

Dialogue IV

A Dozen Styles of Biblical Integration: Assimilating the Mind of Christ

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Chewning states that biblical integration requires the Holy Spirit, but can be fleshed out in a number of different ways. He offers 12 possible biblical integration methods.

Those of us who are seeking God's guidance and assistance in assimilating His "world/lifeview" in order to embody it in our academics should engage this undertaking with the following four thoughts in mind: a) There can be no genuine integration without the help of the Holy Spirit; b) The *mind of Christ* is sufficiently bestowed upon all Christians for their salvation, but much more than the bare minimum of Christ's mind is available to those whom *He calls* to be teachers; c) Integration requires cooperation between the Christian and the Holy Spirit; and finally, d) There are a *variety* of styles, methods, processes, or ways by which integration may come to pass—it is this last truth that stimulated the writing of this

treatise. We will examine these propositions in the order in which they are listed.

Proposition A **Integration requires the help of the Holy Spirit.**

Jesus made several statements to His disciples on the night before He was crucified that capture the essence of the proposition—biblical integration requires the help of the Holy Spirit.

*But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ... But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. ...*¹

*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. ... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.*²

*If you abide in Me, and [1] My words abide in you, [2] ask whatever you wish, and [3] it shall be done for you.*³

The three scriptural samples quoted above are just that—samples. Scripture is resplendent with the following message: a) It is God who sends the Holy Spirit to help us; b) It is the Holy Spirit who guides us "into all the truth;" c) Apart from the Spirit of Christ we "can do nothing"—this statement is to be taken both literally and figuratively; d) When we abide in Christ, He sees to it

that His "words abide" in us; and e) When His words abide in us, and we ask anything that is in keeping with His will, He will do for us what we ask.⁴

An Appropriate Response

Given the fact that Christian teachers cannot do anything to advance the kingdom of God in their teaching environment apart from the abiding presence, guidance, and help of the Holy Spirit, it behooves us to *repeatedly* seek the face of Christ in prayer. And in our prayers we need to beseech Him to help us to assimilate *His mind* so thoroughly that our teaching endeavors will more frequently reflect His understanding and wisdom—His "world/lifeview."

Proposition B **The mind of Christ is available to those whom He calls into teaching.**

The statement was made earlier that all Christians are given a sufficient amount of Christ's mind to be "qualified" by God for salvation. This is really

¹John 16:7, 13. (All Scripture is quoted from the NASB.)

²John 15:1-2, 4-5 (verse divisions and emphasis added).

³John 15:7 (Emphasis added) To "ask," in this context, is to seek the will of Christ as found in the Scripture.

⁴I John 5:14-15: "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." Also see Romans 8:26-27 and reread John 15:7, quoted previously.

self-evident. What is not always so self-evident, however, is the fact that those whom *Christ calls* to teach for Him have *at their disposal*—if they will but ask—a much larger portion of Christ’s mind, sufficient (not exhaustive) for the calling.

Two truths will be set forth to reinforce this asserted proposition. First, the Apostle Paul stated that in his task of fully preaching the Word of God it was important for him to point out that God had at that point in time chosen to reveal “the mystery which had been hidden from the past ages and generations.” And what was the mystery that “has now been manifested to His saints?” The newly revealed mystery was “Christ in you.”⁵ Yes, Christ is *in* all of His people.⁶ And when Christ is in us, we are *in* Christ—see this footnote for a brief explanation of the importance of the doctrine “we are in Christ.”⁷

The second truth has already been stated but will now be elaborated on. It is that those in whom Christ dwells, and who in turn are *in Christ*, have *at their*

disposal all of *Christ’s mind* that is *appropriate* (from God’s perspective) for them to first assimilate and then integrate into their academic endeavors. We will examine this actuality in the light of I Corinthians 2:10-16.

For to us God revealed [His wisdom] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are [must be] spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things,

yet he himself is appraised by no man. For “Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul’s assertion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is that those who have received the Holy Spirit “have the mind of Christ.” This truth is central to the proposition that the mind of Christ is *available* to those whom Christ calls into teaching.

The “mind of Christ” is first and foremost to be understood as having been revealed and made available to us through the Scripture. God has promised to write His Word on our hearts.⁸ God’s Word, as a creedal statement says, is the only infallible guide and rule for life and all of its practices. It is the benchmark or touchstone against which all of our thoughts, intentions, motives, and actions must be measured, tested, and examined. As the Word of God is written in our hearts, we have that portion of the mind of Christ. The more of His Word we assimilate and learn to integrate with our academic disciplines, the more we can teach the truth to

which He has promised to guide us. And this results in our applying “His mind” in our calling to Christian higher education.⁹ When the “mind of Christ” shapes our teaching/research, the results are truly “higher education.”

An Appropriate Response

The only way this author knows to be blessed with an ever-increasing portion of Christ’s mind is to first spend considerable time in prayer asking Christ to implant His Word in our hearts in the belief that God *desires to give us the mind of Christ* in ever-increasing portions. We need to practice the *faith* Christ has given us. To illustrate: “I believe that God desires to give me more of the mind of Christ. I will therefore go and ask Him to help me secure more of the mind of Christ, in the *belief* that He will honor my request because it is His will that His children have the mind of Christ. Furthermore, I believe this to be especially true for those of us who are called to serve in Christian higher education.” This would be putting our faith into practice in

⁵Colossians 1:25-27.

⁶Romans 8:9-11; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; II Corinthians 6:16.

⁷To be “in Christ” is to derive the benefits of being His brother or sister. It represents the truth that we may commune with our Savior—talk to and hear from Christ—at any time. Read Ephesians 1:3-13 and you will discover that the idea of our being in Christ appears ten times. Also see Romans 8:1; Philipians 1:1; John 14:11, 20.

⁸Jeremiah 31:33; Psalm 40:8; 119:11; etc.

⁹John 16:13.

the practical circumstances of life.

Proposition C
Integration requires cooperation between the Christian and the Holy Spirit.

There are two imbalances that hinder the growth of Christians in their desire to become more Christlike. First is the mistaken belief that by simply becoming a Christian the Lord somehow mysteriously treats us like a hose and simply pours Himself out to others through us. Or a corollary view sometimes expressed is that He “inoculates” us with a special spiritual blessing that somehow mysteriously recreates a full-blown, mature, vibrant Christian out of us. Both of these are often accompanied by a false humility that declares, “Oh, I am nothing. I did nothing. God did it all.” This is a false annihilation of the personality of the one created in the image of God—created for good works.¹⁰

The second imbalance is observed in those people who pray little and act as if everything depends upon their superhuman effort. They renounce verbally

that they are “living by works” rather than “living by faith,” but their behavior denies their profession. Even good Christians occasionally “get off the track” and discover they have fallen into this fearful plight. It is generally discovered when burnout seems to be just around the corner—they are depending on their own strength and wisdom and have temporarily left God out of the mix.

Living by faith means, in this context, that we faithfully acknowledge our *absolute* dependence upon God, who both guides us and strengthens us for His work. And then we are to rise from our prayers and go forth and work as hard as we can, believing He is both present and enabling us to work for His good pleasure.¹¹ Only the Spirit of God can help us maintain the balance between the two heretical extremes described above.

An Appropriate Response

It has been this author’s experience that the following are essential components of what the *Christian needs to contribute* to the “cooperation equation”¹² if we

are to assimilate God’s Word and successfully integrate His “world/lifeview” into our teaching: a) We need to be spending *much time*¹³ in the Word; b) The more time we spend in prayer seeking Christ’s help, the more likely we are to be blessed; c) The more time we spend in meditating on what we have *studied* in God’s Word, the more likely it will be that we will retain His thoughts and discover applications for it; and finally, (d) The more time we put into *practicing* what we have gleaned from God’s Word—discussing “integration” with our colleagues, applying the integration skills we do have in our classroom presentations, and writing—the more Christ blesses us with a small but ever-growing portion of His mind.

