

FULLY DEPLOYING THE WORD OF GOD TO OVERCOME ALL ADVERSARIES¹

Introduction for Pastors and Teachers

Most of us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life recognize by this point in the early twenty-first century that biblically-based Christianity is in for the fight of its life. Adversaries include not only modernism that lives on in science and engineering circles, post-modernism that continues to dominate the liberal arts, but these adversaries also include neo-pagan forms of unbelief and militant, expansive Islam. No believer, and in particular our believing children, can escape these temptations of reinforced arrogance, subjectivity, and hatred of God's revelation. In the Apostle John's words, these adversaries are antichrists who all, as we shall see, fundamentally deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jo 2:18).

According to various religious surveys and personal experiences we evangelical Christians are losing ground even within our own circles. What as pastors and teachers are we to do? For the past century or so our community has tried various responses. In the 19th century many tried a strategy of accommodation whereby Scripture was interpreted with one eye on the text and the other eye on post-Kantian philosophical implications, evolutionary visions of natural history, and socialism. The attempted harmonies were not convincing and failed to stem the tide. During the early 20th century, one denomination after another was captured by modernism. Campuses, seminaries, and libraries were lost. After World War II fundamental evangelicalism made something of a comeback among groups outside of those "fallen" denominations.

Unfortunately, that revival of biblical authority seems to have run out of steam. Many schools that had returned academic authority to the Bible have since adopted curricula that confine this authority to the campus religious department. Lyell, Darwin, Marx, Freud, and Derrida are given equal or greater stature than Moses, David, Jesus, John, and Paul. Even in the religious department biblical authority isn't always safe any more. The siren songs of neo-Marxist political correctness and pagan mysticism are heard more frequently in places you would least expect.

Unless we as pastors and teachers understand how this happens, we cannot effectively respond and protect our flocks. We need to take seriously the Bible's warning that there is an evil order to the world (Gk *kosmos*) that is brilliantly energized by Satan and that insidiously resonates with fallen human flesh (Eph 2:2-3; 1 Jo 2:15-16). And as leaders in local churches we are on the front lines of this war whether we like it or not, whether we feel prepared or not, and regardless of how tired and over-committed we find ourselves.

¹ This is not a formal research paper and therefore lacks the number of references normally expected of such a document. Rather, it is a broad introduction to actual usage of the concept and strategy of a biblical framework in teaching the Word of God more formally in the pulpit and classroom as well as informally in the home and family environment.

The good news is that the Word of God is as completely sufficient today as it has ever been down through the centuries. The bad news is that too many pastors and teachers of the Word have never been given a vision of “squeezing the sponge,” i.e., of mining the neglected treasures in the canon of Scripture, of seeing the implications of special revelation for interpreting general revelation, of understanding how God has given enough information in the Bible to knock the feet out from under every adversary you or your flock will ever face.

As I develop my suggested strategy of deploying the often omitted implications of Scripture, I want you to think how you prepare to teach and how you present the Word of God. What I’m going to present may require some modifications if you want to implement this strategy.² Quality preparation, as we have been traditionally taught in our circles, begins with exegesis of the text. There is no substitute for quality training in exegesis—awareness of hermeneutical principles, skill in Hebrew and Greek, and mastering the author’s arguments. But preparation by no means ends here. Unless one submits to Scriptural authority, unless one abides in Christ and lets the text dwell fully in his or her heart, the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit so necessary for enlightened application of truth will be severely compromised. And there are more steps that follow from exegesis.

Let me direct your attention to Slide #1. You’ll see a formula $R_v + R_{nv}$. This formula expresses a fundamental concept in fully deploying the Word of God. R_v stands for the information content of special or verbal revelation, i.e., the surviving portion of historically-revealed information preserved in the canon. R_{nv} stands for general or non-verbal revelation in man and nature—i.e., design in creation and providential events in history, including individual life events. Now the formula $R_v + R_{nv}$ expresses the compatibility of the biblical text and real life existence. It points to the *absolute necessity of interpreting all the data and experiences of general revelation in man, nature, and history by the Word of God.*

Notice that even in the exegetical process that both R_v and R_{nv} are involved. The notion that some in our circles have that the science of exegesis is totally objective, totally free of concepts outside of the text is naïve and incorrect. As I indicate, there are other sources of information coming into the interpretative process. Archeological information from Old Testament Introduction and New Testament Introduction, literary form, linguistic notions, and personal experience all influence exegesis for good or for worse. *When we fail to subject these areas of general, non-verbal revelation (R_{nv}) to critical interpretation based upon the Word of God (special, verbal revelation- R_v), we leave “privileged sanctuaries” where anti-biblical doctrines gain footholds and then launch*

² By the way, I didn’t learn this strategy in a homiletics class; I had to develop it in the heat of battle in a university town when New Agers descended upon my congregation from the hippie communes of Colorado during the 70s. That generation, as Justice Robert Bork has pointed out in his book, Slouching Toward Gomorrah, is the generation that now leads this nation in all branches of government and in the corporate world. It is precisely their culture that dominates our society today. Please do not confuse this strategy with “worldview”—the two are not the same.

attacks back against us. We must never forget that unbelief's agenda always is to interpret all revelation—the Bible, man, nature, and historical experience—in such a way to make the world safe for sinners.

Notice also that from exegesis of a portion of the biblical text we move toward biblical theology. Biblical theology is a science that has more fully developed over the past century. If used critically and based upon correct exegetical procedures, it is a tool that offers considerable aid in refining understanding of Scripture. It's of great benefit to distinguish the unique qualities of each biblical author—how, for example, Paul and John use the expression “eternal life” with different emphases. As teachers of the Bible, we develop our sense of biblical theology gradually as we gain more experience in exegesis.

Then we move toward systematic theology as we seek to develop internal consistency or coherence in our thinking. It's at this point where we necessarily interact with the concepts floating around in the culture and with theological conclusions reached by our forefathers in the faith. Notice on Slide #1 that it is here where the pressure from the *kosmos* becomes most obvious. It is at this interface between systematic theology and unbelieving cultural thinking that the apostle John invokes the antichrist test of 1 John 4:1. It is here where Paul warns of the conflict between Christology and the fundamental ground ideas of pagan thought (Gk: *stoichea*). Here, too, Isaiah sets forth the challenge between Mosaic Yahwehism and ancient near eastern idolatry (Isa. 40-44).

