

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Thinking Biblically: Part 3

The Source of Thinking: The Definition of God

by John W. Robbins

Editor's Note: This Review is taken from Dr. Robbins' lecture "The Definition of God," Lecture 4 of Thinking Biblically, specifically from the second section – The Source of Thinking. The lecture has been transcribed and edited for print.

The word *God* is as meaningless a word as there is in the language unless it is defined. The Dutch philosopher Spinoza talked about God all the time. In fact, he talked about God so much he was called "The God-intoxicated Man." However, what he meant by God is quite different from what the Bible means by God. Thomas Aquinas talked and wrote about God. Immanuel Kant wrote about God. Yet these three men have three different views of God, three different definitions of the word *God*. In addition to that, there are all sorts of pagan religions, such as tribal religions in Africa, Asia, and in the Americas, all of which talk about God. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism all deny the definition of God given in Scripture. If this term is so vague and meaningless, the question arises, Can the term *God* be defined? Several theologians made statements on this issue.

Kaufman, Brunner, Stace, and Van Til

Gordon Kaufman in his book, *God the Problem*, says, "God is ultimately profound Mystery and utterly escapes our every effort to grasp or comprehend him. Our concepts are at best

metaphors and symbols of his being, not literally applicable."¹

A more familiar theologian, Cornelius Van Til wrote, "If we take the highest being of which we can think in the sense of have a concept of and attribute to it actual existence, we do not have the Biblical notion of God. Man cannot think an absolute self-contained being. God is infinitely higher than the highest being that man can form a concept."²

That is essentially the same thing that Gordon Kaufman wrote. God is beyond conceptualization. As the Neo-orthodox theologian Emil Brunner put it, "If you are *thinking* God, you are not thinking *God*."³

In his lecture "Mysticism and Human Reason," W.T. Stace stated, "God is utterly and forever beyond the reach of the logical intellect or of any intellectual comprehension and that in consequence when we try to comprehend his nature

¹ Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem*, Harvard University Press, 1972, 95.

² Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 1971, 206 (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1997, 328).

³ Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter*, Greenwood Press, 1943; quoted in Gordon Clark, *In Defense of Theology*, [1984], 2000, 16.

intellectually, contradiction appears in our thinking.”⁴

Again, VanTil says,

All teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory.⁵

Since God is not fully comprehensible to us, we are bound to come into what seems to be contradiction in all our knowledge. Our knowledge is analogical and therefore paradoxical.⁶

While we shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory, we embrace with passion the idea of the apparently contradictory.⁷

Shall we follow Karl Barth in saying contradictions in Scripture do not matter in the least because what takes place in the Gospel takes place in a realm above ordinary history? Or shall we with Gordon Clark say that the contradiction that we think we see is no real contradiction at all. We cannot follow any of these ways.⁸

Dr. VanTil says we embrace the apparently contradictory, we shun the really contradictory, but we also deny that the statement “there is no real contradiction” is false. That view is very common, not just in Neo-orthodox churches, not just in liberal churches, but in many Reformed churches. This is an attack at the root of thinking. We cannot think God. If we try to think God, we run into contradiction, and therefore it is useless to pursue this by intellectual or logical processes.

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms

What do the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms* say about these things? Question 4 of the *Shorter Catechism* is, “What is God?” The

⁴ Walter T. Stace, “Mysticism and Human Reason,” Howison Lectures in Philosophy, University of California at Berkeley, 1954, published in 1955 by the University of Arizona Press.

⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972, 142.

⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, [1955] 1967, 44.

⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 9.

⁸ Cornelius Van Til, “Toward a Reformed Apologetics,” self-published, 1972, 4.

question is asking for a definition of God. The answer is, of course, “God is mysterious, ineffable, unknowable, totally other, and beyond the reach of human conceptions.” Is this the answer from *Catechism*? That God is beyond the reach of the human intellect is not what the Bible teaches, and it is not what the *Catechism* says. It is what Neo-orthodoxy teaches. Quoting the *Shorter Catechism*, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” The *Catechism* gives a sentence in which various attributes are listed and, like the Bible itself, expects us to learn what those terms mean. The *Catechism* and the Bible do not say that God is mysterious, ineffable, unknowable, totally other, and beyond the reach of human conceptions. It gives several human conceptions, which are revealed in Scripture and define the term *God*.

