

A Consideration of

# *'GENESIS 3 CHRISTIANITY'*

In the Quest for a Church of Kingdom fullness

by Jim Juers (a disciple of Jesus)  
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## INTRODUCTION

As a seminarian I served my vicarage year in Lansing, Michigan. My bishop there at Christ Lutheran Church gave me a gift, a book from his personal library. It was an anthology of sermons covering the two-thousand-year span of Christian Church history. Although I no longer have the book, I distinctly remember reading homilies by such revered and ancient authors as Chrysostom, messages from medieval mystics and scholastic preachers, and sermons on the then-current disputations over dogmatic theology from Reformation heroes. The surprising thought that came to me at the time was that none of them presented the heart of the evangelical gospel of salvation as I understood the good news at that time. It was not until I came to the sermonizing of eighteenth-century evangelist and Pietist-influenced John Wesley that I began to feel more comfortable and at home with the presentation of the good news as Jesus and Him crucified for our sins. It was in reading the clear Wesleyan message of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's vicarious blood sacrifice on the cross that at last the preaching resonated more precisely with my own twentieth century gospel understanding of forgiveness, atonement-redemption, and divine reconciliation—with resurrection and heaven to follow at last. To my youthful thinking, it was as though it had taken more than a millennium and a half for the church to finally arrive at a clear and functional articulation of the gospel. At the time this curious discrepancy that I sensed between early church teaching and modern evangelical preaching sowed a seed in my soul that has since then sprouted and begun to grow amazingly during the last half century of my life. One might say that I had unexpectedly and without deliberate searching or even desire stumbled upon the 'until-then-for-me' unrecognized 'problem plant' of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*'!

In the course of my life, with much study and through repeated experiences, I have come to recognize that we of the Christian era have thus far regularly missed the supernatural essence of 'church' with regard to its eschatological uniqueness—to a great extent because of that 'problem plant' of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*'. We have been quick to fault the Jewish failure to recognize and receive their Messiah; but we as Gentiles have failed to see that we ourselves have often and seriously missed the unique nature and full impact of the Messiah's Incarnation and coming to earth as the beginning of the eschaton, the last days, and the very inauguration of the true fulfillment of the eternal purposes always intended by God even before the problem arising because of Genesis 3. For me the growing realization of a discrepancy between God's higher and eternal designs when contrasted to the concerns of a very earthly 'church' perhaps too preoccupied with man's fall and sinful condition has been a progressively enlightening, even if at times painful, experience. It was perhaps in seminary that I first specifically and consciously recall observing the meaning and significance of different theological interpretations and the critical impact of their specific paradigms in ministering salvation and designing church life and practice. It became ever clearer that knowledge about God and the experiential knowing of him are both profoundly affected by the paradigms and belief

structures we embrace in forming our personal worldviews. Thus began my lifelong attempts at an honest evaluation of and, as necessary, a genuine labor of correction to the worldview of my own upbringing in the then current social, cultural, and religious structures of history. It has been a challenging and costly, but exceedingly rewarding, journey. What I hope to convey and share in this writing is an encouragement for all of us to ignore the world's shackles, especially so much of those often imposed upon us as heirs of Christendom's civilization, and to seize the opportunity of such an exciting pilgrimage. *Carpe diem!*

My invention of the term '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' is designed to critically highlight the evangelical church's gospel proclamation as an imprecise and incomplete perception based on an imperfect and only partial model of the New Testament gospel. In the next section of this article, I will attempt to explain more fully what I mean by my choice of terms. That is, the evangelical gospel sees the essence of the Scriptural story to be the failure man encountered in Genesis 3 and then answered by God's Christological salvation solution to that problem. In this article I want to argue that there has always been much more to the divine designs for humanity according to the full teaching of Scripture and especially the New Testament's gospel message—and that the failure to evangelize with and declare according to that full story has resulted in a feeble church and carnal, worldly Christians in an especially dangerous stage of the eschaton. To that end I am tracing something of the story of my own unfolding Christian journey as it slowly altered my gospel paradigm and my controlling worldview with major hermeneutical modifications and more accurate historical interpretations. As we face increasingly difficult challenges to Christian faith in the unexpected lengthening of our frightening eschatological age, it is logical that such insights for spiritual growth will be more necessary than ever if we choose to be faithful to our calling. We can no longer bear with the craven fear that clings to traditions, uncritically assuming that our earlier 'fathers' have provided us with all that we need to benefit from our walk of faith and to accomplish Jesus' desire for the Church!

Over the past fifty years of my life many books have been read, many experiences encountered (even and especially the painful ones), and an increasingly deliberate seeking of the Lord aroused. These have watered and fertilized questions about that 'problem plant' as they germinated and grew out of that rather intuitive and inductive thought emerging from my youthful observation that something was quite different between the gospel presentations of ancient versus modern church teaching! And that difference reflected increasingly negative changes in ecclesiastical history, not always a positive maturing of understanding and experience. *For the sake of this article's purpose to encourage a more mature understanding and embrace of our Christian faith, I am suggesting that worldly institutions and the ecclesiastical processes within history have shrunk, to the point of distortion (perhaps even caricature), the full and large-scale gospel message of our faith.* That reduced gospel, as it has been handed down to the present time, is what I mean by referring to the church's contemporary good news message as a truncated '*Genesis 3 Christianity*'. It implies that we are prone to begin telling the metanarrative of the Scriptures too long after the real beginning, long after the divine plot and program had actually and already begun (cf. I Cor. 2:7). The full story of the Bible, for which Genesis 3 and the gospel dimensions necessary for and applicable to the

event there recorded, begins in eternity past and rests upon the purposes of God in creating man and the time-space cosmos of Genesis 1 and 2 as the platform and stage upon which all the meaning and telos of His majestic intentions would transpire toward a deliberate design and ultimate consummation. The difference between the earlier church message and the contemporary gospel interpretation (that *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*) is the difference between having a much broader appreciation of God's grand designs from eternity past versus a partial faith focused only on the resolution of problems encountered along the way and later historically, problems then being resolved with a view for selfish personal heavenly blessings. And that difference has very real and very negative consequences. It helps to explain the pathetic contemporary condition of the church and her often carnal, worldly disciples. It interprets the history of the 'church' during and after the failures of the era of Christendom—and suggests where and how in that history we might best discover a modern pathway forward.

The thought structure of this paper is meant to flow something like this. I want to begin first with a careful definition of what I mean by using the term *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*. Then we'll discuss more in-depth the unfortunate historical developments that began the transition from the worldview of the first century disciples and their teachers to the ways of medieval Christianity and finally to our modern world as it grew out of the Renaissance and the Ages of Enlightenment and Rationalism. From that historical position we'll evaluate the sad results emanating from the historical saga by which Christendom brought forth a mature *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*. And, at last, I hope to suggest an alternative for the future. And so, we begin with our definition of the term.

## 1.

### **WHAT IS *'GENESIS 3 CHRISTIANITY'*?**

I have invented the term *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*. By it I mean to highlight the source and fundamental content of a problem in our gospel understanding and proclamation! That problem is—the 'salvation' story gospel is interpreted only in response to the problem of sin—thus its human introduction in Genesis 3. The full Scriptural metanarrative suggesting a 'salvation' gospel rooted in God's eternal plans and purposes for man has been lost in that misguided overemphasis on the need to solve a critical problem that developed early on but after the beginning of the bigger story. Thus, for all practical purposes the contemporary Christian gospel is seriously, even dangerously, abbreviated. It focuses only on a hindering problem rather than the greater grace. It tells only a part of the story (solving the problem of man's fall into sin) and has replaced the divine whole of the 'salvation' gospel (the eternal plans of God) with an imperfect and compromised abbreviation. And all this has happened with serious and tragic consequences. The grand and glorious whole, God's creation of man as a key player in the ultimate and total triumph of his victorious and glorious kingdom, is mostly

missing from our gospel presentation. The church wallows; believers are weak and ill-equipped to face the times in which we live!

