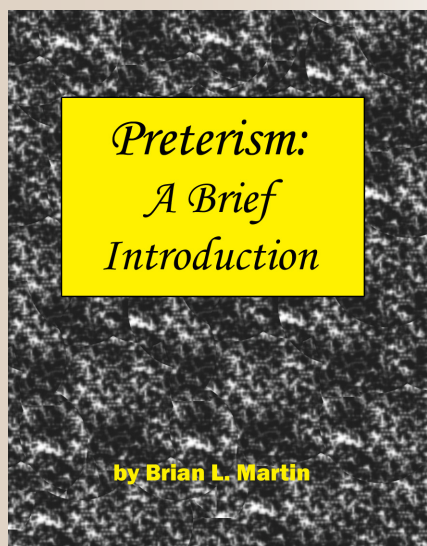


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To order, contact Tony Denton using the contact info in the ad just above.

(Please note that this booklet is currently not available from FCG.)

4. Editor's Note
In this issue we are embarking on a series of articles dealing with the most divisive subject in preterism—the resurrection.

5. Mailbag
Catch some of the letters to the editor and comments on articles and features from the readers.

6. Perspectives - Brian L. Martin
Critical Christian Thinking—coming to our own understanding of the truth.

8. Resurrection
Where do CBV and IBV first part ways?

12. Life in the Kingdom - James W. Moore
Drawing encouragement from John the Baptist.

The great weakness of full preterism—and what I regard to be its fatal flaw—is its treatment of the final resurrection. If full preterism is to gain wide credibility in our time, it must overcome this obstacle.

...The divisions that exist within the Christian community are understandable, considering that both the subject matter and the literary genre of future prophecy are exceedingly difficult. This does not mean that we may push the Bible aside or neglect its eschatological sections. On the contrary the interpretive difficulties presented by eschatological matters simply call us to a greater diligence and persistence in seeking their solution.

R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus*, p 203

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Editor's Note...

IN SEPTEMBER MY WIFE and I went to Kerrville, Texas, where I was one of the speakers at the Big Tex Preterist Conference. That was my first time speaking at a preterist conference. Though I have received invitations in the past, I've always declined because I'm just not comfortable speaking in front of a group of people. But with each invitation I've declined I have felt that I was eventually going to have to get out of my comfort zone and broaden my horizons. Thankfully the audience was gracious and none of them walked out on me! In fact, after hearing my first presentation (each speaker gave four presentations over the weekend) they still sat through my other presentations.

Aside from my nervousness and stage fright, we both had a wonderful time and enjoyed meeting many readers and article contributors that had only been digital acquaintances up to that point. It was great to finally put a face to several names, and to meet in person those whose faces I had only seen in photos in the magazine.

Another one of the weekend's highlights was a musical variety show put on by the conference hosts, TJ and Maria Smith. The audience was roaring with laughter as they impersonated musical and comedy icon after icon.

Along with laughing together, and learning together from all the speakers, perhaps the greatest feature was the times of fellowship with one another between sessions and during meals. We can all watch conference videos and learn from a host of available preterist resources. But being able to sit and fellowship with like-minded believers lifts the spirit. It was great getting to know various individuals, and hear them share about their journeys into preterism, their frustrations with those who refuse to listen, and even the heartaches and losses many have suffered. Though it is theology that has

brought us all together, when we get a chance to look behind the theology we find that we are all individuals who are simply doing our best to walk in a manner pleasing to our Lord and Savior. I think we all find encouragement when we can interact with others making the same journey.

In this issue we are embarking on a series of articles dealing with the most divisive subject in preterism—the resurrection. Because the timing texts throughout the Bible associate the general resurrection with the Second Coming of Christ at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, all full preterists believe the resurrection is a past event. And because the resurrection is a past event and graveyards still contain the remains of deceased believers, we believe that the resurrection did not entail the raising of physical corpses. But that's about as far as the agreement goes. The Corporate Body View (CBV) and Individual Body View (IBV) each espouse vastly different concepts of the resurrection. Yet even CBV and IBV are not monolithic views themselves, with each having variations over the details. Because of this, you wouldn't receive an accurate understanding of these views if I merely selected a single representative from each and let them present their view.

Therefore, for our initial article, I have polled ten preterist pastors/authors/speakers to give us their perspective on where the two views first part ways after having agreed that the resurrection is past and that it didn't involve raising physical corpses. (Notably absent from this panel is Don Preston, who was too busy to participate. Hopefully he will be able to participate in future installments.) Their responses will form the basis for the subsequent articles as we endeavor to gain a clear understanding of both views.

Naturally, as we dig deeper into the

We can all watch conference videos and learn from a host of available preterist resources. But being able to sit and fellowship with like-minded believers lifts the spirit.

various issues of the resurrection, the responses will need to be longer than those in this issue. I can't print ten full-length articles in a single issue, so I will have to select a few individuals as representatives of their respective views. Nevertheless, I will strive to maintain a balance in the presentations. I don't view this as a debate between the two views, but rather a "come let us reason together" opportunity. While I would love, after all is said and done, for both sides to come away from the table with a unified view of resurrection, I know that is not going to happen. But I do hope that readers will come away with an accurate understanding of all sides of the issue, enabling them

to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling."