The men who wrote the *Westminster Confession* and the *Catechisms* understood that if a term is not defined, one does not know what he is talking about. A good portion of the *Westminster Catechisms* consists of definitions such as these fifteen from the *Shorter Catechism*: What is God? What are the decrees of God? What is the work of creation? What are God’s works of providence? What is sin? What is effectual calling? What is justification? What is adoption? What is sanctification? What is faith in Jesus Christ? What is repentance unto life? What is a sacrament? What is baptism? What is the Lord’s Supper? and What is prayer?

The goal of the writers of the *Catechism* is to give concise definitions, usually consisting of a single sentence that can be memorized so one can have in mind the meanings of these terms. There is no anti-intellectual nonsense about the terms being undefinable or beyond the reach of human conception, and this includes the definition of *God*.

The *Westminster Confession* itself expands on the definition of God given in the *Shorter Catechism*. Chapter 2, *Of God and the Holy Trinity*, Section 1 states:

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions;

immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

Section 2 continues and expands the definition even further:

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

Nowhere does the *Confession* suggest that understanding God is beyond the reach of human intellect. However, that does not mean that we find out God on our own power. That is impossible. God must reveal himself to us. But once he reveals himself, we understand. That is the meaning of revelation. If revelation is given and it is not understood, then it is not revelation. It is obscurantism, or it is riddling, but it does not constitute revelation. The concept of revelation itself implies, not only that God gives us information, but that the information is meant to be understood and can be understood. Otherwise, there is no revelation.

The Johannine Logos

Before looking at *John* 1 to see what Scripture says regarding the doctrine of God, consider this: We say that *God is living*. What is meant by that statement? Does it mean that he is breathing? Does it mean that he has a pulse? Does it mean that he has brain waves? No. It means that God is thinking. It is a metaphor. It means that He is a thinking God. Now to *John* 1:1-9:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

This is the description that John gives of the Word of God. This is the way he begins his *Gospel*. The *Gospel of John* is a very profound and a very simple book. When people read it they sometimes skip over this introduction because while it is very profound, it seems very simple. In skipping over this, they are skipping over what John thought most important. This is how he begins his *Gospel*. This is how he begins his explanation of Jesus Christ. He ties it by his language back to the Word of God who appears throughout the Old Testament and speaks to and through the prophets: "Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying..." (*1 Samuel* 15:10), and the prophets understand who is speaking to them.

The idea here in John's *Gospel* is that the *Logos* is God. What does that Greek word *λογος* mean? The *King James Version* and the *New King James Version* translate it as "Word," which is a perfectly fine translation. The *Liddell and Scott Lexicon* lists many meanings for the word *λογος*. Some of them are: computation, reckoning, account, measure, esteem, proportion, ratio, explanation, pretext, plea, argument, discourse, rule, principle, law,

hypothesis, reason, formula, definition, debate, narrative, description, speech, oracle, phrase, wisdom, sentence, and the last definition they list is *word*, and that is the meaning found in virtually all English translations.

What is common among all of those possible definitions? The common thread is that they all pertain to thinking. To compute, reckon, account, measure, esteem, explain, argue, discourse, rule, hypothesize, reason, formulate, define, debate, narrate, or describe are all intellectual acts. From this Greek word *λογος*, we get our English word *logic*. Etymologically, it is also the root of our words that end with l-o-g-y such as *theology*—the study or understanding of God, and *biology*—the study or science of living things. These words are intellectual through and through. This is contained in what John is saying.

This word had been used in Greek philosophy for centuries before John wrote his *Gospel*, but John is not adopting some meaning given to it by the philosopher Heraclitus. John is using a perfectly good Greek word in a Christian context. Translating the passage “In the beginning was the *Wisdom*” instead of “In the beginning was the *Word*” might make it more intelligible to you because then you could relate John’s *Logos* to the word *wisdom* found in the book of *Proverbs*.

“In the beginning was the *Reason*, and the *Reason* was with God, and the *Reason* was God” is another legitimate translation. Sometimes when people hear this they say, “You are making *Reason* God.” However, *I* am not making Reason God: John’s *Gospel* says “...the *Logos* was God.”