Proposition D
There are *varieties* of styles by which integration may take place.

There is no “particular way” or one way to achieve integration.

Those who serve in Christian colleges and universities and want to grow in their ability to integrate the “mind of Christ” with their academic pursuits often do not know how or where to begin.¹⁴ They feel inadequate. They may *presume* that “the way” to do integration is the same way

a particular person they have observed does it.

There is no “particular way” or one way to achieve integration. There are multiple ways to integrate the “mind of Christ” into our disciplines, and it is the aim of this section of the treatise to enumerate (define) some of those ways and illustrate the defined style.

Style 1: Presuppositional Assimilation/Integration Defined:

Some people live all of their lives without being aware of the truth that all of their thoughts and subsequent behavior rest on top

¹⁰Ephesians 2:10; I Timothy 5:10; 6:18; II Timothy 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; James 2:14-26; I Peter 2:12; etc.

¹¹Philippians 2:13.

¹²Cooperation Equation: God’s work + human response = “to God be the glory” progress and victory.

¹³I have told the faculty at the five schools where I have served as a visiting professor (while involved in encouraging them to seek and practice the “assimilation/integration” of God’s Word into their academic work) that if I could somehow guarantee they would each spend 10,000 hours in God’s Word, I would immediately pack my bags and go home.

¹⁴**Proposition D** is offered with the *assumption* that the elements described and discussed in **Proposition C** are taken seriously and are being pursued.

of unarticulated “prolegomena”—unspoken beliefs, assumptions, or presuppositions that *proceed, lie behind, or undergird* their communications and actions. Our presuppositions are the buried, invisible foundational beliefs on which our entire world/lifeview rests. They serve as invisible tracks that *determine* the direction of our thinking. Every thought and action has a “trusted belief” right under it, supporting it. If the “trusted belief” (presupposition) is warped and twisted, it produces a deviant thought and behavior pattern (deviant from the “mind of Christ”). On the other hand, God-fashioned presuppositions nurture a Christ-centered life that “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”¹⁵

Presuppositions are normally formed and set in place in childhood. They become more difficult to change as a person grows older because they are the stabilizing pillars of a person’s psychological security, and the older the person becomes, the more they have attached to each particular presupposition. That is

why when people seem stubborn and unyielding in their opinion on some matter, it is often because their reasoning rests on top of what is for them an important presupposition. Giving up any significant presupposition requires a lot of re-sorting of a number of other appended ideas. This is extremely hard work and next to impossible if the person’s identity is tied to the threatened presupposition. Without the hope of receiving an enormous amount of outside help when threatened with the prospect of undergoing a presuppositional shift, a person will do almost anything to avoid the sensed threat to their psychological well-being. And the older the person is, the truer this seems to be.

God, however, is in the business of changing humanly generated and erroneously fabricated beliefs/presuppositions. God is in the business of changing *hearts*¹⁶—the repository of all our presuppositions. This life-changing work is the awesome responsibility of the Holy Spirit. Only He has the capability of taking a heart that is

“dead to God” and making it “alive to God.” This is the work of regeneration. It is the rebirth. It is the making of a “new man” in Christ. Only God is capable of replacing a deformed set of presuppositions with a new and reformed set of presuppositions that conform to the “mind of Christ.”

God’s plan to “rework” a *heart* is a plan known only to Him. But God begins His work within the human psyche at the particular place within that psyche that He deems to be the best place to begin His work. Furthermore, God may begin the renovation process on as many fronts as He judges appropriate. He may begin by bringing about changes in the new Christian’s knowledge and understanding—their *intellect*. Or He may start by renovating a particular heart’s desire—their *affections*. Or He may begin with their “pig-headed” will—their *volition*. Or He may begin working in two or three of these arenas simultaneously.

Example:

Cornelius Zinger was 24 years old when Christ convicted him of his deep depravity and rebellious nature, causing him to desperately want Christ as his

Lord and Savior. As a child, Cornelius had been exposed to a mixture of pantheism and a form of New Age mysticism. But in college he rejected these earlier notions of God and haphazardly settled into an “agnostic, but who cares” frame of mind. If God existed at all, Cornelius had so reconstructed Him into his own image that God in no way resembled the self-revealing God of the Bible. And on those few occasions when Cornelius was exposed to someone’s thinking as it regarded the Trinity, he had always found himself thinking that such an idea was absolutely irrational, and he therefore disregarded such thoughts and formulations as if they were utter nonsense. After all, who could rationally believe that “three could be one” and that the same “one could be three.” How ridiculous!

Shortly after his conversion, Cornelius was having a serious spiritual conversation with his best friend whom God had used to bring him to a saving faith in Christ. Cornelius’ friend suddenly became aware that Cornelius held some really unbiblical ideas about God’s nature and character. Recognizing both Cornelius’ hunger to learn and grow and his intellectual capacity to absorb

¹⁵Hebrews 12:11.

¹⁶The *heart* is the seat or center of the human *intellect, affections (desires, identity needs), and volition*. The development of the point being made would require too much space to warrant its enlargement at this juncture. Let it be sufficient to say that the comprehension of the biblical view of the heart is at the core of our having a right understanding of human nature and thus human behavior.

some fairly weighty teaching, his friend gave him Stephen Charnock's two-volume work *The Existence and Attributes of God*. Cornelius devoured all 1,130 pages of it in a month and was absolutely thrilled by its substantive content.

But Cornelius was also deeply humbled by what he had read about the characteristics of God that Charnock tied so closely

... examinations of particular biblical subjects provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to expand the mind ...

to Scripture. He quickly became aware that he had harbored numerous false *beliefs* about God's very nature—His attributes and character. Cornelius did not know when or exactly what new understandings of God propelled him to the realization that his own underlying *beliefs* and *assumptions* did indeed shape his every thought and subsequent actions. But this realization did dawn upon him, and thereafter he found himself constantly searching for his own underlying beliefs—*presuppositions*—and those of other people with whom he talked. He even heard himself ask some of his friends on more

than one occasion what they were presupposing when they made specific assertions.

This pattern of searching for the presuppositions undergirding his thoughts and the thoughts of other people and the practice of carefully testing these presuppositions against the *presuppositions established in Scripture* continued throughout Cornelius' life. He carried the

habit through his graduate studies and into his teaching career. He eventually went to work at The Mind of Christ College, where the habit benefited

everyone as he labored to carry out the mission of the school.

Style 2: Doctrinal Assimilation/Integration
Defined:

Biblical *doctrines* are simply biblical subjects or topics that are either discussed or merely mentioned in many different places in the Bible. Their importance to God became evident to the church fathers centuries ago as the Holy Spirit led them to identify and clarify the importance of these truths to the *gospel*. Today, however, there are many Christian fellowships that do not stress doctrinal

teaching for whatever reason. When this occurs, doctrines like “the doctrine of the Holy Trinity,” “the doctrine of God's eternal decrees,” “the doctrine of providence,” “the doctrine of justification,” “the doctrine of sanctification,” and many, many other doctrines just disappear from those churches that overlook teaching of this type.

However, when biblical doctrines are included as an important aspect of the teaching ministry of a particular church, those in-depth examinations of particular biblical subjects provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to expand the mind of a person seeking to assimilate and integrate God's Word into their “world/lifeview.”