There's a somewhat controversial point about this slide. Some in our circles demean systematic theology, presumably reacting to its misuse in exegesis. To avoid systematics, however, is to lack coherence in your thinking. Your teaching inevitably will be fragmented, like beads of a broken necklace. You will be feeding your flock a story here and a story there, a book here and a book there, but in the mind of those under your care these all too often become mere marbles rolling around on the table.³ And most importantly neither you nor those you teach will have a strong defense against the systematic evil of the *kosmos*. I will give specific instances to illustrate this point later in this paper. Instead of fleeing systematic theology with consistently stated doctrine, the proper response to sloppy “eisegesis” is to ensure that when theology uses philosophical concepts (and it can't avoid doing so) it subjects them to biblical critique. For example, you want to be consciously aware that the commentaries and grammars you use are founded upon a biblical philosophy of language and meaning. Do any of them blindly assume the universal pertinence of pagan literary genre to the biblical text? Good exegesis necessarily relies upon systematically thinking through the nature of verbal revelation culminating in Christology for its linguistic implications as well as other matters.

³ This is the major reason in my opinion for the increasing defection from Bible-teaching dispensational churches to Reformed churches. Believers to whom orderly thinking is important and whose spiritual diet has consisted of disconnected Bible expositions are readily seduced by the “neat” appearing system of 5-point Calvinism. Early 20th century dispensationalist teachers like Scofield and Chafer spent considerable effort systematizing doctrine in their writings and as a result had great and lasting influence. We would do well to emulate them.

Finally, let me articulate a philosophy of pulpit ministry that blends well with the framework strategy I will present here. After the academic discipline of learning exegesis, it becomes very easy to think of the people you teach as you would your fellow students in a seminary classroom. In the classroom your presentation would be down at the exegetical level giving details of the textual argument. You would naturally want to employ all your freshly-learned skills to develop your report.

But in the pulpit or local church class, it's different. Unlike seminary classroom students, these folks live in a different environment. They want you and me to develop the meaning of the text in the details of life—struggles in the mind, navigating relationships in the home and dealing with conflicts at work. They also need review, lots of it. They need specific application examples that are readily visualized. And, as we will see, facing today's *kosmos*, they need a coherent frame of reference so they can move from one situation to another with confidence and consistency. Slide #1, therefore, shows the framework as an organizer of teaching and evangelism. I will illustrate later in this paper.

General Introduction

No one here today can be unaware of the increasing hostility toward Bible believing Christians not only in this nation but also around the world. Statisticians tell us that more believers have been martyred for Christ in the last century than in all the previous centuries combined. Christianity has all but disappeared from Europe as Western secularism—with Islam following rapidly on its heels—entrenches itself on that continent. Here at home each week, it seems, new perversions appear. Neo-paganism that once was confined to a few outspoken individuals has become so popularized that it now is becoming institutionalized. Thus Ford Motor Company corporately insults every Christian employee and customer by channeling its earnings toward homosexual advocacy groups. Last month Goldman Sachs announced that their employee health plans would start covering sex change operations. And it's only a matter of time before "hate crime" legislation by both individual States and the U.S. Congress will criminalize the teaching of certain passages of Scripture by pastor and parent alike.⁴

Within our own evangelical circles we are seeing antichrist theology on a scale not seen since modernism triumphed over biblical faith in most Protestant denominations during the early half of the 20th century. I will later explain why I use the terms "pagan" and "antichrist" for these adversaries. I am not name calling. I mean exactly what dictionaries and the Bible mean by these terms.

Toward the end of the last century it became obvious that there is a global confluence of antichrist doctrine. One can easily spot the trend in the New Age, neo-pagan book, A

⁴ If your church leadership hasn't consulted Christian attorneys knowledgeable in church-state law on how to protect your pastors and parents from lawsuit or criminal indictment likely to come from the homosexual campaign in progress, you better have them do so as soon as possible.

Road Less Traveled. That book remained on the New York Times best seller list for 400 weeks—over 7 years! In it the author, M. Scott Peck wrote,

“God wants us to become himself (or Herself or Itself). We are growing toward godhood. God is the goal of evolution. It is God who is the source of the evolutionary force and God who is the destination. This is what we mean when we say that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end....It is one thing to believe in a nice old God who will take good care of us from a lofty position of power which we ourselves could never begin to attain. It is quite another to believe in a God who has it in mind for us precisely that we should attain His position, His power, His wisdom, His identity..”⁵

As humanists have dreamed of for years, global religious unity is slowly emerging not led so much by Western intellectuals as by mystics within each of the major world religions. New Age writer David Spangler says it clearly:

There will be several religious and spiritual disciplines as there are today, each serving different sensibilities and affinities, each enriched by and enriching the particular cultural soil in which it is rooted. However, there will also be a planetary spirituality that will celebrate the sacredness of the whole humanity in appropriate festivals, rituals, and sacraments. There will be a more widespread understanding and experience of the holistic nature of reality, resulting in a shared outlook that today would be called mystical. Mysticism has always overflowed the bounds of particular religious traditions, and in the new world this would be even more true.⁶

This confluence was brilliantly anticipated in 1898 by Samuel J. Andrews in his book, Christianity and Anti-Christianity in Their Final Conflict.⁷ Being at home in the cross currents of 19th century European thought, he foresaw that the God of the Bible was being systematically effaced in preparation for an impersonal and mystical pantheism that would encompass all religions. Andrews rightly saw that below the Christian façade of his day, the philosophical trends coming out of the so-called Enlightenment were neatly surrounding traditional biblical faith and were already well on their way of choking it off. He summarized the trend in his day. It was redefining Christianity to deceive the public, deifying man to justify his autonomy, using biblical criticism to alter the biblical message, divorcing creation from science to exclude testimony to the Creator, extending the democratic spirit to render all literature anthropocentric and existential, and re-explaining evil as not due to personal responsibility but due to environmental victimization. The state, Andrews correctly perceived, was being transformed from a preservative institution into a redeeming institution.