In other places I have referred to *'Genesis 3 Christianity'* as *the salvation gospel of 'sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die'*. That is a shorthand description of the earlier mentioned message and preaching of John Wesley. Those elements of early Methodist teaching can be found throughout church history. But they are usually more sophisticated and placed in the context of God's historical plans for the time/space-cosmos—rather than just cleansing and disciplining good men and women for use in the social order of our times. In the past few centuries that salvation gospel of forgiveness became the staple of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian teaching. Revivals have regularly simplified the gospel with these basic elements—man's sin and guilt, his need of forgiveness, the substitutionary redemption via Christ's cross and blood, regeneration faith to embrace that atonement, and the promise of a heavenly reward later. This emphasis originates in the problem of man's 'fall' as recorded in Genesis 3. Today's evangelization repeats these basic elements as the gospel of a forgiveness-based salvation. For example, the so-called 'Romans Road' witnessing tool consists of selected passages from Paul's letter to the Romans that make the Christian testimony one of man's sinfulness, his consequent state in judgment, atonement by Jesus' blood, and a personal faith for receiving that forgiveness for salvation in heaven. D. James Kennedy's 'Evangelism Explosion' methods follow essentially the same technique by asking if one has the right answer (forgiven through Christ) in order to enter heaven upon death. Evangelical churches present the work of conversion-salvation more in terms of personal decisions and choices; 'high church' denominations present the same message connected to obedience to the sacramental workings of the church. Either way the basic gospel message remains the same— *'sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die'!*

While the elements of such a gospel of salvation are not new and appear already in a less theological formulary in the New Testament, they were perhaps first so systematically well-articulated into a more contemporary theological formula by a scholastic theologian of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, one St. Anselm (yes, the same theologian so well known for his ontological proof for the existence of God). In his popular writing, *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*, he created a dialogue with a man named Boso in which the doctrine of *penal substitutionary atonement* through Christ's death on the cross is clearly argued as the redemptive purpose of Christ' Incarnation and thus our salvation. Anselm emphasized the debt toward God into which man had fallen and his inability to pay the debt and to make an adequate restitution. Jesus, however, as the incarnate Son of God was able to fully pay the debt for all of mankind. Anselm's discussion does not contain some of the more modern practices of answering an altar call for confession of personal sins, baptism expressing faith in Jesus' ability to forgive, and the prayer for rebirth into the new life. Anselm's work lacked an emphasis on a 'new birth' that usually describes and goes with today's conversion experience. But his teaching clearly embraces the basics of *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*—sins and forgiveness through faith in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus opening heaven's gate.

Has it ever occurred to you that the salvation gospel with which we are so familiar has the appearance of an unflattering caricature of God? The story could be interpreted as saying that right from the beginning the Lord was 'outfoxed' by Satan. His 'very good' creation was robbed from him by an enemy. In desperation God had to devise a plan to ransom and recapture what he had lost. The cost, the humiliating death of his only begotten Son on a cross, was effective but came with an extremely high price tag. Being God, he had the power to do such things. But the process meant the loss of so much of his human creation and the garden paradise was abandoned as a lost cause. He has prepared a new paradise in heaven and will at last receive into it those who believe. The caricature has an omnipotent God settling for a second option. It is not really the picture of a divine plan being realized but rather of a failed plan being replaced at an extreme cost with a second chance option and alternative. That is an interpretation of the 'sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die' gospel of salvation that should give us pause to question its peculiar simplicity. In ways it can be viewed as an unflattering caricature of God and his works! Such a caricature all but cries out for an articulation of a more mature gospel message.

We must be clear! The teaching of vicarious satisfaction for sin is NOT an error! It is the redeeming truth that provides the atonement-reconciliation for a sinful humanity and each of us individually to a holy God! Our concern is, therefore, not to discredit this element of salvation but to argue for its proper place in the whole gospel of God's eternal purposes in and for creation! Indeed, the increasingly popular critique of the vicarious atonement as 'an act of divine child abuse' borders on blasphemy. Many modern interpretations of the cross fall short, rooted as they often are in the moral influence theory of Anselm's virtual contemporary, Abelard. But as we strive to enter at the narrow gate, we must learn the full story of God's work for us and how the partial truth of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' fits into that grand theme. Later we will discuss the gospel of the Incarnation as a grand and fuller work of salvation. I plan in section 4 of this article to argue for a more concerted effort to probe after the elements of such a gospel!

But before making suggestions for a better understanding of God's fuller story and his gospel purposes, it will help to consider the historical origins and development of that partial gospel story. How and why did it originate and develop during the past 2000 years of the ecclesiastical experience? And what was the impact of this diminution of God's grand work? If we honestly deal with the root of the problem and observe the results, we will more likely be willing, even eager, to place all the components of the gospel into a more complete account of what God has done on our behalf for his eternal glory and heavenly purposes.

## 2.

### THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY '*GENESIS 3* *CHRISTIANITY*'

This is an important inquiry into the two thousand years of ecclesiastical history. It is worth careful consideration. A good answer (and good answers only come with good questions) will provide guidance for our instruction in a better understanding of God's works and ways. So, we ask: How did the primitive church manage, in just a couple hundred years, to make the historical transition from Jesus' original gospel proclamation inaugurating the Kingdom of God to the thinking and practices that have eventuated in our present day partial gospel of '*sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die*'? At the beginning Jesus' announcement was a declaration of the imminent and immanent fulfillment of the patriarchal hopes and the subsequent prophetic promises for the long-expected Messianic Age. His message declared a divine kingdom with its righteous victory over Satan's rebellion, a victory early implied by God's inclusive promise of the Overcoming Seed. Of course, Jesus' message and his works would surely also include any necessary works for a divine-human reconciliation. But such an atonement-based reconciliation would be accomplished because of the needs of the larger Kingdom-purposes in view. New Testament 'salvation' was never seen as a 'stand-alone' gospel of redemption; such a reconciliation was always a means to an end. The proper definition of salvation includes not just the means and but also the end goal. *It seems that God always intended man's participation in the full defeat of all his enemies and then a co-regency with him in the resulting eternal and heavenly rule of righteousness.* What happened that such good news of eternal blessings was reduced to merely carnal heavenly joys, a virtual caricature of divine business? If we are able to trace that unfortunate, even if unintended, transition (from God's Kingdom in the early church to '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' in contemporary faith), we will be better able to make the necessary corrections for a better and a fuller pathway in living the Christian faith as the Church of the Eschaton. With that hope of corrective instruction out of an examination of history, let's review the past two-thousand-year story of the church and see what we can learn from that rough and tumble and confusing journey. It is the historical saga of medieval Christendom, the Renaissance, and the outcome in Modernity!