I should note that although I have stated there are two resurrection views, two of the respondents hold to what is loosely defined as a "hybrid" view. So IBV and CBV may not be the only games in town! Because of the number of respondents, I have asked them to provide a brief answer to my question and withhold any defense of their answer or concerns with an opposing view for a later article.

Blessings,

Brian

Mailbag...

Always look forward to your magazine, miss Don's articles. Thank you for all the hard work.

Mariana, WA

We love and enjoy your Fulfilled! Magazine. Thank you for your faithfulness and your labor. May the Lord keep blessing the magazine and all of you. In love,

Ron & Peggy, NC

Thanks for all you do and for Fulfilled! Magazine. I signed up for the Amazon Smile program to support you today, and I pray this small gift will help as well. Much love in Christ,

Kari, CO

I always look forward to Fulfilled! Magazine. I enjoy it. Keep up the good work. Thank you,

Joan, WV

May God bless your work which is so vital in this day and age. I look forward to the next magazine in the mail. Many thanks,

Joan, Australia

“
May God bless
your work which is
so vital in this day
and age.”

Perspectives

“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”

Critical Christian Thinking

by Brian L. Martin

OVER THE YEARS I’VE expressed my belief in the necessity of honestly examining all sides of a theological topic in order to arrive at the truth of the issue (this actually holds true for all issues of life, not just theology). Having recently listened to an audio lecture series titled “Critical Thinking” by Dr. Robert Bowman, I found his words especially fitting as we embark in this issue on an examination of the various resurrection views within preterism. One of his opening points was our responsibility to come to our own understanding of an issue and not let others dictate what we are to believe [note that Dr. Bowman’s quotes are transcribed from audio lectures and thus the grammar is more colloquial than text edited for print]:

If there is a God, it would be the height of folly, would it not, to ignore what He has to say about why things are the way they are. . . . But that is not to say that human beings are not created with responsibility and a capacity to think through things for themselves – they are. We in fact, I would argue, ought to value individual autonomy in relationship to other people so that we’re not letting other people tell us what to believe; we’re not letting other people dictate to us what we are to think. But we are to examine everything as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we are to critically examine claims, and we are to come to our own understanding of what the truth is.

I especially appreciated Dr. Bowman’s admonition to examine all sides of an issue:

Proverbs 18:13 *“He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”* Now, let me paraphrase that; if you criticize somebody before you understand what they’re saying, you’ll just look stupid. And of course, we all do that sometimes, and we all need to work very hard not to do it. . . . This is a value that Proverbs is presenting to us, that we should listen to what other people say, and work hard to understand what they are saying, to really listen to them, before we criticize what they believe.

Proverbs 18:17 *“The first to plead his case seems right until another comes and examines him.”* Isn’t it the case that the first person to present their position, their argument, very typically will make a very plausible sounding argument. But then somebody can come along and cross-examine his argument, critique it, and then you start to see maybe it wasn’t such a strong argument after all. . . . If you only listen

to one side, it may sound good, but you really don’t know if it’s right or not. The only way you’re really going to know is if you push beyond a one-sided view of things and you listen to both sides, or all sides in the case of many issues, and you really take the time to work through the issues and hear what people are saying, and look at the evidence. When you do that you’re in a much stronger position to assert that you know something than if you only read people that agree with you, if you only listen to people on the radio who agree with you, etc., etc.

Most preterists, to varying degrees, at times will have to function as apologists for their eschatological views. We must be prepared to give an answer to everyone (1 Peter 3:15). Therefore, Dr. Bowman’s following admonition is worthy of our consideration:

And by the way, if you’re interested in Christian apologetics, you have to do that. If you’re interested in Christian apologetics and you only read works of Christian apologetics, you are not an apologist. . . . A Christian apologist is somebody who reads books and articles by non-Christians and works through the issues that they raise, and is prepared to deal with them in that very direct fashion, and is not somebody who simply has read books by good Christian apologists and remembers their arguments. That’s

a start, but you’re not really an apologist, as far as I’m concerned, unless you, and until you, have wrestled with what non-Christians are saying directly.

To bring his point closer to home, unless we have wrestled with all the major views of resurrection we cannot truthfully consider ourselves an apologist for one particular view. How many of us have longed for friends and family to simply *“come, let us reason together”* with us regarding preterism—not with a view to coerce and convince them, but to merely hear us out that they may at least understand preterism from a preterist’s perspective, rather than from their futurist pastor or favorite author. Yet if that is the audience we would desire from those who disagree with preterism, how can we deny that same audience to those with whom we disagree regarding the resurrection, rapture, etc.? Dr. Bowman comments further on the need for this kind of open-mindedness:

Another quality or value of critical thinking is open-mindedness. Now if there’s a value in critical thinking that conservative Christians often speak against, this would be

. . . we are to critically examine claims, and we are to come to our own understanding of what the truth is.