Once we realize this grand strategy of the modern *kosmos*, we should not be surprised at the increasing animosity toward fundamental Christianity. To stubbornly hold to belief in knowable truth is to obstruct this all-encompassing wave of the future. And like that

⁵ M. Scott Peck, M.D., *The Road Less Traveled* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1978), p. 270.

⁶ David Spangler, *Emergence: The Rebirth of the Sacred*, op. cit., p. 112.

⁷ Originally published by the Bible Institute Colportage Association of Chicago and reprinted by Bob Jones University.

lone rock jutting up out of the ocean surf, we are being surrounded (Slide #2). The road is no longer less traveled.

For the rest of this paper I am going to first critique what I think is a procedural weakness in the way we have traditionally viewed and taught the Word of God. Then I will present a new strategy that I call the “biblical framework” approach, illustrating it by a list of conflicts with today’s *kosmos*. Finally I will end with a somewhat detailed development of one of those conflicts.

A Strategy of Weakness and a Strategy of Strength

A Strategy of Weakness

Understandably the tendency when we are teaching or learning the Word of God is for us to focus on the particular passage or particular doctrine to the exclusion of other issues. Our perspective at that moment is like the rock in the surf that protrudes above the incoming waves. We necessarily concentrate on the details of the subject. However, we need *situational awareness*. What is going on around this subject? If we attempt to respond to this particular truth in the everyday flow of life, how will it withstand our adversaries’ counter strategies? What ocean of facts that we have left uninterpreted by the Word of God will surround and envelop this text or doctrine?

I often use the illustration of an amoeba that envelops a bit of food by flowing around it (see Slide #3). God-hating unbelief in the *kosmos* easily overpowers isolated bits and pieces of Scripture. I could just as well use some plays in football where the defense team concentrates heavily on one part of the field while the offense team end runs or passes over them. Or we might think of the flanking maneuver in Operation Desert Storm that drove northward into Iraq over terrain far to the west of the main Iraqi forces.

This sort of strategic envelopment can be seen in history, in sports and even in personal spiritual struggles in our minds. Paul tells us to “cast down vain imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:5). This battle I’m speaking of isn’t some alien, academic phenomenon; it takes place in our own souls 24/7. As Slide #3 shows, when we are strategically enveloped, it’s because either through spiritual immaturity or passivity or downright carnality we’re letting unbelief interpret our surrounding situation. In this situation we can try to claim a portion of Scripture all we want and just spin our wheels. We can’t attain a faith rest status because *the piece of Scripture we’re using is completely enveloped in a context of unbelief*.

Consider what happened to the apostle Peter in Matthew 16. Jesus has just commended Peter for his clear understanding that Jesus is the Christ, not because Peter has such a great mind, but because the Father revealed that truth to him (16:16-17). Peter is learning a great amount of truth about the Messiah—about what we would call Christological doctrine. But apparently the notion of a suffering Messiah doesn’t fit with his idea of what the Messiah should be and do. Perhaps Peter shares the prevalent Jewish notion of

a glorious reigning Messiah that will deliver Israel from Roman occupation. Or perhaps he so admires Jesus that he can't stand the idea of seeing him suffer. Whatever, he blurts out his rejection of such a future outcome. Jesus immediately recognizes that Peter the Rock has just become Satan's spokesman (16:23).

This happens to all of us more often than we would like to admit. Not only do we fall for satanically-inspired thoughts, but we, like Peter, can quickly become unintentional agents of Satan to attack our best friends without even realizing that we're doing it! What happened to Peter was another case of strategic envelopment. The piece of Christological truth he had grasped was swallowed up in a greater, surrounding and false context of the Messiah's role in history, a context skillfully crafted by the god of the *kosmos*.

At this point in Church history every one of us needs to take very, very seriously the threat of strategic envelopment. Much of the anti-biblical thinking we presently face results directly from a strategy of weakness that Christians have pursued time and time again over the past centuries. While the Protestant Reformation rightly submitted the teachings of salvation to biblical authority, they could not and did not submit vast areas of surrounding theological terrain to the Bible. They left areas of doctrine inherited from Rome untouched in significant ways such as the nature of the church and its relationship to the state (ecclesiology) and the place of the church and Israel in God's prophetic plan (eschatology). But more importantly, they left philosophy and natural science to develop on their own, unguided by the information that God had revealed and preserved in Scripture.

With the advent of the so-called Enlightenment, leading thinkers—some of whom were professing Christians—devoted great effort at developing large-scale interpretations of man's mind, the role of reason versus experience, structures in the natural world, and views of history. Much of their initial perspective came from the revived paganism of ancient Greece. This is why I deliberately use the term "pagan" in spite of criticism I have received for doing so. Watch carefully what happened next.

Slide #4 summarizes how Bible study became completely surrounded by powerful concepts of man, language, nature, and reality itself—concepts that were not subjected to biblical critique. Biblical truths are held captive. This trend continues to our day. Present-day resurgent paganism is just unbelief becoming more self-consistent. After all, if conceptual knowledge begins in man's brain and there's a more basic mystical component to man, why think of religious belief as divinely revealed and cognitive any longer? Why take seriously the uniqueness of the Bible and the God of the Bible? Why not forsake limited cognitive reason in favor of mental passivity? Why not join the mystics and contemplate our navels so we can join together with all men everywhere as one entity with nature? If language is constructed by one's socio-linguistic community, it no longer can be considered descriptive of reality. In fact, it can't even be a medium of intellectual dialog among us.⁸

⁸ An immediate result is the emotional hostility we observe when disagreements are aired in public forums today—in place of reasoned discussion we see invective and *ad hominem* arguments used by both sides.

That's where we are today. Immanuel Kant separated mind from truth. Higher criticism followed up by reinventing the Bible so all we have left are some disconnected "Bible stories" that belong to the same category as Aesop's Fables. Anti-supernaturalism has now completely separated "objective science" from "subjective religion", thanks largely to the courts foolishly imposing a Kantian interpretation on the first amendment. Post modernism through its liberal arts spokesmen has redefined language so students are taught to use "hermeneutics of suspicion"—to deconstruct Shakespeare, for example, as the ranting of a white male Englishman. Missionary and other evangelistic activity is now considered socio-linguistic arrogance so Wycliff's Summer Institute of Linguistics is kicked off the campus of the University of Oklahoma and moves to Dallas. Bible-believing Christians, like the rock in the surf, protrude above the waves, and most observers in the world can't wait for us to erode and disappear.

