



Annual Book Review 2008

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It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. The summer months are on us, and I trust that they will bring opportunity to imbibe deeply in some good books! So if you are looking for some good ideas, I offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the last year.

Theology

I am going to start this year's list with a book that I consider to be easily the best book I have read in the last 12 months: **Heaven** by Randy Alcorn (Tyndale House Publishers, 492 pgs.). This is not one of those "I went to heaven and spent 30 minutes there and got a tour from Gabriel" type books. **Heaven** is a biblical, exegetical, and theological explanation of our eternal home. The Bible has far more to say concerning heaven than most of us realize. You will be amazed!

The book is wisely divided into three major parts. Part 1 deals with the theology of heaven and physical resurrection. Part 2 deals with questions concerning heaven. Part 3 helps us to orient our lives with a heavenward perspective. One important warning: You will be tempted to skip the theology of heaven and skip right to the questions section to get answers to questions like: Will There Be Space and Time?, Will the New Earth Have Sun, Moon, Oceans, and Weather?, Will We Eat and Drink on the New Earth?, What Will Our Daily Lives Be Like?, Will Animals Inhabit the New Earth?, Will Animals, Including Our Pets, Live Again?, Will There be Arts, Entertainment, and Sports?, and many more! Don't give in to that temptation. Don't skip ahead!

The joy and delight of this book is following the argument that Alcorn develops from chapter to chapter.

You will not enjoy this book as much if you skip ahead. Unless you understand the theology of physical resurrection and the New Earth and New Heavens, then the answers in Part 2 will strike you as silly, far-fetched, and unbiblical. However, it won't be Alcorn's answers that are unbiblical, but your understanding that is lacking. You probably suffer from Christoplatonism's false assumptions. What is Christoplatonism? You'll find out in Appendix A.

Get this book and read it! Read it slowly. Read it thoughtfully. Read it prayerfully. It will make your mouth water for your eternal home!

Evangelism & The Sovereignty of God by J.I. Packer (InterVarsity Press, 126 pgs.). I have been told for years that this book is the classic on understanding evangelism in light of the Sovereignty of God. So I finally bought it and found that "the half had not been told me." You will find your mind stretched and your heart enlarged. You'll see how the Sovereign grace of God in salvation does not hinder evangelism, but motivates us to evangelism and gives us that undying confidence that was evident in the life of Paul.

The Mystery of Providence by John Flavel (Banner of Truth Trust, 221 pgs.). Originally published in 1678, this book explains the doctrine of providence, gives evidence of providence, and explains the benefits of meditating on the works of God's providence. It is a Puritan writing, so be prepared for some heavy reading.

The Gospel According to Jesus by John MacArthur, Jr. (Zondervan, 284 pgs.) is a book that launched a firestorm of controversy. I first read this book back in 1994 when the whole lordship salvation vs. non-lordship salvation debate first came to my attention. I enjoyed the

book back then and I figured it was time to read it again and then to follow it up with its sequel (see below). In this book, MacArthur shows from the gospels what Jesus taught concerning the nature of saving faith. Did Jesus ever teach that it was possible for one to be saved without acknowledging Him as Lord? Or did Jesus demand repentance and obedient faith? This is a solid rebuke to the gospel of easy-believism so prevalent in our day.

The Gospel According to the Apostles by John MacArthur, Jr. (Nelson Books, 266 pgs.) is the sequel to ***The Gospel According to Jesus***. I enjoyed this book even more than I did the first book. MacArthur answers objections raised after the publishing of ***The Gospel According to Jesus***, showing the centrality of the call to repentance in the message and preaching of the Apostles. This is a must-read for anyone who seriously thinks they can have Christ's salvation without His Lordship.

One Minute After You Die by Erwin Lutzer (Moody Press, 144 pgs.) is a quick and easy read. I finished it in only two days. This book got put on my list after I was asked to preach a message on heaven at a seminar in Creston, British Columbia. Lutzer does a great job of summarizing the Bible's teaching on death, hell, heaven, and eternity. I'll bet there is plenty in this little book you have never even thought of before!

The Existence and Attributes of God, Vol. 1 by Stephen Charnock (Baker Book House, 606 pgs.) is a book I have been wanting to read for a couple years. I finally started it at the end of June 2007 and finished in the beginning of December 2007. The length of time I spent in the book is due to the fact that I only read 3-6 pages a day. That is how I would recommend that you digest this tome! Written in the 1680s, this incredibly thorough treatment of the attributes of God includes discourses titled: On the Existence of God, On Practical Atheism, On God's Being a Spirit, On Spiritual Worship, On the Eternity of God, On the Immutability of God, On God's Omnipresence, On God's Knowledge, and On the Wisdom of God. This is not light reading by any stretch of the imagination, which is why I will save Volume 2 for next year! I can't wait!