Critical Christian Thinking

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the one. “Oh, people are so open-minded anything just kind of falls in, and they’re just believing anything.” Open-mindedness is not the same thing as gullibility. Being open-minded is not the same thing as being a person who uncritically accepts whatever he hears—that’s not open-mindedness. Open-mindedness is a willingness to learn and have your beliefs changed. Open-mindedness means that you are open to being persuaded that what you have believed up to this point is in fact not true and that you need to change your mind—you need to adopt a different position. In that sense open-mindedness is not only a good thing, it is a biblical value.

Proverbs 18:13 & 17 [cited above] teach us that it is important to listen to other perspectives than our own. Because if we don’t do that we are not going to grow, we’re not going to understand things accurately, we’re not going to really know the truth. We’re going to have only a partial, at best, perception of what’s really going on. . . . Both of those verses are making the point that *it is important for us to listen to those with whom we disagree* [emphasis added]. There’s no particular value in talking to people who only agree with you all the time. What can you learn from them? If they already know everything you know, and they think everything you think – well, as some people have said, one of you isn’t thinking – but beyond that, you’re not going to learn anything, and you’re certainly not going to learn as much as if you talk to people, listen to people, who disagree with you, who can give you another perspective. So Proverbs encourages us to get the other side.

Seek information from both sides of an issue, or all sides if there happen to be more than two. We shouldn’t assume that one particular side is completely correct in everything it says, has it all together, and no questions need to be asked, that no information needs to be obtained from the other side. We shouldn’t assume, if we are Calvinists, what we read in Calvinist literature about Arminianism is necessarily correct, balanced, fair, judicious, etc. And likewise, we shouldn’t assume if we’re Arminian that our Arminian literature accurately, fairly, judiciously, reasonably represents what Calvinism says. It’s important to get both sides of an issue.

I would encourage you to reread the previous sentences while substituting the terms *Calvinism* and *Arminianism* with *IBV* and *CBV*, or *literal rapture* and *spiritual rapture*.

We shouldn’t assume, if we’re Calvinists, that our Calvinist

interpretation of a particular passage is obviously the correct interpretation. It wouldn’t hurt to go see what a Lutheran or an Arminian thinks that passage means. We might actually learn something; we might learn that the particular Calvinistic interpretation that we have accepted of a passage has some problems. And likewise an Arminian—if we’re Arminian we might hold to a particular interpretation of a problem text for our Arminian view, and the Calvinist might help us see that there are problems with our interpretation. So, it doesn’t matter what your theological position is, you can gain something by seeking information from other perspectives, from the other side. If you don’t, then you are really not pursuing truth but you’re pursuing an ideology, your pursuing a propaganda, you’re pursuing confirmation of your position or arguments you can use to support your position, but you’re not really pursuing truth. I’ll just be really blunt about that. If you only listen to people that agree with you, you’re not really interested in the truth. Because people that really care about the truth realize that people that disagree with them have something to teach them.

I believe that the last part of that paragraph strikes at the heart of the issue and bears repeating:

“The first to plead his case seems right until another comes and examines him.”

Proverbs 18:1

So, it doesn’t matter what your theological position is, you can gain something by seeking information from other perspectives, from the other side. If you don’t, then you are really not pursuing truth but you’re pursuing an ideology, your pursuing a propaganda, you’re pursuing

confirmation of your position or arguments you can use to support your position, but you’re not really pursuing truth. I’ll just be really blunt about that. If you only listen to people that agree with you, you’re not really interested in the truth. Because people that really care about the truth realize that people that disagree with them have something to teach them.

While I agree wholeheartedly with that claim, I remind you that these are not my words but those of an academic Christian philosopher and apologist. Dr. Bowman further clarifies the importance of using the proper sources to examine all sides of an issue:

Now closely related to this point, we need to use primary sources. The distinction between primary and secondary sources is a basic one in research. . . . A primary source is the source from which the information ultimately derives. A secondary source is a source that comments on, or

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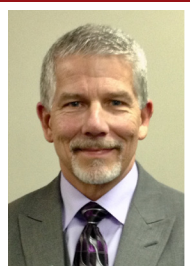
Perspectives

Where do CBV and IBV first part ways?

OF THE MANY POINTS over which preterists divide, arguably the greatest is the nature of the resurrection. The preterist community, by and large, is divided into camps—the Corporate Body View (CBV) and the Individual Body View (IBV). Both of these views are themselves further divided into various components, as not all of the respective proponents of a particular view agree on all of the details. Over the years it seems that the division has become more polarized, to the extent that I’ve even heard the “H” word (heresy) alluded to. Unfortunately, in our modern era of social media, it is very easy for the “facts” we read or hear to be second- or third-hand.