Example:

Jane Pilgrim was teaching at The Word of God College in the sociology department and attending a local church where the pastor was including in his teaching a diet of clearly defined biblical doctrines. One winter when the doctrine was focused on the Trinity, Jane became fascinated with this deep truth regarding God. She asked the pastor if he might recommend any outside reading sources that would help her dig even deeper

into this profound truth about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Three who are One, the One who is Three. The pastor gave her a copy of *The Trinity*, by Edward Henry Bickersteth, to study.

Well, Jane Pilgrim had no idea she was in for the “unfolding of God's true nature” that occurred when she studied the Word of God that was laid out before her in such an organized way in *The Trinity*. It soon became clear to her that within the Trinity there was absolute equality between the individual members of the Godhead—every attribute ascribed to one member of the Trinity was indeed ascribed to every member of the Trinity. But just as true was the fact that there was a diversity of roles that was associated with the individual members of the Trinity—only one member of the Godhead became incarnate, only one member of the Godhead is sent to dwell in the hearts of God's children, etc.

Before Jane had finished her study, she had identified five areas of importance that she could integrate into her work in sociology. They had just sort of “jumped out” at her while she was studying the Trinity. She identified them as:

The Trinity's Contribution to Sociology

- 1) Equality/Role Diversity
- 2) Authority/Submission
- 3) Individuals/Members of a Community
- 4) Rights/Responsibilities
- 5) Freedom/Self-control

Jane recognized the fact that the Trinity has modeled and revealed, in the Scripture, five of the toughest areas for fallen humans to get a handle on and discuss. She had previously found it very hard to provide good illustrations of the wholesome balance she believed God desired on these topics, but now she knew that God Himself could be used as the perfect model. She was ecstatic!

Style 3: Principles Assimilated/Integrated Defined:

“Biblical principles” are very similar to the “biblical doctrines” that were just described in *Style 2*. But there is one very important difference. Many books are written on biblical *doctrines* because this is the territory of the professional theologians who have done their work well in describing the process and significant ingredients associated with the *gospel*—the good news of the

kingdom of God and salvation in Christ. The theologians, however, in their almost exclusive focus on the “spiritual matters” of the *gospel* (salvation, regeneration, justification, grace, faith, sanctification, etc.) have largely spent their time on the salvation in Christ aspects of the gospel. In doing this they have, to a large degree, neglected the kingdom of God aspects of the gospel where Christ would also rule in the lives of His people in every dimension of their lives. Christ is Lord of all of life—life in the public square, life in the marketplace, life in the home, life in our educational institutions, etc. And the Bible has a lot to say about every dimension of life, not just our salvation and the doctrines that focus on this one extremely important reality. The biblical *principles* apply to the other *important* dimensions.

Biblical *principles* are ferreted out and discovered with the Holy Spirit's involvement in our persistent searching. A *principle*, for the purpose of this treatise, is defined as finding the same applicable truth expressed in Scripture *three or more times*. The “three times” has been chosen as a means of avoiding

the possible hermeneutic¹⁷ difficulties that can be associated with finding a “point” only one time. It is a method that could be called “cross-referencing” the Scripture. It is the method of finding a particular statement in Scripture and then asking if the Bible says the same thing again in other places. Then to answer the question, a search is made of Scripture to determine if the same idea is contained elsewhere. If the answer is “yes” at least two more times (giving three references in total), then a *principle* has been identified.

Example:

Jim Trumpet was an assistant professor at Praise the Lord University. He was facing a review by the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences to see if he should be recommended for a “three-year rolling contract.” (He was first employed four years ago and had been on one-year contracts since being hired.) The major requirement he faced to receive the lengthier contract was the need to present a 25-page paper demonstrating his skills of biblical integration in the field of history. He had received his Ph.D. from a well-recognized secular

university, but his experience there certainly did not prepare him for the integration task that his university desired. He had worked hard at *trying* to integrate Scripture in his classes, but he really felt “lost.” And he had received no help from the school in learning how he might proceed. He was discouraged.

Jim had been earnestly seeking the Lord's face about his upcoming review. It was just seven months off. He asked the Lord to open up his understanding. Even in asking this, he had no idea how the Lord might go about answering his request, but he did believe He would answer. At the same time this was going on, Jim was attending a home Bible study on Friday evenings with nine friends from his church. They rotated the teaching assignment among the participants. They were studying the book of James, and when Jim's turn came to teach, he was to prepare and present James 2:1-13. As he was preparing, he did not know why but verses 1 and 9 became very significant in his mind. The whole text seemed to Jim to be dealing with the issue of “showing partiality,” which, according to James, was a

¹⁷Hermeneutics is the study of the methodology employed in the interpretation of the Bible.

grievous sin. Jim had never particularly thought of that before, and he wondered if the Bible had anything else to say on the subject. He noted the tiny editorial letters inserted in the text of the two verses (1 and 9) that made reference to other texts, and he began to follow the trail of cross-references. In ten minutes he located nine other biblical references¹⁸ to the sin of “showing partiality.”

Jim was profoundly impacted by both the importance of this particular sin which he was unaware of previously and the connection he was able to make between this new enlightenment and his work in history. It became clear to him that “showing partiality” had played a key role in the decisions and subsequent actions of so many kings. It was several years later before he began calling such clusters of texts “biblical *principles*,” but this new-found method of searching the Scripture got Jim rolling, and he eventually had lots of biblical material to work into his review paper.

This little stumbled-upon discovery actually provided Jim with a new method of Bible study. His very approach to

studying the Bible changed. He cross-referenced avidly. Over time this technique provided Jim with many, many biblical *principles* with which to work. The cross-referencing seemed to “load up” the evidence on an issue, and this in turn made the issue being studied more important in his mind, which led him to ponder it more fully.

In reflecting back on this experience, Jim often remembered His earliest prayers for help. It seemed that he had received his answer before he even realized it. But now he thanks the Lord over and over again for His merciful guidance and gracious acts of providence.

Style 4: Personality Traits Assimilated/Integrated

Defined:

Christ is the archetype for all humanity. This being so, whenever a person wishes to evaluate the *personality traits* (character and conduct) of another human being, they need to make the evaluation in the *light* of Christ’s revealed *personality traits* (character and conduct). Christ is the standard, benchmark, or prototype against which all

true human evaluations of this type should be made.

Theologians and other students of the Bible often refer to specific persons in the Bible as Christ-types—people who manifested a particular characteristic(s) in their thoughts, intentions, motives, or actions that manifests the same perfection later revealed in the person and life of Jesus Christ.

For example, Abraham was a Christ-type; his believing in God was exemplar.

Moses was a Christ-type; he interceded before God for God’s people. Samuel was a Christ-type; he was a high priest offering sacrifices to God. David was a Christ-type; he was a conquering king before God. Most, if not all, of the “positive people” recorded in Scripture are preserved for our edification precisely because they were Christ-types. Helpful Bible teaching often incorporates this element in it as a way of holding God’s Anointed One before us as the perfect model and mentor.

Example:

Mary Goodheart taught English literature at His Majesty’s College. She had been there for

28 years and was a designated master teacher. She was given this recognition because of her incredible biblical integration skills. She in fact had several *styles* of integration, but the one her students loved the most was her ability to compare the fictional *personalities* that appeared in literature to Christ. Shakespeare’s writings, for

Christ is the archetype for all humanity.

example, provided Mary with a fertile number of characters from which to draw

her illustrations. And those personalities appeared in every form from “debauchery to godliness.”

