

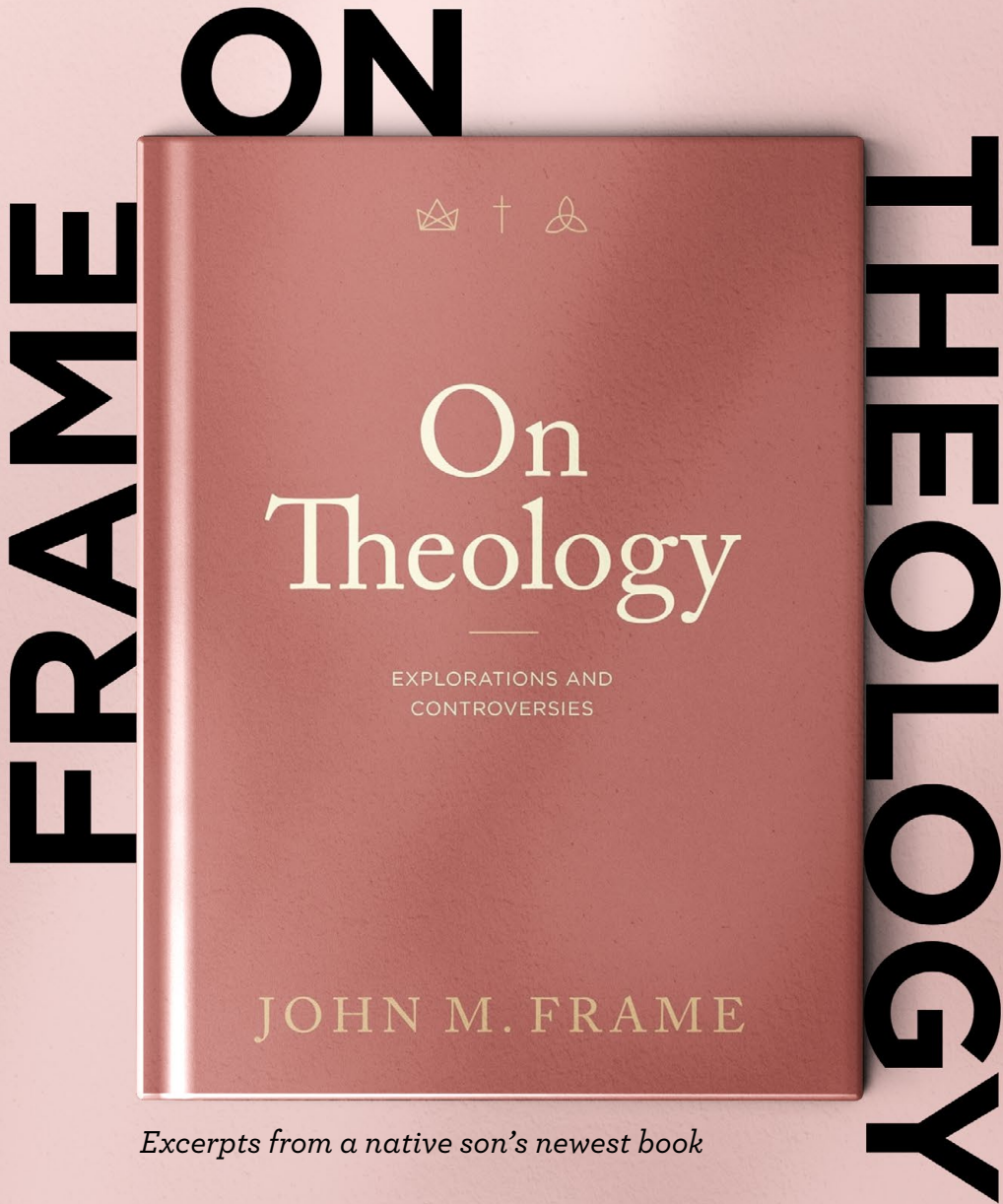


Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

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Excerpts from a native son's newest book

PROLOGUE

As one of the most respected Reformed theologians in the country if not the world, John M. Frame recounted on our podcast awhile back (episode 60) that his Christian formation at Beverly Heights was of far more humble origins.



While growing up here in the late 1940s and '50s, he developed a bit of a reputation as a scamp who absolutely terrorized his Sunday school teachers. Quickly, after coming to faith at the age of 13, he developed a secondary reputation as a quick-witted and sharp young man who was destined for distinction.

Those expectations were indeed realized and even exceeded.

After graduating from Mt. Lebanon High School in 1957, he went on to Princeton University from which he earned his A.B. degree. He also holds three advanced degrees from Yale University and Westminster Theological Seminary.

Dr. Frame began his teaching career on the faculty of Westminster in Philadelphia before serving as a founding

faculty member at Westminster Seminary California for two decades.