A Strategy of Strength

Thankfully, as Solomon wisely noted millennia ago, there is nothing new under the sun (Eccles. 1:9). Early Christians also faced intense political and social challenges to major truths of the faith. Unbelief, then as now, attacked the central Christian miracle of the resurrection (Matt. 28:12-15; Acts 17:32; 26:8). Then as now, pagan nature worship made the Creator-creature distinction almost inconceivable (Acts 14:8-18; 17:22-31). Ancient political leaders branded early Christianity an enemy of the state long before modern Communists, Muslims, and ACLU lawyers (John 11:48-53; Acts 4:13-22; 6:11-15; 17:5-9; 19:21-41; 21:27-31). Unbelieving family members questioned the faith of the earliest Christians (I Pet 3:15). Present-day unbelievers, in spite of their misplaced self-confidence, are no more intelligent than their pagan predecessors centuries ago. Thank God that He has preserved in Scripture sufficient revelation for us to manage each of these circumstances (II Tim. 3:16-17).

In speaking his Word into the fallen world God has provided us with a model strategy for victory. When we comprehend the entire sequence of historical revelation, we have all the guidance we will ever need. By it we can turn the enemy's envelopment game plan on its head. By *fully* deploying *all* the resources of the Word of God, we have the capacity to envelop every kind of unbelief and render its attacks impotent. This strategy must be distinguished from worldview construction although it definitely supports construction and critique of worldviews as we shall see.

Let's watch Paul use this strategy of strength in the intellectual capitol of paganism in his day—the city of Athens. Athens was filled with pagan attempts to construct total world views or idolatries (17:16,22).⁹ The "flash point" between Paul's preaching and some of the city's prominent pagan authorities centered upon the resurrection (17:18-19). If Paul had followed the procedure used by most conservative Protestants since the

⁹ Note that when the Bible speaks of idolatries, it points to man's attempt to re-engineer reality—to *construct a view of reality that protects him from responsibility to the God of creation*. Idolatry means nothing less than that. Idolatry starts by shifting authority from the God who is known by all men (Rom 1:18-20) to man himself as the ultimate definer of "god" (see Isaiah's extensive critique of idolatry to prepare Jews for their coming life in exile in chapters 40-44).

Enlightenment, he would have focused upon defending the isolated act of resurrection. He probably would have cited witnesses to the resurrected Christ and appealed to a supposed “common ground” shared by him and Greek philosophy. The end result would likely have been hearers who absorbed this event into their own view of the world as just another mystery, a strange event to add to their unknown god.

Paul knew better than to try such an approach. He knew that their consciences had to sense that they were faced with their Creator and Judge.¹⁰ As one raised in the pagan world outside of Israel, Paul was very familiar with the perspective of Athenian authorities. He realized that their deception would insulate them from understanding the gospel. He therefore had to prevent the truth of Christ’s resurrection from being reinterpreted and absorbed within that view—within the “Athenian Amoeba” if you will.¹¹

Operating with a strategy of strength, Paul deployed the Word of God in its fullness rather than using a fragment here and a fragment there. Utilizing Old Testament revelation extensively, he contrasted major biblical truths with the pagan worldview point by point. He challenged the pagan belief in the Continuity of Being with Isaiah’s and the Psalmist’s Creator-creature distinction (17:24-25 cf. Isa. 42:5; Pss. 42:5; 50:9-12).¹² He denied paganism’s deification of man’s intellect with Solomon’s confession of the incomprehensibility of God (17:24; cf. I Kings 8:27). Against Athenian racism Paul presented Moses’ account of the unity of the human race (17:26; cf. Gen. 1,9; Deut. 32:8), his account of the paganization of civilization (17:30; cf. Deut. 4:19), and the Psalmists’ subordination of national existence to God’s decreed doxological purpose in human and natural history (17:27; cf. Ps. 74:7). Paul then used Greek literature to show that underneath their paganism they really did know God and their responsibility to think according to His standards (17:28-29).¹³

Do you see what Paul did here? In the war of maneuver, he challenged every part of their viewpoint. He denied them use of unbelieving interpretations of reality—anti-biblical views of nature, of history, of culture. No part of their worldview was immune from his

¹⁰ Paul expounds the nature of the confrontation between the gospel and paganism in Romans 1:18-32. Central to his strategy was addressing the conscience of man where God-consciousness resides.

¹¹ Paul explanation of the meaning of “resurrection” to the Athenians shows why the apparently simple gospel statement in John 3:16 requires a lot of work using Old Testament antecedent revelation to be clearly communicated in pagan cultures like ours in rapidly becoming.

¹² Unbelief always denies the Creator-creature distinction so it has to posit a unified reality in which the gods, man, animals, plants, and matter form a blended spectrum of being that is ultimately impersonal and unintelligible. Documentation of this Continuity of Being concept from Old Testament times through modern Darwinian evolution may be found in Henry M. Morris, The Long War Against God (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1989).

¹³ Paul’s tactic of using their own literature against them exposed the ever-present flaw in unbelief: its inability to totally suppress the truth. After all is said and done, unbelievers have to live as creatures made in God’s image so they aren’t able to reinterpret everything perversely. They inevitably retain some sense of logical reasoning, certainty of knowledge, and moral law—all of which conflict with their idolatries and cannot be justified by them. Whereas we believers can become hypocrites by choice, unbelievers cannot avoid being systematic hypocrites at a very deep level, i.e., they can’t live in accordance with what they say they believe (or don’t believe).

biblical critique. He thus prevented them from launching a counter-attack against the resurrection from such “privileged sanctuaries.” By using an entire array of biblical truths that contrasted with the Greek perspective all across the board Paul successfully preached the resurrection with unmistakable clarity and contextual flanking protection. The “Athenian Amoeba” couldn’t gobble up the resurrection as an isolated fragment of truth. Having dismissed the cyclical Greek view of history, he explained the resurrection within the Old Testament view of history as progressing toward a goal. The resurrection’s meaning, Paul explained, is that it constitutes the last step in a progression toward final judgment of all men (17:31). Notice that throughout Luke’s account in Acts 17 he does not give center stage to the Athenian worldview. The text gives only hints of it. What gets center stage is the glory of the Word of God. Paul fully deploys it to challenge, disarm, and neutralize the dark forces in Athenian hearts. Paul obviously is trusting the Holy Spirit to utilize the Word preached in this fashion to convince them that repentance is necessary.¹⁴