In light of the current written debate between Don Preston and Ed Stevens regarding the nature of the rapture (visit www.bibleprophecy.com or www.preterist.org to follow the debate), which touches upon but does not directly address the resurrection, I think it timely to compliment their debate with a similar interaction regarding the resurrection. Based upon the views expressed in the “Critical Christian Thinking” article (if you haven’t read that yet I urge you to read it before continuing with this article), the best approach is to ask both (all) sides of the issue to lay their cards on the table, so to speak, and allow readers to “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.” Hence, I have asked a number of leading preterists to answer the question below for this initial installment. Since there is neither time nor space to explore every facet and variation within the IBV and CBV positions, I will attempt to focus on the major points and structure each subsequent article on its predecessors.

Both IBV and CBV agree that the resurrection is a past event. Both also agree that the resurrection did not entail the restoration and rising of physical corpses. In your opinion, what is the initial fork in the road, the point (or points), at which IBV and CBV begin to diverge?



David Curtis - Hybrid

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To most Preterists the CBV means that we don’t get a body at death, they see the body talked about in Scripture as the corporate Body of Christ. I used to hold to this view, and I somewhat still do. I believe that the Bible often uses “body” to refer to the corporate body of Christ. I see the corporate body made up of individuals, with personalities, and spiritual bodies.

The Immortal Body at Death View (IBD) believes that at death we receive a spiritual or immortal body. I now believe this. So I guess I would have to say that I hold both of these views. I think that quite often the Bible speaks about the corporate body of Christ. But I now also believe that at physical death we will receive a spiritual body.



Jerel Kratt

Jerel is an agricultural scientist and former Church of Christ minister, and has spoken at several preterist conferences.
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The fork in the road, as I see it, begins with defining the word “body.” Is the resurrection body the church, or a person’s own embodied spirit? This division may be driven at its root by hermetical differences, and in this topic it figures strongly with understanding the death of Adam. One side may see the whole of scripture more from a figurative, spiritual or metaphorical sense, and the other from a more literal or physical sense. There are those from both sides who have taken their hermeneutic too far, in my opinion, and the truth likely lies in the middle, with a more hybridized approach.

Resurrection

In Romans 12:4-5, Paul said:

For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.

It wouldn't make sense for you and I to argue about whether we're members of one body or members of one another, for both are true, right?

I believe the same thing is true of the resurrection. It was of one body, the body of Moses, but the body of Moses consisted of all the Old Testament saints. However, it didn't consist of the biological bodies of the Old Testament saints, but their spirits from Hades. To me, the IBV goes awry when we're thinking of individual bodies instead of spirits.

Samuel Dawson - CBV

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Tony Denton - CBV

Tony is administrator of the Preterist Network Registry and author of commentaries on Hebrews and James.
www.ASiteForTheLord.com/id20.html



Seems to me it goes all the way back to the very beginning of redemptive prophecy; I mean, per Genesis 3:15, through grace, the enemy of law with its flock of blind yet law-promulgating sheep (which ended up through Adam's/Seth's seed becoming what we know as the nation of Israel, i.e. the corporate body of people who were provided by Yahweh with the epitome of all law) would, all at once, be fulfilled/finished/crushed (cf. Rom 16:20), while the corporate body of the grace adherents, the remnant (aka the seed of 1 Cor 15), would (simultaneously with the crushing, Dan 7:22) have immortality provided to them, again, all at once (1 Cor 15:50ff), creating the body of immortality into which the lifeless outside of that body may, by choice, enter today.

For me, that fork in the road was reached when I answered the following two questions: (1) How were the dead ones RAISED at the Parousia, and (2) What kind of BODY did they have after they were raised? (1 Cor 15:35) The two key words here are "raised" and "body." Each of the two views (CBV and IBV) defines those two words very differently. For instance, the CBV defines the resurrection as a spiritual-only change to a collective body, while the IBV sees it as individual souls being raised out of Hades to put on their new individual immortal bodies.

Ed Stevens - IBV

Ed is President of the International Preterist Association
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In short, the CBV holds that Christ is the resurrection, participation in Him involves individual choice and action, in a process that began through the cross, implemented on Pentecost and consummated at the Parousia.

IBV holds to an individual bodily change effected in the afterlife beginning at the Parousia.

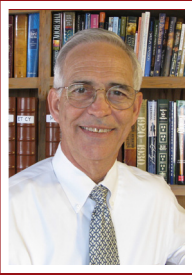
The point of divergence is the eschaton, i.e. the period of Pentecost to the Parousia in time as well as in nature. One is in process at the beginning of the gospel, the other does not begin until the Parousia.

William Bell - CBV

William is the founder of All Things Fulfilled online ministries and author of several books, audios, and DVDs on Covenant Eschatology.
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Charles Meek - IBV

Charles is author of *Christian Hope through Fulfilled Prophecy*, co-administrator of the Facebook page *Evangelical Preterism*, and editor of www.FaithFacts.org and www.ProphecyQuestions.org

“The IBV recognizes two types of death (spiritual and physical) mentioned in the Bible, thus requiring two types of resurrection. While the CBV acknowledges that physical death exists, they hold that only spiritual death requires a resurrection.”