This is intellectual through and through and in stark contrast with the theory of evolution which puts non-living matter first, then some living beings, and finally in the last few hundred thousand years something that might be called man—something with the characteristic of logic or reason—*homo sapiens*. That evolutionary view makes logic or reason a latecomer on Earth and in the universe as well. The Bible does not. *John* 1:4 says, “in this *Logos* was life; and that this life was the light of men.” Rather than life being deeper than logic, the *Logos* is prior. This is the complete opposite of the Darwinian or evolutionary worldview.

Now before looking at *John* and other verses look at *Proverbs*, a book that is replete with information about knowledge and understanding and wisdom. *Proverbs* 3:19, 20 say, “THE LORD by *wisdom* founded the earth; By *understanding* he established the heavens. By his *knowledge* the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew.”

Jeremiah 51:15, 16 state, “He has made the earth by his power; He has established the world by his *wisdom*, and hath stretched out the heaven by his *understanding*. When he utters his voice—There is a multitude of waters in the heavens: ‘He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he makes lightnings for the rain; he brings the wind out of his treasuries.’”

Recall in *Genesis* 1 how God created. He speaks. “And *God said*, Let there be light.... And *God said*, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters.... And *God said*, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together.... And *God said*, Let the earth bring forth grass....” God speaks and the Word creates the universe. The Word is prior to and superior to the creation. Life is not deeper than logic. If we are talking about the Divine Life, it is the same as logic. If we are talking about human Life, human life is not as deep as logic; far from what the Romantics and the Darwinians would have us believe.

Here is an excerpt from Goethe’s poem *Tragedy of Faust*, where Faust is translating *John* 1:1:

‘Tis writ, “In the beginning was the Word!”
I pause, perplex’d! Who now will help afford?
I cannot the mere Word so highly prize;
I must translate it otherwise,
If by the spirit guided as I read.
“In the beginning was the Sense!” Take heed,
The import of this primal sentence weigh,
Lest thy too hasty pen be led astray!
Is force creative then of Sense the dower?
“In the beginning was the Power!”
Thus should it stand: yet, while the line I trace,
A something warns me, once more to efface.
The spirit aids! from anxious scruples freed,

I write, "In the beginning was the Deed!"⁹

The Romantics cannot believe that God is the Word, and on the other hand the Jehovah's Witnesses cannot believe that the Word is God. Also, the spirit that is mentioned in that passage as guiding the translation is not the Holy Spirit.

Returning to *John* 1, The *Logos* is *eternal* (verses 1, 2). The *Logos* is the *Creator*, (3). The *Logos* is the *true light*, the light-giver who lights every man coming into the world (9). John is not speaking here of the saving knowledge of Christ. Not every man is lit by the saving knowledge of Christ. John is speaking of the image of God.

God is Truth

The Father is truth. *Psalm* 31:5: "Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth." But some will object, "But God is love. We are told in the Scripture that God is love." Yes. God is love. But God would not be love, if God were not truth. The only reason we can think that God is love is because prior to that, God is truth. The attribute of truth makes the attribute of love possible.

The Son is truth. *John* 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" When Jesus makes this statement, he is speaking literally. He is not using a metaphor when he talks about the truth here. He says, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" In chapter 1, John says that Jesus is the life. In chapter 1, he also says that Jesus is the truth. The only possible metaphor here is *the way*, in the sense of a path. In *John* 1:14 Jesus is described as full of grace and truth: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and *truth.*"

The Holy Spirit is truth. *John* 15:26: "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of *truth*, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify of me:"

Here are a few more verses about God and truth. *Psalm* 43:3: "O send out your light and your *truth!*"

Let them lead me; Let them bring me to your holy hill and to your tabernacle." *Psalm* 36:9: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your *light* we see *light.*"

Throughout Scripture, light is a metaphor for truth. Jesus says, "I am the *light* of the world" (*John* 8:12). Peter talks about the *light* that shines in the darkness (2 *Peter* 1:19). Light is a metaphor for *truth*.

God is Omniscient

The doctrine of God includes the idea of omniscience—God knows everything. Omniscience is simply the idea of the sovereignty of God applied to knowledge and thought. God knows all there is to be known.

