

## Enthroning the Interpreter: Dangerous Trends in Law and Theology - Part

### IV

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The first two articles in this four-part series showed that proper legal and biblical interpretation involves pursuing authorial intent through the mechanism of a literal hermeneutic. The underlying philosophy behind such an approach is to dethrone the interpreter's personal ideological or theological preferences and instead to enthrone what is objectively revealed in the text. In other words, the goal of applying a literal hermeneutic is to transfer the authority in the interpretive process away from the dynamic and subjective imagination of the interpreter and instead toward the objective standard of the unchanging text. Part three of this series traced an erosion of this time-honored principle in the area of constitutional interpretation. Because modern judicial philosophy determines the Constitution's meaning based upon what the judge says it means rather than based upon what the document actually says, the true authority in the interpretive process has transferred from the text to the interpreter.

Sadly, as will be demonstrated in this final article, a similar shift in authority is also detectable in the field of evangelical, biblical interpretation. In the legal arena, this trend is not necessarily discernible in all facets of legal interpretation but is particularly noticeable in the field of constitutional interpretation. Similarly, although this same trend is not necessarily apparent in all aspects of biblical interpretation, it is particularly observable in the way many modern interpreters approach the subjects of origins and eschatology. Thomas Ice offers an explanation as to why origins and eschatology are the two areas where modern evangelicals are most reluctant to apply a consistent, literal approach:

It is instructive that in the two major areas where we creatures have to take God's Word, and it alone as the basis for knowledge in that area, it is exactly these two areas that are under attack from much of evangelical scholarship. These

two areas are: first, what happened in the ancient past, when there were few or no creatures to observe events; and second, what will happen in the future. The past and the future are the main areas where we must take God's Word about what happened or will happen. Only God was there and I have no problem trusting His account of what has occurred and what will take place.<sup>1</sup>

## Substituting Reason for Revelation

Forty-six years ago Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost warned that abandoning the application of a consistent literal hermeneutic to eschatological truths could lead to dire consequences.<sup>2</sup> One of these consequences enumerated by Pentecost involved the biblical text becoming reduced to whatever seems reasonable to the interpreter.<sup>3</sup> Today, it seems that Pentecost's warnings are more relevant than ever as more and more interpreters are substituting their own standard of reasonableness for what the biblical text reveals through its plain language. Many modern interpreters seem to be applying a literal hermeneutic as long as the end result appeals to their common sense or is consistent with their theological presuppositions. When such a result is not reached, these interpreters begin to allegorize the text's plain language. As developed in the previous article, legal positivism gave jurists permission to abandon authorial intent in order to foist upon the Constitution their own ideological preferences concerning what an enlightened and evolved American society should look like. Similarly, many modern biblical interpreters

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Ice, "From a Garden to a City," in Thomas Ice, ed. *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, vol. 8 no. 12 (Dallas, TX: Pre-Trib Research Center, April 2004), 4.

<sup>2</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

substitute their own personal theological presupposition and sense of reasonableness in lieu of authorial intent.

### *Progressive Creationism*

Progressive creationism exemplifies such an approach. Popular progressive creationist Hugh Ross is a vocal proponent of the day-age theory or the belief that each of the creation days constitutes an extended period covering several hundred million years. Day age theorists reject the notion that the creation days represent consecutive 24-hour days. But how did Ross reach this conclusion? Van Bebber and Taylor explain as they respond to Ross' assertion that the day age view is the simplest way of reading the creation account:

As a 17 year old, Ross first read this scripture with the goal of comparing the Creation account to his knowledge of the 'scientific facts.' He was already convinced of the Big Bang and the age of the universe. He was already convinced of the progression of life forms found in the 'geological column.' Is it any wonder that as a teenager with an uncritical acceptance of science, he would find the 'simplest' reading of the Bible to agree with his preconceived views? His reading of the Bible was also done without knowledge of Hebrew or the rules of proper hermeneutics, and without any real understanding of biblical theology. Yet the conclusions that he arrived at by his 'simple' reading are what he still teaches today. His further Bible study and training have not affected his original opinion.<sup>4</sup>