I sometimes visualize this need for repentance concerning the nature of God by looking at the Grand Canyon (Slide #5). When revelation is allowed to interpret all existence, i.e., when the authority of the Word of God is honored, a chasm opens between belief and unbelief. Distinct differences arise at many points along the chasm. One becomes aware of just how extensive are the claims of Scripture and how fundamentally different they are from the conventional thinking of the *kosmos*. Jesus and resurrection no longer are just a couple of interesting ideas to be reinterpreted and added to one’s already well-established mental storehouse. They are two historical realities that are related to many other historic realities. Together they comprise an all encompassing network of truths. Now unbelief faces not just a piece of truth but an array of truth. The amoeba is caught in a web (Slide #6). If he wants to attack a piece of biblical truth, he must attack all the supporting pieces of truth. By analogy with football, it is as though we have the line of scrimmage covered from left to right; an end run is no longer possible.

To sum up this issue of strategies—that of weakness and that of strength—let me review the difference. With the strategy of weakness we only partially deploy the Word of God, confining it to the “spiritual” part of our life. We present truth piecemeal. We surrender all other territory to whatever interpretations the *kosmos* puts on it. And we reap personally what we have reaped corporately from the past four centuries of negligence (see Slide #7)—a chained in ghetto religion that fails to draw blood from its adversaries. With the strategy of strength, on the other hand, we fully deploy the Word of God as our source of information to interpret all of life and history (see Slide #8). We have the courage to let the Word of God loose to challenge apostate conceptualizations in science, literature, medicine, psychology, politics, art, and music. As the old timer used to say, “we done stop preachin’ and gone to meddlin’!”

¹⁴ In Acts 20:21, Paul shows that repentance has to do getting the nature of God squared away first so that true faith in Christ can occur afterward. He never starts with a Jesus story. Following Isaiah he starts with the event of creation and its implications in order to expose the extent of idolatry in unbelief. With correct Old Testament revelation understood, he sets Jesus and his resurrection within that context.

The Word of God as a Network of Truths Founded Upon the God of Truth—Our Creator, Redeemer, and Judge

Let's make sure that in talking about the Word of God as an all encompassing viewpoint, we don't lose sight of what it says about itself as truth. The New Testament clearly says that the truth we see revealed is ultimately the mind of God Incarnate, the Person of the God-Man. The Logos that created the universe became flesh, dwelt among us, and his glory was observed (John 1:1-14). Therefore, we're not talking of truth as a universal abstraction like Plato talking about the Ideal Good. Nor are we engaging in New Age talk about some imagined pantheistic "Christ spirit" that indwells all. Nor are we talking about the more sophisticated notion making it way around religions circles today of a panentheistic deity.¹⁵

So a brief review of Christology is in order. Note how in Colossians Paul warned the Church about being deceived by pagan notions of the fundamental categories of reality (Col. 2:8). These basic categories or *stoichea* in ancient times could be earth, fire, water, air, or other created things that paganism falsely interpreted as cosmic sources and sustainers. Against this pagan viewpoint Paul directs us to build upon the biblical Christ and the truths revealed in him. Christ, says Paul, created the entire cosmos—it didn't emanate from him. He sustains every so-called natural process, and fully reveals God's Person (Col. 1:15-17). Yet Christ is fully and completely man forever. So while maintaining the Creator/creature distinction, Christ settles the philosophical problematic of how a finite mind can know an infinite Creator. In Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Christ links omniscience with limited human thought, perfect holiness with creature righteousness, all-determining sovereignty with human choice. In considering truth, therefore, we face the Living God revealing himself in and around us at all times and in all places. We aren't strolling through a "worldview cafeteria" dispassionately checking the menu of interesting intellectual options. Far from it. We humble ourselves before him as our Creator, Savior, and Judge, or we engage in the futile attempt to make him go away. *Either way our search for truth cannot avoid a personal relationship with him, one of friendship or one of animosity; there is no neutrality.*¹⁶

The apostle John makes this point explicitly clear by what today would be considered a politically incorrect breach of intellectual etiquette. John has the audacity to accuse every claim that would deny directly or indirectly the hypostatic union as a claim coming from the evil spirit of antichrist (1 John). He would no doubt be accused of polarizing what ought to be "morally neutral" academic dialog. Looking at today's global culture through

¹⁵ Pantheism is the label placed upon a centuries-old tradition emanating from Neo-Platonism which compromises the Creator/creature distinction but which also refuses to identify God with his creation as pantheism does. See discussion and critique in John W. Cooper, Pantheism: The Other God of the Philosophers (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

¹⁶ Here is the proper perspective on the oft-repeated and false disjunction between "doctrine" and "personal relationship" as though they could ever be separated. All men everywhere and always are in "relationship" to God. The proper distinction is the quality of that relationship. If this were not the case, there would be no explanation for the call to be reconciled to God.

his eyes, however, we unmistakably observe that culture is being shaped ever more self-consciously by this spirit of antichrist. The contemporary view of the limitations of language denies that Christ could harmoniously think and speak as God and man. The view of naturalism that order somehow exists on top of unintelligent chaos denies that Christ could have thought and spoken the universe into existence. The view of moral relativism that ethics is an arbitrary social construction denies that Christ could be the coming Judge of all men from every era of history.

Full deployment of the Word of God transforms a casual worldview shopping trip into an up close and personal encounter with God. Every attempt to reinterpret our environment and our situation apart from the Word of God is a direct denial of Jesus Christ. It is an expression of personal antagonism toward him that by implication attempts to redefine his nature. And “he that denies the Son, has not the Father” (1 Jo 2:23).

