

Cruciform Press

THE TWO FEARS

TREMBLE BEFORE GOD ALONE

Chris Poblote

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Chris Poblete

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To the beautiful Alyssa, a God-fearing woman
(a la Proverbs 31:30) who, next to Jesus,
is the clearest example of God's grace in my life.
May the Lord grant us many years of faithfulness
in marriage and ministry.

– Chris Poblete

CruciformPress

“I don’t know about you, but most of the things I grapple with in ministry, and in my own life, are summed up in two issues: We are too scared; and we aren’t scared enough. This book by Chris Poblete points the way to crucify our fear of man and to rightly order our fear of God. Reading this book will prompt you to seek in your own life the biblical tension between ‘fear not’ and ‘fear God.’”

Russell D. Moore, Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Our lives can be guided by what we fear, and Chris Poblete wants us to fear the Lord! He unpacks for us, through the lens of God’s revealed character and the gospel, that fearing the Lord is not some cheap cliché, but a blood-bought gift for his people that leads to repentance, thankfulness, adoration and worship.”

Darren Carlson, President and Founder, Training Leaders International

“A.W. Pink lamented that ‘the God of the twentieth century . . . commands the respect of no really thoughtful man . . . The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than awe-inspiring fear.’ What Pink said of the 20th century rings true today when downsized deities and consumer-friendly “Christs” are a dime a dozen. Chris Poblete has written an importantly countercultural book, moving us beyond a homeboy God we could fist-bump to a holy God we can worship. *The Two Fears* helps us recover a biblical fear of God and all the awe, repentance, and freedom from self-centered fears that go with it. An awesome resource!”

Dr. Thaddeus Williams, Biola University; author, *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?*

“Chris Poblete is an artist and his book, *The Two Fears*, will take you on an engaging, picturesque journey through the orchard of fearing God. Along this path of wisdom, he will linger long enough for you to pluck its fruit and savor the richness of its gospel flavor, leading you to worship God as you forsake the lesser

enticements of this world. By God's grace, you will be freed from unholy fear and its fruits, and instead, enabled to embrace a lifestyle of faith and a habit of God-fearing worship: generosity instead of self-entitlement, humility instead of arrogance, reverence rather than indifference, dependence rather than doubt, obedience instead of revolt, and faith instead of faithlessness. The clarity and sobriety of *The Two Fears* will show you how to enjoy God as you magnify Christ and walk by the power of his Spirit. I commend this book to you: it will fuel your worship and empower your discipleship."

Gabe Tribbett, Director of Life Education and Leadership Development, Christ's Covenant Church, Winona Lake, IA

"Those who find themselves struggling relate to God and man in a way that is balanced and biblical will find an excellent guide in *The Two Fears* by Chris Poblete. This simple and direct book confronts and redirects our misplaced fear of man, reminding us of truths that instill a fear of God that is both biblical and life-affirming."

Richard H. Clark, co-founder, Editor-in-chief, *Christ and Pop Culture*

"Readers will be equally challenged and blessed as they read *The Two Fears* and heed Chris Poblete's call to embrace a holy fear of God—one that doesn't cause us to cower in terror, but empowers us to move forward in Christ's mission, entranced by the beauty and wonder of the cross of Christ."

Aaron Armstrong, author, *Awaiting a Savior* and *Contend*

"The writer of Hebrews teaches us that 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10:31). The writer of Proverbs states that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). Poblete not only stirs us up to this truth, but teaches us what it means to fear God, that we stand in awe of God by hearing and heeding his Word in Scripture, and that the fear of the Lord will set us free. One who learns to fear the Lord need fear nothing else, for though God's wrath is fearful, his mercy

is awing as well. I hope you will hear Chris out, and that his book will teach us to both tremble and rejoice in the majesty of our God.”

Brad Williams, pastor, New Covenant Baptist Church, contributor, *Christ and Pop Culture*

“In this excellent and easy to read book, Chris Poblete tackles a topic that is often overlooked in contemporary Christian theology. As he examines an unhealthy fear of man and the fear of God, he leads his readers straight into the throne room of the One who is sovereign in and over all things—the One who is wisdom from God—the Lord Jesus Christ. Read this book, but beware—rather than you examining it, the Word of God will examine you and encourage you to consider that the God of the Bible is far more majestic and glorious than you ever dared to imagine.”

Dave Jenkins, Director, Servants of Grace Ministries

“This timely book enters into a church context where ‘God-fearing’ is out of vogue. Combining biblical passages, theological categories, pastoral wisdom, and his personal story, Poblete has given us a needed reminder of how important it is to be God-fearers if we seek to know God and live for him.”