Mary was a real disciple of Christ. She not only studied to *know about Him*, but she spent much time in communion with Him that led others to conclude she also *truly knew Him*. She loved Christ, and the more she got to know Him, the more she delighted in including Him in her analysis of the people she encountered in her work in literature. Christ was indeed her Standard.

The students frequently commented that when they left Ms. Goodheart’s class, they believed they had experienced

¹⁸The other references were Acts 10:34; Deuteronomy 1:17; 10:17; II Chronicles 19:7; Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; and I Peter 1:17.

more of Christ in her lectures than they generally did when they attended chapel. Her skills were profound. She would contrast the manifested “fallen nature” aspects of the people being portrayed in the literature with the perfected *personality traits* of Christ. And she also had the corollary skill of being able to point out the Christ-honoring *personality traits* in others. She was a genius and a gem.

Style 5: Wisdom Literature Assimilation/Integration
Defined:

Three books of the Bible are frequently referred to as the Wisdom Literature. They are Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. These three books in particular never abstractly separate Divine wisdom from its practical implications for human conduct, and they are probably the easiest from which to glean God’s gems and apply them to life, for the jewels seem to lie right on the surface. It is indeed the very intention of the three books to impart practical instructions and to provide directions for the reader. The wisdom they speak of can be, in many ways, likened to common sense. It does not require a great deal of special discernment or intellectual power

to understand what they are calling for you to contemplate or do. The communication is plain and simple. The content of the three books is without question the easiest biblical material to assimilate and integrate. In many cases an unregenerate person could make application of the revealed wisdom as readily as a Christian.

Job addresses the universal and multitudinous questions that arise in the presence of evil and suffering in a world created by a loving God. Ecclesiastes casts life’s experiences into a pessimistic frame of reference, wrapped up in the expression “vanity of vanities.” It concludes that all is vanity when God is left out of the picture, and everything makes perfect sense when God is at the center of one’s world/lifeview. Proverbs, on the other hand, is optimistic in its outlook when one is prudent and wise and follows God’s instructions. It is, for the most part, full of pithy statements regarding what is *right* and what is *prudent*.

Example:

Philip Voyager was a part-time evening instructor in an undergraduate business degree program at Lord’s College.

He was 57 years old and held an MBA degree from an Ivy League school. He was a successful executive in the human resources department of a national retailing organization. When he was hired by the school, it was made clear to him that the college administrators both desired and expected him to relate his Christian convictions to his teaching endeavors. This really excited him, because he had developed a habit over the 35 years he had been in the business world of reading the entire book of Proverbs every month. After all, there were just 31 chapters in the book, and that meant he only had to read about one chapter a day. And besides, he loved the practical instructions it contained regarding what behavior is *right and wrong* and what is *prudent*.

Philip’s mind was virtually saturated with the wisdom sayings found in Proverbs. Wisdom directs us in godly paths (4:11); the wise heart receives the commands of God (10:8); wisdom dwells with prudence (8:12); the wise and prudent

person develops discernment (14:8); and the beginning of all this wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (9:10). He knew these truths, and many more, by heart. To these profound, foundational truths he added the prudent, common sense directions that are more practical than spiritual in character. (Philip did not doubt for a moment, however, that there was a close tie between the “practical” and the “spiritual” aspects of God’s ordained reality.) Philip had identified dozens and dozens of specific verses that had very prudent advice for those who worked in business,¹⁹ and he routinely integrated them into his classroom presentations.

Style 6: Allegories Assimilated/Integrated
Defined:

Caution, we are entering a Warning Zone! Scripture does contain some allegories²⁰ and other writings that lead Christians to ask, “Am I to take this particular biblical passage literally or figuratively?” For example, when Christ was

¹⁹A sample of Philip’s favorites: Proverbs 10:2, 4, 5, 9, 15, 22; 11:1, 3, 4, 15, 16, 18, 25, 26, 28; 12:9-11, 27; 13:4, 7, 8, 11, 18, 22-24; 14:2, 4, 20, 23, 31, 35; 15:16, 27; 16:2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 16, 18, 26, 32; 17:3, 13, 18, 20, 23; 18:2, 5, 9, 11, 15, 17; 19:1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 15-17, 20, 21, 23, 24; 20:4, 5, 10, 11, 13-18, 22-24; 21:2, 6, 15-17, 21, 23, 25; 22:1-4, 7, 10, 17, 26-29; 23:4, 5, 10, 17, 23; 24:1, 3, 4, 10, 16, 30-34; 25:26, 28; 26:14, 20, 27; 27:1, 2, 9, 12, 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23-27; 28:4-8, 11, 16, 19-22; 29:2-4, 18, 23, 24, 27; 30:5-9, 24-28, 31:10-31.

²⁰Examples of allegories in Scripture—Psalm 80:8-19; Galatians 4:23-26; etc.

answering His disciples' question about who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven, He set a child before them and said,

*Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell.*²¹

Such passages are rich with applicable meaning, but they also offer many opportunities to wander into fallacious interpretations and create applications that are simply wrong.

There was a time in the early church when an allegorical system of biblical interpretation became popular, and much of the Bible was screened through this type of filter. An example of a person who practiced this was the Greek writer, teacher, and church father Origen (182?-254? A.D.). He postulated that there were *three levels* of truth in the Scripture:

- 1) the fleshly/literal level;
- 2) the moral content and meaning level;
- and 3) the pneumatic level—truth about the hierarchy and nature of non-human

spiritual beings that included God. He was the head of the School of Alexandria during its prime. The school emphasized the allegorical interpretation of the Bible. A number of the Reformers—Luther and Calvin, for example—strongly opposed the allegorical method because it was too *subjective* and *uncontrollable*. But aspects of the method linger to this day and are sometimes displayed by those persons who love to integrate biblical parables, allegories, and

metaphors into their academic teaching.²²

Example:

Nancy Purity was a member of the education department at The Saints Below College. Her favorite course was one that focused on teaching pedagogy. She loved to have her students wrestle with the problems associated with the gleanings of truth from metaphors, allegories, and parables. She believed good teachers in the elementary and secondary schools, where most of her students would be placed, should expose their students to the rich deposits of truth that were contained in some of the West's finest literature that was recorded in story form. *Aesop's Fables*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the Bible were her favorite sources for practice materials. She would make assignments and have the students give oral reports to the class on their interpretation of specific allegories or parables and explain how they would guide their future students into

discovering (discerning) the legitimate message of the story. This got at the very difficult question: Can *discernment* be taught, and if so, how?

Her most recent assignment called for the students to interpret Christ's parable found in Luke 16:1-13 that concerns itself with an "unrighteous steward."

There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this steward was reported to him as squandering his possessions. And he called him and said to him, "What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward." And the steward said to himself, "What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the stewardship, they will receive me into their homes." And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first,

²²This author "cut his integration teeth" on the parabolic/allegorical work of a few men who were writing in the late 1950s. It was, however, my *rejection* of their "literal" interpretations of many of Christ's parables (which I knew were missing the truth) that motivated me to seek the Lord's help in finding a better way to integrate His truths into my thinking and work. I knew His Word had much to say to business, economics, and public policy, and I was *convicted* that it was my God-ordained assignment to learn how to assimilate and integrate His Word. The parables and allegories are a part of God's Word, however, and are therefore to be rightly interpreted and applied to life. We need to be extremely careful with the *allegorical method*, for its path meanders toward a slippery slope.

²¹This passage of Scripture is set up by verses 1-6 that precede Matthew 18:7-9.