God is Logical

Logic, to use a metaphor, is the architecture of God's mind. Logic is the way God thinks. Logic is not created. "In the *beginning* was the *Logos*...." The universe is created, man is created, but logic is not created. However, this view is contrary to what is taught by some Reformed theologians. For example, Morton Smith writes,

Non-Christians maintain that man reasons univocally, that is with one meaning per word. Christians on the other hand maintain that all human reason is analogical. For the non-Christian, the law of contradiction is a principle that stands above God and man alike. God and man are under the same system of logic which is higher than both, and exists independent of both. For the Christian, on the other hand, God exists before time and the laws of logic. The law of contradiction is part of the created temporal world. It is the expression of the internal coherence of God's nature but is not above God. The law of contradiction operates only under God and not above Him. The Christian does not use it to say what can or cannot be true about God Himself.¹⁰

That is a very common view among some Reformed theologians. He said, "For the non-Christian...God

⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Tragedy Of Faust: Faust Meets With Mephistopheles*, <<http://goethe.classicauthors.net/TragedyOfFaust/TragedyOfFaust6.html>>.

¹⁰ Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Volume I, Greenville Seminary Press, 1994, 25.

and man are under the same system of logic which is higher than both, and exists independent of both. For the Christian, on the other hand, God exists before time and the laws of logic.” Certainly God exists before time, because time is created. But does God exist before the laws of logic? That would make God illogical. The author goes on though and inconsistently says, “The law of contradiction is...the expression of the internal coherence of God’s nature...” But how does one judge the internal coherence of God’s nature if the laws of logic do not apply to God?

The author has committed the very common error of setting up a false dichotomy. Either you have to accept the idea that logic is created, or you have to accept the idea that logic is superior to God, and God is subject to logic. Neither view is the Scriptural view. The Scriptural view is that logic is not created, and logic is not superior to God because John says that Logic *is* God. It is not some standard external to God that he has to obey. It is simply the way God thinks.

If we think that David was king of Israel, and that Absalom was the son of David, and we conclude that Absalom was the son of a king of Israel; God reaches the same conclusion. God does not have some different logic by which if he thinks that David was king of Israel, and that Absalom was the son of David, therefore Absalom was the nephew of the prime minister of Babylon. That would be a different logic. That would show that God was not subject to the laws of logic.

God and Arithmetic

God’s logic is the same as our logic just as God’s arithmetic is the same as our arithmetic. For more on the Scriptural foundation of mathematics, see the excellent article by J.C. Keister, “Math and the Bible,” the September, October 1982 issue of *The Trinity Review*.¹¹ The author refers to a few of the many instances of calculations being done in Scripture and derives from those calculations the principles of arithmetic. This is revealed information. Non-Christian mathematicians debate over the philosophical status of arithmetic. Scripture

reveals arithmetic that says “two plus two is four.” It is four for God, and it is four for man. Arithmetic and logic themselves are not affected by sin. However, sin does cause us to make mistakes in our thinking—in our adding and subtracting and multiplying and dividing. That is one of the effects of sin on the mind, but sin does not affect the logic or the arithmetic themselves. Two plus two is four. That is revealed in Scripture.

This sort of thinking that offers the false dichotomy, *Either logic is superior to God, or logic is created*, is very misleading. Logic is simply the way God thinks.

New Lectures Now Available

We have added three new lectures and a Question and Answer session to Collection 13 in our MP3 Lectures. The Lectures are all by John W. Robbins and were given at a Reformation Day Conference in 2004. The titles are “Forgotten Principles of the Reformation,” “The Reformation Betrayed,” “The Current Justification Controversy,” and a “Question and Answer Session.” Special thanks to Paul Elliott for uncovering these lectures.

Descent into Debauchery, Depravity, and Insanity Continues

This article and the whole series of lectures by Dr. Robbins on Thinking Biblically is even more apropos for our current time than when they were first delivered over 15 years ago. One does not have to look at society to witness the descent into immorality and insanity; the church, even the Evangelical and Reformed church offers plenty of examples. The church needs to repent and conform her thinking to the Bible, God’s infallible Word. Here are some Scriptures that speak to our time today that should challenge us in the church to repent and be transformed by the renewing of our minds:

A false balance is an abomination to YAHWEH: but a just weight is his delight. When pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom. The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them. Riches profit not in the day of

¹¹ J. C. Keister, “Math and the Bible,” *The Trinity Review*, September, October 1982, <<http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=55>>.

wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death. The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness. When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of the unjust men perisheth. The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead. An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbor: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered. When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. He that is devoid of wisdom despiseth his neighbor: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. (*Proverbs 11:1-12*)

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (*Isaiah 5:20, 21*)

Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against YAHWEH, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: And YAHWEH saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him;

and his righteousness, it sustained him. (*Isaiah 59:9-16*)

A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (*Jeremiah 5:30, 31*)

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest to all men, as theirs also was. But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou has known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith [belief] which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [God-breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all

longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. (2 Timothy 3:1-4:5)

We the church need to take to heart these Scriptures, repent, and take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ. It is no wonder that our society continues its immoral descent and contempt for God and his Word, but what about the church?