Jared Oliphint Regional Coordinator, Westminster Theological Seminary; Contributor, Reformed Forum

“In this practical and very readable book, Chris Poblete describes a side of our culture—the absence of fear. ‘Where have the God-fearers gone?’ he asks. He shows how both the absence of true fear and the presence of ‘unholy [false] fear’ stem from an absence of a knowledge of the awesome God of the Bible, and that, in meeting him, we discover the real dimensions of creational existence and the wonderful benefits of living in fear and deep respect before him, freed from the ‘[false] fear of men.’”

Peter Jones, PhD, Executive Director, TruthXchange; Scholar-in-Residence and Adjunct Professor, Westminster Seminary in California

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INTRODUCTION

Most Christians will agree that we ought to love our God. But what about fearing God? The Bible says that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10), yet an honest assessment of modern evangelicalism would suggest that we do not today give the fear of God nearly that level of respect. Many Christians seem to assume that the gospel of grace trumps the fear of the Lord, and that wisdom now has some source other than godly fear. Yet only the God of the gospel is truly worthy of our reverential fear.

Encouraging a group of Christians, the apostle Peter wrote: “conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1 Peter 1:17). Life is an “exile,” a short passing through on the way to our true home. And apparently we are to live this exile in godly fear. But what does that mean? And what does that *not* mean? What is good fear and what is bad fear? The Bible offers us a standard for the pursuit of answers, an explicitly active standard:

My son, if you *receive* my words
and *treasure up* my commandments with you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom

and *inclining* your heart to understanding;
yes, if you *call out* for insight
and *raise your voice* for understanding,
if you *seek it* like silver
and *search for it* as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and
understanding. (Proverbs 2:1-6)

My hope is that in the coming pages you will embrace every active verb in this passage from Proverbs—that you will receive, treasure, listen to, incline your heart, call out for insight, raise your voice, seek and search with all your might for holy reverence and the fear of the LORD.

As you do, the promise could not be more clear: then you will understand. Then you will fear. Then you will find.

One

THE NATURE OF FEAR

Along the Southern Californian coast is a short strip of sand called Aliso Creek Beach. Lined with picnic tables and fire pits, it's a popular place for afternoon picnics, family outings, and beach bonfires.

The college group I attended early in my Christian life frequented this spot every summer. I'll never forget one of these afternoon gatherings. A thick blanket of clouds hid the California sun, unusual for a summer in Orange County. The ocean breeze was especially chilly and the water was much too cold for good sense. Despite the conditions, my friend Chase and I decided to jump into the freezing ocean to see who could withstand it the longest. I cannot for the life of me remember what prompted such an idiotic dare, but it probably had something to do with the fact that sixty of our peers were shouting, "You guys are crazy!" I'm sure my 20-year-old self had something to prove that day, although I can't recall what.

The water was ice cold. The kind of cold that makes your diaphragm go rubbery once your chest hits the water

and you feel stupid because you suddenly forget how to breathe properly. In our contest of resolve, however, I had a secret. What Chase didn't know is that I used to play this game by myself when I was a small kid. I would jump into the family pool in the winter and, with chattering teeth and shaky breaths, I would grin and bear it until I could breathe normally again. In this water-treading face-off with Chase, I felt like a natural. After about a minute in the ocean, just as my lungs had reclaimed the ability to take full breaths, Chase began his shivering retreat to shore.

Instead of swimming in to claim my victory, I made a decision that would almost claim my life. A new believer at the time, I wanted all my new Christian friends to notice how crazy cool I was. As my pride swelled to biblical proportions, I swam out further from shore, just past the point where the waves break, and began floating on my back. I lay there in the frigid water — a demonstration of foolish arrogance if there ever was one — warmed by the thought that everyone onshore must be marveling at my stamina. When I switched back to treading water and my ears resurfaced, I immediately knew I had a bigger problem than just being cold. Instead of the noise of 60 college students on a beach all I could hear was waves. I scanned the shore for their bonfire and finally found it about 200 yards north. I had been drifting in a rip current.

The current was aggressively pulling me both further south and farther out from shore. I started swimming toward the beach, but every yard I went forward, I drifted at least another yard back. Soon I was almost half a mile south of the bonfire, and no closer to shore. Waves started

to break over my head and my muscles began to cramp. For the first time in my life, I feared the ocean. I suddenly realized that behind me lay an infinite amount of water, and below me in the depths lurked . . . I had no idea.

I gasped for air but swallowed seawater instead. Just as I began to admit to myself that I couldn't last much longer, a wave drove me under and tumbled my body like clothes in a washing machine. I tried to swim back up, but I had no idea which way up was. I almost stopped fighting, but instead for some reason I cried out silently to God for help. And at that very instant a wave pushed my head above water, I took a full breath of air, and my limp body rode the lip of that wave all the way to the beach like a dumb plank of wood that had learned how to surf.

Lying there in the sand gasping, all I could say was, "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus."

That afternoon, I discovered both humiliation and a fear of the ocean I had never known before. In God's good providence, this experience also gave me my definition of fear:

To fear something is to give credence to its power over you.