Rod Stokes - IBV

Rod is pastor of Open Door Church in Maple Ridge, BC Canada, and conducts yearly missionary training with pastors/leaders in various countries.
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All of the errors/divergences “start” from the major breakdown and difference in the “death in Garden.” CBV holds to this being a “strictly spiritual only”: both the threat and the actual death which happened.

IBV views the threat of death as a “totality death”—meaning that the death Adam and Eve were threatened with, and that would happen the “very day” they ate, would have been a “penal (capital punishment)” death. An “unnatural” force death (meaning not a natural death which would happen sometime later in their life once cast out of the garden away from the Tree of Life) from breaking God’s command which would have physically killed them “that very day” being the portal into their eternal death. That is why Genesis 3:21 is so critical where God instituted the sacrificial substitutionary system that very day. That animal died in their place. They died with that animal. (It was a type, the antitype of which was Christ on the cross).



Alan Bondar - CBV

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From my conversations with IBV advocates, the fork in the road comes down to two things:

1. How one interprets *soma* (body) in the resurrection passages. IBVers interpret it as an individual body whereas CBVers interpret it as a corporate body.
2. IBVers believe that the individual assumes application to the corporate, whereas CBVers believe that the corporate assumes application to the individual and that the individual does not assume application to the corporate.



Kurt Simmons - IBV

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The point at which IBV and CBV first diverge is their respective DEFINITIONS of the eschatological resurrection. IBV holds that the eschatological resurrection spoke to the release of the spirits in Hades, some to eternal life others to eternal damnation. The eschatological resurrection was therefore the release of individuals out of Hades unto their respective eternal rewards.

CBV spiritualizes the eschatological resurrection, equating it with justification from sin and reconciliation to God (“resurrection is restored relationship with God” were Don’s words in his debate at our last conference) which they say did not arrive until AD 70 when they say the law of Moses was purportedly removed. The CBV therefore removes atonement and reconciliation from AD 33 and the cross, relocating it at AD 70 and the fall of Jerusalem in order that their spiritualized view of the resurrection may coincide with Christ’s return in those events. In order to postpone justification until AD 70, CBV must therefore argue the law of Moses was still valid, binding, and obligatory until the fall of Jerusalem and that it held mankind under condemnation of sin, and without its removal men could not be justified.

Critical Christian Thinking

by Brian L. Martin

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reports about, that information coming from the primary source. An example would be the Bible as a primary source, a commentary on the Bible as a secondary source. . . . You can't expect to know the Bible if all you do is read or listen to people talking about the Bible; you've got to actually read the Bible for yourself and you might find that you learn something you would have missed if you simply accept the sort of digested, processed explanation or exposition that you get from your pastor or your Sunday School teacher, or your radio Bible teacher, or your internet web site, or your commentary, or whatever it might be.

A good secondary source will always point you to the primary sources; they will quote them, they will explain them in an objective fashion, they will represent them fairly, they will tell you where you can find them, they will do everything they can, if they're good secondary sources, to encourage you to look at the primary source if at all possible.

In light of our ensuing investigation of the various resurrection views, a primary source for IBV would not come from a CBV proponent. And a good secondary source will not merely repeat the primary source, but will provide citations, references, etc. so that its readers can examine the source for themselves. A good example of this is the Bereans in Acts 17. Although they eagerly received Paul's interpretation (a secondary source) of the Old Testament prophecies, they examined the Old Testaments text itself (the primary source) to verify Paul's teaching. When CBV and IBV make various claims about the other, they need to provide references to the source material so that we, as Bereans, can examine these matters for ourselves.

I'll conclude this article with Dr. Bowman's thoughts on biases and assumptions:

We need to be aware of our own biases and assumptions and well as those of others. Most of us are very good at picking up on the assumptions that other people bring to a subject—we're not very good at picking up on our own.

We're not aware of our own assumptions, we're not aware of our own biases, or prejudices, or presuppositions. The reason why is because the very nature of an assumption, or a presupposition, is that of something that underlies our thinking, but we rarely think consciously or reflectively about it. Assuming it does not mean we arrogantly tell people "you have to believe this" without giving them a reason. That's not what we mean here by an assumption. What we mean here is we never even talk about the thing that we are assuming is true—we just take it for granted.

This problem isn't that we've got these assumptions; the problem is that they very often go unexamined. We think that we're trading in facts when we're really trading in assumptions.

