



Annual Book Review 2006

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It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. With the summer months ahead of you I expect that you will find yourself lying in your hammock in the cool summer evening breeze with a good book in your hands. Or maybe your style is the beach with the warm sun on your face, your feet in the sand and a book in your hand. Or maybe you're like me, trying to cram in a portion of a chapter in between weeding the garden, mowing the lawn, answering phone calls, and preparing for the next wave of traveling family members coming to visit.

So if you are looking for a good book to hold in one hand while you push the mower with the other, I offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the last year.

Theology

The Sovereign Grace of God by *James R. White* (GC Books, 198pgs). Anything by James R. White is worth reading. White asserts that a proper understanding of the gospel rests on rightly understanding the nature of God and the nature of man. White offers a biblical defense of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man. Being the leading debater of Roman Catholic apologists, James White understands well the historical and theological issues upon which the Reformation hinged. If you want a good readable study of the reformed doctrines of grace, I heartily recommend this book.

Scripture Alone by *James R. White* (Bethany House, 217 pgs). One of the battle cries of the reformation was Sola Scriptura or Scripture alone. Yet

today, many protestants don't understand what the Bible teaches concerning its own sufficiency and authority. Typical of his readable and engaging style, apologist James White explains what we mean by the "sufficiency of Scripture" in chapters like *Three Arguments Related to Scriptural Sufficiency*, and *Did Thomas Write a Gospel?*

This last year I have done some concentrated reading on the subject of eschatology (end times). I have plowed through four major books on the subject of millennialism since the beginning of this year.

The Millennial Kingdom by *John Walvoord* (Zondervan, 373 pgs). This book was my text for Eschatology class at Bible College. It had been almost 15 years since I had studied the issues surrounding the millennial/amillennial/postmillennial debate. Walvoord (once Chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary) gives a thorough treatment of the nature of Abrahamic Covenant and its end-times ramifications.

Serving with Walvoord at Dallas Theological Seminary was *J. Dwight Pentecost*, author of ***Thy Kingdom Come*** (Kregel, 360 pgs). This book gives a cursory treatment of all the covenants in Scripture and how they relate to each other as he traces God's Kingdom program and covenant promises through history.

Millennialism: The Two Major Views by *Charles L. Feinberg* (BMH Books, 366). This book is not an easy read, but it is thorough. Millennialism has gone through three editions since its original publication in 1936. It provides a good comparison and contrast of the amillennial and premillennial philosophies of history

and approaches to Scripture.

Walvoord, Pentecost, and Feinberg all produced good books, but there is one I read that was great.

The Greatness of the Kingdom by Alva J. McClain (BMH Books, 556 pgs.) Occasionally there comes along a book that causes me to exclaim, "Where have you been all my life?!" This book is one of those. One man said of Alva McClain that he had "the finest grasp of the significance of the biblical teaching about the Kingdom of God of any man of our generation." I heartily agree. Perhaps no other book that I have read on the subject of eschatology was so thorough, so well written and so engaging as this book. **Warning:** If you don't want thoroughness, don't pick up this book.

McClain traces the concept of the Kingdom of God from creation all the way through the book of Revelation. Committed to a literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture, McClain offers the finest defense of the premillennial philosophy of history that I have ever read. If I had to select one book on the subject of Eschatology that is best on my shelf, it would be *The Greatness of the Kingdom*.

Leadership/Preaching/Counseling

Blame it on the Brain by Edward T. Welch (P&R Publishing, 208 pgs). The tendency of our culture is to blame all types of sin (drunkenness, homosexuality, drug addiction, etc) on chemical imbalances or brain disorders. Is there validity to this? What role does the brain and its chemicals play in all this? Edward T. Welch (a nouthetic counselor) tackles the tough questions of Alzheimer's Disease, dementia, head injury, psychiatric problems, depression, ADD, alcoholism, and homosexuality from a thoroughly biblical perspective.