#### **CHRISTENDOM**

It was a disaster with millennial-long consequences when one's baptismal certificate became essentially synonymous with papers of state citizenship. But such was the mistake when the early institutional churches lost the vision of the true nature and purpose of the Kingdom of God—and in good measure the heavenly life of the Holy Spirit as well! In 313 the Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan legalized Christianity. Jesus' followers understandably rejoiced at the cessation of the cruel and brutal persecutions and martyrdoms at the hands of earlier Roman Emperors. But little did the bishops and believers appreciate the spiritual dangers that would inevitably ensue for them as a result of such *a mutual joining of the worldly and institutional powers of church and state.* (Ponder for a moment: a Roman emperor, needing a unified Christian church to stabilize his reign and empire, moderated and pontificated as church

bishops sought to resolve in a creed the theological issues concerning the incarnation at the church's first ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325 A.D. Should we be surprised that Constantine himself was not impressed with arguments either for or against an *iota* in determining the nature of Jesus' deity?) Thus, already before the fourth century had ended, Christianity itself was the only legal religion of the Roman world and pagan sacrifices themselves were then outlawed. This development of a working harness between church and state was the result of the worldly church's loss of its true heavenly foundations and substance. *And the consequence was the establishing of the false perception for the coming centuries of Christendom that worldly ecclesiastical institutions are the kingdom of God on earth.* Such a model is also to be seen, perhaps even more egregiously, in the example of Caesaropapism within the hierarchy of the Eastern Church and the state authority in Constantinople/Byzantium. A proper godly distinction between church and state was lost. The Latin realms in the West also developed in kind, ending eventually (long after the total collapse of the Roman Empire—410/476 AD) with the papal coronation of Charlemagne in 800 AD as the new emperor of the emerging Holy Roman Empire. From these historical events arose the Christendom of Western civilization and culture—the lands where one's baptismal certificate in infancy was also in effect the record of his citizenship in the state. Thus, occurred for believers a total confusion with the loss of rightly recognizing what is truly meant for the Church Age—dwelling provisionally in the ontologically transcendent, here and now, truly present Kingdom of God.

For more than 1000 years this confusion of a union of the powers of church and state was conceptually and practically equated with the kingdom of God on earth. Our precious Saint Augustine was one of the well-meaning instigators and interpreters. The social and moral needs of this new culture and civilization were met on behalf of and for the state by the church's teaching of Judeo-Christian moral standards. Thus, the joint powers of the states' physical armies and the authority of the church's sacramental enchantments assured a proper and adequate rule of the citizen-saints and their social structures throughout the medieval world and its feudal age. And that heritage remains with us even to this day—in the West we know this culture and civilization as our own. It explains the common mixing of those feelings of state patriotism and denominational Christianity—and the equally common inability of many Christians to comprehend the source of social decline in a country of both Judeo-Christian origins and great individual freedoms from the Enlightenment. You can detect that legacy when considering the meaning of the family records pages so often included at the beginning of printed Bible editions. The records there of marriages, births, grandchildren, and deaths are relics of our heritage in the West. They testify to the powerful influence of the union between church and state culture and civilization as even today it lingers in memory and practice as remnants of Christendom still with us—but only on life supports. More of that later. The contemporary secular war on Christendom is known as 'Cancel Culture' because of the conflicting elements created when in this present worldly age church and state attempt to create the Kingdom of God on earth and fail to recognize the impassable gulf that exists between the two of them! Secular humanism refuses to continue any attempt to bind church and state—and the church has been slow to catch on!



But first we want to consider in a little more detail how it appeared when the early church began to yield to that unionizing influence of what became Christendom. Very quickly the Acts 2 church stumbled, lost its true calling, and yielded (surely unwittingly) to the assumed securities and advantages of the Constantinian formula of a church-state structure for Christendom and the developing western civilization. The decline of the first century Church of Pentecost was both a cause and an effect in the development of the earthly and institutional church. And that worldly church was quick to cleverly identify itself with the kingdom of God in the world. For with that self-assumed authority, it developed dogmas for the possession of peculiar powers of 'enchantment' to administer and thus to control the lives of those citizen-saints. Most believers naïvely submitted to those earthly ecclesiastical powers in exchange for the promise of a secure entrance into heaven upon death. Significant among those 'enchanted' powers was the growth of a sacramental system with its hierarchical authorities which empowered the church to impart a heavenly rebirth (infant baptismal regeneration) and the forgiveness of sins (confession/penance and Eucharist). Thus, with such powers, an earthly and institutional church controlled the opening and the closing of heaven's gates for mankind. While disciples of the early church had been personally and experientially familiar with the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit and while it had looked for the manifest rule of Jesus in the Kingdom of God at his soon Parousia victory, such spiritually ontological realities of a proleptically present Kingdom of God began to quickly wane. *A church of earthly institutions and powers usurped God's Kingdom and the powerful and manifest workings of the Holy Spirit were substituted with the clergy's enchanting and priestly sacramental powers—and Parousia hopes faded.* Our historical documentation of this transition is not entirely clear and easy to trace in all its details. But this fact is plain. The true Pentecostal life of the Holy Spirit and the reality that the Kingdom of God had already been truly inaugurated as a substantive heavenly reality just as Jesus said—that had all been significantly and tragically lost to the believers of the medieval realms of feudal-age Christendom. The crude history of the ruling institutions of state and church make the loss abundantly evident—from the moral lapses of the medieval church and state hierarchies to the perennial witness of believers outside those worldly institutions who have left us with a significant legacy in writing and history that testifies to the painful realities of an earthly church in spiritual decline. I have no desire to be too severe in evaluating or judging the infant church of the first century. The stress of persecution, its own challenges and shortcomings in understanding and interpreting the prophetic Scriptures, and their disappointment stemming from the failure of an expected soon return of Christ must give us a sympathetic pause in seeking to understand. But also, and above all, it should prompt us to be more diligent in perceiving God's will and ways for us nearly two thousand years later.

It seems clear that true spiritual life from the Holy Spirit and a correct understanding of the nature and timing processes of the eschatological Kingdom of God in the present Church Age were not, from the beginning, properly developed and transmitted down through the generations that followed. In its place came an earthly church rather than the Kingdom of God; and its powers were the assumed 'enchantments' of a clerical sacerdotal system. All this, within a few centuries, became a part of the church/state coalition of powers within Christendom. Under these rulers the subject citizens of the medieval, feudal world were kept under the fear of sins' punishments (everlasting hellfire) and thus obedience to the institutions

of an ecclesiastical dominion. After all, those authorities possessed the powers of spiritual life and forgiveness (through the sacraments) and thus controlled the chances of entering heaven at last. The sacral society thus created for the medieval world had the effect of putting Christians into an ecclesiastical bondage in order that they might be assured of forgiveness and their ultimate place in heaven. It is not difficult to see where the paradigm with a strong focus on a gospel of salvation, that is, a gospel of 'sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die', '*Genesis 3 Christianity*', had its fledgling but deep and powerful roots. Its origins lie in the decline of first century Christianity into the medieval world of feudal Christendom with its earthly institutional church and its emphasized doctrine of sins and forgiveness of sins for an open heaven after life in this world. That 'salvation' gospel was also practical for enforcing an earthly morality necessary for the development and maturing of a post-ancient culture and civilization. But it really said little or nothing about God's eternal purposes throughout and beyond the present age! The early church emphasis on Jesus' mission for ransom and as *Christus Victor* (and the larger spiritual battles implied thereby) had been lost to a partial, a smaller message arising in '*Genesis 3 Christianity*'. The larger expectations for the complete defeat of all God's enemies and the Church's ultimate role in that victory and its subsequent righteous reign in a new heaven and a new earth, those larger expectations had been long lost.

## **RENAISSANCE**

But the world of Christendom was destined to end by historical process. The civilization and culture of the medieval feudal age would be challenged by old ideas revived and new ideas introduced. A secular transition and philosophical 'upgrade' were in the works. The natures of both state rule by divine-right monarchies and ecclesiastical dominion through an absolute clericalism would be questioned, assaulted, and essentially rejected. The result was that the old social order of church/state civilizational partnership was, if not totally dissolved, at least radically altered and transformed. Unfortunately, the changes of this new age would not eventuate in a good attempt by institutional churches to either recognize or to review the primitive church's loss of vision and calling. The state saw a renewed opportunity for sole dominance in a revised structure while the church's foundational ideas of divine transcendence yielded slowly but surely to the anthropocentric humanism of the Enlightenment's Age of Reason. That is the condensed story of the Renaissance—the rise of secular humanism with its many innate dimensions of spiritual rebellion against both state and church. This advancing new epoch was harboring a radically different vision for the world order—church and state! It was destined eventually to develop into the wicked behemoth glimpsed in divine revelation by ancient Hebrew prophets.