Credence is not a word we hear a lot. Let me explain.

When children are afraid of the dark, they give credence to the power that darkness has over them—fear of what could be lurking in the shadows. When one fears being alone, he gives credence to the power of loneliness over him—he accepts as true the possibility that he will never experience fulfilling companionship. Think of other things that people are commonly afraid of: drowning,

heights, spiders, snakes, clowns, conflict, public speaking, suffering . . . the list goes on. But God is rarely on that list. Why is that? How does God, the creator who transcends space and time, not make the cut? Should he?

Again, when we fear something, we give credence to its power over us. If you fear the ocean, your heart will pound when currents pull you away from land. If you fear heights, your knees will wobble when you approach the edge of a 12-story balcony.

And if you fear God, your heart will quake at the smallest glimpse of his majesty.

Consider the prophet Isaiah when he became undone before God enthroned: “Woe is me!,” he confessed, “For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (6:5). For Isaiah, to see God’s glory and majesty was to immediately acknowledge God’s power over him. The fragility of his own sinfulness came instantly clear as he stood before God’s holiness.

A Fear Forbidden, a Fear Commanded

Some say we don’t need to fear God anymore. They say this grand picture of God in Isaiah is the Old Testament God—or God of the Law—and that the New Testament God is best represented as Jesus, “Meek and Mild”—a Jesus that we shouldn’t fear, a God of grace. After all, they argue, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). Yet when the man who penned those words—John, the beloved disciple of Jesus—saw a vision

of the risen Christ at Patmos, he fell at his feet as though dead (Revelation 1:17).

The fear of the Lord is commended throughout Scripture. Let's look at just a few examples:

- God rewarded Abraham for his fear: “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (Genesis 22:12).
- Fearing God is akin to loving your neighbor: “You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 25:17).
- Fear is a way to serve the Lord: “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11).
- Fear is pure: “The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever” (Psalm 19:9, HCSB).
- Fear is a mark of faithfulness: “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household” (Hebrews 11:7).
- Fear is something we will still know in heaven: “And from the throne came a voice, saying, ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great!’” (Revelation 19:5).

At the same time, Scripture also warns against fear. When the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, they saw thunder and flashes of lightning and heard trumpets blaring before a mountain billowing in smoke. As a result, they were utterly terrified. Moses then spoke

puzzling words to them: “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin” (Exodus 20:20). Here, Moses commands the nation of Israel both to fear God and not to fear God. So which is it? *To fear or not to fear?* How do we explain this seeming contradiction? John Bunyan clarifies, “that fear which already had taken possession of them, was not the fear of God, but a fear that was of Satan, of their own misjudging hearts, and so a fear that was ungodly.”¹

Bunyan goes on to say that there are two types of fear: “a fear forbidden, and a fear commended.”² Other fellow Puritans and Reformers have echoed these sentiments, careful to affirm a biblical distinction between the two fears:

- For Stephen Charnock, it was the difference between bondage fear and reverential fear.
- For George Swinnock, it was the difference between filial fear and servile fear.
- For John Gill, it was the difference between idolatrous fear and worshipful fear.
- For Charles Spurgeon, it was fear that draws men further from God versus fear that drives men toward God.

Today, however, many evangelical churches—especially those in the West—treat the fear of the Lord as a taboo subject. There is no distinction between good fear and bad fear. To us, all fear is bad fear. Fear is so un-Western, so unsophisticated, so unfashionable.

Talk about the fear of the Lord with Christians in

some rural areas of Rwanda and Uganda, however, as I have, and you will see how quick they are to get this notion of godly fear. They understand that God is mighty and they are not. They understand that they are dependent upon God to send rain so that they can grow food, and eat, and drink, and live.

When a Ugandan Muslim girl asked us what the religious landscape looked like in America, we included atheism in our response. Confused, she asked, “What is atheism?” When she learned that atheism is the belief that there is no God, she was floored: “Not believe in a god?!”

Even though this young woman did not believe in the God of the Bible, she knew enough about our fallen world from living in an impoverished Ugandan village that she could easily acknowledge that she was not entitled to anything. She knew to be thankful for simple things like food and shelter. She knew she answered to something, or Someone, bigger than herself for her very existence.

In contrast, Christians in the West—myself included—often feel entitled to what we have. From the roof overhead to the car in the garage to the technology in our pockets to the relative freedom and stability of our society—we feel we simply deserve it all.

This attitude creeps into the church, threatening our humility and, consequently, our worship. But a godly fear of the Lord requires that we give credence to the God who has power over us:

- the power to give and to take away
- the power to form us in a mother’s womb

- the power to know when we lie down and when we rise up
- the power to regenerate a heart of stone
- the power to number our days
- the power to enthrone rulers and make kingdoms fall
- the power to do whatever he pleases

Our God holds the power to save sinners, to reverse death, to destroy the bonds of Satan and sin. He is the mighty Savior and great Redeemer who can regenerate a heart, reform it from the inside out, and keep it for all eternity.

