

# The Arminian

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## HAS GENESIS BEEN HIJACKED?

*Thane H. Ury*

**G**iven so much wobbly preaching, deviant scholarship, and eccentric exegesis nowadays, it's natural to ask what is currently passing for orthodoxy in our evangelical colleges and seminaries. And why? The issue is a tad complex, certainly, but perhaps the most telling clue is found in how the opening chapters of Genesis are viewed in these hallowed halls. Laity and alumni are too often lulled into a false sense of security, often completely unaware that subversive philosophies have quietly Trojan horsed their way into their almae matres.

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Harvard's founding 1692 motto was "Veritas pro Christo et Ecclesia" (Truth for Christ and the Church). That was before the doctrinal termites imperceptibly began eating away the foundations. Paul's words, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting..." (Gal 1:6) seem apropos for all of America's earliest universities, 106 out of 108 beginning with Christ...but deserting Him over time. What happened?

In Genesis 3:1-5 we catch Satan's sinister strategy. He enticed Eve with offers of special knowledge, liberation, and even godhood. Pretending to be her friend, he gained entrance into her mind by luring her to doubt God's Word: "Did God really say?" With this toehold, the stage was set for all his future wicked schemes and plans.

In recent years, traditional views of Genesis 1-11 have undergone stealth revisionism in many evangelical institutions. The goalposts have slowly shifted left, with overly-generous concessions being made to extra-biblical influences. Alarmingly, even some schools founded to take a stand against every "taint of destructive criticism" (H.C. Morrison's phrase), now seem to be fine with whittling out more and more history from these pivotal chapters of the Bible. Traditional readings of Genesis are often dismissively scorned as quaint throwbacks to a time when the church was scientifically ignorant.

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More than a century ago, secular academia fully yielded to Darwinism. No news-flash there. But in time, mainline seminaries followed suit. And then a steady diet of “did God really say?” quietly followed. One by one, key rubrics of Neo-Darwinism crept into schools’ curricula; not just in the sciences, but also hissing their way into the humanities and all biblical disciplines (2 Cor 11:3). This is an oversimplification, needing healthy doses of qualification, but it shouldn’t be odd to at least ask this: Has the serpent effectively beguiled our top Christian academicians today with the very same strategy used to woo Eve to mistrust God’s Word?

“Evolutionary Creationism” (EC) differs little from “Theistic Evolution.” EC defends the view that evolution is a God-ordained process, and thus perfectly biblical. But EC also quietly includes the idea that untold disease,

suffering, and death occurred for eons prior to humanity, thus cutting any link between Edenic sin and death and natural evil. So, mass extinctions and natural evil over deep time must then be forced to fit God’s approbation that his work was “very good.”

This—and many other costly concessions—must be borne in mind as we’re invited (bombarded actually) to consider and imbibe EC thinking. Keep asking yourself, though, if EC’s biblical rationale is truly the fruit of a dispassionate exegesis of Genesis, or if it’s only the tail wagging the dog. When looking under EC’s hood, it’s not long before one suspects that something else is driving their conclusions. That something could be oxymoronically labeled “theistic naturalism.”

What you won’t find is a rigorous and sustainable grammatical-historical hermeneutic the likes of which gave rise to the Reformation. To rubber stamp an approach that seems fine with demythologizing the Pentateuch

sure begs the question, “Why stop there?” To be consistent, why doesn’t EC apply their same approach to the Gospels, like Bultmann did? Why, for example, is the revivification of Lazarus (on EC’s view) any less unscientific than, say, Noah’s flood? Or the virgin birth, water to wine, or walking on water? Is belief in miracles really just a smorgasbord, where we just take what we like?

If a school with deep evangelical roots shifts to condone EC, it should clearly state this. If she no longer holds to the biblical authority as framed by her founders, alumni and prospective students deserve to know. When pushing for clarity on this, EC advocates commonly (and ironically enough) respond that this is “divisive.” But a modest plea for “honesty in advertising” isn’t scandalous. What is scandalous, however, is to claim that you’re one thing, when in fact you aren’t.

When we read or hear graduates of “solid schools” who have deviated widely left from said schools’ meticulously focus-grouped statements of faith, we may be miffed. But stop and consider. Is it really outlandish to suggest that slow-release malignancies which these pastors received as students might be partially to blame? In fact, it would seem foolhardy not to make that connection. When the first 11 chapters of the Bible are constantly assaulted, ridiculed, and re-contoured to fit the latest dictates of scientism, should we really be surprised that the door is opened to distrust the remaining 1,178 chapters?

Regarding Gen. 1-11, let me give a lightning-quick summary of what is being taught/allowed in some academies of faith today. Such will help us get a feel for doctrinal erosion past, present, and future. EC is not monolithic. Proponents allow for endless variations within each rubric. Accordingly, we can always find an EC apologist who demurs here and there. But the general thrust of the following points may be likened to seven vertebrae that the EC mindset has gotten quite cozy with. We could add many additional

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points of compromise, but the 7 below are sufficient to remind us to be more discerning to the views being allowed in many evangelical schools and denominations today:

1. Genesis 1–11 is treated more along poetic lines. Thus, we are told that Adam and Eve may not have even been real people. Even if it's (begrudgingly) conceded that they might have actually existed, they still must be plotted on modernity's evolutionary timeline. Deviating from a Darwinian narrative is impermissible if not heretical.
2. Genesis is compared to other Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts. Nothing wrong with that on the surface. Liberals go overboard to highlight any residual similarities. Conservatives should continue to point out the vast incongruities. But the biggest danger comes when we're

assured that Moses was molded by these works, and even drew (pilfered) from them. Moses (and thus Genesis) is thus unflinchingly portrayed as influenced by mythical

thinking. These wayward schools ignore the DNR note on the toe tag of JEDP thinking, and keep propping it up.