“How much do you owe my master?” And he said, “A hundred measures of oil.” And he said to him, “Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.” Then he said to another, “And how much do you owe?” And he said, “A hundred measures of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill, and write eighty.” **And his master praised the unrighteous steward because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and**

despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (emphasis added)

The results were mixed, to say the least. A few of the students thought God was commending the shrewd behavior. Others mistakenly expressed views that the people who were already in heaven were making judgments about who would be subsequently accepted into heaven. The students concluded that those in heaven would make their judgment based upon the peoples’ use of their wealth while on earth. Other students refuted those two ideas but had little to offer in their place.

The majority of the students, however, had ferreted out most of the salient points Nancy had hoped they would discover. Some of the more pertinent points were a) The master who praised the unrighteous steward was *not* representing God, for He would not commend such conduct; b) Worldly people do tend to be *shrewder* in their earthly dealings with other people than do God’s children, who do not think of shrewdness as a virtue; c) There is an admonition in the parable, though, for the children of God to use their mammon (wealth, riches) in a way that is pleasing to

God; d) There will be an explanation made to God one day, by His children, of just how they used the wealth He entrusted to them; and e) It is clear that no one can serve both riches and God simultaneously.

Nancy was thrilled that so many of her students had done so well on the assignment.

Style 7: The “History Books” Assimilated/Integrated Defined:

There are different kinds of literature in the Bible. There is the Wisdom Literature that we spoke of in *Style 5* and the songs and prayers of the Psalms. There are the apocalyptic writings—futuristic writings that reveal mysteries yet to unfold. Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation are generally regarded as examples of this type of literature. There are the books of the Law, the four gospels, and the epistles of Paul, Peter, James, and John. Then there are the books referred to as the major and minor prophets—designations related to their length, not the significance of their content. In addition to all of these, there are the history books—I and II Samuel,

I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Nehemiah, and Acts are examples.

The important issue to be raised here, in the context of our discourse about the assimilation and integration of God’s Word into our academic endeavors, is *when do we take a revealed historic activity, event, or occurrence and treat it as if it is normative?* For example, faith healings, miracles, speaking in tongues, “all things were common property to them,” and other nonrecurring or lacking a basis in *principle*²³ incidents are all a part of the biblical record. There is no reason to doubt their occurrence. But are any of these circumstances to be considered standard occurrences that will repeat themselves on an expected or routine basis? There is no agreement within the broader Christian community on the answer to this question.

Example:

James Truemind was an associate professor of political science at The Servants of Christ University. His doctoral dissertation allowed him to become immersed in the theories

²³“Biblical principles” were defined in *Style 3* as “finding the same applicable truth expressed in Scripture three or more times.”

and arguments that permeate the political and economic positions associated with egalitarianism, libertarianism, free markets, regulated markets, democratic/representative forms of government, and socialism. He had carried his particular focused interest right on into the classroom when he began teaching. He remained as wrapped up and committed to this work, and its focus, as he had been 20 years ago when he began. If anything, he believed it was even more important today than in the past for the students to understand the issues that separated the various political/economic views. In his judgment, the struggle in our culture between these ideologies was growing stronger and almost vicious at times.

James' biblical world/lifeview was a major stimulus behind his interest in this political/economic struggle in the public square. He certainly *did not* believe that

the Bible was a political science book or an economics textbook. He did, however, believe that the Bible laid out a number of clear principles that undergirded God's interest in human choice, creativity, stewardship, freedom, equity (*not* equality), and other aspects of the human enterprise to provide godly guidance to those who cared to search it out.

With this in mind, he gave an assignment to his junior class to "discuss the application of Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-37 to the contemporary public debates regarding poverty and the homeless." [See footnote 24 for the full Acts text.]

It was early in the semester. The class began its discussion with the usual pretty superficial and emotional rhetoric that characterizes such discussions early in a semester before the students are familiar with the professor's expectations.

The early discussion revealed

that it did not matter if a student was egalitarian or libertarian in his or her focus. The perspectives expressed by almost all of them were rather shallow. James knew that at their age they could not be expected to be real biblical scholars. In fact, he was not really disappointed in them at all.

He really expected it.

He took it as an opportunity to lead them into a deeper understanding of the significance of God's "whole message" or "whole purpose"²⁵—*what God has to say throughout Scripture about a particular subject and the additional factors that bear on the issue.*

James accomplished this by asking the students questions that brought direction to their thinking, and then he shepherded them carefully to biblical passages that opened up a whole new vista of understanding for them. In fact, a number of the students began to demonstrate their latent ability to use associative thinking skills as they related the diverse passages of Scripture to the issue at hand. This really excited James, because from his perspective this skill would serve them well in

many areas of life in the future. At times the class would have appeared to an uninformed outsider to be more akin to a Bible class than a political science class, but effective integration required this use of time. The students were soon

The students were soon ... in thoughtful dialogue that was constantly being examined under the lens of Scripture.

engaging one another in thoughtful dialogue that was constantly being examined under the lens of Scripture.

It was not long before the students recognized the relationship between the guided discussion and the original question. They were soon considering God's perspective and desires regarding human choice, creativity, stewardship, freedom, equity, the rights of the poor and needy, greed, the Spirit's gift of liberality, and several other biblical considerations that related to the Acts assignment. All of this took two weeks, and then James sent them back to redo the original assignment. The end results were dramatically

²⁴Acts 2:44-45: "And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need." Acts 4:32-37: "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

²⁵Acts 5:20; 20:27.

different. The students had genuinely matured, and much had been accomplished educationally.

Style 8: “Selected Lenses” Assimilated/Integrated Defined:

Caution, we are entering a second Warning Zone! No exceptions exist to the following truth: Everyone who takes up the Scripture to read it does so with a “mental lens” through which God’s Word will be filtered and its message subsequently interpreted. The significance of this reality is *extremely* important to comprehend. We lose our humility and ability to truly understand another person’s world/lifeview when we fail to realize that we are not God and do not have His perfect perspective. Yet on the other hand we are, without a doubt, responsible and ultimately accountable for making the right interpretation of God’s Word. But the Word of God itself tells us that some people *distort* the Word so harmfully that they ultimately bring about “their own destruction.”²⁶ Those of us who have accepted God’s call to be

teachers and who handle His Word in conjunction with our basic academic disciplines should be particularly careful. The apostle James even warns us, “Let not many of you become teachers [of God’s Word] ... knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.”²⁷ The issue before us is extremely important, and now is the time to recall the truths set forth in the opening proposition—**Proposition A: Integration requires the help of the Holy Spirit.** Apart from the work of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, we can do nothing to “adjust our spiritual lenses” so we can interpret and integrate properly.

The heart of the issue is this. Each one of us comes to the Scripture with a “mental lens.” That is true. But the important question is, is the Holy Spirit *reforming* our interpretive lenses, or are we *deforming* the truth of God’s Word by *distorting* it?

Those of us who spent years being an “indentured servant” while gaining our terminal degrees went through a brainwashing experience that made every effort to implant a discipline lens into our

world/lifeview. The training in our disciplines did nothing to help us learn how to seek God’s corrective help so we might learn how to integrate His truth into our worldview. In fact, it built barriers that were constructed to challenge anything that contested the veracity of the discipline’s official doctrines. But *many* of the *presuppositions* that guided our academic disciplines are manifestations of a world/lifeview that is antithetical to the “mind of Christ.” (Many seminarians did not experience what was just described!)