Do you know this God? Do you know the power he has over you? Do you acknowledge—give credence to—his power? His majesty? His splendor? His *being*?

This is godly fear. It is the fear of the Lord.

When we reject the notion that fear should characterize our approach to God, we rob ourselves of a worshipful delight that can only come through reverential fear. In his commentary on Psalm 22, John Calvin writes, “The fear which [David] recommends is not, however, such as would frighten the faithful from approaching God, but that which will bring them truly humbled into his sanctuary.”³

For the Christian, the fear of the Lord does not diminish the gospel of grace; it amplifies it. This reverential fear makes his grace more amazing, his mercy more grand, his justice more right, and his love more astounding.

The deeper our understanding of what it means to fear a holy God, the better able we will be to fear him as he ought to be feared, and the better able we will be to worship him as he ought to be worshiped.

Two

A GOD WHO IS NOT LIKE US

I know a lot of creative types, from writers and musicians to painters and photographers. I've watched them engage in their craft and I know that each discipline requires two things: a tool in hand and a canvas of one sort or another to mark upon. This is how creativity works. An artist must start with something. She needs a pencil or an instrument or a brush, and she needs something to alter. She can't work with nothing.

God works with nothing. All he needs is the sheer volition of his will.

The first words spoken in the universe were, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). Before they were uttered, there was nothing. No time. No matter. Only a dark void. And guess what happened after this command was delivered? Well, there was *light*.

Try to wrap your mind around that one. Something came out of nothing because Someone spoke it as so.

I can't make that happen. What about you? Walk down the timeline of Genesis 1, and you'll notice that

God is always the subject of the sentence while creation is always its predicate.

God is not like us. And we are not like him.

As elementary as this may seem, if we want to understand the fear of the Lord, we must begin with the knowledge that God is not like us. It's worth relearning and remembering. For the one who concedes this fact, the rewards are great.

Calvin said that true wisdom “consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”⁴ And he rightly observed that these two are interconnected. A right view of one will inform a right view of the other.

Such a high view of God is central to godly fear. Jeremiah asked, “Who would not fear you, O King of the nations?” He then answers his rhetorical question with a humble confession: “For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you” (Jeremiah 10:7).

When we meditate upon the incomparable nature of God, our esteem for self and other idols fizzles away, extinguished under the weight of his majesty. But all too often, we grow numb and dull to this spiritual reality. Instead, we want Jesus the God-man to be our homeboy, a friend who is on our level—who wears our clothes and speaks our language and shares our idiosyncrasies. As someone once told me, we forfeit God's transcendence by overemphasizing his immanence—that he is present and his help available to us. This is a grave mistake.

Yes, God is immanent and deeply involved in the lives of his creatures. He certainly is not the apathetic God of

deism who retreated eons ago to his ivory tower in the sky. He is a personally involved High Priest and dear friend to sinners. But the awe-inspiring wonder of God's immanence finds its full meaning not in an "I'm just like you, homeboy" persona, but rather in his holy and transcendent nature. Although he is the Lord God Almighty, he chose to leave his throne in heaven and condescend to save a fallen people. That's why we sing of his grace as *amazing*. He is more than a tender friend; he is a fear-somely merciful Redeemer and Friend.

We need to learn and relearn the details of his transcendent nature, the "God-ness of God." Let's take a closer look at some of his incommunicable attributes—those which we do not share with him, despite being made in his image. These are his independence, immutability, eternity, and omnipresence.

Independence

By his very nature, God is independent. Unlike us, his life and being do not depend on anything or anyone. When Moses asked God what he should be called, God replied, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). In other words, he is both self-existent and self-sufficient.

In his best-selling book *The God Delusion*, pop atheist Richard Dawkins repeatedly asks the question: "Who made God?"⁵ He and his colleagues proudly consider this the "unanswerable question"—an unbeatable ace of spades in their deadly gamble against faith. But their question merely misses the point. Dawkins assumes that something must have created the Creator because he cannot fathom

the idea that anything could have existed outside of time forever. What if we creatures humbly yield to the truth that God is, in fact, the uncreated creator? Then, the senselessness of the question “Who made God?” becomes clear.

God was made from nowhere and by no one. He has always been.

John said of Jesus: “All things came into being through him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3 NASB). When the universe was birthed, it was created through God the Son. While God clearly has wants (that’s why he created all things), he never experiences need. However, the whole of creation—planets, stars, beasts, people, Dawkins, me, and you—depends upon Christ who “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3).

We are utterly dependent. God is magnificently not.

Eternality

God is also unlike us in that he has no beginning or end. He is in no way bound to the constructs of time.

Moses confessed in a prayer, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:2). In other words, God is, has always been, and always will be.