3. Since the New Testament clearly refers to Adam and Eve, many professors and theologians "allow" the first couple to have been real people, but they'll quickly add that Adam and Eve weren't the first human-like beings and thus not created de novo.
4. Adam and Eve are now merely cast as "special hominids," whom God cherry-picked from preexisting group of neolithic hominids. These two would have been anatomically identical to their progenitors. It was only in being "stamped" with God's image

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that they obtained their unique status in the biblical story. This made them spiritually different, we are told. But again, we must ask if this is really the fruit of an unalloyed grammatical analysis of Genesis, or Genesis being hijacked by ever-shifting genetic theories that will be overturned in the future.

5. EC apologists are notoriously fuzzy about where straightforward history begins in the Bible. Is it at Genesis 12? The post-exilic period? In inviting us to take Genesis 1–11 as less than fully historical, EC must clarify for us what genre it is. When you hear EC's clarification, please contrast their words with the credal convictions of the schools they represent (or which produced them), and you'll see how far the acorn has fallen from the tree. EC and JEDP types are all too ready to turn on the spicket of biblical (historical) minimalism, but pathologically imprecise when it comes to who or what decides when we can shut off that spicket.
6. The living beings "created" in Genesis 1 were not fashioned in a "temporally immediate" manner. Speaking things instantly into existence (the traditional view) must now be recast as happening over untold millions of years of natural processes (the accommodationist view). Naïve literalism like God "speaking," "walking in the garden," "a literal tree of life" or fables like Babel and the flood are best kept reserved for VBS toddlers, and must not trespass onto our top-tier evangelical campuses.
7. Lastly, the consensual EC view is that Adam and Eve's sin (if historical at all) only ushered in spiritual death. In other words, human physical death is not linked to Adam's sin. The curse brought no changes to the cosmos, or at least none that science could detect. The "thorns and thistles" of Genesis 3:16 therefore existed long before the Fall, as did pain, blood-

shed, extinctions, cancer, and pretty much every other natural evil that we presently observe. Moreover, these are somehow still seen as “very good.”

Do you now see why EC is so enticing? A patina of evangelicalism is kept, but we are saved the embarrassment of going against the grain of the prevailing scientific orthodoxy. But a risky precedent has been set. If the Pentateuch must be read through the lens of methodological naturalism, how long before we are also asked to handle Paul’s writings in a more “scientifically responsible manner”? You needn’t wonder. It’s already happening. In fact, for quite some time Paul has been drastically reinterpreted to dovetail with Neo-Darwinism. Ironically forgotten are his words, “But I’m afraid that as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds might be also led astray” (2 Cor 11:3). Jesus’ words, too, need to be downplayed a bit: “If you really believed Moses, you would believe me because Moses wrote about me. But you don’t believe what Moses wrote. So how can you believe what I say?” (John 5:46-47 ICB).

When considering the “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” paleo-orthodoxy has always connected Calvary to SOMETHING that really happened in Genesis 1-3. EC types are far from convinc-

ing when they suggest that we can adopt their daring and novel renditions on that “something,” without also impacting our soteriology.

In the 1970s, while the battle over inerrancy was being fiercely waged, JEPD thinking was revivified in Christian seminaries. It was given a cosmetic makeover, with all the requisite assurances that to be respectable we must “go with the science.” But some in the resistance read the waves correctly, and warned that the next dominoes to topple would relate to Genesis and gender.

And in observing the extreme fuzzification on gender and marriage issues today, we must ask whether the modern views of Genesis that we’ve nurtured in our schools are partly to blame! If the bugle of Genesis is permitted to carry such uncertain tunes, how can we possibly prepare for any cultural battle? In allowing Genesis to be weighed in the scales of modernity’s great creation myth—rather than vice versa—this may prove to be one of the serpent’s most effective and costly hijackings yet.

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## Wesley Stories

Joseph Beaumont Wakeley

It is always dangerous to turn prophet, and be wiser than revelation. There were those in London who got the spirit of inspiration, and declared the world would end on the 28th of February 1764. Multitudes believed it, and the terror it occasioned was fearful. From the time Mr. Wesley heard of it he preached against it with all the energy God had given him. He said, “It must be false if the Bible was true.” The last day came when time was to end, and the funeral of the world to take place. Mr. Wesley preached from “Prepare to meet thy God,” attacking the absurd notion that the world was to end that night. But notwithstanding all he said many were afraid to go to bed, and others wandered in the fields, firmly believing that if the world did not end that night London would be destroyed by an earthquake. Mr. Wesley went to bed at his usual hour, and slept very sweetly till morning, its light showing their prediction false, and the utter folly of being wiser than revelation.

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# THE SPIRIT OF ANARCHY

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*Vic Reasoner*

According to Romans 13, Christians are to be subject to civil law unless it directly conflicts with God's commandments. Certainly the church has a prophetic responsibility to call out civil government when it tries to usurp God's final authority. However, when we speak out we must do so on the basis of God's Word and not another agenda.

Every sovereign nation has the duty to protect its citizens. This protection starts at our borders. In the Old Testament God designated the borders for each tribe of Israel. They were cautioned not to move the boundaries. This warning is found in such diverse sections of Scripture as Exodus 23:31, Deuteronomy 19:14, 32:18; Proverbs 23:10, and Acts 17:26.

"Build bridges not walls!" is a common mantra today. While the church is commissioned to take the gospel to the whole world, nations must be vigilant in regulating who crosses the bridge and enters their land. It is irresponsible to invite terrorists, gangs, and

human traffickers across our borders in the name of hospitality. Just as God raised up Nehemiah to build a wall around Jerusalem,

God has walls around the new Jerusalem. Revelation 22:15 identifies those who are not permitted to enter.

Yet liberals today are claiming that we should protect and even offer sanctuary to those who break the laws of our land. This is the spirit of anarchy. Wesley himself abhorred lawlessness. He held strongly to the rule of law.

However, this appeal to "sanctuary" amounts to hypocrisy at the highest level. Secular liberals who reject God's authority and do not want Christian values in government

cannot appropriate this biblical concept and advocate sanctuary cities or states.

The concept of "sanctuary" comes from Numbers 35:11-28; Deuteronomy 4:41-43, 19:2-3; Joshua 20:2. In that era family was allowed to avenge the shed blood of a member of their family who was killed accidentally. The perpetrator who was being pursued could flee to a city of refuge or literally grasp the "horns" or corners of the altar and there find mercy and protection.