In the process of embracing the day age view, Ross rejects some strong exegetical evidence favoring interpreting the creation days as ordinary days. For example, the words "morning and evening" are combined with the word day ("yom") 38 times outside of Genesis 1. In each

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Van Bebber and Paul S. Taylor, *Creation and Time*, 2d ed. (Gilbert, AZ: Eden Communications, 1994), 63-64.

instance, such a combination always refers to a literal 24-hour day meaning. Moreover, in every other instance in the Old Testament where the word day is used with a numerical ordinal modifier it represents a normal day. This holds true in at least 358 of the 359 times that day is used with a numerical modifier outside of Genesis 1.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Exodus 20:8-11 sets up the Israeli workweek on the basis of God's work in creation. Such an analogy would be significantly strained if the creation days were understood as something other than ordinary days. In addition, a perusal of how New Testament speakers and writers quoted the early chapters of Genesis demonstrates that they interpreted these texts in their ordinary sense.<sup>6</sup> Why should the creation days be treated any differently? In sum, little exegetical basis exists for taking the creation days as extended periods of time. The only logical reason for interpreting the creation days as anything other than ordinary days has to do with the presupposition of an old earth and a desire to harmonize the Genesis account with that presupposition.

Rather than altering the plain language of the text in order to accommodate their own presuppositions, perhaps progressive creationists should reevaluate their interpretations of the physical world. Standard definitions define science as something observable, testable, and repeatable.<sup>7</sup> Because Ross was not present to observe the creation event when it transpired and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 73. The only possible deviation is in Hosea 6:2. However, the Hebrew grammar of Hosea 6:2 shows that this passage is meant as a rhetorical device. See Ibid., 74-76. Interestingly, despite the rhetorical nature of Hosea 6:2, some scholars still see the possibility for the days in this verse to be understood as ordinary days. See Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 211.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Walt Brown provides a helpful chart of the 68 direct references to Genesis 1-11 found in the New Testament. This chart demonstrates that all of these references treat the early Genesis narrative historically and literally. See Walt Brown, *In the Beginning: Compelling Evidence for Creation and the Flood*, 7th ed. (Phoenix: Center for Creation Science, 2001), 283-84.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *In the Beginning*, 228.

because he certainly is incapable of repeating the creation event, his findings are best categorized as interpretations of data rather than scientific fact. Interpretations of this nature are certainly not infallible. This lack of infallibility is especially true considering the fact that other scientists, who are just as well credentialed as Ross, have selected differing interpretations of the same data that happen to better harmonize with biblical revelation.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, because Ross approached the creation account with the presupposition that the universe is billions of years old, he found it unreasonable to follow the authorial intent as determined through the application of a literal hermeneutic. Instead, he stretched out the creation days in order to accommodate his presuppositions and in the process violated numerous standard linguistic, grammatical, hermeneutical, and exegetical rules.<sup>9</sup> His hermeneutical approach therefore furnishes a textbook example of an interpreter substituting his own personal presuppositions and sense of reasonableness in lieu of the author's plain meaning.

### *Preterism*

Substitution of human reason in lieu of the author's plain meaning is also prevalent among evangelicals in the area of prophetic and eschatological interpretation. R.C. Sproul exemplifies such an interpretive approach through his advocacy of partial preterism. This theological system holds that most of Scripture's unfulfilled prophecies found their realization in A.D. 70. Sproul claims he adheres to the preterist interpretation because of the various texts found in the New

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<sup>8</sup> The previously referred to Walt Brown, who holds an earned doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, would be an example of such a scientist.

<sup>9</sup> For a thorough refutation of the teachings of Hugh Ross, see Mark Van Bebber and Paul S. Taylor, *Creation and Time*, 2d ed. (Gilbert, AZ: Eden Communications, 1994); Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004).