The limit to God’s existence is . . . none. He calls himself both the *Alpha* and the *Omega*—the beginning and the end. A.W. Tozer observed, “The [human] mind looks backward in time till the dim past vanishes, then turns and looks into the future till thought and imagina-

tion collapse from exhaustion; and God is at both points, unaffected by either.”⁶ As the owner of time, nothing comes before him, nothing after.

God’s eternity is good news and cause for worship. Whatever he is in attributes, nature, and divinity, he is eternally so. As the One who actually dwells in eternity, he is the only one who can guarantee eternal life.

Immutability

In his eternal being, God is immutable, or unchanging. This truth is critical to reverential worship: “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6). If we are to delight over God’s majesty and splendor as they are displayed in his other attributes, then he must be unchanging. If God could ever come to a place of not being righteous, holy, or good, then we would be in big trouble, and our reverence toward him would be completely in vain.

Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck noted the importance of God’s unchanging nature as it relates to his uniqueness from us (his God-ness):

The doctrine of God’s immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture God is often called the Rock.⁷

As an unmovable Rock, ours is a God who can be

trusted to keep his promises. He proved it with the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. He will also prove it when he comes to judge the living and the dead.

Because God is unchanging, there will never be an instant when he ceases to be worthy of reverential fear.

Omnipresence

Lewis said, “We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with him.”⁸ Not only does God exist in himself, without change, and at all times, he also exists in all places. David understood this when he wrote Psalm 139:

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
(Psalm 139:7-10)

Neither land nor sea, neither heaven nor hell: there is no flight from God’s presence. Moreover, God sees and knows every one of our motives, deeds, and thoughts:

- “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

- “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1 Peter 1:17).

We may try to fool others about what we are truly like; at times, we may even succeed. But there’s no deceiving God. He is in all places and knows all things. When you remember your perpetual position before the presence of his fearsome majesty, all your sin simultaneously exposed yet lovingly robed in Christ’s righteousness, then true humility and a spirit of repentance will seize your soul, and you will worship.

Do you see that God is not like us? Do you see the “God-ness” of God in his attributes? Does it humble you to glimpse the humanness of humanity? God is independent, immutable, eternal, and omnipresent. At our wisest, most inspired, and most insightful, we barely scrape the surface of his splendor and wonder. The list of his perfections goes on and on. God is not like us. Understanding this will only amplify for us the scandalous magnitude of his love, mercy, and infinite grace.

The Holiness of God

There is one attribute that Scripture uses to refer to God more often than any other. It is an attribute that, once we concede to it, reforms our understanding of all the others. This attribute is *holiness*. Our God is the Holy One.

What does Scripture mean when it says that God is holy?

A common mistake is to think of God's holiness largely in the human sense of the term. We can easily imagine that holiness is an abstract virtue by which things can be ranked and graded, with cheaters, murderers, and plunderers at one end of the scale and philanthropists, missionaries, and faithful clergy at the other. But if you imagine a perfect score on the "holy scale" as being 100, then I have a suggestion: start your imagination at 10,000, go up the scale as fast as possible, forever, and you might be about halfway to God's level of holiness.

The point, obviously, is that the holiness of God is simply off the charts. He is the perfection of all good. According to Scripture, God's holiness cannot be placed in the same category or scale as ours. It is *other*.

The very otherness of God, the true God-ness of God, means that he is completely separate from all that is not God. There is an infinite qualitative difference between him and us. "There is none besides you," declared Samuel (1 Samuel 2:2). There is no higher reality or virtue to which God must conform. There is no higher standard, or scale, by which he must be measured. He is not holy because he keeps the Law; the Law is holy because it reveals God. God is the only absolute. Everything else derives from him.

"I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst" (Hosea 11:9) His holiness is his unique, divine essence, and it is determined by no one. God in his holiness simply *is*. He deserves to be feared in reverential worship because he is holy. He is completely perfect, transcendent, and set apart in every way.

There is an eternal song of worship that appears

throughout the Bible, and it begins with the words “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). R. C. Sproul comments on this in his classic *The Holiness of God*:

On a handful of occasions the Bible repeats something to the third degree. To mention something three times in succession is to elevate it to the superlative degree

Only once in sacred Scripture is an attribute of God elevated to the third degree. The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy The Bible never says that God is love, love, love; or mercy, mercy, mercy; or wrath, wrath, wrath; or justice, justice, justice.⁹

We need to get this. Is God loving? Of course. Is he merciful and just? Absolutely. But if we want to know anything truthful about God’s love, mercy, or justice, then we need to start with his transcendent holiness. And that means we need to start with godly fear.

Why is a proper appreciation of God’s holiness important to the fear of the Lord? Because that is where you must begin in order for your theology to conform to Scripture, which basically describes God’s holiness as the umbrella over all his other attributes. If you begin with a statement like, “I believe God is love,” and interpret all things through that filter, your view of God will fall tragically short and you will end up unable to imagine a God whose infinite holiness demands infinite punishment. If you begin with a statement like, “I believe God is just,” and interpret all else through that filter, you’ll end up unable to

imagine a God whose infinite holiness was truly and completely satisfied by the infinite sacrifice of God the Son.