An incident recorded in 1 Kings 2:28-35 demonstrates that while Joab caught hold of these horns, he was not granted asylum because he had committed murder. Such temporary "sanctuary" was designed to insure the due process of law, not protect anarchy. Therefore, the church cannot arbitrarily overrule civil law and provide sanctuary for those who deliberately break civil law. However, we can advocate that everyone receives a fair trial. We may even need immigration reform. But we cannot condone anarchy.

The concept of *sanctuary* is a religious concept based on the idea of sacred space—where the divine and human realms intersected. Therefore, it is a distortion of this sanctuary concept to allow criminals a safe haven—all in the name of a holy God. Today "sanctuary cities" have been declared, making a zone in which anarchy exists. This was never the original intent.

Theologically, this is a discussion about covenant institutions, namely the role of the church and the role of the state. As Samuel Rutherford stated magisterially in *Lex Rex* (1644), neither the church nor the state is above God. However, God has designated realms in which he has delegated his authority—namely to the family, the church, and the state. Yet he never relinquishes his final authority.

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The most basic misunderstanding is the differing functions of the church and of the state. The church is international and has no borders. According to Ephesians 2:14, Jesus Christ himself broke down the wall separating Jew and Gentile. The church must take the gospel of the kingdom of Christ to every nation, language, and ethnic group. Every nation should become a Christian nation. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12).

However, the church is not authorized to circumvent civil law. Civil law is the prerogative of the state. And every nation has the right to control who comes across its borders. Every nation must control its borders if it is to uphold its divine mandate to defend its citizens, protect private property, and punish criminals. For the church to harbor such criminals is a violation of God’s purpose for his

church and the result is that the church puts its neighbors at risk.

I have traveled internationally in order to preach and teach God’s Word. In the process I have been frisked, walked through metal detectors, had my suitcases rummaged by the military, had to remove articles of clothing, filled out forms, made application, paid money for visas to enter their country, and signed statements that I would abide by their law. I would not expect any less. It is not the prerogative of the church to circumvent such national security. Civil government should not encroach upon the duty of the church to preach the gospel and the church should not encroach upon the duty of the state to provide protection to its citizens.

*Dr. Reasoner is the general editor for Fundamental Wesleyan Publications.*

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## PUSILLANIMOUS PASTORS AND POWERLESS PREACHERS: THE PATRONS OF ABORTION

*David Martinez*

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I recently spoke at a pro-life event about three hours away from where I live. It was a fund-raiser for a pregnancy center. The event was a success, and I later heard reports that lots of money was raised, far beyond what any of us anticipated. However, I can’t shake off the profound dissatisfaction and disappointment I feel, even weeks later. The problem? With the exception of a few personal friends of mine, only two people from my particular denomination bothered to attend, even though they were informed of it long before. The event was hosted at the church of godly Calvinists, non-denominational Christians, and a splattering of other denominations... except mine, of course.

I made all the necessary excuses for them—the ones we make when we don’t want

to fall into the sin of judging our brothers in the faith:

- They were busy.
- They didn’t know about the event.
- Even though they weren’t there, *surely* many of them must have sent donations.
- Even though they weren’t there, *surely* they are engaged in the culture war in other meaningful ways.
- I think my denomination takes a “strong” stance on abortion. I think it can be found somewhere in the back of their manual, right?
- There were so many other denominational events going on at the same time.
- I am not God!
- Romans 14:4, Romans 14:4, and Romans 14:4!

- (Fill in the blank)

All of us know what it's like when we think the worst of our co-laborers in the ministry, only to be kicked in the gut by the Holy Spirit. I, for one, struggle with this and do all I can to avoid falling into judging other Christians who are called to different things.

However, it can't possibly be godly to lie to ourselves when we see sinful indifference, apathy, laziness, and cowardice on full display in our church/denominational "leaders." The culture war is raging. We hear the bullets whizzing past our ears as we leap over the bloodied bodies of its victims—73 million aborted babies, globally, according to the World Health Organization. During the Nazi holocaust, Hitler was responsible for the death of approximately five million people. In America, since abortion was legalized in 1973, approximately 62.5 million children have been slaughtered in the womb. Let that sink in. The image of tiny, mangled limbs crowding a river of blood

is an unpleasant one and it's hard not to get depressed along the way. This is why God commands

us to encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11). Christian soldiers get injured along the way. We get weary; and when we look around us during combat, we don't want to see our generals giving yet *another* conference on how to make our churches bigger so that the bigwigs could add another dollar to their wealth. Have they not read THE manual? They must have skipped this part:

Deliver those who are being taken away to death.

And those who are stumbling to the slaughter, Oh hold them back.

If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts understand?

And does not He who guards your soul know? And will not He render to man according to

his works?

—Proverbs 24:11-12 (LSB)

After our brother Charlie Kirk was martyred, the pastor of the biggest church in my denomination in my city preached on how we should "build bridges" with others. Brother Charlie was a simple footnote in the introduction of his sermon. All I could think was, "Really?" Cultural Marxism has indoctrinated an entire generation—castrating our men, rebelling our women, sexually mutilating our children, dismembering our babies, declaring our religion ignorant—and our "leaders" are worried about building social bridges so as to not disrupt our holiday dinners? What happened to our mandate to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3)?

Truly, we have fallen into Satan's trap of what Eric Metaxas wisely calls, "The Idol of Evangelism," in his book, *Letter to the American Church* (2022). He says that pastors have elevated evangelism to the point that they have neglected true discipleship. They think that "when someone comes to faith, their behavior and their views on every subject will eventually come into line with God's will. They will instantly come to hold a biblical view of sexuality and of the infinite value of all life, and anything else that is biblical. It's inevitable" (p. 75). Metaxas might as well put the name and address of my denomination's headquarters! We throw around the same tired phrases ad nauseam—"church growth," "outreach," "reaching the lost," "church planting," etc.—as ends unto themselves, ignoring that in order to make disciples, we are going to have to actively teach them to keep all that Christ commanded us (Matt 28:20). I don't mind "building bridges;" I mind building them over the bones of murdered humans.