How do we avoid trading in assumptions? How can we be made aware of our own biases and assumptions? By interacting with those who hold a different view. Because they hold a different view it is very unlikely that they will have the same biases and assumptions that we do. Granted, they will have biases and assumptions, but they will differ from ours and, as iron sharpens iron, so we can sharpen one another by helping each other become aware of our underlying biases and assumptions. †

Most of us are very good at picking up on the assumptions that other people bring to a subject—we're not very good at picking up on our own. We're not aware of our own assumptions, we're not aware of our own biases, or prejudices, or presuppositions.

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Life in the Kingdom

Learning from John the Baptist

by James W. Moore

BASED UPON MY OWN experiences as a believer I find that there are three spiritual states possible to a sinner like me—unbelief, belief, and doubt! I have also found that these three states are experienced by the various characters of whom we read in Scripture. I am very thankful for this fact, as it gives me hope of my union with Christ as my Savior and Lord. As I have sought to run the race set before me, I have left behind me a trail of failures with few successes. Thus I am thankful that my experiences are neither foreign to, nor absent from, the men and women of Scripture.

Sometimes life hurts. And sometimes the “doubt” or “unbelief” in our hearts multiplies the pain to the point of being unbearable! Confusion and fear then rule, and we become “worthless” to those around us, but especially to our loving Savior. During one such “hurt” of life I found comfort in the example of John the Baptist, which I now share in the hopes that you, too, may find comfort in the midst of your life “hurt.”

Consider the witness and testimony of the Lord Jesus regarding John Baptist and his ministry:

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. (Matt 11:11)

Would you not delight in a testimony such as that coming from the Lord Jesus concerning you? These words of Jesus tell me that John the Baptist had an “absolutely necessary ministry” and that he was exactly the right man for the job. God made no mistake in calling John the Baptist to the ministry of being the “forerunning” herald of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ—the task was given to no other! I am sure as John was preaching “*the baptism of repentance*” he could hardly contain himself as he labored in fulfillment of his calling as the “forerunner” of Christ the Messiah!

Yet at the end of John’s ministry, while he was in prison, the reports of Christ’s ministry caused John to send his disciples to Jesus with a question:

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matt 11:1-3)

What I am about to say, I do not say dogmatically, but I believe it to be true. John’s disciples did not come to Jesus to only remove their own doubts concerning Jesus, which they

apparently had, but to inquire concerning doubts that John the Baptist had about Jesus!

John the Baptist doubting? How can that be, considering John’s unique ministry and having such a testimony as “*none greater born of women*” from the Lord of Glory Himself? Can such a one as this doubt the very One he has so faithfully preached at great cost to himself?

Confusion, dissatisfaction, frustration, disappointment, doubts, and unbelief are all possibly inherent in this one simple question on the part of John the Baptist! How could this be? Have you and I ever asked Jesus this question since taking Him as our Savior: “*Are you the One or shall we look for another?*”

John had warned his listeners of coming judgment, and announced Jesus as the one who would bring that judgment:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Matt 3:7-12)

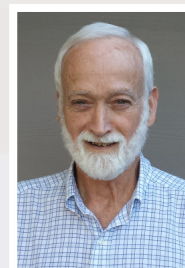
John was confused as he received reports of Jesus’ healing ministry—not a ministry of “judgment” as John had proclaimed! In fact, when Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue, He stopped short of reading the text that proclaimed the Lord’s day of vengeance:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus was not fulfilling what John had preached and expected Him to do; therefore, John appears to doubt that this Jesus was the one he expected and proclaimed! But John’s doubt was the result of Jesus not fulfilling John’s *own*

Dealing with Doubt

James W. Moore



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expectations—Jesus did not do the very things John expected in the manner he expected them to be done! (Does He ever? Do you ever find your expectations unfulfilled?)

John the Baptist’s “doubt” could have been fueled by the fact that John did what God wanted, in the way that God wanted, yet he ended up in prison for proclaiming the Truth! This could have left John somewhat bitter concerning God’s providential dealings with him.

John may have mulled the thought over and over again . . . could the Jesus he saw really be the victorious king who was to come in power and authority, carrying out judgment and vengeance upon the rebellious religious leaders and oppression of Rome? While locked up in prison, all that John hears is how gracious, kind, and merciful Jesus is! Perhaps John wondered . . . how could this Jesus permit the world and all its “injustices” to go on as it is? Have you never asked this question of God?

To doubt is to “second guess” God, or our decisions concerning God, in His leading, guiding, and purposes for us. We then find ourselves changing our mindset about Jesus and who He is and what He purposes to do with and through us. Do you never consider questions and feelings such as these? I know that I do!

Consider how Jesus deals with this kind of question coming from confused, fearful, and doubting hearts. Jesus answered John’s disciples by pointing to His evidences and works that had been prophesied long ago!