With our finite minds and limited souls, our human views of love, justice, and mercy are always inadequate and inconsistent. A man-based, “downward up” approach to trying to understand God will always fall horribly short, and leave us with insufficient and misleading conclusions. What we need to do is begin with the holiness of God. Interpreting the attributes of God from this “God downward” approach will fuel our fear of the Lord and intimately inform our worship and love for our Maker and Savior.

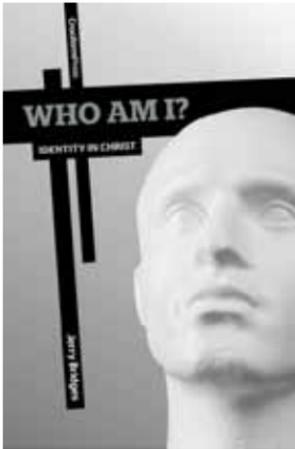
Stephen Charnock said “the holiness of God is his glory.”¹⁰ It is the measure of his enduring value. Charnock continued his thoughts on God’s holiness, which we might also consider his purity, in this way:

If every attribute of the Deity were a distinct member, purity would be the form, the soul, the spirit to animate them. Without it, his patience would be an indulgence to sin, his mercy a fondness, his wrath a madness, his power a tyranny, his wisdom an unworthy subtlety. It is this gives decorum to all.¹¹

Someday God will destroy every competing glory and make his holiness known to every creature. But there is no need to wait for this. Learn, relearn, and remember that God is unlike us—set apart—in the most magnificent of ways. He is ever-present, authoritative, powerful, revered, and fearsome. Above all, he is holy. He alone is worthy of our praise.

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[Who Am I?](#)

Identity in Christ

by Jerry Bridges

Jerry Bridges unpacks Scripture to give the Christian eight clear, simple, interlocking answers to one of the most essential questions of life.

“Jerry Bridges’ gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian’s true identity in Christ.”

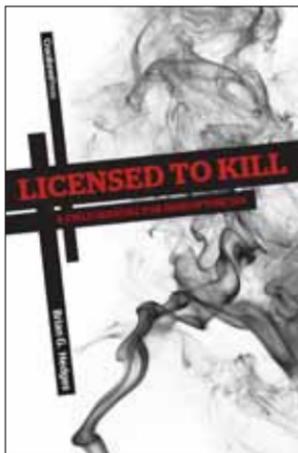
J.I. Packer, Theological Editor, ESV Study Bible; author, Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology

“I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book.”

R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, Tabletalk magazine; general editor, The Reformation Study Bible

“*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians.”

Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC



[Licensed to Kill](#)

A Field Manual for Mortifying Sin

by Brian G. Hedges

**Your soul is a war zone.
Know your enemy.
Learn to fight.**

“A faithful, smart, Word-centered guide.”

- **Wes Ward, Revive Our Hearts**

“Are there things you hate that you end up doing anyway? Have you tried to stop sinning in certain areas of your life, only to face defeat over and over again? If you’re ready to get serious about sin patterns in your life—ready to put sin to death instead of trying to manage it—this book outlines the only strategy that works. This is a book I will return to and regularly recommend to others.”

Bob Lepine, Co-Host, FamilyLife Today

“Brian Hedges shows the importance of fighting the sin that so easily entangles us and robs us of our freedom, by fleeing to the finished work of Christ every day. Well done!”

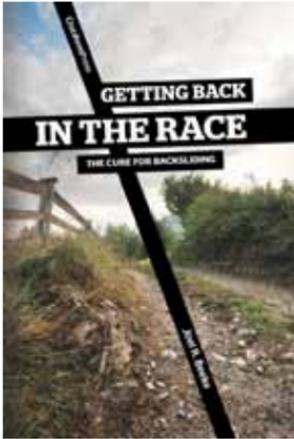
Tullian Tchividjian, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church; author, Jesus + Nothing = Everything

“Rather than aiming at simple moral reformation, *Licensed to Kill* aims at our spiritual transformation. Like any good field manual, this one focuses on the most critical information regarding our enemy, and gives practical instruction concerning the stalking and killing of sin. This is a theologically solid and helpfully illustrated book that holds out the gospel confidence of sin’s ultimate demise.”

Joe Thorn, pastor and author, Note to Self: The Discipline of Preaching to Yourself

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[Getting Back in the Race](#)

The Cure for Backsliding

by Joel R. Beeke

Backsliding is the worst thing that can happen to anyone claiming faith in Jesus.

Find out why. Learn the diagnosis. Experience the cure.

“This book is a masterpiece, and I do not say that lightly. This excellent work, so helpfully spiced with quotations from the Puritans, needs to be read over and over again. I heartily commend it.”