So where do we go from here? Reader, I offer you three challenges:

- Hold your leaders accountable. Stop lending your support to institutions that refuse to care about what God cares

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about. Stop sending them money! Stop being present *at every single event* they require you to be a part of. Give them a big NO! They think cowardice is a fruit of the Spirit. Show them otherwise. Eventually, you will be asked about your actions. You will respond in such cases that you are merely too embarrassed before God to be associated with institutions that do not hold to his values.

- Preach on social evils as well. It is my conviction that every pastor and minister would do well to dedicate at least one sermon a year to the topic of abortion. Make it the big deal that it is. Show your church constituents what a real leader is.
- Be at peace with not being liked. If you are going to do 1 and 2 above, be at peace with rejection. If you haven't noticed, denominational leaders invite their friends to speak at all their important events. They generally aren't looking for speakers that challenge them but rather invite speakers who will toe the party line and protect the status quo. That is the nature of the beast. Crucify your desire to be liked, to be perceived as "successful," or to make money. Only then will you be free to call a spade a spade.

Will you accept this challenge?

Finally, one last thought. If you are uncomfortable with the way I have framed this

article, perhaps you need to read a good book on what the violent practice of abortion entails and just how much influence the church has lost in our society. While I am not eager to criticize, nor do I want to sin against God, I am through with making excuses for people that should know better. I see absolutely *nothing* in God's Word that obligates me to honor those to whom honor is not due, simply because they occupy some position in an ungodly denomination somewhere. My opinions are my own, but for what it is worth, if we do not wake up and start truly leading our people to care about what God cares about, we might as well go on Amazon and order a millstone and some rope. Christmas is around the corner, and these might make great gifts for our leaders.

Was confined in the evening to the company of men who were destitute of religion, and full of sin and politics. My brethren and myself were glad to have prayer in the morning and leave them. If there were no other hell than the company of wicked men, I would say, From such a hell, good Lord, deliver me! —Francis Asbury, May 8, 1775

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## WHY SOME PEOPLE REJECT THE DOCTRINE OF THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

*William H. Sillings*

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In seminary days, 45+ years ago, a classmate of mine espoused the idea that each of us actually determines what Scripture means because we are products of our reason and training. That sounds good enough, but it is the direct result of relativism in reason. In this

manner, there can be no such thing as final truth, but truth is always developing in the minds of readers and thinkers in Scripture.

Thus, we become our own final authority in scriptural matters. God is relegated to a super-human status, but still less than omni-

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scient, omnipresent, or omnipotent. This is a dangerous philosophy, flipping principles of interpretation on their heads. When we approach Scripture with the attitude that God is the final authority, we bow our will and our reason to God's revelation. When we approach Scripture as though we ultimately determine what the Scripture means by the way we think about God and His Word, we raise our own reason above God's infinite reason for revelation. Paul wrote, "If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know" (1 Cor 8:2).

### **Reluctance/Recalcitrance Refusal Response**

Some things in Scripture are hard to bear. Even some of Christ's sayings seem impossible to live with—at least to the natural heart. The natural heart wants to be its own boss, does not want to be ruled by anyone else, and wishes to deny the ultimate nature of God.

For the natural heart, some parts of Scripture seem too hard to understand or to obey.

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### ***When the heart is in a submissive stance before God, his Word comes alive.***

gods? Why obey your parents? Kids know better than their parents, right? Why does God say to honor and obey them? Can't we choose our own way? Why keep a holy day per week? Seriously? Take away 14.5 percent of our time just for worship and rest? Can't we worship in the first 20 minutes of an hour long service on Sunday, and then spend the rest of the week in "our time"?

When the heart is in a submissive stance before God, his Word comes more alive with the revelation of God's person and expectations. It takes a heart submitted to God to trust God's revealed Word in Scripture—especially when we haven't figured out what He means in statements we do not yet understand.

### **Training Often Destroys Trusting.**

Not all training will do this. I thank God for my own training. But any training which teaches that the Bible is merely a record of the way human beings experienced God will ultimately destroy faith in an ultimately authoritative word from God. If we make the Bible merely a record of how certain influential people experienced God in the past, we make the Bible merely a product of the community. If we make it a product of the community, then we strip away its finality in favor of relativism. "I'm part of the Christian Community! Who's to say that I am not as anointed as the Prophets and Apostles of the Scripture?" And if we make ourselves equal to the authors of Scripture in our anointing or inspiration, who's to say that our own words are less authoritative than Scripture? This too is seriously dangerous.

### **Mastery Trumps Mystery**

If we cannot deal with God's mystery, we can never know God fully. God is much greater than a composite drawing of our beliefs and experiences. He is much greater than our understanding, and his ways are far past finding out. His thoughts are high above our thoughts and his ways high above our ways. We should never expect that we will know everything about him on this earth.

However, to rationalistic cultures like ours, if a Word does not fit our sensate existence (our empirical experience), then it cannot be true. We Western Christians are Hellenized, rationalized, and empiricized beyond our conscious perception. We tend to believe that truth is determined by our sensate experiences, even beyond our willingness or ability to think those experiences through. We suffer great spiritual loss when we deny the place of mystery. Interestingly, the Eastern Church has been, and still is, much more comfortable with the notion of mystery than the West-

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ern Church. The Western Church believes we must dot every “i” and cross every “t” before we can say we know something. Eastern Church leaders often seem more content to let God be God and refuse to set themselves above the Almighty.

Believing that inerrancy requires literalism. It does not. This is probably the natural result of reason without revelation. Scripture should be interpreted for the meaning the authors intended. That is sometimes a difficult task. We must give ourselves to that task with both deeply spiritual perception and the best of our reason. On one hand, we cannot ignore the dynamics of the spiritual in the production and interpretation of Scripture. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the importance of reason in interpretation. Nor can we ignore the grammatical, historical, textual, or literary context of any Scripture if we want to be accurate in interpretation and application. While I have met several individuals who take great comfort from literalistic applications of Scripture, I cannot interpret every text literally. Even an inerrant text has nuances which cannot be ripped out of its context and applied

immediately to the 21st century, as though the author was a contemporary author. Yet, Scripture is as contemporary today as it was when written.