The greater tragedy, however, is the fact that this same lens problem is found in the church, where one might hope to receive help in having his or her spiritual lenses adjusted, unless, of course, the person is simply attending to “have their ears tickled.”²⁸ If one is still unclear as to the issue being pointed to, just ask yourself, is the church unified on the subject of a) capital punishment? b) the role of women in the church? c) election/predestination? d) the use of “contemporary music” in the worship service? and e) a host of

other important and not-so-important issues? Conclusion: *Everyone needs the continual reforming work of the Holy Spirit in his or her heart so that his or her spiritual lens may, by God’s grace, become more and more conformed to the “mind of Christ.”*

Example:

Betty Unity, a professor of Christian education with a focus on children’s education, was a member of the Bible department at His University. She was blessed with the gift of love for children and the gift of singleness. She was 47 years old, and for 27 of those years she had given her whole life to Christ without reserving any corner of it for herself. She believed with all of her heart that marriage and family life were God’s “norm” and communicated this to her students when one might venture to ask her why she had never married (she was a beautiful person both inside and outside). She would also carefully point out that some people, such as she, had been given the “gift of singleness”²⁹ and were really

²⁶II Peter 3:16.

²⁷James 3:1.

²⁸II Timothy 4:3.

²⁹Matthew 19:10-12. Betty did not believe that Christ’s reference here to “men” was in any way undermined or unfairly adjusted by believing that some women also “made themselves eunuchs [figuratively] for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” Psalm 113:9 was also an important verse to Betty.

content to serve Christ without the outside demands that so appropriately accompanied marriage.

One of the topics that regularly came up in her classes was the issue of child discipline. Some states had laws regulating the discipline of children, subjecting parents to the threat that their children could be removed from their home and placed in a

state-approved home or facility if they failed to adhere to the state standards. There were stories galore about Christian families being harassed and upset in some parts of the country as a consequence of violating their state's position regarding corporal punishment—spanking was forbidden, for example.

There were, of course, those students who had been raised in a home where corporal punishment was a normal part of their rearing. They were almost universally eager to defend the practice and were quick to point out one of its positive benefits—the early opportunity for a child to recognize that negative consequences are to be associated

with ungodly conduct. On the other hand, there were those students who had never had a hand placed on them as a means of discipline, as far as they could remember. These students overwhelmingly disapproved of corporal punishment. They argued that there were alternative ways of getting a child's attention and

negative consequences associated with unacceptable behavior. Betty had learned that the students' personal experiences tended to determine what side of an issue they would land on. But what really disturbed her was the realization that the individual's personal experiences tended to either determine how the student would amass and arrange the available biblical evidence, or worse yet, allow the student to view the experiences as more authoritative than the Word of God. Rational discussions rarely altered the lenses the students wore.

that the alternatives should be positive reinforcements for good behavior, not

Betty had always ended up at the end of an issue with a heavy heart. The students who held the

very position she held on an issue generally clung to their position on *the same grounds* as the students who took the opposing position—because of their personal experience. Why did the classroom discussions and homework not change their hearts? The answer God gave was both heartwarming and challenging. Betty came to realize that there would be no material changes in the lives of her 18- to 22-year-old students apart from the *reforming work of the Holy Spirit*. This truth drove her to her knees in intercessory prayer. Her classes, thereafter, had been much better. God blessed her by letting her see that more and more of her students were getting in touch with the realization that their world/lifeview lenses needed to be adjusted by the Holy Spirit. In fact, a number of them shared with her that they were seeking the Lord's face concerning their need.

Style 9: "Answered Questions" Assimilated/Integrated Defined:

One of the incredible realities about the Scripture is that while it was written and the canon closed hundreds of years ago, it possesses to this day all of the *principles* necessary to address

the most complicated, modern ethical issues. Cloning, genetic engineering, embryo development in dishes, mechanical maintenance of life, and many other modern day miracle discoveries and inventions have pushed a number of ethical *questions* into the public's consciousness. This has taken place at a time of genuine ethical confusion. It would be hard to find a worse time in the past 1,200 years for so many significant moral issues to descend upon our community. Theologians, philosophers, ethicists, and those who are responsible for the establishment of some form of legal direction are living in the midst of great moral confusion. The biblically-based Judeo/Christian world/lifeview no longer dominates the public discussion of ethics. Today the humanistic perspectives guide the thinking of most of those who are in positions of power.

Nevertheless, the Christian community has a responsibility to train its young people to think biblically. This means that the moral *questions* being raised in the public arena need to be wrestled with under the lens of Scripture. The moral issues that flow out of cloning, "external to

... the moral questions ... raised in the public arena need to be wrestled with under the lens of Scripture.

the womb” embryo development, genetic engineering, and other technically-oriented problems cry out for those *who teach the sciences in our Christian colleges and universities to step forward and lead the Christian community through the labyrinth of ethical confusion.* The *technical details* that are so often at the heart of these issues *must* become an integral part of the moral dialogue. It is not enough to just say “this is right” or “that is wrong.”

Example:

John Preacher, the chairman of the biology department at Disciples College, had been at the college for 17 years. He had just come under the Spirit’s conviction that he really needed the “mind of Christ” in a fresh and new way. This occurred when he returned from his discipline’s annual conference, where he had been overwhelmed by the number of “breakout sessions” that had been specifically focused on emerging ethical issues in the field of biology. And on five other occasions he had listened to the same issues arise “out of nowhere” during general sessions. It wasn’t that he was unaware that the issues existed before he went to the meeting,

nor was it true that he did not have an opinion on them—he did. The conviction came from the fact that he had never really studiously examined *any* of the issues through the lens of Scripture. He suspected that if he did, he would discover *principles* that were both directly related to and parallel to the ethical issues. He was now embarrassed by his prior failure and lack of resolve to seek the “mind of Christ” to learn what Christ thought about the issues. The question before John now was, how should he strategically approach these ethical issues and bring them to the lens of Scripture?

John made a decision at this point that might have appeared to be rather unorthodox to many of his colleagues if they had known he was wrestling with his failure to seek the mind of Christ on such issues. He decided to tell his philosophy of science seminar students of the conviction he was under and engage them in the biblical search. There were 14 science majors in the seminar. John believed his “self-exposure” would become an encouragement to them and that the exercise itself would prove to be a tremendous growing experience for them all.

The students were ecstatic when the professor informed them of the project assignment that would fill their time for the next three weeks. John told them everything that had led him to make a mid-term adjustment in the semester plans. The students thought it was neat that a professor had the courage to expose a particular kind of hole in his own development, but they instinctively knew they would be the real beneficiaries by being included in his semi-public effort to fill the hole. (Indeed they were mightily blessed. The exercise proved to be the greatest academically-related spiritual experience of their four years at college.)

John began by allowing the students to choose the ethical issue they would work on. The class chose the issue of genetic engineering. Then he asked them to identify the deepest presuppositional question they could think of and thought ought to be answered first. The class had learned previously that the question you pursued concerning any issue predetermined both the direction of the inquiry and the fruitfulness of its results. They wrestled with this for an

entire class period and finally settled on two questions. First, “Does applied genetic engineering arrogantly challenge the sovereignty of God?” and second, “*If* applied genetic engineering has an appropriate role to play in medical science, how will society prevent it from being used in ungodly and diabolical ways that could eventually alter the very genetic structure of God’s image bearers?”

Before the first question was resolved, the students raised biblical points like, “Behold, they are one people ... and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them,”³⁰ that seem to lend weight to the view that human accomplishments are to be unfettered before God. But the counterpoint was made that God had planned many good things that were to be accomplished through what humans generally consider to be “negative realities.” For example, a student quoted, “And the Lord said to him [Moses], ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?’”³¹ The point was, should we humans interfere with God’s sovereign work? Another student

³⁰Genesis 11:6.