Martin Holdt, Pastor; editor, Reformation Africa South

“Joel Beeke’s characteristic clarity, biblical fidelity, and unflinching care as to detail and pastoral wisdom is obvious on every page. This book is an honest and sometimes chilling exposition of the seriousness of backsliding; at the same time, it unfailingly breathes the air of grace and hope. Timely and judicious.”

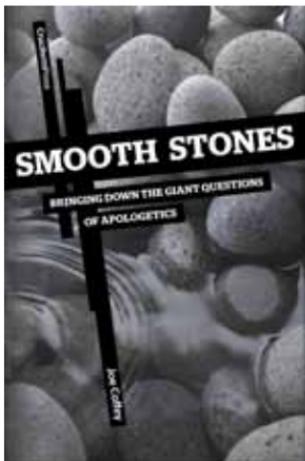
Derek W.H. Thomas, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC; Editorial Director, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

“Don’t settle for being a spiritual shrimp,’ argues Dr. Beeke. The pity is that too many modern Christians are opting for shrimpishly small degrees of grace. Indwelling sin drags the careless believer down into guilty backsliding. This book is a prescription for the believer who feels his guilt.”

Maurice Roberts, former editor, Banner of Truth magazine

“Dr. Beeke outlines the best means of bringing balm and healing to the backslidden soul. Highly recommended.”

Michael Haykin, Professor, Southern Baptist Theo. Sem.



[Smooth Stones](#)

Bringing Down the Giant
Questions of Apologetics

by Joe Coffey

**Street-level apologetics for
everyday Christians.**

**Because faith in Jesus makes
sense. And you don't need
an advanced degree
to understand why.**

“What a thrill for me to see Joe Coffey, a graduate of our first Centurions Program class, apply the biblical worldview principles we teach at BreakPoint and the Colson Center. In this marvelous little book, Joe simply and succinctly lays out the tenets of the Christian faith within the context of the four key life and worldview questions. This is an excellent resource for Christians and non-Christians alike who are seeking the Truth.”

Chuck Colson, Founder of Prison Fellowship and the Colson Center for Christian Worldview

“This book may be the best resource I've seen to answer common objections in everyday language.”

Jared Totten, Critical Thinking Blog

“A quick read that packs a punch.... I'm always on the lookout for something like this. *Smooth Stones* is a winner.”

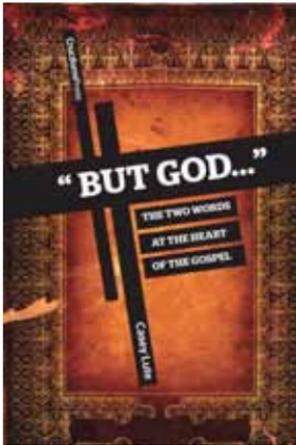
Mike del Rosario, ApologeticsGuy.Com

“Most books on apologetics are too long, too deep, and too complicated. This book has none of these defects. Like its title, it is like a smooth stone from David's apologetic sling directed right to the mind of an enquiring reader”

***Norman L. Geisler, Distinguished Professor of Apologetics,
Veritas Evangelical Seminary, Murrieta, CA***

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[“But God...”](#)

The Two Words at the Heart of the Gospel

by Casey Lute

**Just two words.
Understand their use in Scripture,
and you will never be the same.**

“Rock-solid theology packaged in an engaging and accessible form.”

- Louis Tullio, *Sight Regained* blog

“Keying off of nine occurrences of “But God” in the English Bible, Casey Lute ably opens up Scripture in a manner that is instructive, edifying, encouraging, and convicting. This little book would be useful in family or personal reading, or as a gift to a friend. You will enjoy Casey’s style, you will have a fresh view of some critical Scripture, and your appreciation for God’s mighty grace will be deepened.”

Dan Phillips, *Pyromaniacs* blog, author of *The World-Tilting Gospel* (forthcoming from Kregel)

“A refreshingly concise, yet comprehensive biblical theology of grace that left this reader more in awe of the grace of God.”

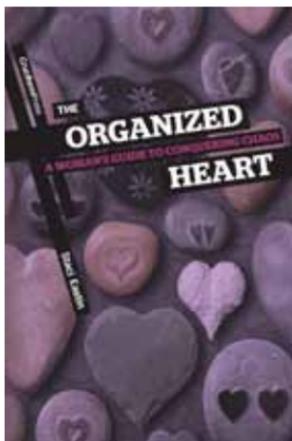
Aaron Armstrong, *BloggingTheologically.com*

““Casey Lute reminds us that nothing is impossible with God, that we must always reckon with God, and that God brings life out of death and joy out of sorrow.”

Thomas R. Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“A mini-theology that will speak to the needs of every reader of this small but powerful book. Read it yourself and you will be blessed. Give it to a friend and you will be a blessing.”

