



Annual Book Review 2010

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It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. Last year I lamented how little reading I'd gotten done the previous year. Though I resolved to try to do better this year, I'm not sure that any perceived improvement is more than a figment of my imagination. I heard someone say that theologian D.A. Carson reads 500 books a year. Like I needed something else to make me feel bad!

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

The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible by Benjamin B. Warfield (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 442 pgs.) has long been considered the finest defense of the doctrine of inspiration in print. It is a tightly written, well worded, and exquisitely reasoned answer to the attacks on the doctrine of Biblical Inspiration which were gaining ground in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The second half of the book is a more technical defense of Biblical Inspiration which deals with authors widely read in Warfield's

day. The meat of Warfield's arguments were stated and defended, in popular terms, thoroughly enough in the first half of the book, so the second half was only given a superficial and cursory read. Though this was a great resource, if you are interested in reading more on the subject, I have other books on the subject which are easier reads.

As the title suggests, **The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship** by Jeffrey J. Meyers (Canon Press, 433 pgs.) argues that the worship services of the Christian church should be modeled off the characteristics of the Old Testament Covenant renewals and worship of the nation of Israel. Meyers argues for a heavy and thick use of liturgy in modern Protestant churches, including written prayers, reciting of creeds, and the wearing of robes and even clerical collars by pastors.

I can agree with Meyer's lament concerning the church's modern fixation with dumbing down the services and entertaining sheep and goats. However, I have to strongly disagree with his proposed cure: liturgy.

It is good to read books you might not agree with, if for no other reason than to force yourself to think through your own theology more carefully.

It did not take me long to read through **Safe In The Arms of God: Truth From**

Heaven About the Death of a Child by John MacArthur (Thomas Nelson, 171 pgs.). It was a quick read which was originally sparked by a series of messages I heard on *Grace To You*, MacArthur's daily radio teaching program. The messages did much to inform my thinking on the subject and the book enabled me to work my way through the theology behind this issue. Before hearing the messages and reading the book, I have to admit, I lacked an understanding of just how much the Bible does say about the eternal destiny of infants who die. I had always thought that the Bible did not have a lot to say on the subject and that the Lord had not revealed much concerning the issue. I found myself delightfully surprised and encouraged. I think that it is a "must read" book for any who have suffered the loss of a child or any who seek to minister to those who have.

I didn't read all of the **Matthew 24-28** volume of the **MacArthur New Testament Commentary** (Moody Press, 347 pgs.), however, I did read the commentary on Matthew 24-25 (126 pgs.) as I wanted to brush up a little on the Olivet Discourse. MacArthur's commentaries have always proved to be a thorough exposition of the Bible. If you are looking for a good set of commentaries on the New Testament, you are hard pressed to do better than this series.

A Bible college friend and I read together **Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views** by Dave Hunt and James White (Multnomah Publishers, 427 pgs.). We read a chapter a week and then discussed that chapter over the phone on Sunday evenings. The book is presented in a "point - counterpoint" format, each chapter containing 5 sections of back and forth over a contested theological position. The first half contains seven presentations by James White affirming the reformation doctrines. Those 7

points are then rebutted by Dave Hunt (who denies and opposes the reformed doctrines). The second half of the book is the opposite with Dave Hunt, presenting a case which is then rebutted by James White.

Both my friend and I found ourselves frustrated with Dave Hunt's inability or unwillingness (I'm not sure which it is) to *understand* the positions that he opposes. His constant use of irrelevant Scriptures, straw-man arguments, and ad hominem attacks which have little bearing to the issues at hand was, in the end, exasperating. He would often avoid the central issues and spent time arguing with his straw men. Hunt constantly caricatured Calvinists in a fashion that bore **no** resemblance to any Calvinist I have ever met! Even when corrected by James White, Dave Hunt would blindly continue on with rambling, often incoherent screeds which ignored the fact that **he was missing the point entirely**. It was worth the time to read, but I don't think that Dave Hunt was up to the task before him.

I heard John MacArthur recommend **Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged** by Barry Horner (B&H Academic Press, 377 pgs.). I immediately put the book on my wish list and was not disappointed. **Future Israel** unashamedly promotes the premillennial perspective of history. The most beneficial aspect of the book was the five very detailed chapters devoted to tracing anti-Semitism through history and its connection to Augustinian amillennialism. Horner rightly identifies the key issue which separates amillennialists from premillennialists--hermeneutics. I believe he also rightly identifies the root and cause of so much anti-Semitism that has plagued the Christian church for nearly 20 centuries.