Testament that seem to indicate that Christ would return within the life span of His original audience (Rev 1:1, 3; 3:11; 22:6-7; 22:10, 12, 20). However, Sproul also claims that by promoting the preterist view, he believes that he is helping save biblical Christianity from modern skeptics who follow the thinking pattern of twentieth century liberals such as Bertrand Russell and Albert Schweitzer. Sproul notes that one of Russell's chief criticisms of the Jesus portrayed in the gospels is that Jesus was inaccurate with respect to the timing of His future return. Russell charged that Jesus failed to return during the time frame that he predicted. Sproul and other preterists answer this charge by saying that Jesus did in fact return in the first century. Christ returned spiritually through the military activities of Titus and the Roman army that destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, Sproul approaches Scripture with the presupposition that it is unreasonable to have a delay in Christ's Parousia lasting for thousands of years in light of Christ's promises to return soon. To overcome such unreasonableness, Sproul embraces a theological system that maintains that Christ came back invisibly in the form of the Roman armies in A.D. 70. However, to reach such a conclusion Sproul must reject the plain language of scripture by wildly allegorizing Scripture's prophecies. Such excessive allegorization is necessary in order to fit scripture's predicted global events into the local event of A.D. 70. For example, Revelation predicts that the entire sea will be turned to blood (Rev 16:3), half of the world's population will be destroyed (Rev 6:4; 9:15), and the greatest earthquake in human history will occur (Rev 16:18). How can these prophesied global events have been fulfilled in the local Jewish War of A.D. 70? The ordinary import of Revelation's words and phrases makes it impossible to argue that most of the book's contents have already been fulfilled in a past local event. Thus, in order for the preterist system to work, the plain language of the text must be abandoned.

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<sup>10</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 13.

Preterists accuse futurists of also abandoning the plain language of the various passages predicting Christ's soon return.<sup>11</sup> However, this charge is unfounded. A more plausible alternative is to understand these texts qualitatively rather than chronologically. These texts could be describing the *manner* of Christ's return rather than *when* he will return. In other words, prophecies concerning Christ's soon return could be saying that when the action comes, it will come suddenly and with great rapidity. The New Testament allows such a usage. For example, Acts 22:18 says, "Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me." Here "quickly" (ταχος) is used to depict how to leave Jerusalem rather than when to leave.

In sum, Sproul believes that it is unreasonable for Christ's coming to be delayed for thousands of years in light of Christ's predictions of His soon return. This presupposition forces him to adhere to an interpretation that teaches that Christ did return in the first century. However, this system only becomes viable to the extent that the interpreter rejects the plain meaning of Revelation's language regarding global judgment. Note the similar hermeneutical approach displayed by both Hugh Ross and Sproul. Ross must reject the creation account's plain language regarding ordinary creation days in order to accommodate his presupposition of an old universe. Similarly, Sproul must reject Revelation's plain language communicating global judgments in order to teach that most of the Bible's prophecies were fulfilled in the first century. Sproul does this for the purpose of accommodating his presupposition that a lengthy delay in Christ's coming is unreasonable. The point of similarity linking both interpreters involves their willingness to substitute their own personal presupposition and sense of reasonableness in lieu of the author's plain meaning.

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<sup>11</sup> Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 56.

## *Allegorization in the Apocalypse*

Many evangelicals also practice reducing the plain meaning of Scripture to the interpreter's private standard of reasonableness as they attempt to interpret John's Apocalypse. For example, preterist Kenneth Gentry contends that Revelation 20:1-10 does not necessarily limit the length of the duration of Christ's reign to a thousand years. Gentry explains, "Only one place in all of scripture limits Christ's rule to a thousand years: Revelation 20:1-10, a half chapter in the most highly figurative book in the Bible."<sup>12</sup> Despite the fact that the thousand year reign of Christ is mentioned no less than six times in Revelation 20:1-10, Gentry feels no obligation to be constrained by these clear textual statements. His reasons for ignoring what the text says include the fact that the duration of Christ's rule is only mentioned in Revelation 20, the information that speaks of the duration of Christ's rule only comprises half of Revelation 20, and elsewhere Revelation makes use of numerous symbols. Here, Gentry has introduced three arguments that really have nothing to do with what Revelation 20 actually says as rationalizations for why he should not be bound by Revelation 20's clear language. In other words, Gentry has substituted his own personal standard of what is logical or what makes sense to him in lieu of scripture's plain teaching.