To appreciate how widely and how deeply Christ and the *kosmos* oppose one another, consider a short list of 20 instances of where they collide. Without going further into worldview studies, but by simply unfolding the big and comprehensive implications of the Word of God, we automatically employ a strong strategy. We can cast down every vain imagination—beginning, of course, in our own heart and then working outward from there.

Pagan Denials and Biblical Affirmations of Reality.

1. Creation.

a. Pagan denial. Creation never happened. All existence is eternally self-transforming—gods and goddesses transform themselves into matter, and matter spontaneously transmutes into animals and man. Though there are scales of Being (gods, mankind, animals, plants, raw material, fire, etc.) all is ultimately One. Our education generally overlooks (intentionally ?) the pagan roots of Darwinian naturalism and fools us into thinking that it is purely a product of post-Enlightenment science.¹⁷

b. Biblical affirmation. The Genesis 1-2 creation event and statements throughout the rest of the Bible point to the Creator/creature distinction with act of creation-into-nothing. No transmutation ever occurs across this boundary, even in the God-man. Two levels of being exist, not one, and radical implications follow for every area of our lives as well as for philosophic reflection.

2. Completion of creation.

a. Pagan denial. All things continually change as they forever have. Even the Big Bang is an instance of transformism, not *ex-nihilo* creation.¹⁸ This denial supplies the rationale for applying the scientific method to understanding the “prehistoric” past (see next section below).

¹⁷ See any ancient cosmogony such as the Babylonian Enuma Elish. Also see the discussion and bibliographic list of source materials in chapters 4 and 5 of Henry M. Morris, The Long War Against God (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989).

¹⁸ For a broad discussion of why the Big Bang cosmology is not true creation, see chapter 4 in Mortimer J. Adler, How to Think About God (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980).

b. Biblical affirmation. The Genesis 2 report of the termination of God's creating work is memorialized in Israel's Sabbath. The next universe is to be created in discrete stages, each of which is completed sequentially beginning with the resurrection of Jesus that was completed during the 3rd day of his burial. This affirmation supplies the rationale for restricting the scientific method to understanding history only where direct observations exist (see next section below).

3. Uniqueness of man vis-à-vis animal.

a. Pagan denial. Both ancient and modern pagan cosmologists see man and animal as mutually transformable into each other. Ancient art depicts man-animal beings and modern evolution asserts the chimpanzee-like (derived?) genetic nature of man. Man is part of nature and only an insignificant part at that.

b. Biblical affirmation of the uniqueness of man vis-à-vis animal. The Genesis 1-2 creation event and subsequent Scripture references to it insist that man is a finite replica of God, that God prepared the human form for incarnation, and that man under Christ shall one day rule the universe above all other creatures. Man is separate from nature and is its lord.

4. The "recentness" of creation and the immanency of coming judgment.

a. Pagan denial. Both ancient and modern pagan cosmologies assert that man and nature came to exist in their present state far off in the distant past and can look forward to the uninterrupted existence of natural cycles into the distant future. This perspective is relieving guilty consciences of a sense of the nearness of God.

b. Biblical affirmation. The obviously short chronologies of Genesis 5 and 11 coupled with universal language of the events of creation, fall, and flood, bear witness to recent creation. The textual references to an immanent return of Christ in conjunction with exhortations to Christian living in accordance with that event bear witness to immanent coming judgment.

Pagan Denials and Biblical Affirmations of Understanding Truth.

5. Truth has an existence in God that is independent of man

a. Pagan denial. Although some early pagan thinkers thought truth may have existed independently of man, they did not locate its source in God. Most today insist that what we call "truth" is a product of individual minds or biochemical phenomena of individual brains. Remarkably some mathematicians think this way (see Slide #9). Morris Kline, the celebrated mathematics teacher at New York University for many years, wrote:

"Is then mathematics a collection of diamonds hidden in the depths of the universe and gradually unearthed one by one or is it a collection of synthetic stones manufactured by man but nevertheless so brilliant that it bedazzles those mathematicians who are already partially blinded by pride in their own creation? Several considerations incline us to the latter point of view."¹⁹

Fearful of the design implication of the obvious correspondence between some mathematical structures and experience with natural phenomena, "the philosophically

¹⁹ Morris Kline, Mathematics for the Nonmathematician (Mineola, NY: 1985 Dover edition of original Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1967), p. 545.

minded mathematician will avoid as much as possible reference to mathematical existence independent of human thought.”²⁰ In blunt terms, paganism now contends that man *invents* truth.

b. Biblical affirmation. The Genesis 1-2 creation event with God’s direction for man to name his natural environment, the subsequent biblical contracts between God and man concerning natural phenomena, and Old Testament wisdom literature witness to truth that originates in the mind of God and which is revealed in his creation design to man’s mind that was made to receive such truth. According to the Bible man *discovers* truth.

6. Truth is revealed only in man’s observational experience . (Slide #10)

a. Pagan denial. Scientific truth can be inferred by extrapolation beyond the reach of our senses and instruments with the same credibility accorded laboratory science; religious truths cannot derive from sensory experience or historical events.

b. Biblical affirmation. God reveals truth to man via observational experience in history shown throughout the events of the biblical record and chiefly in the Incarnation. Beyond the reach of our senses and instruments we can know nothing except by speculation and conjecture which should be distinguished from knowledge revealed to us through observation.

7. The consistency (coherence) and correspondence truth tests must rest on the presupposition of the God of the Bible. (Slide #11)

a. Pagan denial. These tests rest on their common acceptability among men and the necessity of assuming their validity in order to discern truth.

b. Biblical affirmation. These tests have no basis except in God since he alone is the rational Creator of man and nature. If the truth hasn’t been shown to exist independently of man, then a social convention like common acceptability has no basis for claiming to discern truth.

8. Search for truth is always colored by one’s relationship with the God of the Bible. (Slides #12,13)

a. Pagan denial. Man can search for truth with no religious commitment whatsoever.

b. Biblical affirmation. Man cannot search without interacting with the Creator because of the implications of creation and judgment and the direct statements in wisdom literature and Romans 1. To say man can search for truth in neutral fashion is to make a non-neutral claim that the God of the Bible doesn’t exist (for if he did, then truth would derive from him and could not be sought independently from him).

“Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material

²⁰ See discussion by professor of mathematics at the University of Antwerp, Willem Kurk, “The Irreducibility of the Number Concept,” Philosophia Reformata, 31 (1966), 37.

causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.” *Richard Lewontin reviewing a book by Carl Sagan in “Billions and Billions of Demons,” New York Review of Books, 44:1 January 9, 1997, 32.*

“I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that.” *Thomas Nagel, The Last Word (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 130.*

Pagan Denials and Biblical Affirmations of Moral Responsibility to Ethical Norms (Justice).

9. Ethical norms and justice can only derive from the biblically-revealed character of God.

a. Pagan denial. Unbelievers are often more ethical and just than believers so these qualities don’t derive from God’s character. There are several sources of justice: what is best for man as a human being, what is best for society as a whole, or what the law specifies.

b. Biblical affirmation. None of these sources outside of God’s character work. Man’s nature, on the pagan basis, evolves and, even if it didn’t, there is not enough knowledge available to tell what in the long term is hurtful or harmful to individual man or to society. No one can infer what “ought to be” from “what is” unless “what is” includes the God of the Bible. Law can’t define justice because it itself can be unjust as history shows. Thus we are back to the event of creation and conscience, back to the Mt. Sinai event of law-revelation with ensuing contractual blessings and cursings, and ultimately we face the crucifixion of Christ as revelation of divine justice.

10. Man’s responsibility can only derive from his creation design.

a. Pagan denial. Man can have a sense of responsibility to his family, his tribe, and his nation without being a creation of some god.

b. Biblical affirmation. Unless man is distinguished as a personal agent free of biochemical processes of nature, he can only claim victimhood. The event of creation with the future event of judgment establishes man’s responsibility.

11. Man has no ethical responsibility for the environment apart from his created position on earth.

a. Pagan denial. Everyone ought to be interested in the environment. It’s a matter of survival.

b. Biblical affirmation. Survival isn’t necessarily what is best for nature. Neo-Darwinism has stated repeatedly that evolution proceeds by natural selection in a

competitive environment. Only as the creation event shows, is man responsible for nature. But the event of the fall shows he has already irreparably ruined it such that it can only be redeemed by a wholly righteous man free from responsibility for the curse. That man is the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. The flood event shows that man has also at God's direction accomplished the most important ecological act so far in human history by saving the entire air-breathing animal gene-pool. The prophesied coming kingdom and eternal state show again that nature is man's responsibility but not in the trivial and often idolatrous sense of most modern environmentalism. Nature is redeemed when Jesus Christ fully redeems man.

Pagan Denials and Biblical Affirmations of Divine Design of Social Institutions.

12. Sexual distinctions and marriage and family form an indivisible and unchangeable function.

a. Pagan denial. Sexual distinctions are probably only conventional. They certainly are not necessarily related to marriage and family which are mere social conventions.

b. Biblical affirmation. The creation event and the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai explain how they are interrelated. The New Testament analogy between the Body of Christ and Christ show further that sexual distinctions along with the marriage institution are revelatory of deeper spiritual realities.

13. Civil authority rests upon divinely authorized capital punishment.

a. Pagan denial. Civil authority arises from social covenants, tribal structure, or strong leadership; it isn't necessarily connected with capital punishment.

b. Biblical affirmation. The Noahic covenant together with the Mt. Sinai event clearly demonstrate that civil authority is primarily a judicial function; civil authority is to preserve fallen society long enough for redemption to be a possibility for all men. Jesus and the apostles reinforce that idea in their interactions with civil authority in the New Testament.

14. The function of government is to preserve fallen humanity until redemption is finished.

a. Pagan denial. The function of government in most pagan schemes, except in libertarianism, is to promote various versions of social redemption (human work and merit).

b. Biblical affirmation. From Eden, the Noahic Covenant, Mt. Sinai, the prophets, and revelation of the Eternal State government as an formal institution is to restrain evil enough that man has opportunity to be saved. Since government is only preservative, not redemptive, utopian dreams of Marxists and Muslims are futile. Full redemption can only occur by grace and God-supplied merit when Jesus returns with his people all in immortal bodies incapable of sin.

15. Entrepreneurial activity expresses the dominion mandate given to man at creation.

a. Pagan denial. Labor is merely an evolved form of animal function in community.

b. Biblical affirmation. Labor is patterned after God's labor and was commissioned by him during creation week. Entrepreneurial activity reveals man's productive capacity

in bringing nature to completion as well as showing imputation of value that relates to God's imputation of value upon man and his works.

16. Artistry is to express the glory of God.

a. Pagan denial. The arts are merely demonstrations of human capacities.

b. Biblical affirmation. The arts demonstrate human capacities as finite replicas of God's creative capacities as shown in all of his creative acts, as shown in the Tabernacle and Temple, as illustrated as well as reflected upon in the wisdom literature, and as seen in worship models throughout the Bible, and as one day will be seen in the new universe.

Pagan Denials and Biblical Affirmations of Redemption.

17. Ethical-spiritual progress originates only with the God of the Bible.

a. Pagan denial. Ethical and spiritual progress are social phenomena that arise by man's good works.

b. Biblical affirmation. Man is fallen and has no intrinsically good works. History shows retrogression without divine intervention. Whatever progress he makes originates with the grace of God intervening in his life as shown from Genesis 3 forward all the way to the book of Revelation.

18. The God of the Bible has entered into historical and public contracts with man.

a. Pagan denial. No society except Israel a long time ago ever even claimed to have a contract with their god or gods. That would imply that a god spoke to humanity in its own kind of language.

b. Biblical affirmation. That is precisely the biblical claim. Because of the design of man in creation and language, God can enter into contracts. The contractual nature of the relationship of God to man forms the basis for the meaning of history and is why history writing originated with biblical faith.

19. The Kingdom of God can come only in a supernatural way in history.

a. Pagan denial. Historical golden ages come about by man's ethical and spiritual progress with no divine intervention.

b. Biblical affirmation. Because man is fallen and because the *kosmos* is now controlled by evil spiritual powers, a golden era can only come about when God intervenes to overcome human sin and at the same time sweep aside the evil powers. The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation reports events and revealed information that show why this must be the case.

