

The Doctrine of the Word of God

(Preliminary Draft, 1st Edition)

Preface

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In Memory of
Edmund P. Clowney
(1917-2005)

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And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Ex. 31:18)

"Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ² that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:1-9)

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Josh. 1:8)

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Ps. 19:7-11)

In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, ¹¹ in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? (Ps. 56:10-11)

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17-19)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

(John 1:1-3)

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

...Scripture cannot be broken. (John 10:35)

If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. (1 Cor. 14:37)

...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

(2 Tim. 3:15-17)

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

Preface

I turn 70 in April, 2009. My father died at age 72, in 1980. They discovered that he had acute leukemia, and he was gone in six months. So I find myself more and more often calculating the implications of mortality. I am not morose, and for now I am in good health. I believe in Jesus Christ and anticipate a glorious reunion with him before too long. But while I am here I need to put a fresh emphasis on redeeming the time. There are a lot of affairs I would like to put in order, if God wills. This book is one of them.

I have published three big fat books in a series called *A Theology of Lordship*. These are *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (DKG), *Doctrine of God* (DG), and *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (DCL). The present volume, DWG, is the final planned volume of the series. In a way I have been planning this book longer than the others. I worked on the doctrine of revelation and Scripture during my doctoral program at Yale (alas, leaving the dissertation unfinished). Through forty years as a seminary teacher, I have taught the course *Doctrine of the Word of God* every year, and I have written a great many articles and book reviews on

this subject. I have accumulated about 600 pp. of reading notes on the literature of the field, typed, single-spaced, and concise. I have hoped that I can finish DWG before God takes me home.

But there are many other things to do, and writing such a big book is a large job. About fifteen years elapsed between DKG and DG. That happened because my Lordship books require a lot of research, and because my other work required me to do a lot of other things, labeled urgent. Those other urgent things continue to beckon me, and I think it humanly impossible that I could finish DWG, as originally planned, in two or three years.

So, just in case God doesn't allow me to finish DWG according to my plan, I would like to leave behind the present draft, a kind of summary. I have in my mind a pretty clear idea of the basic case I'd like to set forth. So I think I can summarize the book now, and add to it later, if God permits. This summary will contain very little documentation: relatively few citations of historical and current writers. I will be more careful than I usually am to avoid rabbit trails. Here I will simply outline my basic contentions and their basic arguments, so that these will be on the table for discussion, even if all my research is not.

If God permits I will add to this book over the next years. I'm not worthy of being compared to Calvin, but perhaps this book will grow over the years like the successive editions of Calvin's *Institutes*. Or perhaps I shall write an additional book or two, dealing with the history and contemporary discussion of the word of God and Scripture.

On the other hand, maybe I will not expand this project at all. To tell the truth, I rather like this concise version, and I have some worry that it might even be harmed if I add to it a great deal of interaction with historical and contemporary literature. Regular readers of my work know that I am critical of the typical method of modern theologians (including evangelical theologians) who include in their writing a great deal of interaction with other theologians and very little interaction with Scripture itself. Interaction with the theological literature is useful in a number of ways. But most important is what Scripture itself tells us. It has always been my purpose to emphasize the latter, even though more of the former might have gained for my work a greater level of acceptance. Focus on Scripture without the theological environs gives my argument a kind of starkness, a kind of sharpness, that I want it to have. So this concise version of DWG may turn out to be the final version, regardless of how many more years God gives me.

Thanks to many who have shared kind words and constructive criticisms of the other books in this series. To those who have noted that these books are too "self-referential," that I refer too often to other writings of mine, I would reply that that is the nature of the *Theology of Lordship* series. In my view, this series is a single project, setting forth a unified vision of the theology of Scripture. I believe

most of my readers understand this, and that I am doing them a service by referring to parallel discussions of issues from volume to volume. This is simply a supplement to the indices, analytical outlines, and tables of contents, a reference tool. I hope that practice doesn't draw too much attention to myself; I don't intend that, and I don't believe that it does. But in any case, I think these references perform a service to those who are interested in the *Lordship* project as a whole.

A few words about the dedication of this book. Edmund P. Clowney was the first President of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. He was a teacher, friend, and mentor to me during my student years at Westminster (1961-64) and until his death a few years ago. From 1968-80 we were colleagues at Westminster in Philadelphia, and from 1980-2000 at Westminster in California. Westminster in Philadelphia during my student days was a wonderful place in which to study the doctrine of Scripture. Practically every professor made some major contribution to the defense of biblical authority. But Ed Clowney seemed to me to be the best at setting forth the big picture, that Scripture asserts the authority of God's word on nearly every page, in one way or another, and that the Christian life in its essence is a faithful response to the word of God. Ed never wrote a major work on this subject, but the present volume seeks to set forth his vision.

Ed and I disagreed on a number of things that were important to both of us: the regulative principle of worship, the appropriateness of contemporary songs and instrumentation in worship, the pre-eminence of biblical theology in sermon preparation, the "two kingdoms" view of Christ and Culture, and the value of Norman Shepherd's theology. These issues have produced factions in Reformed circles, with one party trying to exclude another from the Reformed community. But the friendship between Ed and me was never disrupted by this kind of division. He respected my Reformed commitment, even when others questioned it, and I treasured his faithfulness, wisdom, and kindness, to the end of his life. I seek to honor him here, as well as to emulate his theology of the word of God.

At the suggestion of my editor, and following the usual current practice, I have chosen to capitalize *Word* when it refers to Christ and to use lower case in all other instances. This decision does not imply any lesser respect for the word in other forms, such as God's direct voice, the word as prophecy, or the word as Scripture.

I wish to express thanks to the Board, Administration, and Faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary for granting me a study leave for the spring term of 2007, which helped my preparation to write this book. Thanks again also to P&R Publishers for their support of my work over many years, and especially to _____, who edited this volume.

Abbreviations of Commonly Cited Titles

DCL: Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008).

DG: Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002).

DKG: Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987).

WCF: Westminster Confession of Faith

WLC: Westminster Larger Catechism

WTJ: Westminster Theological Journal

WSC: Westminster Shorter Catechism

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