Elsewhere, Gentry furnishes his rationalization as to why he refuses to employ a consistent literal approach in deciphering John's Apocalypse:

Some instances of literalism seem to me to be strange, unreasonable, and unnecessary. For example, Robert Thomas holds that the eerie locusts of Revelation 9 and the strange frogs of Revelation 16 are literally demons who take on those peculiar physical forms, that the two prophets of Revelation 11 literally

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "A Preterist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 82.

spew fire from their mouths, that every mountain in the world will be abolished during the seven bowl judgments, that the fiery destruction of the literal city of Babylon will smolder for more than 1000 years, that Christ will return from heaven on a literal horse, and that the new Jerusalem is literally a 1500-mile high cube.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, Gentry rejects the application of literalism in Revelation because it runs the risk of producing results that he finds personally “strange, unnecessary, and unreasonable.” If Gentry only accepts biblical ideas that appeal to his standard of reasonableness, then the text is no longer the authority in the interpretive process. Instead, Gentry becomes the authority. However, the issue in accepting biblical truth should not be based upon what seems reasonable to the interpreter but rather what the text reveals. Whether the text’s meaning appeals to the interpreter’s common sense or not is irrelevant. If Gentry were to consistently apply his subjective reasonableness test to the rest of Scripture, there are many biblical truths that Gentry would be forced to reject. Scripture often presents truths that contradict man’s common sense, such as floating axe heads, the collapsing of the walls of Jericho after Joshua’s troops had marched around them seven times, and even the preaching of the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:23). Using Gentry’s logic, the Apostle Peter would have rejected some of Paul’s teaching since Peter indicated that some of the writing of Paul are difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:16).

Other examples of interpreters who reduce Revelation’s plain teaching to their own personal standard of reasonableness are those who insist that the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21–22 must be understood symbolically on account of the city’s large size. Apparently, a city 1500 miles long, wide and high (Rev 21:16) is simply too big for many interpreters to grasp.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 40.

Consequently, they begin to allegorize these dimensions.<sup>14</sup> According to Swete, “Such dimensions defy imagination and are permissible only in the language of symbolism.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Barnes concludes, “Of course, this must preclude all idea of there being such a city literally in Palestine...this cannot be understood literally; and the very idea of a literal fulfillment of this shows the absurdity of that method of interpretation...this cannot be taken literally; and an attempt to explain all of this literally would show that that method of interpreting the Apocalypse is impracticable.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Grant notes that there is “no clearer proof...that all is figurative. Such a height is simply out of harmony with the constitution of our world.”<sup>17</sup> Like Gentry’s aforementioned interpretive philosophy, the issue to these interpreters is not what Scripture plainly reveals but rather whether the ordinary import of Revelation’s words and phrases appeal to their personal standard of rationality and common sense.

### *Ezekiel’s Millennial Sacrifices*

Nowhere is the interpreter’s willingness to lay aside his presuppositions more severely tested than in how he deciphers the predictions of the millennial temple and sacrifices as depicted in Ezekiel 40-48. Many interpreters reflexively and instinctively allegorize this section of Scripture because it is difficult for them to harmonize its plain language with statements found in Hebrews

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<sup>14</sup> The following list was originally compiled in Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1974), 285-86.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1907), 289.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1968), 1722.