One might have expected that the Reformation age (as a sort of religious extension or reflection of the Renaissance) might correct the church's root blunder in that church-state union. Unfortunately, not so! While it is true that a genuine, but unfortunately only partial, renewal of the church and theology did take place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, that fundamental medieval problem of the union of church and state as an earthly representation of the kingdom of God was neither perceived as a problem nor addressed. In fact, the error continued and contaminated the religious renewal with bloody warfare between the multiplying factions of the Reformation churches and somewhat later the developing identities of new and

independent *nation states* then being formed out of the various ethnicities of the waning Holy Roman Empire. We all know something of the story of how the Reformation came about. The mercenary desires of that worldly church at last abused its powers so badly (think the sale of purgatorial indulgences seeking money from already impoverished feudal serfs for the building of a new St. Peter's Basilica in Rome) that a conscience-stricken professor-monk in Germany only and at last found peace with God in a more powerful and effective manner. His wrath against indulgence abuses burned so hot as to create a religious dimension to the already blazing inferno in the medieval world order. That inferno was already long kindled by ideas from Renaissance sparks with its own reform zeal. While that 16<sup>th</sup> century reform that emphasized forgiving grace gave a soothing comfort to many in that epoch of Renaissance changes, it failed to recognize the fundamental error of Christendom, the error of a church/state union forming a worldly church void of the Holy Spirit and not truly representing and serving the Kingdom of God. And Luther's own powerful conversion experience had so emphasized reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins that he added new theological supports for the growing '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' emphasis on '*sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die*'. And while the so-called 'stepchildren' of the Reformers (Luther naturally used much stronger terminology for them) had witnessed throughout the medieval world to the failure of the church/state model, the root error endured among reform movements needing political/state protection. The classic example was Calvin's Geneva. And the secular humanism of the Renaissance age found it convenient for the state also to maintain the church-state structures of the world of Christendom—only now the church was not one but many. But even this arrangement was about to be challenged. The Renaissance itself morphed into further and ever more advanced dimensions of secular humanism, outpacing the medieval worldview in many ways. By the time the religious wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century were over, the Enlightenment and its offspring, the Age of Reason, were in full development mode and the Christendom model took an even more unedifying turn. The new and more mature paradigm for the modern world would see, not a church-state co-regency but a definite independence and arrogant dominance of secular state authorities. Now the church itself would have to adjust to something like servitude to the newer and more advanced claims of secular humanism. An example of the church's weak attempts to once more engage and operate in the political world, only now on the world's terms, can be seen in the 1891 papal encyclical appropriately named *Rerum Novarum (Of New Things)*. And the Lateran Treaty in 1929 likely betrays a latent desire within man's church to be an equal party to worldly matters—it was hard to let go of the medieval powers and glory that were earthly even though established on a human claim to a heavenly authority and role. The present (2021) situation of the papacy of Francis perhaps reflects a shocking desire and attempt of the human institutional church to reclaim, enjoy, and participate in the power and prestige of an earthly kingdom such as was enjoyed during the medieval time! That is for a study at another time and place.

Briefly then, this has been my beginning of a summary for the historical origins of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' through the time of the Renaissance. First, in the early centuries the church had lost its original vision and calling to be the now-present manifestation of the promised Kingdom of God. For whatever the reasons and causes, it yielded to the tempting promises of the Constantinian formula of church-state union. And so, in Christendom a new paradigm arose—

an earthly and institutional church with enchantment powers manipulated through the sacerdotal powers of a clerical hierarchy. We see there the rise of the first articles of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*': Church and state worked together for the establishment of a certain social order and civilizational structure. The medieval feudal world was governed by the monarchies of state and feudal lords; the power to grant the forgiveness of sins and open heaven's gates after death was ruled and administered by the church's sacraments. But that world ended with the coming of the Renaissance. That age of renewals saw the revival of classical thinking and, with that, the strong resurgence of a raw secular thinking that the coming of Christianity had at first successfully challenged. In the thinking of the Renaissance movements of Enlightenment and Reason, the state transitioned from absolute monarchies to various emerging democratic forms while the church was reduced to a lesser, a more supportive and optional secondary role. The radical maturing of both of these changes brought us to the Modern Age. The separation of church and state did nothing helpful to correct the problems that had arisen as a result of that original root error. Indeed, the problem was exacerbated by the sinister appearance of subtle and growing powers that had a tendency to militate aggressively against Christianity's innate and essential sovereignty arising out of transcendental thinking and realities. That ugly 'blossom' would flourish in the new movements that matured in Modernity. So, we come to consider the ways in which believers in the present Modern Age have dealt with and still deal with the heritage thus received. For them humanism matured into a secular existentialism that would even reject notions of absolute, transcendent truth!

## **MODERNITY**

It was the present Modern World that eventually emerged as the Renaissance dismantled Christendom's thinking and feudal life. Both state and church institutions underwent progressively more radical changes. Monarchies gradually lost the principle of an absolute divine right for kings. Under the influence of the Age of Reason, secular humanism glorified personal individualism and autonomy, thus laying the groundwork for existentialism's rejection of ecclesiastical authority and replacing it with ugly versions of the self. So also arose ideas of democracy and government by 'the consent of the ruled'. By the time Modernity reached its postmodern age in the late twentieth century, any remaining kings and queens were a curious relic of history. The true state authorities were learning to wield their 'faux democratic' powers under false pretenses—an electorate of ignorant, selfish, and manipulated voters! That story, expanded and extended into the future, would very likely be the introductory segment for the apocalyptic events in an advanced stage of the cosmic eschaton. It will always be a topic of interest and speculation among apocalyptic-minded Christians. But for our purposes in this article, it is the 'church' element within Modernity, rather than the state element, that is of special interest!

As already said, the Renaissance would eventually separate the mutually supporting powers and functions of state and church. The net result for the church was a loss of self-respect, of power and purpose in society, and of a clear and genuine self-identity in a material world. In the early centuries of primitive Christianity, it had lost its sense of calling to be the true Kingdom of God on earth in an eschatological Church Age. It had wasted many centuries seeking to partner with the world's powers in a faux display of social and cultural

development. As this mammoth and worldly institutional relic was filtered out by the Christendom-Renaissance events, it wrestled to reinvent itself. Two opposing concepts came into existence. These two concepts did not exist as two denominations or church bodies but rather as two new and opposing interpretations for the nature and purpose of the church in the world. These two concepts or interpretations for *church* developed side by side throughout western civilization. Eventually they would actually be in open conflict with one another, and each would take refuge in varying degrees within church groups and organizations that were mutually compatible and sympathetic. (Curiously, one can see different vestiges of medieval Christendom nestled in each.) The *church* in Modernity found itself divided between and harboring two contrasting views of its nature and calling. Neither is fully worthy of Jesus' vision—and unalterable intention. We will briefly look at the first and then, more carefully, at the second. It is the second which is of keen interest to us—for it is the heir and practitioner of the medieval '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' paradigm, that 'sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die' model of the faith.