### Too Much Reliance on A Tradition

—Primarily the tradition in which spiritual understanding has been forged. Sometimes denominational/ecclesial traditions make it difficult for individuals to raise significant questions about long-held beliefs of that tradition. Tradition should be formed from biblical understanding rather than allowing our traditions to determine biblical understanding. The church has been widely varied from the days of the apostles onward. Yet, certain central truths have remained intact throughout the centuries, and they still do today. Perhaps this is another way to say “concentrate on Scripture’s major doctrines. Allow freedoms where Scripture doesn’t speak.”

*Dr. Sillings is the general superintendent of the International Fellowship of Bible Churches and a contributing editor.*

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## THE 5 POINTS OF ARMINIANISM—ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

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*Vinicius Couto*

Jacob Arminius’s position on the Assurance of Salvation and/or Perseverance of the Saints is situated within a theological context marked by debate with the predominantly Calvinist position. His works express a calculated ambiguity, configuring positions that reflect the tension between the experiential security of grace and the real possibility of apostasy. And this can sometimes leave readers confused as well.

Arminius categorically denied that a true Christian could fall from the faith completely

and definitively, but he recognized that there could be temporary declines and departures. The most important text of this Dutch theologian is his *Declaration of Sentiments*, which would be more appropriately translated as *Declarations of Opinions*, since the Latin word *Sententiae* does not mean, in this context, sentiments, but rather opinions or judgments, which is the nature of the work.

In the text in question, Arminius begins his considerations by saying that, after a person is regenerated, they receive God’s em-

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powerment to fight against sin and against the temptations of the enemy of our souls. It is not, therefore, a matter of an inherent ability, but of an empowerment from the Holy Spirit. In Arminius' words, "those persons who have been grafted into Christ by true faith, and have thus been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, possess sufficient powers [or strength] to fight against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to gain the victory over these enemies—yet not without the assistance of the grace of the same Holy Spirit."

It is important to emphasize that, for Arminius, this empowerment also comes from the help of Christ, who "by his Spirit assists them in all their temptations, and affords them the ready aid of his hand." Immediately afterwards, Arminius states: "Christ preserves them from falling." Jesus said that no one snatches his sheep from His hands (John 10:28), and Arminius agrees with this when he says: "it is not possible for them, by any of the cunning craftiness or power of Satan, to be either seduced or dragged out of the hands of Christ."

Basically, Arminius maintained that believers who participate in the true faith are sustained by the continuous help of the grace of the Holy Spirit, through which they receive strength to resist temptations and attacks from the enemy. He argues that Christ guards his sheep, making it impossible for them to be snatched away or raptured, agreeing with the supremacy of divine care over evil powers. Apostasy, therefore, is not a reality caused by the demonic world.

Satan and his evil hosts are nowhere near stronger than our Christ. The dualistic idea taught by spiritual warfare movements, that the devil is in a constant tug-of-war with God, is wrong; it is a syncretism of Manichaeism. The Scriptures clearly state that "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love

of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

Arminius was not yet fully convinced of the reality of apostasy. Therefore, he said: "I think it is useful and will be quite necessary in our first convention [or Synod], to institute a diligent inquiry from the Scriptures" in order to analyze whether it is not possible that "some individuals through negligence to desert the commencement of their existence in Christ, to cleave again to the present evil world, to decline from the sound doctrine which was once delivered to them, to lose a good conscience, and to cause Divine grace to be ineffectual."

This seemed to be a controversial issue, and for this reason, Arminius also claims never to have taught that "a true believer *can*, either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish." The issue is that James Nichols' translation added a *can* to the phrase, and this does not appear in either Dutch and Latin version. The addition of *can* in the English version eliminates an important distinction of the time, namely, the possibility and the reality of apostasy. Arminius acknowledges the possibility of apostasy, but not its reality. In his *Apology Against Thirty-One Defamatory Articles*, written around the same time as the *Declaration of Opinions*, Arminius stated that, "I certainly did say, with an explanation subjoined to it, 'that it was possible [posse] for believers finally to decline or fall away from faith and salvation.' But at no period have I asserted, 'that believers do finally decline or fall away from faith or salvation.'"

The difference is subtle and, at the same time, contradictory; for how can something happen and, at the same time, not actually happen? It is more reasonable to conclude that Arminius was confused about the subject of apostasy or that he still had doubts as to whether its reality was concrete. He does not give a final answer on this matter. However, there are texts in which Arminius seems to demonstrate certain doubts regarding the subject, as the presence of scriptural passages

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that teach this real possibility left him wavering, to the point of stating in his *Declarations of Opinions* that “certain passages are produced for the contrary doctrine [of unconditional perseverance] which are worthy of much consideration.”

In his letter numbered *Ep. Ecc.* 115, he understands that caution is needed before making a statement, as he recognizes that there are passages in Scripture that seem to support the Perseverance of the Saints both conditionally and unconditionally. Although Arminius does not declare whether apostasy is real or not, this does not prevent him from taking a position regarding the certainty of salvation.

Such certainty is possible through internal and subjective evidence (such as the testimony of the Spirit in the conscience and the non-condemnation of the heart) and

external and objective evidence (fruits of faith). Certainty, however, should not lead the believer to pride (excessive security), to a life detached from sanctification, careless. Concerned about this, Arminius states in his *Declaration of Opinions*: “I also believe, that it is pos-

sible for such a person, with an assured confidence in the grace of God and his mercy in Christ, to depart out of this life, and to appear before the throne of grace, without any anxious fear or terrific dread: and yet this person [the true believer] should constantly pray, ‘O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant!’”

This is why he avoids using the word “security” (*securitas*) to describe this state, as this expression is associated with careless certainty. Keith Stanglin explains this: “Is it possible to have too much security? Is there such a thing as unhealthy security? Arminius af-

firmed that there is, and he called it *securitas*, or *sorgloosheydt*.” This is a pastoral theme for Arminius, and he suggests that the limits of this doctrine be discussed at the national synod. A practical pastoral concern about this can be seen in an epistolary account by Arminius about visits to two sick people in *Ep. Ecc.* 56, in which they had doubts about salvation.