<sup>17</sup> P.W. Grant, *The Revelation of John* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 593; cited in Tan, *Interpretation of Prophecy*, 286.

indicating that Christ's death rendered obsolete the animal sacrifices instituted under the Mosaic Law. Preterist Gary DeMar adheres to such an approach when he notes, "The Book of Hebrews was written to show beyond a shadow of a doubt that the entire Old Covenant system—with its priest, sacrifices, ceremonies, and temple—has been done away with in Christ."<sup>18</sup> DeMar's solution to this apparent contradiction is to allegorize Ezekiel 40-48. He maintains:

The prophecy of Ezekiel's temple is a picture of the restored covenant community that returned to the land after the exile. The vision should not be projected 2500 years into the future into some earthly millennial kingdom where sacrifices will be offered *for atonement* in the presence of the crucified Christ.<sup>19</sup>

However, by allegorizing in this manner, DeMar ends up rejecting the plain import of Ezekiel 40-48. Nowhere does Ezekiel even hint at the notion that his description of the temple and its sacrifices are to be understood non-literally. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case. Ezekiel goes to great lengths to record the minute details of the millennial temple. The people involved as well as the geographical notations are discussed with great specificity. Moreover, the revelatory angel instructs Ezekiel to record all of the minute details of the temple vision so that he might declare them to the House of Israel. Such instruction would be meaningless if the details of the vision are not to be understood plainly. In addition, Ezekiel employs a formula to inform his readers when he is speaking non-literally. He explains that a particular item is symbolic and then interprets the symbols for the reader. For example, in Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel explains that the valley of dry bones is symbolic and then he interprets this symbol as the House of Israel. No such formula is employed in Ezekiel 40-48.

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<sup>18</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 4th rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1999), 97.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

In essence, because a literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48 contradicts DeMar's theological presuppositions and because the power of his own reasoning process cannot harmonize Ezekiel 40-48 with Hebrews, he attempts to resolve this tension by allegorizing Ezekiel's temple vision. Thus, DeMar represents another example of an interpreter who reduces Scripture's plain meaning to the level of his own private standard of reasonableness.

Hebrew-Christian scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains the fallacy of such an approach:

Do we really have to fully understand all the whys and wherefores in order to take a passage literally? Our critics claim that just because we cannot justify the Millennial sacrifices in light of the Messiah's sacrifice, these chapters cannot be literal. But is such a presupposition valid? I suspect that an Old Testament saint who understood Isaiah 53 literally would have concluded that the Messiah would be the final sacrifice for sin. But how would that correlate with the Law of Moses that prohibited human sacrifices. He may not have been able to answer all of the questions raised by the Law of Moses, but that would not have justified allegorizing all of the prophecies of Isaiah 53 away and in the course of progressive revelation and the coming of Messiah, the apparent contradiction became clear. The same thing may be true with the Millennial sacrifices. We may not be able to answer all of the questions that the book of Hebrews raises concerning the prophecies of the Book of Ezekiel, but that is not a good reason to automatically resort to allegorizing Ezekiel away. The final and complete answer may only come with further progressive revelation that will come with the return of the Messiah. . . we do have the answers to the questions raised over the literal temple and sacrifices, but even these answers may not answer all the questions and issues. But a lack of a complete understanding of all the issues raised never

justifies the dismissal of the literal interpretation. It is for the critic to explain exegetically from the passage itself, why it is not literal.<sup>20</sup>

According to Fruchtenbaum, those seeking to maintain the literality of both Ezekiel and Hebrews have produced plausible solutions for harmonizing these different areas of Scripture that do not resort to allegorization. Such a solution might involve viewing the millennial sacrifices as memorial in the same way communion is practiced to memorialize Christ's death. Perhaps a better solution may entail viewing the sacrifices as removing ceremonial uncleanness and preventing defilement from polluting the millennial temple.<sup>21</sup> Another possibility could include highlighting the numerous differences between the Law of Moses and what is described in Ezekiel 40-48. Emphasizing these differences could be used to argue that Ezekiel 40-48 is not really a return to the Mosaic Law and therefore it does not violate the New Testament teaching that the Law terminated with Messiah's death.<sup>22</sup>

However, even if these solutions do not answer all the questions or did not even exist at all, no justification would exist for allegorizing the plain language of Scripture. The discrepancy may become cleared up with the passage of time or the progress of revelation or at the Second Advent. Such an approach recognizes God's prerogative to reveal truths that are beyond human comprehension at the time they are given only to be made more understandable with the passage of time. A similar phenomenon occurs repeatedly throughout the Scriptures (Dan 12:4,9; 1 Peter

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<sup>20</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "The Millennial Temple-Literal or Allegorical?" (An unpublished paper presented to the Pre-Trib Study Group, Dallas, Texas, 2001), 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (July-September): 279-89.