The author of more than 20 books, he is best known for his four-volume *Theology of Lordship* series.

An ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in America, Dr. Frame mentored many pastors and former students. He taught several of our past podcast guests, among them T. David Gordon, Uri Brito and David VanDrunen.

Dr. Frame is a talented pianist and organist. He and wife Mary (who went to Heaven in October 2022) have two children.



He and his publisher, Lexham Press, graciously gave us permission to reprint the six concise essays which appear on the following pages. They are among 76 which were published in his newest book, *On Theology: Explorations and Controversies*.

“Whether considering age-old questions or current debates,” one reviewer said of the book, “Frame evokes deep thinking about Christian theology in a style that is accessible and engaging.”

We agree. Enjoy.

The way he was. Our author, John M. Frame, pictured at the organ keyboard in this 1966 photograph from our archive. John was then employed by Beverly Heights as our organist and choir director. The more recent photo of him was taken when he was the J.D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, a post he held until his retirement in 2017. He remains on the faculty of RTS as professor emeritus.

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E S S A Y

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Theology in Three Dimensions: A Summary by the Author

MY BOOK EXPLAINS a theological method that I have been using for most of my 49-year teaching career. Some students and readers have expressed appreciation for it. So in *Theology in Three Dimensions*, I seek to summarize the method briefly and make some applications of it.

Theologians today usually write with a primary focus either on church history or on the debates among modern theologians. Those kinds of theology are useful, but I have always felt that what people need most is a focus on the Bible itself. It is the Bible that is the supreme standard of truth for Christians, and the ideas of historical and contemporary thinkers must be secondary to it. But how can we focus on the Bible itself, without getting bogged down in historical and contemporary debates about the Bible, and without treading over and over again on very familiar ground?

What I have tried to do has been to emphasize a Trinitarian structure in the Bible's theology. God is Father, Son, and Spirit. That statement has profound depths to it, but it has some immediate applications that are often neglected. One of these is that there is a threefold structure to God's ways of working in the world. The Father devises the eternal plan by which everything happens. The Son accomplishes that plan

in history. And the Spirit applies that plan to our hearts and to the depths of creation. God's lordship reflects that Threeness.

To say that God is lord is to say that he is our supreme authority (focusing on the Father's eternal plan), the controller of history (focusing on the Son's accomplishment) and the one who takes us in personal relationship to himself, as his sons, daughters, friends (focusing on the Spirit's work in our hearts). That concept of lordship is central to the biblical narrative: "God is Lord" summarizes the teaching of the Old Testament. "Jesus Christ is Lord" summarizes the teaching of the New.

Looking at the Bible this way shows us a way to better balance. Christian theology is a worldview (the Father), a history of redemption (the Son), and a love letter from God to his people (the Spirit). We don't need to choose one of these over the others, nor do we need to get into constant debates about which we should "emphasize."

My students have described this way of reading the Bible as "tri-per-spectival." I have expounded it in many books and articles, but in *Theology in Three Dimensions* I focus on the fundamentals, both to justify the method and to teach readers how to use it.

Christian theology is a worldview, a history of redemption, and a love letter from God.

E S S A Y

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The Gospel in an Image

I SAW THE NEW STAR WARS film recently.* The last scene (slight spoiler warning) is a wordless image that summarizes the goal of all the action of the film and points ahead to the plots of the sequels. Many films are like that: after all the fights, misunderstandings, reconciliations, evil deeds, narrow escapes, heroism, foolishness, and wisdom, there is a quiet ending that sums it all up, often without words. I have always felt that the Lord's Supper is like that.

In our worship service, the Supper comes at the end, before the benediction. We use some words to explain the sacrament, but for the most part the sacrament is an image. The bread is broken and distributed to those who have received Jesus by faith. We eat together. Then we drink the cup as well.

When I introduce the sacrament, I usually connect it with the sermon. Our sermons, of course, range over the whole of Scripture. But it is never difficult to connect them to the Lord's Supper, because the Lord's Supper summarizes the whole Bible. In the Lord's Supper, God gives us gifts of his good creation, which nourish our bodies, but broken they represent the death of the Son of God, the result of man's fall into sin. But the image is not only death, but death as redemption – Jesus enduring death for sinners, for us who killed him. And in the Supper we also look to the future: as Paul says, we “proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

This redemption is the whole meaning of the Bible. Whatever the preacher preaches on, if he's preaching rightly, he's preaching Christ (Luke 24:27). If he preaches God's moral law, he's preaching how the fall has injured us, why we need to turn to Christ in

faith, and how the Lord wants his redeemed people to live. If the preacher speaks about Israel's history, he's telling us how God prepared the earth for the coming of Jesus and for his sacrifice for sin. When he preaches from the book of Acts, he is telling us how God made his word to grow throughout the world, as believers set out to proclaim the Lord's death “until he comes.”