In his list of *Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed*, Arminius raises the issue involving the perseverance of the saints. His questions are: “Is it possible for true believers to fall away totally and finally: Do some of them, in reality, totally and finally fall from the faith?” In his one-paragraph reflections, he explains that the opinion that one never loses faith has never been confirmed as a primary doctrine of the Christian faith. Conversely, the opinion that it is possible to lose faith totally and finally has also never been considered heretical by the synods and councils of the church. However, he does not provide an effective answer or a formed and consistent opinion on this subject. He simply leaves open the possibility of orthodoxy for both, without, however, taking a position or assuming either option.

And how did the Remonstrants deal with this issue? In the fifth point of the Remonstrance (1610), Arminius’ followers closely followed his texts from the *Declaration of Opinions* and also expressed doubts about the reality of apostasy: “But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginning of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our mind.”

Time seems to indicate that they studied the matter, and in the articles that came out as a response to the Synod of Dort, *The Opinion of the Remonstrants of 1618*, they make comments favorable to the possibility of apostasy

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## **Arminius held that it is impossible for believers, as long as they remain believers, to decline from salvation, but that a believer who ceases to trust God is no longer a believer.**

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and, finally, take sides on this issue, bringing eight comments on the perseverance of the saints. In the fourth commentary, they said: “True believers are capable by their own fault of falling into flagrant crimes and atrocious wickedness, to persevere and die in them, and therefore finally to fall away and to perish.”

The real possibility of apostasy, however, does not eliminate the assurance of salvation. In the seventh commentary, the Remonstrants declared: “As a true believer is capable at the present time of being assured concerning the integrity of his faith and conscience, so he is able and ought to be at this time assured of this own salvation and of the saving good will of God toward him.”

How can we think biblically about this tension? I believe that the doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ is the hermeneutical key to an idea of conditional assurance of salvation, which would be the Remonstrant and Wesleyan position. When the individual is regenerated, he is also grafted into the True Vine and comes to have a positional justification, i.e., in the position of Christ, in Christ.

Being in Christ is an unequivocal biblical statement. Jesus said that those who are *in him* produce much fruit (John 15:5); Paul affirmed that we are justified by grace through the redemption that is *in Christ Jesus* (Rom 3:24); We are also baptized *into Christ* (Rom 6:3); We must be dead to sin; after all, we are alive *in Christ* (Rom 6:11). Our eternal life is *in Christ* (Rom 6:23). There is no condemnation, but this gift is for those who are *in Christ* (Rom 8:1). We are sanctified *in Christ* (1 Cor 1:2). God’s grace has been given to us *in Christ* (1 Cor 1:4). Only *in Christ* can we have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). We are wise *in Christ* (1 Cor 4:10); through the gospel we are born again *in Christ* (1 Cor 4:15). We hope *in Christ* in this life and in the life to come (1 Cor 15:19). *In Christ* we are made alive (1 Cor 15:22). God anoints us and confirms us *in Christ* (2 Cor 1:21). Our triumph is *in Christ* (2 Cor 2:14). *In Christ* we are a new creation

(2 Cor 5:17). We have freedom *in Christ* (Gal 2:4). The possibility of living in unity and being one comes *in Christ* (Gal 3:28). The Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms *in Christ* (Eph 1:3). In short, we could continue showing how our salvation is directly linked to the fact that we are *in Christ*; however, it is clear that this is our guarantee. If someone is not in Christ, they do not experience the listed benefits.

Jesus seems to be working through this idea: “*Remain in me*, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; *it must remain in the vine*. Neither can you bear fruit *unless you remain in me*. I am the vine; you are the branches. *If you remain in me and I in you*, you will bear much fruit; *apart from me* you can do nothing. *If you do not remain in me*, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:4-6 – italics mine).

As we can see, this topic is quite dense. We were unable to analyze several of Arminius’s texts, nor even to focus on biblical theology. We saw that Arminius, while assuring the empowerment provided by the Spirit to resist sin and be kept by Christ, admits the contingency of perseverance, recognizing that the fall is not due to a superior evil power, but to the negligence of the believer himself. The Remonstrants echo this perspective, ratifying the condition of continuous struggle and the need for active cooperation with grace so as not to stray from the faith.

In any case, from Arminian theology emerges a robust theological reflection that challenges both fatalism and presumption, proposing an assurance of salvation marked by living faith, persistence in works of piety, and continuous communion with the Spirit, which opens space for consolation and hope, without ever excluding the exhortation to zealous perseverance, repentance, and constant vigilance.

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# WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING?

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*Vic Reasoner*

Classic Methodism emphasized the gift of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. The Spirit bears direct witness with our spirit that we are children of God. This is confirmed by the fruit of the Spirit which is the indirect testimony of our forgiveness and adoption.

Methodism has also affirmed the gifts of the Spirit and would not hold to a cessationist position. In one sense the one, holy, catholic and apostolic has always been charismatic in the sense that the Holy Spirit has been repeatedly outpoured in revival and his gifts have been in operation.

However, recent attempts to reconstruct early Methodism as charismatic are misleading. The modern Charismatic Movement began in 1960 when Dennis Bennett, rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, spoke in tongues and introduced the experience to his congregation. The attempt to make this link with early Methodism is, of course, anachronistic. It is also reductionistic, emphasizing primarily only one particular gift.

In order to understand Wesley's position, his primary statement is located in *Farther Thoughts upon Christian Perfection*.

There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but *more love*, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, "Have you received this or that blessing?" if you mean anything but *more love*, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love

described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham's bosom [1.33].

Those who attempt to recast Wesley as a charismatic often refer to an outpouring of the Spirit at Fetter Lane. This account is recorded in Wesley's *Journal* for January 1, 1739.

About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord."

With no desire to diminish this blessing, such outpourings can be traced throughout the history of Christianity. The fact is, that such outpourings were often documented within the Calvinistic tradition, especially in their sacramental feasts. The irony is that they were cessationists.