Current Issues/Events

The Truth War by John MacArthur (Thomas Nelson, 215 pgs.) was an easy and engaging read. Much of it

was a treatment of subjects I was already familiar with, but I am someone who needs lots of review. Much of the book is an explanation and application of the book of Jude to modern heretics and false teachings which threaten the church, most specifically the Emergent Church Movement. MacArthur doesn't pull any punches as he "contends earnestly for the faith." His review of historical heresies that have attacked the church from the beginning (Judaism, Gnosticism, Arianism, Sabellianism) is well written and helpful.

Apologetics

In preparation to teach the God Wrote A Book! Adult Sunday School class, I needed to plow through a good number of books on the history of the Bible. Some of these books I have been through before, but most were new to me. They included:

From God To Us: How We Got Our Bible by Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix (Moody Press, 255 pgs.) is an older book. In fact, it was my textbook in Bible college for Doctrine class. The book is very detailed, yet easy to read. It does contain a lot of technical information which was appropriate for a first year Bible student, but you will find it a rewarding read if you want to learn more about how we got our Bible.

God Wrote A Book by James MacDonald (Crossway Books, 120 pgs.) is a great primer on the history of the Bible. The book's great strength lies in its readability and apologetic emphasis. Mostly written to the unbelieving skeptic, the book offers a great introductory treatment of the Bible's significance.

I did not use ***Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*** by R. Laird Harris (Zondervan, 294 pgs.) as much as I did some of the other resources, though it offers a more thorough treatment of the doctrines mentioned in its title.

The Canon of Scripture by F.F. Bruce (IVP, 334 pgs.) is a far deeper treatment of the subject of canonicity through church history than anything else on my shelf. Unless you have at least a basic working of church history, particularly early church history, you will have difficulty enjoying this book. But if you want a very thorough and scholarly treatment, this is the one to read.

How We Got the Bible by Neil R. Lightfoot (Baker Books, 220 pgs.) proved to be a great overview of the history of our Bible. Lightfoot deals with issues pertaining to different manuscript families, textual variants, and the transmission and translation of the text. It is an easy-to-

read survey and would serve as a great introduction to this subject.

If you are going to buy only one book on dealing with the history of our Bible, then pick up ***Nothing But the Truth: The Inspiration, Authority, and History of the Bible Explained*** by Brian H. Edwards (Evangelical Press, 492 pgs.). Don't be intimidated by the number of pages! It is very easy to read, very thorough. Edwards deals with not only the history of our Bible, but he delves into textual criticism, apparent contradictions and how to resolve them, canonicity (why are certain books in our Bible and others not) and even a chapter on Hermeneutics (interpretation).

I re-read ***The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?*** (Bethany House, 271 pgs.) this year. I read this book almost 10 years ago and have intended to read through it again ever since. Teaching the God Wrote A Book ! Sunday School series provided the needed excuse to pick this volume up and work through it a second time. I enjoyed it more on the second read than I did on the first! Anything written by James R. White will be worth your time. White does a great job of dismantling the arguments, muddled thinking, and incoherent reasoning of King James Only advocates such as G.A. Riplinger, Samuel Gipp, Peter Ruckman, Tex Marrs, and others. If you ever cross paths with a King James Only proponent, you will want to get a copy of this book and read it! This is the single best volume on this subject that I have ever seen.

A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life by Don and Joy Veinot and Ron Henzel (21st Century Press, 371 pgs.) has been sitting on my shelf for a couple years. I finally put it on my reading list and am glad I did. I attended a Gothard Basic Youth Conflicts Seminar during the summer of 1991 in Spokane. Even as a young Christian, immature in my faith and knowledge of Scripture, I had some serious concerns with Bill Gothard's use (or better, abuse) of Scripture in his teachings. It turns out, that I only saw the tip of the proverbial iceberg! This book does an excellent job of exposing the gross and prolific errors in Gothard's teaching. Bill Gothard's medical advice, "umbrella of authority," doctrine of courtship, authoritarianism, legalistic commitment to Old Testament ceremonial law (including circumcision), and his denial that grace is God's unmerited favor (a denial that strikes at the heart of the gospel) are all scrutinized in the light of Scripture.

