



## Annual Book Review 2015

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It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. A wise mentor once told me that a man is the product of the books he reads and the people he associates with. Through reading we associate with great men and women of the past and present as we spend time with them through the books they write. What type of company do you keep?

Every year I publish a review of my readings from the past twelve months in hopes of encouraging you to pick up and enjoy some good company during the coming year. The summer months are upon us and I trust that they will bring opportunity to imbibe deeply in some good books! So, if you are looking for some suggestions of books to read—and, in some cases, a couple to avoid—I offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the past year.

### **Theology**

I enjoyed John Owen's work *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation* (Banner of Truth Trust, 270 pgs). Owen takes the time to speak of each Person of the Blessed Trinity and unfold what Scripture says about the distinct ways in which we enjoy and experience communion and fellowship with Them. It is heavy reading, but immensely refreshing.

*The Holy Spirit* by Sinclair Ferguson

(InterVarsity Press, 255 pgs) is part of the *Contours of Christian Theology* series. This is a good, readable book on the various aspects of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Ferguson's style is somewhat academic but fairly accessible. Particularly enjoyable for me was the chapter titled "Gifts for Ministry." Ferguson is a non-continuationist<sup>1</sup> and does a good job of interacting with the position and arguments of Wayne Grudem, a continuationist theologian. I also appreciated the way in which the book emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

### **Apologetics**

There is a "new atheism" afoot in our day and *The Atheist Delusion* (Xulon Press, 208 pgs.) by Phil Fernandes offers a basic apologetic answer to the claims and arguments of Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. The arguments of the "new atheists" are not new at all. They are just the same repackaged tripe dressed up for a new generation with a desperate love for darkness. This book is a basic primer on a lot of different subjects. It is an easy read, but the well-read apologist will wish for something quite a bit deeper. That is the inherent weakness of any book which tries

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Someone who believes that certain sign gifts of the New Testament have not continued to this day. These gifts would include the gifts of apostleship, tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, healing, revelation, and prophecy.

to address a broad diversity of subjects as this one does.

Have you heard of the “Gay Christian Movement?” If you haven't, you will soon. This movement, which is growing in popularity, argues that the Church's understanding of the six key passages in the Bible dealing with homosexuality has been wrong for the last 2,000 years. The most vocal and recognizable spokesman for this movement is Matthew Vines, a homosexual who claims to be a Christian. Vines argues that the Bible only addresses lustful and abusive homosexual relationships and that the authors of Scripture knew nothing of committed, loving, long-term, monogamous homosexual unions. Consequently, he argues, the Bible does not address them. Vines published a book titled *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* in April of 2014.<sup>2</sup> Only a month later, a response edited by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.,<sup>3</sup> was published titled *God and the Gay Christian?: A Response to Matthew Vines* (Conversant Book 1, 62 pgs). It is the response that I read. If you want to endure the mental affliction of reading Vines's book, go ahead, but the response to it is sufficient to understand Vines's perspective. The response does a great job of pointing out the logical fallacies, specious reasoning, inconsistencies, and historical inaccuracies of Vines's book. I highly recommend getting and working through this response. The last time I checked, it was available in Kindle on Amazon.com for only 99 cents.

Have you ever read one of those books where, at the end of every chapter, you get to choose what the main character does next? For instance, “If you choose to open the door, go to page 46. If you choose to leave the building, go to page 98.” *What's Your Worldview: An Interactive Approach to Life's*

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This created quite a stir in the Evangelical world since it was published by a “Christian” publishing company, Convergent Books (a division of Random House).

3 Authors include James M. Hamilton Jr., Denny Burk, Owen Strachan, and Heath Lambert.

*Big Questions* by James N. Anderson (Crossway Books, 112 pgs.) takes that same approach to discovering your worldview. Depending on how you answer questions, you will be instructed to turn to different pages, following a progression that will eventually identify your worldview. Questions such as “Do you believe that absolute truth exists?” and, “Do you believe that God is a personal being?” lead the reader through the maze of worldviews. Anderson concisely and accurately explains the basic beliefs of various worldviews.

However, that is not the only beneficial thing about this book. Anderson shows the inherent contradictions and irrationality of all unbiblical worldviews. Unless you are willing to embrace a biblical worldview, Anderson makes sure you know you have to live in an irrational and self-contradictory world.

This is an excellent book to give to family and friends, and especially unbelievers. It is an easy read, very accessible and thoroughly enjoyable! There is a reason that this book won *World Magazine's* Book of the Year Award for Popular Theology.