Examples from the Evangelical and Reformed churches will demonstrate the problem. In the Reformed church an OPC pastor was tried by his presbytery for not having his chronically ill wife in worship, obviously she was not in worship due to her chronic illness.¹² Or more recently in the Neo-Calvinist movement, there has been controversy over some speakers at this year's Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, specifically speakers from the former Sovereign Grace Ministries now Sovereign Grace Churches (CJ Mahaney – one of the founders of T4G, and two other pastors) over concerns of covering up child sex abuse, which has even been covered in mainstream news publications.¹³ Then there is Megachurch Pastor, Steven Furtick of Elevation Church (a church in the Southern Baptist Convention) in Charlotte, North Carolina who claimed that God broke his own law for love to save sinners.¹⁴

¹² See Valerie Hobbs, "Women on Trial: One Observer's View," February 12, 2015, *The Aquila Report*, <http://theaquilareport.com/women-on-trial-one-observers-view/>, April 12, 2016.

¹³ See Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) "KT—Victims to Protest Huge Protestant Conference," April 11, 2016, http://www.snapnetwork.org/ky_victims_to_protest_huge_protestant_conference, April 12, 2016. See also, Tiffany Stanley, *The Washingtonian*, "The Sex-Abuse Scandal That Devastated a Suburban Megachurch: Inside the Rise and Fall of Sovereign Grace Ministries," February 14, 2016, <http://www.washingtonian.com/2016/02/14/the-sex-abuse-scandal-that-devastated-a-sub-urban-megachurch-sovereign-grace-ministries/>, April 12, 2016. See also, Elizabeth Dias, "Inside the Investigation into Child Sexual Abuse at Sovereign Grace Ministries," *Time*, February 16, 2016, <http://time.com/4226444/child-sex-abuse-evangelical-church/>, April 12, 2016.

¹⁴ "It Works Both Ways," July 26, 2015, <http://elevationchurch.org/sermons/it-works-both-ways/>, April

Is it any wonder then that Georgia Governor Nathan Deal vetoed¹⁵ a bill¹⁶ to protect religious liberty (a right enshrined in our Bill of Rights). Explaining his decision to veto HB 757, Deal made the following arguments:

HB 757 enumerates certain actions that religious leaders, faith-based organizations and people of faith shall not be required to take or perform. These include solemnizing a marriage, attending such marriages, hiring church personnel or renting church property when such acts would be contrary to their sincerely held religious beliefs. While most people would agree that government should not force such actions, there has been not a single instance of such taking place in Georgia. If there has been any case of this type in our state it has not been called to my attention. ...

Therefore, as I have examined the protections this bill seeks to provide to religious organizations and people of faith I can find no examples that any of the things this bill seeks to protect us against have ever occurred in Georgia. It is also apparent that the cases being cited from other states occurred because those states had passed statutes that specifically protected their citizens from adverse actions based on their sexual orientation. Georgia has no such statutes.¹⁷

12, 2016. See also Todd Pruitt, "Is God a Law-Breaker?" April 6, 2016, <http://www.alliancenet.org/mos/1517/is-god-a-law-breaker#.VxAgWavdPdk>, April 12, 2016.

¹⁵ "Deal to Veto HB 757," March 28, 2016, <https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2016-03-28/deal-veto-hb-757>, April 12, 2016.

¹⁶ Georgia House Bill 757, <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/757>, April 12, 2016.

¹⁷ "Transcript: Deal HB 757 Remarks," March 28, 2016, https://gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/press_release/HB%20757%20Veto%20Letter%20and%20Msg%20-%2003.28.16.pdf, April 12, 2016.

The Deals are members of First Baptist Church of Gainesville ("Biography of First Lady Deal," April 12, 2016, <https://gov.georgia.gov/biography-1>), which is part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which ordains women as pastors, and proclaims to "honor historic Baptist principles, are ecumenical in nature, and community-minded in practice," ("First Baptist Church of Gainesville," homepage, April 12, 2016, <http://www.fbcgainesville.org>).