This outpouring which Wesley describes is not necessarily a "charismatic" manifestation, in the modern sense, nor did it include the phenomena of speaking in tongues. We should seek frequent outpourings of the Spirit in revival. However, the Spirit gives the gifts as he sees fit. Paul opens 1 Corinthians 14 with the imperative that we should seek perfect love. We should also desire, but not seek, spiritual gifts—especially "opening and applying the Scriptures"—as Wesley defined "prophesying." Speaking in other languages, a lesser gift, must be interpreted to be of value to the church. Wesley Duewel asked, "Why

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would people prefer tongues when Paul says it is not to be preferred?"

We also need to look at Wesley's encounter with the "French Prophets" who did speak in tongues. Wesley recorded that on January 28, 1739 several of his friends went with him to a house where they met a woman who was connected with a movement of French Prophets. She went into convulsive motions and spoke a prophetic message. According to Wesley, "Two or three of our company were much affected and believe she spoke by the Spirit of God. But this was in no wise clear to me. The motion might be either hysterical or artificial. And the same words any person of a good understanding and well versed in the Scriptures might have spoken. But I let the matter alone, knowing this, that 'if it be not of God, it will come to nought.'"

Wesley did not have to wait long to observe the fruit of this movement. On June 22 he called on one who "did run well," until hindered by "some of those called French Prophets." Wesley concluded that these prophets

were not sent by God and "earnestly exhorted all that followed after holiness to avoid as fire

all who do not speak according 'to the law and the testimony.'

That same day Wesley spoke to the Methodist society from 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God." He told them not to judge the work of the Spirit on the basis of appearances, common report, or by their own inward feelings. "No, nor by any dreams, visions, revelations supposed to be made to their souls, anymore than by their tears or any involuntary effects wrought upon their bodies." Rather, Wesley insisted that everything be subjected to the final authority of Scripture.

In his *Journal* for May 21, 1740 Wesley recorded:

In the evening such a spirit of laughter was among us that many were much offended.... One so violently and variously torn of the evil one did I never see before. Sometimes she laughed till almost strangled; then broke out into cursing and blaspheming; then stamped and struggled with incredible strength, so that four or five could scarce hold her.... At last she faintly called on Christ to help her. And the violence of her pangs ceased.

Two other women laughed for two days. Wesley did not promote this as Rodney Howard-Browne did more recently. Rather he recorded that prayer was made for them and that they "were delivered in a moment."

Wesley also received a report from Wales that after the preaching was over, they sang over and over with all their might a verse of a hymn "perhaps above thirty, yea, forty times. Meanwhile the bodies of two or three, sometimes ten or twelve, are violently agitated, and they leap up and down, in all manner of postures, frequently for hours together." Wesley concluded that while they were sincere, they had little experience in the ways of God and the devices of Satan. "So he serves himself of their simplicity, in order to wear them out and to bring a discredit on the work of God" [*Journal*, August 27, 1763].

Finally, Wesley recorded his dislike of fanaticism in his *Journal* for April 3, 1786.

Satan strives to push many of them to extravagance. This appears in several instances. (1) Frequently three or four, yea, ten or twelve, pray aloud all together. (2) Some of them, perhaps many, scream all together as loud as they possibly can. (3) Some of them use improper, yea, indecent expressions in prayer. (4) Several drop down as dead and are stiff as a corpse, but in awhile they start up and cry, Glory! Glory! perhaps twenty times together.

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Just so did the French Prophets, and very lately the Jumpers in Wales, bring the real work into contempt.

In the attempt to go forward by retrieving our link to historic Methodism, we must avoid both rationalism and fanaticism. My friend Daniel Jennings compiled the primary accounts of Wesley's encounters with the supernatural in his book *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley* (2012). He told me, "The Wesley I discovered in my research was a man who fell between dead liberalism which denies all miracles, and Charismatic emotionalism which accepts anything that seems miraculous as being real. He was simply a man who believed that God had always worked miracles."

Lee Strobel's new book, *Seeing the Supernatural* (2025), is endorsed by a broad spectrum of evangelicals, both charismatic and otherwise. The category of miracles is accepted by all Bible-believing conservatives. But miracles cannot be induced, only acknowledged.

Jennings also documents the fact that Wesley never spoke in tongues nor did he teach that tongues was the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The fact is that glossolalia is not limited to Christianity. It is part of the African Tribal Religion, part of Mormonism, one of the manifestations of de-

mon possession, and was part of the Shaker movement in Kentucky after the Cane Ridge revival.

Theology is not extremely important, however. Rather, the emphasis is on experience. Across the twentieth century, tongues was understood as the facility to speak real languages for the purpose of cross-linguistic evangelism. Then it became a one-time ecstatic utterance which was regarded as the initial evidence of either a second or a third blessing. Then it became a prayer language. For Catholic charismatics, tongues is a renewal. It is part of initial salvation for unitarian pentecostals. Larry Hart concluded, "There is no one 'Charismatic position' on Spirit baptism."

While Nicky Gumbel concedes that all do not have to speak in tongues, his popular Alpha Course encourages people to ask for it. This emphasis is not the thrust of early Methodism. Yet it is being advocated in several branches of the pan-Wesleyan world. The question that must be asked of the "next Methodism," once again, is whether it has room for those who are classic Methodists—who believe that the emphasis should still be on seeking and maintaining a pure heart. Seek the fruit of the Spirit. Pray that Christ will prune you so that you may bear more fruit.

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## DRIVING FROM JERUSALEM TO BETHLEHEM

Jadon Olsen

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For the past six months, I have served as the pastor at Port Royal Methodist Church. Have you heard of it? No? Neither had I. Back in April of this year, I felt God tap me on the shoulder and tell me that it was time to dive back into the deep end of ministry. I had just come off a rough ministry experience a year prior to this moment. At the time of hearing this fresh call, I thought that I was destined to finish seminary without engaging in another

part-time ministry. I had devised a plan, but little did I know that God was about to order my steps. These steps would bring me to the town of Port Royal, Kentucky. The Lord directed me to Port Royal Methodist Church, where I have served as their pastor since the beginning of May. Port Royal is a town of about sixty people in total. I frequently tell others who ask where I pastor that "there are more cows and sheep in the town than peo-

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ple.” Port Royal is about an hour and a half northwest of the “holy city” of Wilmore, Kentucky, where I live. Driving to this little town over these past few months has brought to my mind this thought: “Driving from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.”