If **Future Israel** is a bit too academic for you, you might consider **The Coming Apocalypse: A Study of Replacement**

Theology vs. God's Faithfulness in the End-Times by Renald Showers (The Friends Of Israel Gospel Ministry, 107 pgs.). It is a very simple treatment of the same issues covered in *Future Israel*. Showers does a great job of clarifying the issues surrounding Israel and showing the historical development and fruit of Replacement Theology (the belief that Israel has been replaced by the church). The last chapter contains a very simple and very brief survey of future events from a premillennial perspective (based on the grammatical historical hermeneutic).

Apologetics

Revival's Golden Key by Ray Comfort and Kirk Cameron--yes, the 80's teen star--(Bridge-Logos Publishers, 234 pgs.) only took me a couple of days to read. In typical Ray Comfort style, with lots of humor, gripping illustrations, and fast-paced writing, he accurately describes the horrible fruit of modern methods of evangelism and challenges Christians to return to the method of sharing the gospel given in the New Testament by Jesus and the Apostles: namely, law to the proud and grace to the humble.

I was already familiar with Ray Comfort's ministry and writings, so this book was for me a review of biblical evangelism. If you want to be more effective and biblical in sharing your faith, you would be well served to read this book.

When I was at the Creation Museum last June I picked up **Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do To Stop It** by Ken Ham and Britt Beemer (Master Books, 186 pgs.). Answers In Genesis commissioned a study of young adults who have left church to diagnose why we are seeing a mass exodus among young people from the church when they reach their college years. What they found was nothing

short of shocking. I believe that Ken Ham and AIG have correctly diagnosed the problem. Churches have failed and are failing to rightly instruct both children and adults in a biblical worldview founded upon Genesis. Once the church compromised the Word of God by inserting millions of years into the Genesis record, it unwittingly called into question the authority of Scripture. Not teaching Genesis as literal history in our churches is leading to the same thing in America that such compromise brought to England--empty churches. A quick, easy, and engaging read. Worth your time.

Biographical

You may wonder what a Forty-Niner fan was doing reading **Tom Landry: An Autobiography** by (you guessed it) Tom Landry (Zondervan Publishing, 295 pgs.). I have an admiration for good athletes and excellent coaches. Tom Landry was both. I knew that he had professed a faith in Christ and I was interested to read about the life of a great football coach who coached in the NFL during some very formative eras. Landry's stories from the old days of football including his coaching during the famous Ice Bowl were fascinating for any football fan. Most of the book dealt with Landry's 29 years as coach of the Dallas Cowboys. I had to hold my nose for those chapters, which slowed down my reading a bit. Particularly interesting was that Landry, as coach of the Dallas Cowboys, passed up the incomparable Joe Montana in the '79 draft! Just think: Joe Montana, a quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys. Now that I have recovered from an attack of intense nausea at the very thought, I might add that his 29 years in Dallas and multiple division titles, Super Bowl appearances and Super Bowl victories with them is merely a big black mark on an otherwise stellar career. A great read, even for a 'Niners fan.

I read the entire book **Twelve Ordinary Men** by John MacArthur (W Publishing Group, 198 pgs.) in only two days in preparation for preaching through the last half of John 1, which tells of Jesus' first encounter with five men who would later be His disciples (Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and one unnamed). It was a fascinating treatment of all that the gospels reveal about the twelve disciples. MacArthur brought together everything the New Testament taught about each of those men in a fascinating "harmony of the gospels" style treatment of their lives, ministries, and eventual deaths. A great book that will cause you to appreciate the fact that God uses ordinary men and women for extraordinary things. I learned a tremendous amount!

You may have received a free copy of **Out Of The Comfort Zone** by Ray Comfort (Bridge-Logos Publishers, 266 pgs.). I read it a couple months after we gave them out at the front counter. I have always enjoyed Comfort's sense of humor, passion for evangelism, and ministry of equipping believers to share their faith. The book did contain some teaching on demon possession, exorcism, and on hearing the voice of God with which I would take issue. On the whole, the book was a fascinating look at someone I consider to be a fascinating man.