What is true of the sermon is also true of the hymns and prayers in our worship service: they too drive into our hearts the gospel of God's wonderful grace. God, who is perfectly holy, showed his amazing grace by sending his dear Son to give his life for us.

We confess our sins, acknowledging that we have no hope of having eternal fellowship with God and one another, apart from what Jesus did for us. In our church we “greet one another” after the confession of sin, confessing that the gospel is the very basis of our friendship and brotherhood. If someone is baptized, he or she is baptized into Christ, symbolizing our cleansing from sin through Jesus's work.

The Bible does not specify a single liturgy or order of events in worship that all churches must follow. My point, though, is that however we arrange the specifics, the service is all about Jesus and all about his sacrifice for us.

So at the end we sum it all up with one humble, but glorious image: the bread and the cup, proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes.

**The Force Awakens*. Since I wrote this essay, the Star Wars saga has continued beyond this point.

E S S A Y

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Introduction to My Logos Courses

This was originally a blog post.

OVER THE LAST FIFTY YEARS I have taught theology and have written books on systematic theology and philosophy. Now Logos has given me the opportunity to do some short videos on my favorite themes and to distribute them to Logos users. Some of these emphases you may not find anywhere else. For example:

1. Scripture has much to say, not only about how to be saved from sin, but about how to know anything in God's world.
2. The fall in Gen. 3 affected not only our moral character, but also our ability to know reality as it truly is.
3. Since the fall was comprehensive, corrupting human life in all its dimensions, so redemption is also comprehensive. Christ gives his people new ways of understanding and acting in all areas of life.
4. The history of philosophy displays not only the progress of human thinking, but also the dynamics of the fall and redemption in the intellectual world.
5. In the history of philosophy, some thinkers are rationalists (claiming they can know reality without God's revelation); others are irrationalists (claiming that there is no objective truth).
6. Both rationalism and irrationalism are manifestations of our fallen rebellion; both fail to provide a basis for knowledge; both cancel one another out; but each requires the other to maintain a semblance of intelligibility.
7. The word of God in Scripture provides the only sufficient basis for human knowledge, and therefore for human decisions.
8. God's revelation integrates the natural world, human language, and human subjectivity, providing us with a rich understanding of God's creation, a gift from the one who created it.

I hope that you will take advantage of the opportunity to profit from my courses.

E S S A Y

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Why I Signed the Nashville Statement

The Nashville Statement, published in 2017 and dealing with marriage, can be found at <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>.

I SIGNED THE NASHVILLE STATEMENT, because it is a true statement of biblical teaching on a set of topics of great importance today.

According to Scripture, marriage is the fundamental building block of society, and it symbolizes the covenantal union between ourselves and our creator. God established it before our fall into sin, in Gen. 2:22-24, so it is an essential part of our life on earth.

And the Genesis account of marriage immediately follows and presupposes God's miraculous division of Adam into two sexes (vv. 10-23).

When Scripture uses marriage as a symbol of our relationship to God, as in Eph. 5:22-33, sexual differentiation is again at the forefront. Husbands have one set of roles, wives another. Our relation to Christ is that of his bride, not his bridegroom.

Today, many question this biblical concept of marriage. Indeed, many consider it bigoted to hold such a view. Many think that it is harmful, that it disparages and condemns others. Indeed, it does present a position that seems wrong to many. But if our society were to embrace this position, together with the worldview it presupposes, the results would be joyful and delightful. So it would be wrong for

Christians to withhold these blessings from others in our society by failing to proclaim them. And it is wrong for anyone to ignore, deny, or distort this wonderful truth.

It would have been better if this message had been set forth by the church, rather than by a group of individual Christians. The church is the people of God, and it should be unmistakably setting forth all of God's truth. But the failure of the church does not excuse individual Christians from their task of proclaiming the good news. That the Nashville group set forth this statement was an excellent thing, one that all Christians should be cheering.

Of course, there is much more to the gospel than the biblical view of marriage. The gospel, the good news, is that God sent forth his only Son to live our life, die for sinners, and rise again, receiving from his Father all authority in heaven and on earth. But the biblical vision of marriage is part of the gospel worldview, the gospel promise. The gospel is not only a promise of heaven; it is a promise of blessed life here and now. And part of that blessed life is a renewal of earthly marriage as the anticipation of heavenly marriage.

Husbands have one set of roles, wives another. Our relationship to Christ is that of his bride, not his bridegroom.