The first interpretation of *church* within modern Christianity is the branch that eagerly and fully embraces Enlightenment's secular humanism along with its Age of Reason rejection of the transcendent in favor of a developing individualistic existentialism. In another time and place I have written an article entitled '*The Quest*'. That article focused on the liberal theology that developed out of the eighteenth century's rationalistic thinking. Its roots lie deep in pagan humanism and then more recently in the medieval scholastic Christian thinking of one schoolman by the name of Abelard. That theology shared the utopian optimism of the times, believing with most all Renaissance thinkers that man was 'the measure of all things.' It believed in the essential goodness of humanity and his abilities to implement a beneficent outcome on the vision of such a basic human goodness. It translated this positive outlook of humanism into a general moral teaching for ethical behavior not necessarily based on divine standards or goals. Because it mostly rejected the elements of transcendence and supernaturalism, it came easily in league with the growing philosophical outlooks of the world of naturalism, psychology, sociology, and other related views advanced by the Enlightenment and its offshoots. Jesus, in whatever minimalist way he might be divine, was essentially a great moral philosopher—easily seen to be compatible with other religions and religious teachers (think the rapid rise of syncretistic philosophies together with the rejection of Christianity's claims to unique and absolute truth). It is unnecessary to describe further. This first division of Christianity in Modernity became the cheerleader and activist for the social gospel agenda and movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such it once again found a comfortable place working with the governments of socialist states (here think political activism expressing a worldly and human concept of the kingdom of God but having nothing to do with a divine Jesus, the supernatural, or transcendence) that were emerging during those centuries on the world stage. Behold branch one of the church in Modernity! Lost is its medieval co-regency with the state in the affairs of the world. Now humbled, it serves as an NGO to the world's government leaders of the 'Great Reset' philosophies. Pope Francis' encyclical letters, such as *Laudato Si*, are examples. The ancient deception (human pride at Babel), the error to which even the early church itself had succumbed, the deception that failed then and now refuses to comprehend an ontological and proleptic presence of the Kingdom of God as it was

inaugurated by the incarnation of Jesus—that deception was and still is the tragic mistake of the first division of modern Christianity as it developed out of the ruins of Christendom and was precipitated by secular Renaissance thinking. But sadly, even dangerously, this first group of Christians in Modernity has set itself up to be co-working participants of the eschatological whore of John’s Revelation. In the name of and desiring to perfect humanity in a great realm of human glory and power (that which Jesus rejected in a great battle of temptation during his own earthly pilgrimage), it has and is often aligning itself with less-than-honorable political powers of globalism.

But it is the failure of the second division of Christianity in Modernity that has most taken as its own *sedes doctrinae* that ‘problem plant’ of ‘Genesis 3 Christianity’. I am inclined to believe that most of such believers are sincere and well-intentioned. They have rejected much of the ecclesiastical siren song of modern humanism, higher criticism, existentialism, and all the mumbo jumbo of Enlightenment-Rationalism Deism. They are sincere church members; they make good neighbors and good citizens. But they have failed to see the ecclesiastical failures and errors of history as we have described it. Instead, their faithful allegiance to the *fundamental* doctrine of the vicarious atonement in recognition and honor of Christ’s suffering and cross has held them captive to ‘Genesis 3 Christianity’ and hindered their grasp of the even larger and fuller blessings of the gospel (to be investigated in section 4 of this article). And they have then failed to apply those insights to the teachings and practices of the typical conservative evangelical church today. While the first type of Christian seeks after the prestige and authority of working with the world, the second type of Christian in Modernity seeks the peace and security offered by the sacerdotal systems and/or techniques of ‘sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die’. Many such Christians regularly reject the sacerdotal system itself, but they consistently hold to the pleasures of a heavenly kingdom later as the sole metanarrative and goal of the Christian gospel.

Therefore, in both groups of the contemporary church of Modernity, the root error stems from the same historical error—the loss by the early church of the meaning and calling of being the people of an ontological and proleptic Kingdom of God during a unique eschatological Church Age designed by God for participation in the complete and final defeat of and spiritual victory over iniquity in preparation for the everlasting reign of righteousness! Ecclesiastical history is the story of that one shortcoming of perspective, understanding, and experience being a continual hindering adversary for believers. The beauty and blessings intended by God for the present church age are in need of a more mature understanding and deliberate obedience!

This, in brief, is my suggestion for an interpretative framework of the historical origins, roots, and development of contemporary ‘Genesis 3 Christianity’. It leads us to ask a much deeper question concerning the contemporary results of ‘Genesis 3 Christianity’. We have seen how the early church itself failed to capture and execute its highest calling because of its progressive slip into the medieval paradigms of Christendom. What has been the impact on the life and walk of such believers as we now emerge from the Modern Age into Postmodernity? We have observed how an earthly and institutional church abused and manipulated its powers by working off of the ‘sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven’ paradigm. And we have seen that the

Reformation itself failed to hear and to heed the warnings and experience of believers who had always struggled outside of the institutional church. Also, then we have observed the dividing issues of two contrasting segments of the church in Modernity. Our task now is to make an investigation into and an evaluation of the results of nearly two millennia of the gospel paradigm of *'Genesis 3 Christianity'* and the consequent failure to grasp and live with the Church's true calling. Can we discover a root result, a controlling principle of a church with an incomplete, an abbreviated gospel message? I think we can! And so, we continue in this study by seeking to discover the root problem that emerged and captivated believers whether they strayed to the liberal political and psychological left or to the conservative theological and sociological right!

### 3.

#### THE Results OF *'GENESIS 3 CHRISTIANITY'*

Ideas do indeed have consequences. And the paradigm of *'Genesis 3 Christianity'* with its abbreviated gospel of salvation (sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die) has resulted in the carnal status quo that we now observe and experience as contemporary western Christianity and church life. I have created another term, *'Christian materialism'*, to identify and to explain that troublesome outcome. I will first define my concept of *'Christian materialism'* and then go on to illustrate how it expresses itself in our contemporary faith and practice on whichever side of the already-discussed modern divide we might choose to place ourselves. Later, in section 4 of this article, I intend to point in the direction of an alternative, a more complete gospel presentation as a contrast to what we have inherited from the history of *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*. But first we must examine and explain the nature and the problem of *'Christian materialism'* as it has developed among us. It is the unfortunate but quite logical consequence of the gospel's oversimplification within *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*.

By *'Christian materialism'* I mean a controlling worldview that has failed to recognize the *essential* reality of transcendence as the blessing of the Christian faith! Instead, it interprets the blessings of the gospel (1) in terms of a maturing and perfecting for human experience and enjoyment within the order of material creation and (2) as a heaven of blessings of rather natural pleasures. It is easy to recognize how the medieval social and religious structures of earthly life now and heavenly life later accommodated themselves to such a metaphysical shortfall of faith. *'Genesis 3 Christianity'* and *'Christian materialism'* do indeed go hand in hand. Together they prioritize a moral life to be blessed by God with material well-being here and now and then coupled to promises of an even-better material Garden of Eden to be reinstated later. The supernatural is not really needed—except to facilitate natural blessings, both now and later! *'Christian materialism'* basically misses the greater divine plan for a Second Man in a New Creation. It works instead for a *repair* of the first Adam and an eternity in an even better but *returned* Garden of Eden! By *'Christian*

*materialism*' I am pointing to something even more elementary and insidious than the love of money and the enjoyment of the worldly pleasures and comforts it can provide. All those are only the inevitable symptoms of a far more dangerous worldview that naturally originates out of the *'faulty prioritizings'* growing out of *'Christian materialism'*. *'Christian materialism'* lacks a vision higher than a present and future recovery and aggrandizement of the good life begun in Genesis 2. *'Christian materialism'* is the failure to recognize that God himself, his salvation works, and his true and eternal gospel purposes transcend, and therefore cannot be satisfactorily fulfilled, within the substances of the present age or a permanent continuum of the time/space created order. *'Christian materialism'* operates with a serious metaphysical shortfall and a failure to work within the transcendental dimensions of the divine salvation gospel. *It over-prioritizes the natural created order.* And it regularly conceals its own error by leveling charges of Gnosticism against those who believe God's complete gospel embraces the transcendental and man's participation in it!