Jesus as much as said—but said in tender, loving patience—“*you tell John to consider carefully and thoughtfully my works and see for yourself that I am indeed that One who was promised to appear in this world.*” But Jesus seems to also issue a warning not to let one’s doubts go too far or for too long: “*Blessed is the one who is **not offended** by me.*”

Could John have considered himself “abandoned” by God and left in a prison or “dungeon” to die? Have you ever felt “abandoned” by God? Or that God has put too much on your life’s “plate,” so to speak? Have you felt “unfairly” treated by the Sovereign God who initiates and controls providentially all of our daily affairs? In this “realm of life” as we live it, do you ever “second guess” or “change your mind” concerning God’s promises regarding His leading, guidance, and watch-care over you as you struggle in afflictions, tests, trials, and “heavy crosses”? I know I do!

John is in prison and is soon to die there. But even as Jesus speaks to John’s disciples Jesus is just as surely headed to His own terrible suffering and death for poor, doubting, suffering sinners such as John the Baptist and ourselves! (Jesus, even

in knowing that our doubts would come, still undertook to redeem us by His own blood!)

Thinking too much about ourselves and our “unfair” or “hard” experience in God’s sovereign providence makes us “second guess” and doubt the goodness and mercy of God to us! We begin to think that no one has it as bad as we do, so maybe I should “look for another Jesus” who better suits my own purposes and desires!

Certainly insight, perception, and understanding of the sovereignty of God is controlled by God Himself and we are simply not consulted, nor will we have clear knowledge of many things that come upon us. We must have faith and not doubt!

We must remember that Scripture contains many things hard to be understood. God does not reach the soul through the intellect only, but also through the heart, and He leaves many things unexplained in order to test our faith.

The temptation to “doubt” is inward and experimental rather than speculative in its origin; it starts in a wounded affection rather than the reason and understanding of the intellect.

It was not enough that John the Baptist considered only the outward sign of Christ’s Messianic role. John’s problem most likely was the same as ours: It is a matter of the heart not grasping the workings of God in God’s own way.

The healing of mental tribulation and doubt must begin within our hearts and minds. The most convincing sign from God will fail its appointed end unless the mind can be freed from the distress of its own entangling willfulness and preconception and be made loving and loyal in service and obedience! Hence the exhortation of Paul:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:1-3)

This necessity continues throughout life. God does not always remove the “covering” that hides His purpose and reason but often leaves it covered (or partially covered) so that we cannot “understand it,” as God calls for faith and trust without doubting.

But what if we do doubt? Are you not glad for the likes of Thomas? What kind of God and Savior would so condescend to minister to a doubting disciple rather than rebuke him severely? Even those who walked with

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Him, lived in His physical presence, and who were privy to His personal individual teaching, knew the reality of “doubting” Him and questioning His providence!

I believe that he who most agrees with the “sovereign providence of God” will most often wrestle with inward doubts! To believe that God controls everything results in many “unanswerable” questions that can lead to “doubting” and “second guessing” if we make ourselves the starting point in God’s providential dealings with our world! The starting point of all our thinking and living in consideration of the Providence of God should be *God’s glory* at any expense to us!

For those of us who have “believing, saving faith,” disappointment can still occur when we think God is “too slow” in His providence or doesn’t cause things to go our way and to our desired end! When this occurs, we are in a sense asking; “*are you the One that should come, or do we look for another?*”!

What is the remedy for such a sad spiritual state of “doubting” or “second guessing”?

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
(Matt 11:28-30)

What is it to come to Christ? J.C. Ryle has the best description I have found on what it is to come to Christ:

It is written—“He that comes unto me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst.” We have,

secondly, in these verses, a saying of Christ about those who come to Him. We read that Jesus said—“Him that comes to me I will never cast out.” *What does “coming to Christ” mean? It means that movement of the soul which takes place when a man, feeling his sins, and finding out that he cannot save himself, hears of Christ, applies to Christ, trusts in Christ, lays hold on Christ, and leans all his weight on Christ for salvation. When this happens, a man is said, in Scripture language, to “come” to Christ.* [Emphasis mine]

I believe it is exactly the same understanding concerning the “invitation” of the Lord Jesus to come to Him.

Doubts are heavy—they leave us to the mercy of our own abilities and strengths and they are not sufficient for the task for which Jesus has “yoked” Himself to us.

Because of the “remaining corruptions” of our hearts *we must constantly come to Him* with our “doubts” that we might truly “learn” of Him and find that sought-after rest that is entered into by “yoking” ourselves to Him by His grace! It is there we see Him as the Only Savior that can satisfy! There is no other!

We need to fill our minds and hearts with the Lord Jesus, the Savior of sinners. Taking “His yoke” upon us unites us to Him in such a fashion that our burdens become His burdens, and He has more than enough strength to bear them!

What is the cost to us? We must revise our thinking such that we “deny” ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him no matter where or how that takes us!