E S S A Y

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Review of Douglas Groothuis's *Walking through Twilight: A Wife's Illness - A Philosopher's Lament*

*I posted this review to Amazon.com and to Facebook.
The book itself was published by IVP in 2017.*

DOUG GROOTHUIS and I recently exchanged memoirs. Inside the cover of my *Theology of My Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017) I wrote, "Doug, I thought I had written a half-decent memoir until I read yours." Mine was a kind of general autobiography, with theological observations. Doug's was focused on a single, sad aspect of Doug's recent life: the descent into dementia of his wife Becky. So it reaches depths of humanity I never tried, in my own book, to describe.

Rebecca Merrill Groothuis was a brilliant woman, the author of several books, the invaluable editor of Doug's writings. Doug readily admits that Becky was his intellectual superior. But now she is unable to eat a meal or brush her teeth without assistance. Her illness is not Alzheimer's, but the rarer primary progressive aphasia, which has many (but not all) of the same effects as Alzheimer's. Like Alzheimer's, Becky's disease is not curable, and it is fatal.

Doug suffers as a Christian, and as a philosopher. His reflections in this book, therefore, are profound in many different ways. He contemplates the nature of evil - a common theological and philosophical topic - but with an intimacy made necessary by his situation. He speaks of the temptation to hate God, a temptation he boldly resists. He describes "learning to lament," moved by the Psalms and Ecclesiastes, and shows how even the profoundest of lament can be suffused with joy. He expounds some Scripture texts at length, notably Ps. 90.

The combination of tragedy and divine comfort determine a unique lifestyle. His grief has not turned him away from practical life, from his divine calling. Doug describes "Lamenting in the Classroom," "Lamenting Online," the place of humor in the midst of grief, the use of language in lament, the continuing role in his life of books of all kinds, his love for jazz, for art, and for the family dog, Sunny. Doug's love for God's world and its culture might be described as "escape," but Doug shows to what extent and in what way escape is justified to one who is afflicted. He "escapes into meaning"; that is, through all his learning and experience he seeks to understand Becky and his own grief, and to engage in the world, providing a context for his grief, both within and outside of his suffering, that will benefit others.

I love this book and value it greatly for my own edification. It is philosophy at its best, working through traditional philosophical problems in the middle of real pain. That kind of philosophy can clarify these subjects as nothing else can, testing the theories by the extreme case. Most of us have not been called to suffer in the same way as Doug and Becky. But living in a fallen world, as fallen creatures, gives each of us some grief, some reason to lament. From one perspective, the Bible is all about suffering and loss. And Doug's meditations help us draw near to God - the God of Job as well as the God of Jesus; the God of Lamentations and the God of Paul's "Rejoice in the Lord Always." The Bible's story of loss ends in grace and glory - seemingly far from us now, but summoning us from within our lament.

Being on Jesus's Side

From my journal.

TUES., DEC. 29, 2020: I wrote a student yesterday, who asked me how the church could identify those who are true Christians. Baptism and church membership are often misleading. Creedal affirmations are important, but we cannot forget that the Pharisees were largely orthodox. Fruits of the spirit are often difficult to identify. What about people who make major mistakes in doctrine, sometimes because they've been misled? What about people who reject orthodox Christianity because it's been misleadingly presented to them, or because the people presenting it are beset by inconsistencies of life and doctrine?

I told him something I'd been thinking a lot about lately: being a Christian is being on Jesus's side.

In the OT, God called people (as through Joshua [24:15ff]), to "choose this day whom you will serve." It was like a political decision. In Jesus's earthly ministry, he always forced people to choose between the false piety of the Jewish leaders, the cruel power of the Romans, and his own kingdom which was "not of this world." Jesus healed people, taught them to love God and one another, and to hate evil. In his atoning work, the powers of the world under Satan gained an apparent victory. But his resurrection

defeated them.

In Acts 2, Peter again made the challenge to choose this day. Jesus was aligned against Herod, Pilate, the Jews, and the Gentiles. The people could choose to follow that good man who called them to love God and one another, who was unjustly put to death, or to follow his murderers, who followed the world's religion of power and hate. Three thousand chose Jesus.

There was not an elaborate catechetical period. The people knew, and Peter made it clearer, what the issues were. Those on Jesus's side were known as Christians. The others returned to their old ways. Of course, God's sovereign choice was behind it all.

So when I want to know whether someone is a Christian, I ask them whether they are on Jesus's side. If the Chinese communists, say, were to come to your door and ask your allegiance, if you are a Christian, you will testify of Jesus. Your testimony may be weak and inaccurate.

You may have even been raised in some other faith. You may have been taught very badly. But when the choice is stark, between this good man Jesus and the people who put them to death, you are a Christian if you stand on Jesus's side.

Those on Jesus's side were known as Christians. The others returned to their old ways. God's sovereign choice was behind it all.