I enjoy reading stuff by or about C. H. Spurgeon and I enjoy reading books by Iain Murray. So it is no surprise that I would doubly enjoy **The Forgotten Spurgeon** by Iain Murray (The Banner of Truth Trust, 249 pgs.). This unique biography of Spurgeon focuses on the three enormous controversies that defined Spurgeon's life and ministry: the Calvinism/Arminianism Controversy, the Infant Baptism/Baptismal Regeneration Controversy, and the Down-Grade Controversy. Murray shows how these Controversies defined Spurgeon and his

theology. Much of Spurgeon's fight for truth in these three controversies has been forgotten. Murray's unrivaled understanding of Christian history, and particularly English history, makes this an enjoyable but not casual read.

Devotional

I read **Cries From The Cross** by Erwin Lutzer (Moody Press, 156 pgs.) because I intended to write a series of newsletter articles on the same subject, namely the seven statements that Jesus uttered while hanging on the cross. Lutzer is easy to read and I enjoyed the book's devotional style treatment of the sayings of Christ. I will certainly turn to his insights when I reach the end of the gospel of John. It was a quick read and worth the time.

When I Don't Desire God: How To Fight For Joy by John Piper (Crossway Books, 234 pgs.) took me a while to work through. I kept it by my bedside and read it in small portions over the course of about a year. John Piper continues to bless me with his writings and profound approach to the subject of joy. Especially insightful was Piper's chapter on what to do when you don't *feel* particularly joyful. Piper is a deep and profound thinker and his writings tend to be on the same level. A good book.

Miscellaneous

Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations by Alex and Brett Harris (Multnomah Books, 241 pgs.) was a quick and encouraging read that challenges teenagers to shed the burden of low expectations and "do hard things." The Harris brothers are leading a nationwide movement (TheRebellion.com) among teens to go beyond the adolescent mentality of our current culture and start living, acting, and thinking like adults at a much earlier age. I would *highly recommend the book for both teens and parents of teens.*

For the second time I read **Endurance** by Alfred Lansing (Carroll & Graf Publishers, 274 pgs.) which is the story of Ernest Shackleton and his attempt to cross Antarctica back in 1915. Shackleton never made it to the continent. He and the crew of the *Endurance* were stranded on the ice flow in the Weddell Sea after their ship, aptly named the *Endurance*, was crushed. **Endurance** tells the story of the crew's attempt to survive in the face of overwhelming difficulties. This book is among my top 15 favorite books. I read it to my kids and even the younger ones (7 and 6) enjoyed the story and followed along. I **love** this book and will probably read it again in a couple of years! If you have never read it - do! One of the most amazing true stories you will ever read.

When at Costco, I picked up Glenn Beck's newest book **Arguing With Idiots: How To Stop Small Minds And Big Government** (Simon & Schuster, Inc., 299 pgs.). The style of writing and formatting of the book seemed perfectly written for my short attention span. Beck's funny and engaging style kept me laughing through every chapter, and learning some great things in the process. I especially liked the chapters titled "In Defense of Capitalism," "America's Energy Future," and "Universal Health Care." It was a fun read and something you can pick up for a few moments do a little reading and put right back down again. If you are looking for a great book to digest in small chunks, or if you want a book that addresses current political topics in a witty and informative manner, this would be it. Any one chapter was worth the cost of the whole book.

I forgot why I originally bought **Memory Mechanics: How To Memorize Anything** by Gary DeMar (American Vision Press, 62 pgs.). Then I forgot where I put the book after I got it. Finally I read it and now I can't really remember what it was about.

Actually, a very good book with a lot of great memory techniques, some of which I was already familiar with (grouping, acronyms, acrostics, and visualizations). The book did contain one very interesting memory technique, which is very complex but would come in handy if I could find the time to master it. I may take the time to teach my kids the technique and maybe we could learn it together. It is too detailed to go into here. You'll just have to read the book to find out about it.

John Trapp once said, "As water tastes of the soil it runs through, so does the soul taste of the authors that a man reads." I know you must be looking forward to summer. With all that cries out for your attention, don't forget to give proper attention to reading. Read widely and read wisely. Above all, don't forget to read your Bible! That is the most important book of all.

Without Wax -