*'Christian materialism'* has a similar root to that ontological ignorance and failure, that spiritual blind spot which so hindered Nicodemus in his attempt to comprehend the need for 'a second, a spiritual birth'. *'Christian materialism'* has never made sense of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman that true worship, the worship desired by God, is in spirit and truth rather than with mere human emotions and in man's worldly structures and forms. *'Christian materialism'* has never been able to come to grips with Paul's critical downplaying of Corinthian sanctification by those who desire to 'make full use of this world even though it is passing away'. *'Christian materialism'* fails to live out this present earthly life as a merely temporary season within an inferior age for the further implementation of a grand and complete gospel. It fails to realistically perceive and embrace the gift and life of the Holy Spirit as the already-possessed security deposit of those things to follow upon Satan's ultimate defeat as this present age fully expires. A church sick with *'Christian materialism'* fails to celebrate the event of Pentecost with the same gusto and substance as it has given to Christmas and Passion Week events. When I critique *'Christian materialism'*, I am rejecting the disaster of ignorance and immaturity that robs the Church in this present Age of the Eschaton, blinding her to the substantive, supernatural, and provisional arrival of the Kingdom of God 2000 years ago through the event of Jesus' incarnation, model ministry, and life-giving ascension session! And that failure to recognize the ultimate Christian gospel as not just the forgiveness of sins provided through the gospel of *'Genesis 3 Christianity'* but also the inauguration of our supernatural transformation out of the realm of the first Adam together with all of the failures and innate incompleteness of such earthy material. That tragic failure to recognize and embrace such a large part of our gospel's provisions is the source of the subtle logic by which *'Genesis 3 Christianity'* develops and embraces *'Christian materialism'*. By missing the gospel's full gifts of union and identification with Christ and participation in his other-worldly throne life, *'Christian materialism'* begins to seek the gospel fulfillment in present earthly utopias or Christianized cultures with their future carnal perfections in heaven. To these unfortunate errors, as so much of the present church now unwittingly aspires, we must briefly make an examination. They are the results, the logical outworking, of *'Christian materialism'* as it springs from the development and application of *'Genesis 3 Christianity'*.



In the previous section, in my comments about the developments of modernity in the latter times of the world of Christendom, I severely faulted its emerging 'social gospel'. Clearly 19th century liberal theology had not only lost but, for all practical purposes, had even become an enemy of a supernatural and transcendent Christianity. The Ages of Enlightenment and Rationalism had seen to that. The result was a worldview ready made for '*Christian materialism*'. The material world was made the *priority* with the result that overly optimistic utopian dreams of social and political perfections became the goal of the gospel. The problems of the world were no longer placed on sin's entrance as a spiritual issue. The blame for the problems of the world were human ignorance and economic inequalities. Sin was just a weakness brought on by ignorance and societal imperfections rather than the moral lapse of humanity. Thus, the solution was to be found in secular education and governmental programs of social and political reform. The church would be allowed (on earthly terms) and expected to help. An unreasonable optimism of secular humanism prevailed! While that earlier form of social gospel quickly faded early in the twentieth century as it became obvious that the world's problems were manifestly more complicated than could be resolved by 'churches' preaching 'love' and bureaucrats implementing revolutionary welfare programs, it has returned with a vengeance in the twenty-first century with its global push for a canceling of culture (i.e., Western civilization and Christianity), critical race theories focusing on racial rather than class disparities, ecological pseudo-sciences, the replacement of national patriotism with one-world resets, global commitments and visions, and the religious attempts to syncretistically modify Christianity in order to legitimize as of equal value the heathen beliefs and practices of ancient pagan ignorance. The chronic failure of all dimensions and expressions of the social gospel has resulted from its dangerous commitment to the goodness and strength of man's abilities, *apart from God*, to perfect the imperfect and fallen order of the material first creation. In arrogance the nations of the world have embraced the philosophical error that matter is both of its own making and is eternal (think Carl Sagan). They have rejected the promised judgments of God that have placed a very specific course and time limit to this present cosmic order and the acknowledgement that the course of history under the influence and control of human wisdom and spiritual iniquity in high places is destined for a very cataclysmic conclusion. Because of left-leaning thinking and perhaps without realizing the source of their reasoning, liberal Christianity has sold-out the faith to its form of '*Christian materialism*'. It has reinterpreted the gospel of God's love in Jesus (moral philosopher and example)—with the intention of resolving earthly problems by earthly means in order to make the world once again a paradise. That is the left-wing version of '*Christian materialism*'—social justice, welfare programs, government controls, mother-earth ecology, personal therapeutic existentialism, etc. Note the disastrous absence of the supernatural is coupled to a '*prioritizing*' of the natural order!

But in a more subtle and even more dangerous way, '*Christian materialism*' has also infected and captivated that other more traditional and more conservative branch of Christian fellowships as we saw them develop in the late modern age. Among such believers the transcendental element of Christianity has been maintained in terms of the miraculous. But those supernatural powers have been reinterpreted to serve as instruments for applying and embracing (1) the Judeo-Christian moral codes for God-pleasing and sanctified living in the present material civilization and (2) defining the eternal future in terms of a miraculously

permanent and perfected material paradise. Thus '*Christian materialism*' has also seriously infected and misoriented that more traditional branch of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' within the modern world. A look at some of the major evangelical teachers and leaders of post-WWII America will illustrate my point.

Among many others I mention Billy Graham (conservative evangelist); Francis Schaeffer (founder of L'Abri and author of the book and popular lecture series of *How Should We Then Live?*); Peter Marshall Jr. (author of *The Light and the Glory*); D. James Kennedy (pastor and author of the *Evangelism Explosion* witnessing tool); James Dobson (founder of the *Focus on the Family* ministry); Rousas Rushdoony (advocate of one version of the Reconstructionist Movement); and Jerry Falwell (creator of the *Moral Majority* cultural and political movement). All were 'men of God' working to expand the church kingdom as best they knew how. But in every case their worldviews and gospel paradigms (founded on '*Genesis 3 Christianity*') were, however unintentional and unthought, firmly rooted in the basic error of '*Christian materialism*'! Despite the divine hint of a desire to create His Church as a separate and spiritual eschatological entity (think the post-WWII Holy Spirit outpourings such as the charismatic movement even within mainline churches), each of these 'kingdom workers' was limited by dreams of restoring and reinvigorating the civilization and culture of Christendom's *vision of the church as a material kingdom of God on earth*. Billy Graham precipitated an evangelical renewal that resulted in mega-churches populated by spiritually touched members of former mainline churches but longing for an imagined golden age of an America built on a mixture of Western Enlightenment humanism and Judeo-Christian ethics. His message was justified and intensified by the then quite real battle between atheistic communism and Western Christian democracies. Francis Schaeffer added the intellectual note of an observer of culture and a philosopher's warnings through his evaluation of the United States society's sliding into sexual chaos and other moral declensions. Peter Marshall Jr. (son of the famous and beloved chaplain of the U.S. Senate) added another earthly dimension to the developing church of '*Christian materialism*' by picturing a very 'un-cancel culture' version of the origins and godly goodness in America's founding and outer prospering. James Kennedy created a model church for the growing evangelical movement to demonstrate the excellent lifestyle and fruitful ministry to be achieved by traditional Christian faith and practice even in the midst of an advancing post-modern world. James Dobson's ministry for the preservation of the traditional family and home was in manifest contrast to the worldly corruptions that the sexual revolution had inaugurating for the home in a new secular age. It is interesting to note, however, that his version of Christian psychology blended so well with the growing trends that captivated the individualistic thinking of the new generations of an existential and therapeutic thinking youth. Rousas Rushdoony, like many others, developed a teaching for the return to an Old Testament model of social, cultural, and spiritual life in obedience to Jewish Law and practice. And then we mention Jerry Falwell who helped to add an even greater dimension of political activism to the fading and failing efforts of traditional Christianity's attempts to reestablish the ancient morals of a Judeo-Christian civilization (Christendom).