³¹Exodus 4:11 (clarification added).

reinforced this question by referring to the passage, “And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.’”³² This all led to a two-day discussion on what is to be drawn from the belief that God is absolutely sovereign over everything, while simultaneously providing His image bearers the freedom to freely exercise their will in keeping with their “true nature.” Two weeks were devoted to this first question before the class arrived at a conclusion that was satisfactory, but only to the majority.

The second question was no easier to resolve than the first one. The issues of human choice and freedom, the fall, sin, God’s act of redemption, the rebellion of the unregenerate, and more all surfaced. The problem was that they all surfaced without any *controlling principle* coming to the fore that would provide them with an answer that would work

in the minds of those in the world who rejected Christ as their Lord.

John Preacher, however, was able to clarify in his own mind the biblical picture he would use to guide his thinking and teaching in the future about the ethical issues that surround the subject of genetic engineering. He realized it was not his place to insist on the rightness of his position, but it was his responsibility to bear witness to his beliefs and to be able to defend them in a winsome way.

Style 10: “Cherry-Picking” Assimilation/Integration

Defined:

“Cherry-picking” the Scripture is probably the most frequently used method of making application of God’s Word to life’s situations. Most Christians who are regularly reading and retaining the Scripture, either consciously or unconsciously, employ it on numerous occasions as the Scripture spontaneously comes to mind. Sadly, a good many Christians are unaware of the fact that if such an occurrence is a recurring experience in their lives, it is probably the outcome of the work of the Holy Spirit

who is dwelling in them.³³ (To know this would greatly encourage them in their walk of faith.) The *application* of the gift of “cherry-picking” is useful in carrying out one of God’s “missions” for His children, that of being “salt and light” in the world.³⁴

Just what is “cherry-picking?” *It is the ability to associate specific verses of Scripture with specific occurrences or happenings in the world and relate this association to others.*

Example:

Rachel Helpful, an associate professor of physical education, was the women’s basketball coach and softball coach at The Redeemer’s College. She loved the Lord with all that she knew to give Him, and she loved the girls she coached and taught. She held a women’s Bible study in her home once a week and about 35 girls attended regularly. (She held it on Tuesday evenings when her husband was at a club meeting.) Her three

children were grown and out of the house, so Rachel had lots of time to devote to her girls. She ate lunch in the college dining room with the students five days a week and drove her teams to their games in a 17-passenger school van.

Rachel had a habit of sprinkling Scripture into her conversations in a way that

“Cherry-picking” ... is useful ... in being “salt and light” in the world.

caught her girls’ attention but was not in a contrived or forced manner that could

have brought about a negative reaction. It was not an every-time thing, but it occurred frequently enough so that the girls noticed it and sometimes wondered how she did it. And she did not repeat the same passages of Scripture over and over again when a previous stimulus reappeared. It was almost as if she thought, “I said it once; that is enough.”

An example of Rachel’s salt and light occurred one morning when the girls were all in the college van being transported to a softball game. A pickup truck passed them and then stayed about 50 feet or so ahead of them

³²John 9:1-3.

³³John 14:26: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, *He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you*” (emphasis added).

³⁴Matthew 5:13-16.

for several minutes. Stuck on the rear window of the pickup was the saying “*No Fear.*” Rachel said to Mary, who was sitting next to her in the front seat (all of the girls were paying attention), “Have you ever seen anything so *godless* in all of your life?” Mary responded, “What are you referring to?” Rachel said, “That sign on the back window of the pickup truck.” Betty called from the rear of the van and asked Mary to tell her what the sign said. She could not read it from where she was sitting. Mary sang out, “It says, ‘*No Fear.*’” “Oh,” Betty replied. Rachel asked the girls what they thought of the sign. One girl said she had seen the statement on numerous occasions. Another said she had never stopped to think anything about it. A third said she thought it was kind of macho. Then Rachel said softly, “I think it is blasphemous. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,³⁵ and anyone who is unaware of that is in for a troubled life and a torturous eternal life.” The episode was over as fast as it had begun, but all of the girls reflected on their coach’s observation and mulled it

over for some time. Every one of the girls knew their coach had spoken the truth, as only she seemed to know how. In the next month, they saw two more identical signs on vehicles while on trips, but Rachel never commented on them. The girls did, however.

Another time on a return trip home, one of the girls asked the others if they had noticed the student trainer who worked for the opposing team. They all admitted they had more than noticed. Wow, he was something to look at. The girls began to speculate about him. They wondered out loud about what he would be like. A number of pretty silly comments were being passed around when Rachel wondered out loud, “Do you reckon he would know how to live with you in an understanding way?”³⁶ There was no reply for a moment, and then one of the girls asked, “Why would that be important?” For the next two hours Rachel had a God-given opportunity to talk openly, biblically, and profitably about what a girl should look for in a man she might consider marrying.

The girls *never* forgot that conversation. It went deep into their hearts and remained there.

What has just been shared was the *pattern* of Rachel’s life with her girls. She seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of “cherries” to give away to those that lived and worked and played around her.

Style 11: Paradigms Assimilated/Integrated

Defined:

Author’s Caution, we are entering the third Warning Zone! Paradigms are archetype examples of “good models.” The type of paradigm being thought of here is one that serves as a *model through which we can screen our thinking process* as we seek to relate a worldly encounter with the Scripture. The positive aspect of having such a screening model is that it provides the user with a consistent tool which he or she can repeatedly use and return to. The user thereby gains the opportunity to develop and reinforce a tried and true pattern to guide his or her thinking.

The negative aspects accompanying such a paradigm, however, are the cause for raising the warning flag once again. First of all, a paradigm that is used repeatedly as a means by

which we enter the Scripture *may* eventually become as important, or even more important, to the user as the Scripture itself, to the point where one comes to rely on the paradigm as much as the Scripture. In the second place, the paradigm may not fit all situations or circumstances. This *can* lead the user to presume that what they are encountering is not important because it does not seem to fit the idea of an “all-purpose” paradigm. Thirdly, the paradigm itself *may* eventually cause its user to see the Scripture through the lens of the paradigm rather than the paradigm through the lens of Scripture. And finally, any paradigm *can* be turned into a “works righteousness” model and come between its user and the maturing work of the Holy Spirit. Any of these four things *can* happen; therefore, anyone who uses a paradigm model for assimilation and integration needs to be on the lookout to protect himself or herself from any of these potential pitfalls.

Several of the more popular Christian paradigms are: 1) What would Christ do in a case like this? 2) The Golden Rule is *the* action rule—just as you want people to treat you,

³⁵Proverbs 9:10.

³⁶1 Peter 3:7.

treat them in the same way³⁷—nothing else is necessary; or 3) *Love* is the only thing Christ requires.

Books, in one form or another, have been written about each of these paradigms. There are Christians who successfully use these types of paradigms. Some people even reveal that they have a guiding verse of Scripture that directs their thinking and actions every day of their life. Others view what has just been described as being too restricted for them. They cannot conceive of themselves as being able to navigate life from such a limited vantage point. The Lord, however, leads His people just as He chooses.³⁸

Example:

Paul Purelove was a professor of marketing at King of Kings College. He had been there for 12 years. Paul had discovered, while in his Ph.D. program, that the field of marketing was his calling. Many of its complex facets interested him, but none more so than the myriad of ethical pitfalls that lay in the way of anyone who devoted his or her life to the

endeavors associated with marketing. The area of sales in particular offered numerous opportunities for personal temptations to surface—*immediate* personal advantages to be gained from white lies, exaggerations, deceit, and twisted motives.

... they would succeed if they allowed Christ to rule in their hearts ...