We need not ever look for another Christ—the Jesus we have is the One, and only One, who is made to be all we need for every circumstance of life in which we find ourselves. †

The highest truths and the deepest principles are but the ministers of love; and they are in their truest and safest places when they hasten, at all times, and in all places, to feed her heavenly flame. Philip Henry well said that, “It is not the actual differences of Christian men that are the mischief; but the mismanagement of those differences.” My brethren, let us pray, and labour, and examine ourselves, as never before, so that we may have no hand in the mismanagement of this splendid movement! And, that it may be so with us, let us dwell, and with all our mind and with all our heart on what the same sweet writer says concerning the Church divisions of his day. “Notwithstanding all the sad divisions in our Churches,” says the saintly father of Matthew Henry; “the saints among us, so far as they are sanctified, are already one. The things in which they are agreed are many more, and are far more considerable, than are the things wherein they differ. They are of one mind concerning sin, that it is the worst thing in the world; concerning the favour of God, that it is better than life; concerning the world, that it is vanity; and concerning the Word of God, that it is above rubies.” - Alexander Whyte

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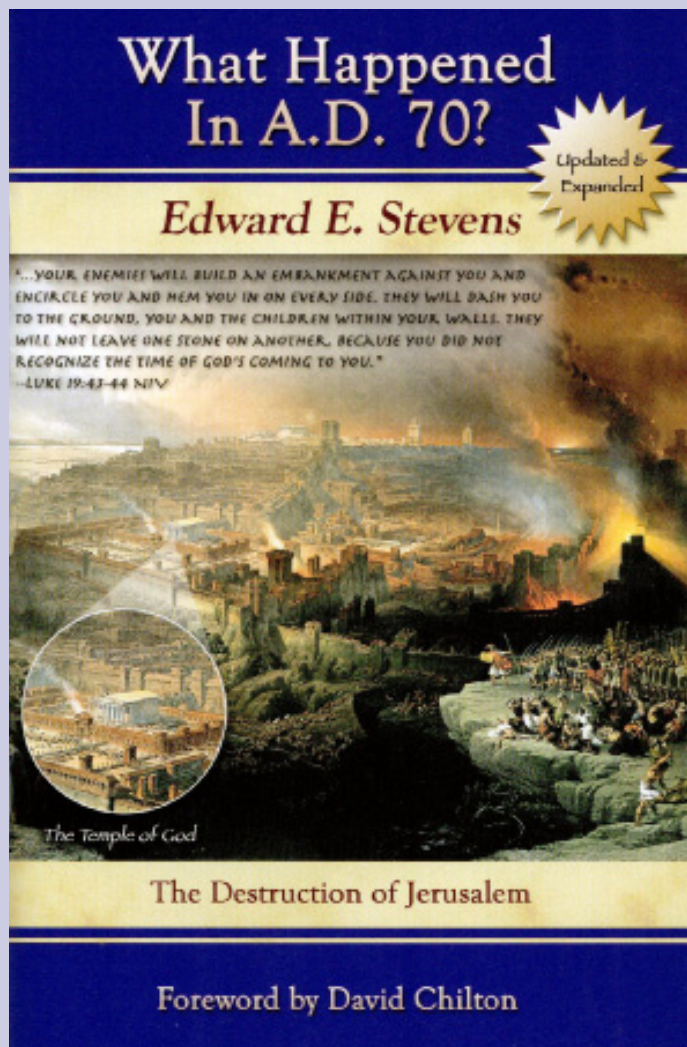
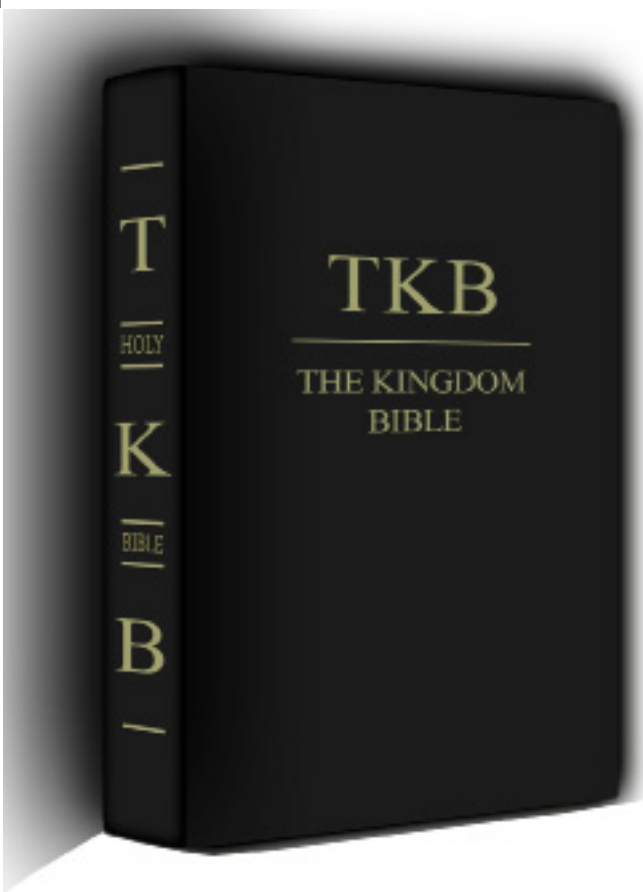
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