Note that all of these 'godly' ministries and their leaders were students and advocates (even if unintended) of what we have labeled as '*Christian materialism*'! And the present 21<sup>st</sup> century

Western world and its church are still surfeiting on the excesses of that philosophy of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*'/'*Christian materialism*'. None of them would have denied the transcendental. Each would have affirmed the supernatural dimensions of the incarnation and the miraculous of the Scriptures. But all of them worked to build a church of believers who excel at living in the present material world/age and wait for a supernaturally provided but material paradise to come. Thus, was established the church we know in our current status quo—a body of believers who have wrongly '*prioritized*'. The spiritual was not eliminated. Rather it has been reduced, limited, and reinterpreted as the power to enhance our lives in the natural material creation both here and in eternity! Very practically, then, '*Christian materialism*' causes traditional Christian believers not to reject but to modify their application of the supernatural in their faith. Rather than understand that they are called to live in a different kingdom, apart from the world, here and now, they believe that kingdom has come to supernaturally enhance this present age and the future with the blessings of a good life. The prosperity message is not always approved in theory, but it is embraced in much practice!

So then, we have established that, whether the contemporary Christian expression of the status quo is liberal or conservative in orientation, '*Christian materialism*' has infected the church with the secular humanist error of '*human flourishing*'. Behold the grand and tragic outcome of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' in the implemented form of '*Christian materialism*'! The second creative work of God in Jesus Christ, that greater and fuller gospel gift, has been reduced or ignored in favor of a pretty fix for a fallen first world! To correct this problem, we need to discover a more complete gospel than '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' offers. We need to ponder an alternative, a complete gospel message that reaches back into that mysterious eternity past and suggests a '*salvation gospel*' that embraces God's purposes. So, we now continue with some thoughts to help and guide us on such a quest!

## 4.

### **TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE, A MORE COMPLETE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL**

Our bigger gospel message must be larger by including more than the merely '*remedial*' dimensions that preoccupy '*Genesis 3 Christianity*'. God's story with man begins prior to the problem of disobedience and failure in Genesis 3. Indeed, it begins even before Genesis 1 and 2. It begins in '*eternity past*', itself a divine dimension of reality that we do not really understand nor are able to describe very well. And all this raises so many questions for which we do not have certain and adequate answers. We do not fully know the origin and nature of the angelic realms. We must be mostly silent when trying to grasp the onslaught of iniquity in the heavenlies and other such problems in the unseen world. And is not our comprehension of '*sin*' and '*death*' appearing in Genesis 3 also rather shallow and

incomplete? And with the Psalmist we should be seeking a fuller insight by asking ‘what is man?’, this awesome creation made in the image of God. And how much do we truly comprehend of the nature of created time and the material world when we seek to relate them to the eternal purposes of God? We are indeed very ignorant of so much. But this we do know. God created man for a glorious participation in all those heavenly works and purposes that such questions and their answers might imply (e.g. see I Corinthians 2:7). Thus, if a ‘Fall’ should complicate such intentions, God would of course incorporate into the eternal plan a timely solution to such a potential problem. Nevertheless, his gospel would always adhere and work toward the greater goal of ultimate intentions! And because such a problem with man did indeed arise, ‘Genesis 3 Christianity’ correctly recognizes the ‘remedial’ elements both necessary and used by God to overcome the failure. But it is important to recognize that the remedy was implemented to be the means of unfailingly accommodating the original and eternal goal. And so, the more complete Christian gospel must look higher and further. Why was God so persistent in pursuing the larger plan, persistent to the point of sacrificing his only begotten Son? How did that mysterious past eternity plan play into God’s desires? The true Christian gospel must go beyond only a resolution to the problem created by the disobedience in Genesis 3. The true Christian gospel must be grand enough to at least begin a description of the fulfillment and consummation of God’s eternal purposes for man that originated even before Genesis 1. The very term ‘salvation’ needs a *redefinition* in order to make it the work of God that not only fixes problems of human sin and death. It must at the least suggest the means and hint at the elements of those eternal and holy purposes of God.

So, a question logically arises, and we must attempt some sort of answer. What alternative gospel paradigm would be more complete and better serve the eternal divine goals? What would it offer; how would it work; and where might it be leading? Thus, we have come to face that old and rather enigmatic (at least for followers of ‘Genesis 3 Christianity’) question. *Did God create man to redeem him, or did he redeem man in order to complete that for which he had been originally created?* Deep thinking theologians, especially among the Reformation age Protestants, in speculating about the decrees of God in eternity past, have wrestled in part with some of the various dimensions of that matter under the terminologies of supralapsarianism versus infralapsarianism. But for us the quest can be put much more simply. Why did God make man back in Genesis 1 and 2, before the problem of Genesis 3? What was his long-term purpose and goal—with or without the intrusion of mankind’s sin and fall? Did he perhaps intend that the making of humanity and his placement in an Edenic Paradise was really only the first step in a much grander enterprise yet to be completed? Did the ‘Fall’ of Genesis 3 and its consequent requirements for redemptive restoration (we cannot avoid the true revelation that the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world) perhaps just add exponentially to the full impact and gracious beauty of all that God designed to accomplish in perfecting and polishing what He had begun in Eden? The so great a cost as we see it in Jesus bears witness to the extreme value and desire of God in the eternal purpose. We might wallow dangerously in much speculation. And many have. But here we will be content to suggest ideas reasonably based in what God has pointed toward in the revelation of Scripture. As we consider such revelations, perhaps here is where our term ‘salvation’ will come to be *redefined* with a much greater meaning than just a repair or fixing of the ‘Genesis 3’ problem; a quality redefinition

must be extended to include the suggested goal of maturing at last unto the attainment of an original divine intention.

The New Testament uses two different categories of technical terms to define its 'salvation gospel'. The first category of technical terms is that which describes *the causal need (sin) and functional element (death) that must be met in order to qualify for full salvation eligibility*. (This is only the redemptive element in the fundamental work of the Incarnation in Jesus Christ.) The second category of technical terms is that which describes *the nature of the benefits of that salvation*. (This is the fundamental work of the Holy Spirit as poured forth by the glorified Lord Jesus to accomplish complete sanctification.) The first category is that which is emphasized by 'Genesis 3 Christianity' in its desire to achieve the reconciliation of the individual sinner to his holy God. The second category is that which we are here seeking to describe more fully as the eternal *telos* of God's purposes for humanity. I will touch on the technical terms of that first category only briefly since that is already well taught by the church. I will touch on the technical terms for the more complete 'salvation gospel' of the second category more fully since that is our whole interest in this article as an attempt to suggest an alternative to what I have labeled as only the partial gospel of evangelical 'Genesis 3 Christianity'.

The New Testament technical terms emphasized in connection with the 'salvation gospel' of 'Genesis 3 Christianity' would include among others—atonement, redemption, forgiveness, (forensic) justification, faith, death, resurrection, and judgment. These are listed in a rather simple and ascending order to logically picture the gospel of that '*sins-forgiven-going-to-heaven-when-I-die*' salvation paradigm. It is based on the need for a reconciliation between the sinner and his holy God. The moral legitimacy for God's forgiving sinners is accomplished through the atoning redemption of Jesus' cross where the death penalty of sin was fully accomplished. (The OT temple worship gloriously pictures that work through the annual high priestly service at the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies when the sacrificial blood was sprinkled onto it.) Based on this substitutionary death for forgiveness, the doctrine of '*forensic justification*' has evolved, especially in Reformation teachings. [This dogmatic development is an inaccurate representation of forgiveness which we will discuss more carefully when we consider the technical terms of the second category of salvation gospel terminology.] With forgiveness-reconciliation accomplished at the cross, the individual must exercise a personal faith in order to join himself to that blessing. As his age advances and he approaches death he can move forward confidently, knowing that resurrection life and a bold standing in the judgment have been guaranteed to him. Heaven awaits his arrival. He is saved. Such is the definition for the 'salvation gospel' of 'Genesis 3 Christianity' summarized and described with certain technical terms of New Testament theology.