*The Puzzle of Ancient Man* by Donald Chittick (Creation Compass, 250 pgs.) challenges the assumptions of evolutionary thinking. According to the theory of evolution, mankind is at his highest state of mental ability and technological prowess. Yet we find all kinds of OOPArts. Yes, you read that correctly. OOPArts stands for Out Of Place Artifacts. These are artifacts, buildings, and structures from ancient history which don't fit with the evolutionary narrative. For instance, the pyramids of Egypt, Stonehenge, and remnants of South American ancient civilizations require a technology and machinery to build that we currently do not possess. How did ancient man do it? We don't know. What we do know is that we can't duplicate it today even with our “advanced” technology.

The Bible's teaching on ancient man holds the clues. All ancient civilizations come from a common culture, with a common technology,

and a common knowledge base. OOPArts are not at all “out of place” if we start with the teachings of Scripture.

This book contains some helpful pictures, good information, and some great chapters on what the Bible teaches concerning man right after Noah's flood. The pictures could be better and the writing could use some help, but overall the book is a good one. An even better book on the same subject is *The Genius of Ancient Man: Evolution's Nightmare* edited by Don Landis (Master Books, 108 pgs). This book is **excellent!** It begins by laying out some foundational truths regarding presuppositional thinking and the way in which our worldview affects how we interpret evidence. A few chapters are spent laying out the history of the world according to Genesis. Most of the chapters offer archaeological evidence that shows that ancient man was anything but “primitive.” There are many pieces of evidence of advanced technology and worldwide travel on the part of ancient man. Further, there are pieces of evidence in the cultures, religion, and history of different civilizations that show that all those civilizations come from one common source: Babel. This book is better written than *The Puzzle of Ancient Man*, but most significantly, it is loaded with full-page, full-color glossy photographs of ancient artifacts and the remnants of ancient civilizations. You will enjoy!

### **Biographical**

The fourth book in the History Lives series is *Hearts and Hands: The Chronicles of the Awakening Church* by Brandon and Mindy Withrow<sup>4</sup> (Christian Focus Publications, 224 pgs). These books are written for young teens. Each chapter covers a figure from church history telling the story of one particular incident in his life. This book covers the post-reformation era of church history and the birth of modern missions. William Carey, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, Adoniram Judson, Jonathan Edwards, and Johann Sebastian

<sup>4</sup> For reviews of the previous volumes, see the Annual Book Reviews from 2012 and 2013 available at [kootenaichurch.org](http://kootenaichurch.org).

Bach are all highlighted in this volume, along with a few others.

The fifth and final book in the History Lives series is *Rescue and Redeem: The Chronicles of the Modern Church* by Brandon and Mindy Withrow (Christian Focus Publications, 256 pgs). This volume covers various Christians from 1860 to the present, including Hudson Taylor, Dwight Moody, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.S. Lewis and others. I was unfamiliar with a number of people mentioned in this series of mini-biographies and found their stories fascinating.

### **Leadership/Preaching**

If you want a pistol-whipping, read *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* by John Piper (B&H Books, 320 pgs). This book is addressed to men in full-time ministry, particularly pastoral ministry. It is quite different from other books by Piper. Each of the more than 30 chapters addresses some aspect of life and theology that is connected to pastoral ministry. The book made me feel beaten down and encouraged, all at the same time! There is much to glean from this book, and it is one I am sure I will return to for another read within the next few years.

### **Miscellaneous**

I read *The Upper Room: Jesus' Parting Promises for Troubled Hearts* (Kress Biblical, 208 pgs.) in conjunction with preaching through John 14-15. This is a great explanation of those two chapters of Scripture and the context in which they take place. The book is very readable and handles the text in a very pastoral and accessible fashion. A great addition to your library.

### **Audiobooks**

Before our family took a long trip last June, we stocked up on audiobooks for the drive. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* was thoroughly enjoyable. Sprinkled with humor, wisdom, and insight, this book was enjoyable

from beginning to end. A great glimpse into the mind and life of one of our Founding Fathers.

The mystery novel *The Blight Way* by Pat McManus was fun and well-written. McManus, known for his humorous storytelling and his local connection to Sandpoint, showcased his talent as a mystery writer. Of course, I can't remember the last mystery or novel I read, so I might not be the best judge of this genre! But the humor is definitely very McManusesque—if there is such a thing. *The Bear in the Attic* (also by McManus) is more like his typical fare and just as enjoyable.

A series of short stories by Richard Peck titled *A Long Way from Chicago* was very humorous and enjoyable. The book is about two kids from Chicago who take the train every summer to go visit their grandma and never fail to get embroiled in some humorous adventure.

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.

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