At the same time, however, Paul saw the wonderful opportunity for young Christians to be salt and light in the workplace. He knew they would succeed if they allowed Christ to rule in their hearts and help them crucify the constant lure to use the *self-serving, short-run* sales tactics that were so pervasive in the field. He knew that to truly serve the customer, one should never lie, never exaggerate, never deceive, and always think about what would be in the best interest of the customer. The integrity that flows from such conduct would build a foundation so strong that *in the long run* his students would be extremely successful in the

field—assuming they had the other tools necessary to be successful.

Paul did not ground his beliefs in a philosophy that honesty paid the best dividend and therefore was best. He simply understood that the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the marketplace rested on God's natural law that He had created and made operative in the world. Such good conduct was *moral*, it was *prudent*, and it was *successful*. God had made it to operate that way.

Given the fact that there were an infinite number of specific situations one might find oneself in while selling a product or service, Paul had years ago settled on the biblical paradigm of the Golden Rule as the perfect guide for Christians in the field of sales. His students would ask hard questions like, "Dr. Purelove, what should a salesman do when he is selling the 'latest model' and knows for a fact that his company is coming out with a vastly improved new model in four months?"

Paul would first reply, "Well, Bill, what do you think is the right thing to say and do?" If doubt and confusion surfaced in the ensuing discussion, Paul would typically try another

question. "Do you think the customer needs the *newer model*? Will the current model meet your customer's needs? Or do you think answering this question before you get all tied in knots over the potential ethical conflict might help guide you to a good decision?" (We will now suppose that the student responds that the customer would very much benefit from having the newer product.) Paul might then ask, "Bill, if you were in the same position as your customer, what would you want a salesman to do?"

Paul employed this Golden Rule tactic with his students until they knew what his answer would be before they even bothered to ask him an ethical question. Some students believed the Golden Rule principle Paul employed was too simplistic, but Paul believed they were still too immature in Christ to be willing to pay the personal price of sticking to it. Other students recognized the "price to be paid" and rethought their desire to go into sales. Paul thought that this reexamination was healthy. And still other students believed Paul's use of the Golden Rule was legitimate, but they did not believe they would have the strength and commitment to use

³⁷Luke 6:31.

³⁸Romans 14:1-4.

it. The price of following it was awfully high. Paul prayed for them all.

Style 12: Discipline-Specific Assimilation/Integration

Defined:

Discipline-specific assimilation and integration is where this author began his personal journey in the integration endeavor in 1963. I was deeply convicted by the Holy Spirit that I was not associating/integrating God's Word, which I was much into, with my teaching. I responded as a loved, but broken child, but I had no idea what was involved in such an undertaking. I was theologically isolated at the time and had no clue if anyone else was doing what I was suddenly *compelled* to do—this being compelled is to be understood literally. I have not rested from making every effort to place God's Word at the heart of my teaching and writing from that time onward. It has been and is my passion!

How did I start? I pled with Christ in prayer. I begged Him to help me. And then a light came on in my mind. It was His Word that He wanted to use as “yeast” in my work, so I suddenly realized I must start with the

Scripture. Then I specifically asked Him to show me, as I read His Word, what parts of it applied directly to business and economics. I began my search. Verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, and book by book I studied the Bible with but one question in my mind, “Does this particular part of His Word apply to my work?” Hundreds and hundreds of verses began to come out of the pages demanding to be seen as truly relevant to the study of business and economics. I put the letter “E” in the margin of my Bible beside every verse that seemed to apply to either business or economics. Soon my Bible seemed full of the letter “E.”

Anyone in any academic discipline can ask God to help them and read the Bible with an open heart in search of the answer to the question, “Lord, does this portion of Your Scripture have anything to say to my work in _____?” (Fill in the blank: English, sociology, history, education, political science, psychology, biology, physics, engineering, accounting, marketing, human resources, information systems, management, art, music, philosophy, finance, etc.)

Example:

Robert Fullfaith was the chairman of the department of education at Resurrection University. He and two other members from the department went together to a workshop on biblical integration at Joy College in the neighboring state and had just returned home. All three of them were relatively new hires and had come to Resurrection University out of the secular university system. The other four members of the department were old hands at the school. Robert's understanding of the school's history led him to believe that Christian education, as it had been historically practiced at RU, had primarily consisted of having prayer before and at the close of classes.

The new president, however, who had come aboard at the same time these three new members had come, soon let the entire faculty know that he believed Christian education was more than simply having prayer before and after classes. He talked of biblical integration and clearly wanted the faculty to seriously consider undertaking it. Robert and his department colleagues had never heard of it, seen it, or knew what was involved in its practice. When the integration

conference at Joy College was announced, Robert applied for trip money for himself and the other two newer colleagues who also expressed an interest in the conference. The request was granted and they attended.

Three styles of integration were discussed at the conference, but the one that gripped Robert (and, interestingly enough, his two colleagues) was the one described as a “discipline-specific” approach, in which you ask God to help you discern from His Word what applies to your particular discipline. There were some “breakout” practice sessions at the conference, and they each separately took small sections of Scripture to read and see if they could spot any content that applied to Christian education. They were all amazed and became very excited by what they experienced and discovered. God's Word came alive for them in a new way.

On the drive back home they began to talk about their experience at the conference. From there they moved to a discussion about the core courses in the education curriculum at RU. They agreed that the core was secular, with a few Christian labels plastered on the exterior to make it sound like it was

Christian. They wondered aloud why they and the other department members couldn't reverse that reality and develop a core that was truly Christian and then plaster the secular demands to the exterior. They had a great time discussing this idea. By the time they arrived home they had decided to see if they could bring the rest of the department along and get them enthused about "discipline-specific" biblical integration.

After several departmental meetings, the whole team was on board and enthusiastic about getting underway. To do this, they each agreed to take a major book of the Bible and to study it verse by verse following a season of prayer in which they would ask Christ to reveal to them specific verses in His Word that applied to their discipline. Each member was to catalogue the verses they believed applied and report back in four weeks at the next departmental meeting. The time seemed to fly by, and they each reported their findings. They were all astounded at how much they had discovered and learned. After three such cycles of studying, reporting, and brainstorming, they began the development of an entirely new concept for their core curriculum.

It would be truly permeated with God's wisdom. The department, the curriculum, and the graduates would never be the same again. They had discovered, by God's grace, what true Christian education was intended to be.

Conclusion

Assimilating the "mind of Christ" and integrating His world/lifeview into our academic disciplines requires the help of the Holy Spirit, cooperation between the individual Christian and the Holy Spirit, and the application of some form of method, process, or style of integration to accomplish the desired end.

The 12 styles reviewed in this treatise for accomplishing the task of integration are simply examples. They are provided in the hope that they will stimulate the thinking of the readers and perhaps lead to their further reflections and eventual effort to expand their repertoire of styles. Many of you have undoubtedly already discovered that you are even now using multiple styles. And I am sure that a number of you are capable of adding to the list of styles. If you are, I would encourage you to do just that, because those of us who have given our lives to Christ, in

response to His call for us to enter Christian higher education, can use all of the help that is available.

The three most important things to remember, however, from the author's perspective are: 1) There can be no growth in our ability to integrate without the active help of the *Holy Spirit*; 2) Our lifeline to the Holy Spirit is our *faith* in Christ and our *belief* that He desires to give us more of His mind to enable us to carry out His purposes; and 3) We are called upon to help maintain this lifeline to our Redeemer through *prayer*. Without the help of the *Holy Spirit*, the exercise of the *faith* Christ has given us, and *prayer*, there can be no true assimilation/integration of Christ's mind. And without His mind, we have little of value to give.

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