But next and more importantly we want to consider the New Testament technical terms emphasized in connection with the larger and the fuller 'salvation gospel' of God's eternal purposes. With this magnified definition of 'salvation' we do indeed accept but move beyond the concepts for reconciliation in order to include the re-creation and therefore eternal fulfillments for man. Among others we include—mystery, justification, *arabon*, rebirth, Last Adam/Second Man, adoption, and Church. These added terms, foundational to the New

Testament teaching of a gospel of salvation, are the technical terms of salvation which advance beyond forgiveness-salvation to form the concept that builds upon but adds a measure of maturity to 'Genesis 3 Christianity'. These terms redefine the popular 'salvation gospel' and advance it to a Christian faith that begins to lay hold of the eternal purposes of God for man. And they embrace the heart of New Testament teaching—the substantive arrival of the Kingdom of God!

(1) Mystery. With this word, closely connected to the meaning and message contained in the 'secrets' of God's eternal purposes, the reality that God has always from eternity had a plan and a purpose of glory both with and for humanity. A quick glance at the concordance entries for 'mystery' makes it obvious that the New Testament gospel of salvation speaks of a hidden knowledge of divine purposes dealing with the resolution of cosmic iniquity and a glorification of man that result in gifts and blessings beyond the elementary remedial tasks for reconciliation.

(2) Justification. The popular Reformation doctrine of 'forensic justification' is built on a false concept. A sinner is not justified by forgiveness. The removal of sin does not make him righteous but rather a morally neutral being. Forgiveness is not the essence of justification. Forgiveness brings reconciliation of the sinner to his holy God by the canceling of the guilt and penalty of transgressions. He is forgiven by the mercy of God based on and validated by Christ's substitutionary atoning work. He may be forgiven but he is not thereby justified. Unlike the vocabulary and translations of the New Testament versions with which we are so familiar, there are not two different words for righteous and justified. NT righteousness is not a condition of forgiveness based on a forensic declaration of justification. NT righteousness is a spiritually genuine substance of holiness imparted to the forgiven sinner by God's Spirit. Thus, it is far more accurate to say that a forgiven sinner is then righteousized (justified) rather than just forgiven—he is actually made holy, transformed by spiritual life from God. And here is where a greater gospel begins to come into its own. While the salvation gospel of 'Genesis 3 Christianity' finds forgiveness in the concept of justification, the salvation gospel of God's eternal purposes sees the addition of an entirely new dimension of salvation as he understands justification to be *the addition of something heavenly and holy rather than just the removal of the guilt of sin*. Understanding more accurately the work of justification as the impartation of the spiritual gift of heavenly reality and life, salvation becomes a work of recreation unto the power of a new life—way beyond and after forgiveness has been accomplished! Thus, we have advanced (in our redefinition of 'salvation' and our quest to better understand the ground and terms of God's eternal gospel calling for man) to the *arabon* of spiritual rebirth and our initial entryway into God's eternal purposes for man.

(3) *Arabon*/rebirth. We are not left to hope our faith in forgiveness has been sufficient to attain to heaven upon our death and to avoid damnation at our resurrection. The salvation taught by the gospel of God's eternal purposes promises here and now to begin the work of recreating us with new life through a spiritual rebirth. And therefore, here and now, Jesus sends from the throne room of heaven what the New Testament terms an *arabon* of such life. That is, he gives a partial payment (a downpayment) of the Holy Spirit, a guarantee of the newly recreated and heavenly life that will begin maturing in this life prior to its completion at the resurrection. This is the great and necessary work of which Jesus speaks in the John 3 late-night interview with

Nicodemus. This initial work for man with the impartation of sanctification's substance was begun with Jesus' own resurrection and explains Paul's terminology when describing the outcome of that event. Jesus became the Last Adam and the Second Man!

(4) Last Adam/Second Man. To be clear and emphatic we must understand that going to heaven after rescue from sin was never the eternal purpose of God for man. His eternal plan was always, whether with or without the entrance of sin, to have a humanity that would be patterned after the model of Jesus after he had passed through the first earthly man and achieved the superior and glorious station of a second man of heavenly substance. The ultimate call to heavenly life was never intended to be some Elysian field of material pleasures. Rather we can only begin to speculate what works of worship are our eternal calling and *telos* when at last we achieve the status of heavenly siblings to Jesus. While in this life we have only that smaller measure of the *arabon*, a full enjoyment will be the believer's with the higher goal of adoption.

(5) Adoption. The New Testament pictures the initial fulfillment of God's eternal purposes for man in what it terms our adoption. Connected in time with our resurrection and the return of Jesus in glory, what had been begun in us as a mere down payment (that *arabon*) will then be completed in us when we see him as he is and share in bodies of resurrection glory. It will be so much more than what we imagine of adoption in earthly human ideas. It will be the first consummating step of our entrance into what we eagerly await, a fullness beyond all imaginings! Yet, while we wait, a heavy responsibility has been placed upon us—Church.

(6) Church. I have faulted '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' for its penchant for materialism, for seeing its calling to be a caretaker of all things earthly, worldly. I have repeatedly, and I believe correctly, criticized all forms of church works limited to the methods and goals of this life. All our power and all our works must be aimed at announcing and implementing the divine aims connected to the mystery that results at last in human adoption as described above. I have come to love the picture of the Church as an Ark riding on the rough and worldly waters of an ocean perishing. For the present we have the great task of discovering what God's desires and work for that Ark are as we navigate such seas. What might be the spiritual battles to which we are called? What gifts will he provide as he works toward the completion of full entrance for his children into that kingdom where righteousness dwells—and eternal purposes come to perfection?

When Jesus came, he announced the inauguration of his kingdom. At the end of this age, we must discover and cooperatively submit to the works of kingdom culmination. At this time, we remain woefully ignorant and profoundly unprepared to minister the new life of God's kingdom in a world which seems to be rapidly approaching its encounter with the Antichrist of the apocalypse. We have been busy thinking about making this world pleasant for ourselves and the unbelievers. We have been enjoying dreams of streets of gold. But all of this Christian materialism has missed the work of spiritual warfare and the message of impending judgments at the return of the King in glory and power. We must commit ourselves to a salvation gospel that is based on the eternal purposes of God for man, purposes that require and then build on the atonement-reconciliation of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' but then go on to believe our human calling as mature sons of God prepared to join him in the rule and administration of a new age

and world.

## CONCLUSION

My life is coming out of the paradigmatic bondage of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*'! By the grace of God, I shall never abandon my appreciation for the forgiveness reconciliation won for me by Jesus' bloody cross of mercy. But also, by the grace of God I shall ever be growing in the awareness and experience of the life that such a sacrifice has won for me and others! The door to the fulfillment of a gospel of salvation now fully defined by God's eternal purposes for man has been opened by Jesus' session at the right hand of the Almighty Father in heaven.

Now I am well into my seventies. Much water has gone over the dam and under the bridge. I am glad to report that there has been precious fruit springing up from those questions that came long ago as my youthful thoughts contemplated the differences between primitive and contemporary Christian preaching. Hermeneutical modifications, radical paradigmatic reorientations, and more accurate historical realizations have provided what I believe to be a better understanding of God and his ways. And I have tried to share the blessings of that journey in a way that does not reject what we have always enjoyed as the gospel of salvation—but in a way that encourages and points toward something even greater. I have attempted to emphasize that what the evangelical churches of '*Genesis 3 Christianity*' teach is not an error but an essential supporting element for the full gospel story of God's eternal purposes with and for mankind. A truly victorious Church of the Eschaton is appearing on the horizon as the Ark that will house and be a safe haven for God's children laboring to advance the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus. It is for all who want to know and serve God rightly! It is for all who seek to escape the world that is perishing. Storm clouds are gathering black and ugly on the horizon.

Should believers and the church embrace this greater gospel, we are confident that individuals, congregations, and the whole Church would soon become a powerful working model for the Kingdom of God! And this in the face of all the apocalyptic evils of the eschaton. He is worthy!