Only two caveats concerning this book. First, there are a lot of typos in the book, which will drive some of you nuts. Second, it will make you sickened and sad that Gothard has so successfully masqueraded as an evangelical for so long and that his teachings and materials are so widely used among believers!

If you have not spent much time studying Creation Science from a young earth perspective, then ***The Six Days of Genesis: A Scientific Appreciation of Chapters 1-11*** by Paul F. Taylor (Master Books, 214 pgs.) is a great place to start. It is a devotional treatment, with a lot of scientific information pertaining to the issues raised in Genesis 1-11. For veterans of the Creation Science literature, you may find some new information here, but not a lot. The value of the book lies in that it is an easy read, even when dealing with some of the more technical details of the young earth creationist perspective.

Biographical

The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce by John Piper (Crossway Books, 166 pgs.) is the third book in a series of four (so far) of mini, subject-oriented biographies called The Swans Are Not Silent Series. Newton, Simeon, and Wilberforce were all contemporaries and all shared a deep and abiding perseverance in the face of opposition or hostility. Having seen *Amazing Grace*, I was particularly interested in this biography of William Wilberforce. What I have enjoyed about this series of books is the ability to get well-acquainted with some of these saints of old without having to pore through much longer and much more detailed biographies. I like getting the "Cliffs Notes" version of biographies. Even though short and concise, these books by Piper are still very challenging and motivating.

Miscellaneous

Second Thoughts by F.W. Boreham, D.D. (John Broadbanks Publishing, 56 pgs.). I heard Ravi Zacharias recommend anything by F.W. Boreham on one of his radio programs. Zacharias said, "I read something everyday by F.W. Boreham and I consider him to be the greatest Christian essayist I have ever read." I had never heard of Boreham before, but I figured anything that was part of the daily intellectual diet of a man like Ravi

Zacharias would certainly warrant my attention. So I purchased *Second Thoughts*, a collection of essays on second things. The essays were titled Second-Hand Things, The Second Crop, Second Fiddles, Our Second Wind, and Second Thoughts. This selection of essays by Boreham was not theological or apologetic, but a thought-provoking treatment of phrases and ideas we use every day. The writing style is readable, engaging, and vivid. He is a word smith extraordinaire and I enjoyed very much this selection of devotional-style material. I will be purchasing some more books by Boreham.

The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing by C.J. Mahaney (Multnomah) is a short read at only 85 pages. The book reminds us of the need to “preach the gospel to ourselves” as the reformers constantly emphasized. The gospel is for more than just getting saved. We need to constantly remind ourselves that every blessing we can ever hope to secure from God comes only and always through the death of Christ on the cross. Mahaney includes helpful reminders in chapters dedicated to the subjects of legalism, guilt and shame, and basing our life on what is real and not what we feel.

I have listened to C.S. Lewis’s ***The Screwtape Letters*** (Barbour, 160 pgs.) audiobook a couple of different times, but had never actually picked up the book to read it. Finally this year I decided to actually read the book. I started to read it to my children in the evenings. Taryn (11) enjoyed it and could follow the story for the most part. Shepley (9) had a more difficult time, and Ayden and Liam didn’t even bother sticking around to listen to my voice. I eventually stopped reading it to Taryn since some of the material was a little mature for her age.

The Screwtape Letters is a collection of letters (fictional) written from an experienced demon tempter named Screwtape to his understudy, Wormwood. Screwtape is Wormwood’s uncle and offers Wormwood counsel on how to keep his patient out of the Enemy’s (God’s) camp. Once Wormwood fails to keep his patient from becoming a Christian, Screwtape’s counsel is then directed to how to distract, tempt, divert, and otherwise stumble the patient. You will smile as you read these 31 short letters which describe, supposedly, a devil’s view of humanity and human destiny.

The Bottomless Well: The Twilight of Fuel, The

Virtue of Waste, and Why We will Never Run Out of Energy by Peter W. Huber and Mark P. Mills (Basic Books, 198 pgs.) will make you think about energy consumption and energy resources from a whole different perspective. For the last 30 years, I have heard repeatedly from pundits of every stripe of the looming energy crisis. Are the doom and gloom predictions true? Is the best thing we can do for ourselves and our environment to live off the land and eliminate power plants and internal combustion engines? Will we ever really run out of energy? To say that the premise and evidence of this book militates against conventional wisdom would be the understatement of the year! I enjoyed it immensely.

Finally, I read ***Animal Farm*** by George Orwell to my children. They enjoyed it as much as I did when I first read it almost 20 years ago. What a great satire of political revolution and the corrupting influence of power!

Without Wax -
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