William Varner, Prof. of Biblical Studies, The Master’s College



[The Organized Heart](#)

A Woman's Guide to Conquering Chaos

by Staci Eastin

Disorganized?

You don't need more rules, the latest technique, or a new gadget.

This book will show you a different, better way. A way grounded in the grace of God.

"Staci Eastin packs a gracious punch, full of insights about our disorganized hearts and lives, immediately followed by the balm of gospel-shaped hopes. This book is ideal for accountability partners and small groups."

Carolyn McCulley, blogger, filmmaker, author of Radical Womanhood and Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?

"Unless we understand the spiritual dimension of productivity, our techniques will ultimately backfire. Find that dimension here. Encouraging and uplifting rather than guilt-driven, this book can help women who want to be more organized but know that adding a new method is not enough."

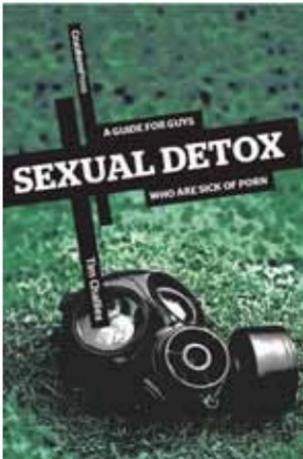
Matt Perman, Director of Strategy at Desiring God, blogger, author of the forthcoming book, What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done

"Organizing a home can be an insurmountable challenge for a woman. The Organized Heart makes a unique connection between idols of the heart and the ability to run a well-managed home. This is not a how-to. Eastin looks at sin as the root problem of disorganization. She offers a fresh new approach and one I recommend, especially to those of us who have tried all the other self-help models and failed."

Aileen Challies, Mom of three, and wife of blogger, author, and pastor Tim Challies

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Free book chapters at bit.ly/samplr



[Sexual Detox](#)

A Guide for Guys Who Are Sick of Porn

by Tim Challies

“In an age when sex is worshiped as a god, a little book like this can go a long way to helping men overcome sexual addiction.”

**-Pastor Mark Driscoll
Mars Hill Church
Acts 29**

“Online pornography is not just a problem for Christian men; it is THE problem. Many men, young and old, in our churches need *Sexual Detox*. Challies offers practical, doable and, above all, gospel-centered hope for men. I want every man I serve and all the guys on our staff to read this book.”

Tedd Tripp, Pastor, and author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart*

“Tim Challies strikes just the right balance in this necessary work. His assessment of the sexual epidemic in our culture is sober but not without hope. His advice is practical but avoids a checklist mentality. His discussion of sexual sin is frank without being inappropriate. This book will be a valuable resource.”

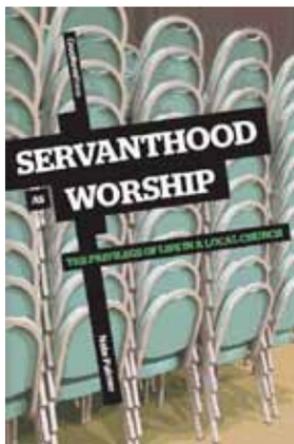
Kevin DeYoung, Pastor and author

“Thank God for using Tim to articulate simply and unashamedly the truth about sex amidst a culture of permissiveness.”

Ben Zobrist, Tampa Bay Rays

“*Sexual Detox* is just what we need. It is clear, honest, and biblical, written with a tone that is knowing but kind, exhortative but gracious, realistic but determined. We have been given by Tim Challies a terrific resource for fighting sin and exalting Christ.

Owen Strachan, Boyce College



[Servanthood as Worship](#)

The Privilege of Life in a Local Church

by Nate Palmer

We [serve] because he first [served] us. - 1 John 1:19 [sort of]

What ever happened to servanthood? Here is a biblical presentation of our calling to serve in the church, motivated by the grace that is ours in the gospel.

"In an age where the church can be likened to Cinderella - beautiful, but largely ignored and forgotten - Nate Palmer's brief book forces us to rethink both the church and our relationship to her. In an age where egocentrism ensures we sing, 'O say, can you see - what's in it for me?' on a weekly basis, Palmer forces us to say instead, 'How can I best serve the church?' Looking at the needs of others rather than one's own is possibly the most serious deficiency in the church today. Reading this book will help redress the deficiency. I heartily recommend it."

Derek W.H. Thomas, Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson)

"Think of these pages as a handbook. It contains a sustainable, practical vision for serving in the local church that is powered by grace. Along the way, you'll get a mini theological education."

Justin Buzzard, pastor, San Francisco Bay Area, Buzzard Blog

"In our media-crazed, me-first culture, the art of the basin and the towel has been shoved off onto those who get paid to serve - certainly a call to serve in humility can't be God's will for all of us, or could it? Nate Palmer gets at the heart of our resistance. I strongly recommend this book."

Elyse Fitzpatrick, author of Because He Loves Me