In the Bible, Jerusalem was the place of worship—the “holy city.” Bethlehem was an “O Little Town,” which, outside of prophecy, was otherwise insignificant. Nonetheless, while Jerusalem was the central place of worship, some God-stuff happened in Bethlehem that changed the world. Wilmore, known as “the holy city,” would seem, in the state of Kentucky, to be God’s chief place of operation. Wilmore is Jerusalem in this pastor’s parable. Port Royal, well... that’d be Bethlehem.

Like Bethlehem, Port Royal seems, by most scales, to be insignificant. There is no port to speak of, nor is there any sense of royalty to be found there. Well, maybe that’s inaccurate—but more on that later.

The road there is by no means glamorous. It’s bumpy, curvy, and sickeningly boring at times. However, the view is immaculate. The

rolling hills, bluegrass, and wildlife have generated many analogies and turns of phrase for sermons and conversations during

my time there. To see beauty, you need to go down those bumpy, curvy roads. After all, Jesus did say, “Narrow is the way that leads to life.” The narrow way doesn’t typically trend on social media, but it does transform hearts.

Serving in a small, local, rural church may not be on the front page, but it helps people see beyond it. In a world of “carnal commonality,” local churches are areas of holy ground where people can learn that “the glory of the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” Your local church may not be on the front page, but serving in the Port Royals of the world helps you see

beyond the headlines to the fact that God is spreading his kingdom throughout the world, one soul at a time.

Upon my initial pilgrimage to Port Royal, I was charmed by the warm, familial nature of the church. The holy love of God is commonplace there. It is seen and shared with every wave, every smiling face, and each bite of Mrs. Janie’s warm apple pie. The first time I took the pulpit at Port Royal Methodist Church, I was unaware of what to expect. The sermon text was Hebrews 1:1–3.

Such a text, which harps upon the authority of God’s revelation, separates the wheat from the chaff in our modern culture. Without God speaking in history, knowledge and understanding are impossible (Prov 1:7; Col 2:3; Heb 1:1–3). All of Scripture is God-breathed and is not merely a matter of one’s own interpretation (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20–21). Such a truth as this sets whatever chaff is in the room aflame. To my delight, upon proclaiming this truth, my eyes saw no chaff—but strong wheat of the Lord, which is not moved by every wind of doctrine. It was then that I realized God had placed me at Port Royal Methodist Church for such a time as this.

Since that initial experience, God’s steadfast love has endured in wonderful ways. We have continued to work through the book of Hebrews together. There have been many more meals, laughs, and “God moments.” As I write, we are in the midst of our fall revival. This three evening event has been nothing short of spectacular. It has been a wonderful time of stirring up one another to love and good works through song, the preaching of the Word, and fellowship through meals and conversation.

The theme for our revival is as follows: Follow Jesus, be like Jesus, and serve Jesus. The drives there and back this week have taught me once again why serving and being a part of the local church—the Port Royals, the Bethlehems of the world—is part of how God is making all his enemies a footstool for his feet. The gospel

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***While Jerusalem was the central place of worship, some God-stuff happened in Bethlehem that changed the world.***

is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16).

We may not have skinny jeans and smoke machines at Port Royal, but we have the gospel. His gospel of grace is sufficient to equip us for every good work. We don't have the ivory towers or the fancy chapels of Wilmore, Kentucky. Don't misread me here—I have been blessed by my time in Wilmore as I study to be a pastor. Nonetheless, I have been just as blessed by driving to Port Royal each Sunday.

Thus, I submit to you: take a drive from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Your church may be five strong. You may be meeting in an unconditioned, hundred-year-old sanctuary. That's fine. To loosely quote Wesley, "Give me five or so people who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergy or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven."

As we lift our eyes toward the Christmas season and celebrate the incarnation of our Lord, this pastor's invitation is for you to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works in your Bethlehem. The road you're on is curvy, probably bumpy, and I'm sure a bit stale at times—but look to the stable of your local church. God is doing something there that you would not even believe if He told you.

Follow Jesus... He's leading the way.

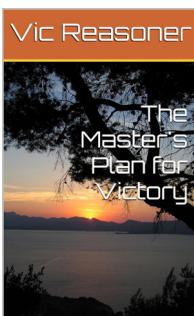
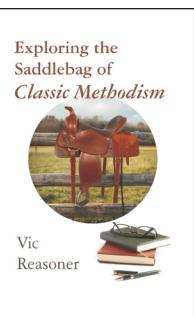
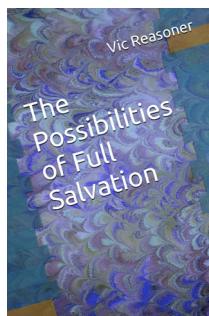
Be like Jesus... He's the best there is, for he is the Truth.

*Rev. Jadon Olsen is an ordained deacon in the Global Methodist Church. He currently serves as the pastor at Port Royal Methodist Church in Port Royal, Kentucky. Jadon is also finishing up his MDiv at Asbury Theological Seminary this coming spring.*

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by Vic Reasoner



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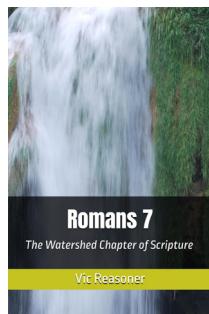
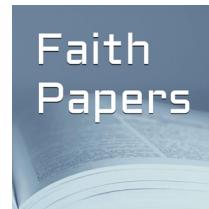
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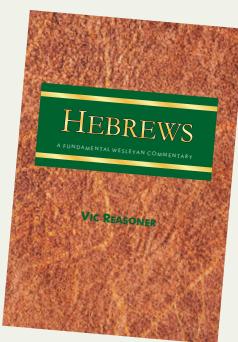
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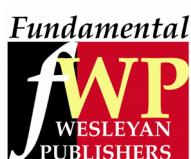


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