<sup>22</sup> Fruchtenbaum, "The Millennial Temple-Literal or Allegorical?" 7-8.

1:10-11). However, the initial obtuseness of these truths does not furnish a justification for allegorizing away their plain meaning. In essence, Fruchtenbaum's interpretive approach is the exact opposite of the other previously described alternative. While the other alternative enthrones rationality and presupposition at the expense of Ezekiel's plain language, Fruchtenbaum enthrones the plain meaning of Ezekiel's vision at the expense of presupposition and subjective standards of reasonableness.

### *Abandonment of Classical Hermeneutical Principles*

The preceding discussion illustrates the fulfillment of Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost's warning. When a consistent, literal hermeneutic is abandoned, Scripture becomes held hostage to the interpreter's presuppositional bias and whatever he deems reasonable. Examples abound by observing the hermeneutical methods employed by progressive creationism, preterism, allegorical approaches to the Apocalypse, and allegorical approaches to Ezekiel 40-48. All of these approaches at some point substitute presupposition and a subjective standard of interpretive reasonableness in place of the text's plain language. Thus, these approaches represent a marked departure from classical hermeneutical philosophy as articulated by hermeneutical authorities such as Milton Terry and Bernard Ramm. According to Terry:

We...should aim...to place ourselves in the position of the sacred writers, and study to obtain the impression their words would have naturally made upon the minds of the first readers...Still less should we allow ourselves to be influenced by any presumptions of what the Scriptures ought to teach...All such presumptions are uncalled for and prejudicial.<sup>23</sup> He [the interpreter] must not

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<sup>23</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (NY: Philips and Hunt, 1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 595.

allow himself to be influenced by hidden meanings, and spiritualizing processes, and plausible conjectures.<sup>24</sup>

According to Ramm:

The danger of having a set theological system is that in the interpretation of Scripture the system tends to govern the interpretation rather than the interpretation correcting the system... Calvin said that the Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at will. Rather it is the Word of God whose teachings must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

This series of articles has chronicled the rise and fall of literal interpretation in both the legal and theological fields. While both disciplines are built upon the pursuit of authorial intent through an investigation of what the author has plainly revealed, the time-honored principle of literal interpretation has also experienced steady erosion in both fields. In the legal field, the influence of legal positivism has shifted the authority in determining what the Constitution means away from the Constitutional text itself and toward the ideological predilections of the judiciary. In biblical interpretation, particularly in the area of origins and eschatology, the abandonment of consistent literalism has often reduced the biblical text to whatever seems reasonable to the interpreter.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 152-53.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3d ed. (Boston: W.A. Wilde, 1956; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 115-16

This battle over biblical interpretation is nothing new. It reaches all the way back to Augustine, who, while approaching the rest of the scripture literally, treated prophecy as a special case that required a non literal hermeneutic.<sup>26</sup> The underlying motive behind this interpretive battle is also nothing new. According to Walvoord:

It's not too difficult to account for the widespread approval of the spiritualizing method adopted by many conservative theologians as well as liberal and Roman Catholic expositors. Fundamentally its charm lies in its flexibility. The interpreter can change the literal and grammatical sense of Scripture to make it coincide with his own system of interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

It all really has to do with the age-old issue of pride. The central question is: will interpreters humbly accept what God has plainly revealed even when it contradicts their presuppositions or personal standard of rationality? Or will they attempt to protect their presuppositions by explaining away Scripture's plain meaning through the adoption of an allegorical hermeneutical approach? As interpreters and teachers of God's Word, let us see to it that we do not stray from consistent literalism so we are able to give His message, rather than our own, to His people.

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<sup>26</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 54.

<sup>27</sup> John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 60.