20. Personal redemption in this life comes only from eternal life now.

a. Pagan denial. Personal psychological progress comes from one's own choices and maybe partially and occasionally from others' help.

b. Biblical affirmation. Redemption understood not as a mere psychological state of mind but as a judicial justification in heaven before the God of absolute justice by the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ and a new birth by infusion with the perfect life of Christ within comes only from possession of eternal life now.

In each of these 20 conflicts between the Word of God and the word of the *kosmos*, notice that the biblical affirmations always referred to one or more biblical events as real history that are interpreted by biblical prophetic writers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They express the information content of special verbal revelation. These 20 examples, therefore, show that when we follow the implications of whatever text we happen to be studying or teaching, we automatically engage surrounding unbelief (see Slide #14).

These 20 examples constitute a network of nodes, sort of like a spider web, that are all interconnected. We cannot leave unchallenged the common cultural thinking that these events are mere “stories” like fairy tales. By repeatedly working outward along the many lines of implications, we make people aware that a profound and comprehensive chasm exists between the Word of God and its adversaries (see Slide #15). We need to press for repentance much more than we do. Minds need to be changed.

And let me not fail to mention that this is preaching Jesus Christ. Every implication of the Word of God is connected with Jesus Christ either as the Creator, as the Incarnate One who combines without mixture deity and humanity in one person, as the human model life of perfection, as the first complete piece of the coming resurrection, or as the peer-level Judge of all men. Denial of any of the cardinal truths of Scripture makes such a Christ impossible. Such a denial is the spirit of antichrist.

The 20 examples that I have given are only short summaries and are not exhaustive. I conclude, however, with an outline of how to think about one of the most vexing questions mankind faces—the problem of evil. So, as I present one more example, I will demonstrate how one could develop the other examples outward along the many lines of implications. As I do so, I want to emphasize again the distinction between world view studies and this biblical framework approach. Slide #16 shows my point. The framework approach uses world view awareness, but it also employs exegesis, biblical and systematic theology. Also let me emphasize that it doesn’t replace any of these disciplines. All that the framework is doing is *combining* these four disciplines into an integrated strategy of strength.

A Developmental Outline of Carrying the Implications of the Text Outward Toward the “Evil Problem”

Let’s suppose we are teaching some passage of scripture that broaches the evil problem. Or suppose we are specifically coping with evil and suffering in our own life or in the lives of loved ones or even in the lives of unbelievers. It doesn’t matter for my illustration. The strong strategy always works no matter what the situation.

Imagine we are reading and meditating on Psalm 74 for example. Turn in the text to that passage and note Slide #17. Imagine that you’ve done your exegesis and have come up with something like this outline in the big font. You’ve recognized the structure as that

of a national lament psalm of the nation Israel. You could stop right here with that outline, prepare a lesson or use it in prayer or extract some promises from it.

If you do stop here, however, someone really struggling with the evil problem or a suffering situation isn't automatically going to get relief. At the moment they are so overwhelmed by the unbelieving confusion of the *kosmos* that this wonderful portion of the Word of God is easily neutralized. You'll hear a big "slurping sound" as the amoeba of unbelief reinterprets it as just another nice religious story. It might help others, but it's not "true for me right now."

So you unleash a full deployment of the Word of God. You are going to conflict with unbelief simultaneously at so many points unbelief can't get a foothold. Note in Slide #17 the small font. When you looked at 74:1-3, did you notice the words "us," "sheep of your pasture," "your congregation," and "sanctuary"? These refer to the historical existence of ancient Israel that is as real as the existence of any other nation in history. So you need to think of what place in the sequence of revelation did this event happen? What was God doing at this time? Now you just opened up a big conflict with pagan views of history—whether it's the declared purposelessness of evolution or the facetious definition attributed to Henry Ford that "history is the sequence of one damned thing after another." Does history have a purpose or not? If not, why be upset by suffering?

74:1-3 triggers another major conflict with modern unbelief over the nature of the interaction going on between God and man. Is this dialog merely a monolog the Psalmist is having with himself, or does he really think he's speaking with the God of the universe? If so, what does such a dialog imply about human language?

74:4-11 speaks of the "enemy" and "you" = God. So the evil isn't looked at as an offense against the psalmist or his community. There is a transcendental standard of justice here. And this justice derives from outside the socio-linguistic community because the psalmist speaks of the lack of verbal revelation in his day as though there used to be this verbal input of information from God to man. Now we have a wholesale challenge to prevailing notions of language, truth, and revelation! On top of all this we have an audacity in the psalmist's prayer that challenges even our way of praying! What does such audacity imply about imputed righteousness and human merit?

74:12-17 rehearses a sequence of historical events in Old Testament history leading up to the psalmist's day. Unlike some contemporary evangelicals, the psalmist has a certainty of knowledge. History has an order and a meaning that man can perceive.

74:18-23 again there's an interaction between God and man absolutely unique among the world's religions—not even semi-biblical Islam can claim to have this intimacy between God and man. The term "covenant" is mentioned as a basis of appeal. No nation on earth ever had a contract between itself and God except Israel. What does a contract between God and Israel imply about hermeneutics and inerrancy of Scripture?

When these questions and observations are made, we expose the depth and comprehensiveness of the chasm between the Bible and the deceptions around us.

Let's turn finally to a very simple diagram of this chasm as it pertains to the evil problem (see Slide #18). Boiled down to its essence, unbelief has no solution to the evil problem. Evil is just a natural part of existence—always has been there, always will be there. The Bible presents a radically different state of affairs. Evil was not always there and will not always be here. Uncompromised justice does exist—not within mortal history, but in God's character. And one day that justice will solve the evil problem by an eternal quarantine in the Lake of Fire. So this is why the psalmist could think about the situation truthfully and make meaningful petition. *He lived in an utterly different reality than that of contemporary complainers about evil.*

What have we done? As Slide #19 shows, we have fully deployed the entire Word of God against the *kosmos*. We have left no privileged sanctuaries, no areas of consideration uninterpreted by the Word of God. We have brought into captivity every area to the obedience of Christ. To reject any part of the implications of Psalm 74 for history, creation, evil, justice, language, and man's relationship with God is to yield to the spirit of antichrist. To think like Psalm 74 is to be able to face down any adversary we shall ever meet!