The Supremacy of God in Preaching by John Piper (Baker Books, 119 pgs). Piper asserts that "we are starving for God," and that our deepest need is to encounter the majesty of God in His Word. So, says Piper, "Our people need to hear God-entranced preaching." In short, God, not man, is to be supreme in the act of preaching. The first half of the book develops that theme around the Goal of Preaching, the Ground of Preaching, the Gift of Preaching, and the Gravity and Gladness of Preaching. The second half of the book is

a survey of preaching in the life of Jonathan Edwards.

Piper concludes with, "*If God is not supreme in our preaching, where in this world will the people hear about the supremacy of God? If we do not spread a banquet of God's beauty on Sunday morning, will not our people seek in vain to satisfy their inconsolable longing with the cotton candy pleasures of pastimes and religious hype?*"

C.H. Spurgeon on Spiritual Leadership by Steve Miller (Moody Publishers, 200 pgs). I find it difficult to read anything either written or spoken by Spurgeon without wearing out a highlighter! This book brings together some of the greatest Spurgeon quotes on the subject of prayer, faith, holiness, service, the Word of God, preaching and evangelism. If you enjoy Spurgeon, you'll love this book.

Apologetics

Christianity on Trial: Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry by Vincent Carroll and David Shiflett (Encounter Books, 244 pgs). Christianity gets maligned and blamed for everything from environmental disasters to the extermination of Jews in Nazi Germany to the mistreatment of the American Indians. One of the untold stories of Christianity is its contribution to mankind and to history. In the words of the authors, "Our purpose here is to rectify the common distortions of Christianity's role in history and tell the neglected story of its contributions, particularly where these have been most maligned."

You'll be amazed to read the untold story of Christianity in chapters titled, *Christianity and the Foundation of the West*, *Christianity and Slavery*, *Christianity and Science*, *Christianity and the Third Reich*, *Christianity and the Environment*, and *Christianity and the American Democracy*, among others.

Preparing myself for the release of *The Da Vinci Code* the movie, involved reading ***The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction*** by Hank Hanegraaff and Paul Maier (Tyndale House, 80 pgs). Historian Paul Maier deals with the factual errors in *The Da Vinci Code* while Hanegraaff offers a well-reasoned defense of historic Christianity.

The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers by Josh

McDowell (Green Key Books, 112 pgs) does an even better job of presenting a response to Dan Brown's attack on the Christian faith. McDowell offers more details in an even more readable format. Both responses to *The Da Vinci Code* books are good reads.

Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus by John MacArthur, Jr. (Thomas Nelson, 218 pgs). MacArthur offers up a piercing evaluation of the "seeker-friendly" philosophy that is infiltrating the American church scene and poisoning the effectiveness of the gospel. This is another in a long line of great books by MacArthur dealing with the "easy believism" gospel (see also ***The Gospel According to Jesus*** and ***The Gospel According to the Apostles***).

This book offers not only a critic of the seeker-centered church, but also will give you an appreciation for the glory, wisdom, and grace of God as revealed in the saving gospel.

Biographical

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years, 1899-1939, Volume 1 by Iain H. Murray (Banner of Truth Trust, 400 pgs) and ***D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981, Volume 2*** by Iain H. Murray (Banner of Truth Trust, 831 pgs). I actually started volume one of this biography in the spring of 2004 and read volume 2 during the summer of 2005. It took me a while to plow through 1200 pages (small print with few pictures) of biography on D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, but it was well worth it.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is one of my heroes of the faith. Only a handful of men in the history of the church have been as widely admired and as mightily used by God as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. There were times in reading this biography that I was literally moved to tears.

Lloyd-Jones had a spine of steel and a commitment to the exposition of Scripture. Sound in doctrine and committed to the faith, Lloyd-Jones was used by God to stem the rising tide of modernism in Britain, and call the church back to the historic Christian faith. If you like detail, biography, and theology, you'll love this two volume work.

Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon

Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards by Elisabeth D. Dodds (Audubon Press, 225 pgs). I have read a biography on Edwards that deals with his theology, one that deals with his life, and some that deal with his preaching. As you can guess from the title, this work tells us about the Edwards's family life. The book is as much about Sarah Edwards as it is about Jonathan Edwards. This biography offers you a peek into the home of the greatest theological and philosophical mind that America has ever produced. Edwards influenced the founding of the American Republic and his theological influence is felt even today. Read the book and find out how his home life contributed to that influence.

The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther and Calvin by John Piper (Crossway Books, 156 pgs). This is Book One in a series of mini-biographies in The Swans Are Not Silent series.

One chapter each is devoted to Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. Piper shows how Augustine found liberating power in a life of holy joy in God and God alone. Piper offers a quick survey of main events in the upbringing, conversion, and ministry of St. Augustine and then draws some great lessons for us.

From the life of Luther, Piper demonstrates the role of the sacred study of the Word of God in Luther's thought and life. You'll learn things that you never new about Luther and be amazed by his commitment to the exhaustive study of the Scriptures.

Calvin shows us the influence of a man committed to biblical preaching. He was committed to the manifestation of the glory of God in the exposition of Scripture and his preaching ministry is an intimidating example to any man who stands in a pulpit.

Piper offers an honest evaluation of the flaws of these three men, something you don't find too often in biographies. In a chapter titled Four Lessons from the Lives of Flawed Saints, Piper challenges us to a little personal introspection.

Devotional

There are few among us that do not wish that we had better prayer lives. The request of the disciples, "Lord, teach me to pray," has probably found its place

on your lips as often as it has on mine. I have found that most books on the subject of prayer are more fluffy than factual and appeal to our emotions in an attempt to “guilt” us into a better prayer life. It was a delight to find an exception to that in ***A Journey to Victorious Praying: Finding Discipline and Delight in Your Prayer Life*** by *Bill Thrasher* (Moody Publishers, 250 pgs). In an easy and enjoyable fashion, Thrasher offers some practical advice and biblical wisdom for enjoying God in prayer.

Although I don't agree with everything in the writings of C.S. Lewis, I did enjoy his children's fiction series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I wanted to brush up on my Chronicles knowledge before the release of the movie, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* so I picked up ***The Soul of the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*** by *Gene Veith* (Victor, 218 pgs). Gene Veith offers a great treatment of the symbolism and Christian worldview behind Lewis's fantasy works in The Chronicles of Narnia series. Part one of the book deals with Lewis's goal of communicating biblical truth through his books. Part two of the book deals with the touchy subject of Christians and fantasy. Should Christians read fantasy? Is there such a thing as “good fantasy?” What makes for good fantasy and bad? How can I know the difference?

Miscellaneous

Free to Choose by *Milton Friedman* (Avon, 330 pgs). Judging from the title, you may think that this book belongs in the theology section. Actually, it is not a theological book, nor is it even a “Christian” book. ***Free to Choose*** is a defense of free market economics and the American capitalistic system. The book was recommended to me by Dave Rich who promised me that it would answer many of my questions regarding the free market and the capitalist economic philosophy. I was not disappointed. I actually found myself reading large portions of the book to Diedre who enjoyed it as much as I did.

This book was a favorite of former President Ronald Reagan and formed the foundation for the economic policies of his administration. I figured understanding Friedman's book would help me understand Reagan and I was right. Reagan's commitment to smaller

government, freedom of choice, and individual responsibility was largely forged by Friedman's work. I found myself reading words in Friedman that were later spoken in speeches by Reagan.

With so much misinformation floating around about markets, supply and demand, government intervention, and “protecting the consumer” you might want to spend some time digesting this book. If you think that Wal-Mart and “Big Oil” is the focus of evil in our modern world, you need to get a bit of Economics 101 from Milton Friedman.

Well, that is all for this year. With all the exercise your body will get this summer in the yard, at the beach, and in the great outdoors, don't neglect your mind. Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. Make time to feed your mind, stretch yourself, and feast your soul upon some good books. Never, **never**, **NEVER** forget that in all your reading, don't neglect the Book, which alone is able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation and build you up in the most holy faith. Don't neglect the bread of life!

Without Wax -

