

Annual Book Review 2016

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It is time for my annual summer book review and suggested reading list. Usually this review is “pre-summer” but this year there were some topics I felt preempted a more timely release of this article.

A wise mentor once told me that a man is the product of the books he reads and the people with whom he associates. 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 12 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

Regarding **What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?** by Kevin DeYoung (Crossway, 150 pgs) I have only two words: “Get it!” Actually three words: “Get it, NOW.”

I was almost finished reading this book when the SCOTUS found a heretofore

unnoticed “right” to “same-sex marriage” in the Constitution. This book is EXCELLENT. DeYoung is clear and concise. The book is well written and well argued and will go a long way to equipping you to think biblically and pastorally about the issue of homosexuality. The first half of the book deals with all the passages in Scripture that address the subject. Objections to those passages typically raised by revisionists¹ are thoroughly and biblically answered. The second half of the book devotes a chapter each to common objections and arguments used by those who promote and/or defend the homosexual lifestyle. They include:

- * *The Bible Hardly Ever Mentions Homosexuality*
- * *Not That Kind of Homosexuality*
- * *You're on the Wrong Side of History*
- * *The God I Worship is a God of Love*, and others

The third section of the book deals with more pastoral issues like how to deal with those in the church who struggle with same sex attractions and how to deal with the push for same-sex marriage in our culture.

¹ This refers to those who argue that the Bible doesn't really condemn loving, monogamous, covenantal same-sex partnerships that we are familiar with today. They argue that all the passages of Scripture condemning homosexuality actually condemn only homosexual rape, homosexual prostitution, or violent homosexual acts. This is the argument of Matthew Vines in his book *God and the Gay Christian*. For a response to Matthew Vines read *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines* edited by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. available from Amazon in kindle for 99 cents.

You will want to have this book to read, re-read and refer back to often. This issue is not going away and faithful Christians will need to be equipped to deal with it.

While preaching through **John 17** I read through the 48 messages preached by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on that passage contained in **The Assurance Of Our Salvation** (Crossway, 662 pgs). These 48 chapters are the transcripts of the messages that Lloyd-Jones preached on **John 17**. The book is easy to read and provides a very practical and pastoral exposition of that chapter. It is exactly what you would expect from the great expositor.

I haven't read a lot by David Wells, but Dave Rich lent me **The Courage To Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World** (Eerdmans, 248 pgs) and I enjoyed it. The book is the fifth and final in a series dealing with Postmodernism's affect upon the world and the church. The best part of the book was the chapter critiquing modern evangelicalism's complete surrender to postmodern thinking. Wells shows that in trying to soften the gospel for a modern audience, the church actually robs the gospel of all that is of any help to the world adrift in its abandonment of truth. Excellent!

Apologetics

Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation by Ronald Reagan (Thomas Nelson, 98 pgs) when published in 1984 was the first book to be published by a sitting President of the United States. Reagan offers a cogent, concise, and well articulated (as you would expect from the Great Communicator) defense of the sanctity of human life and argues passionately against abortion. Reagan connected the pro-abortion arguments with arguments for euthanasia in his day. This book, though not a thorough treatment of the arguments for abortion, does argue that all life is valuable. He writes, "We cannot diminish the value of one category of human life - the unborn- without diminishing the value of all

human life." He argued, "The real question today is not when human life begins, but *What is the value of human life?* The abortionist who reassembles the arms and legs of a tiny baby to make sure all its parts have been torn from its mother's body can hardly doubt whether it is a human being. The real question for him and for all of us is whether that tiny human life has a God-given right to be protected by the law - the same right we have." This book, which includes chapters by C. Everett Koop and Malcolm Muggeridge is filled with cogent arguments and prophetic warnings.

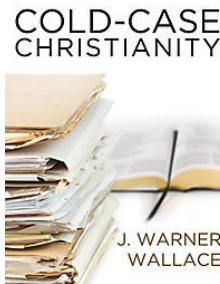
To prepare for teaching a series on Ancient Church Heresies in Adult Sunday School Class, I picked up **Know The Heretics** by Justin S. Holcomb (Zondervan, 176 pgs.) This is a solid introduction to the heresies that plagued the early church. Each chapter offers an overview of a different heresy and includes an explanation of the historical context, the doctrinal issues, contemporary relevance and discussion questions. If you want an easy to read, one volume, book on heresies, this is it.

As part of my study for teaching through Ancient Church Heresies in Adult Sunday School I read **Heresies** by Harold O.J. Brown (Doubleday, 467 pgs). The book begins with a discussion of the definition of heresy and what constitutes a heresy. The bulk of the book is a treatment of the flow of church history and the development of the church's understanding of doctrine. Brown addresses the various heresies and movements chronologically as they came up in history. This is more than a theological treatment of heresies, it is a historical look at the development of doctrines and false doctrines. Therein lies the value of the book.

Heretics and Orthodoxy are two books written by G.K. Chesterton (Thomas Nelson, 311 pgs) published in one volume. I have always heard great things about Chesterton and his writings and read a number of quotes from him in other books. I didn't enjoy the book as much as I expected. In fact, I stopped reading about ½ way through. I read a couple

chapters in the second volume hoping for better, but was disappointed with that as well. **Heretics** is a rebuke to certain thinkers, writers, and poets, from the early 20th century who attacked Christianity. **Orthodoxy** is Chesterton's version of *Mere Christianity* offering his defense of the Christian worldview. I don't doubt that Chesterton's winsome style and ability to turn a phrase have won him many admirers, but I am not one of them.

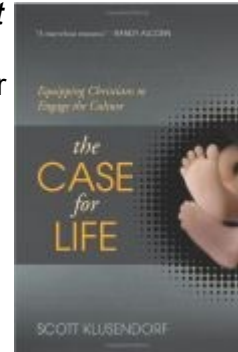
Cold-Case Christianity by J. Warner Wallace (David C. Cook, 288 pgs) offers a fresh and engaging approach to a familiar apologetic issue – the historical reliability of the New Testament documents. Wallace is a retired cold-case detective who solved numerous cases while with the Los Angeles Police Department. In Part 1 of the book we learn how homicide detectives collect evidence, transfer evidence, evaluate eye-witness testimony, and make deductions from the available evidence to solve crimes. Wallace explains these processes, illustrates them with real life scenarios he has investigated, and shows how we apply the practice of critical thinking and investigation to the evidence for the reliability of the New Testament. In Part 2 of the book the principles are applied to specific objections raised by atheists and skeptics. This book is fascinating, engaging and easy to read. You will enjoy it.



Ambassadors to Muslims by Fouad Masri (Book Villages, 165 pgs) serves as a basic introduction to Islamic belief and customs. The book is a much needed reminder that Christians need to be much more intentional in reaching the Muslim community. Masri is a former Muslim who grew up in Lebanon. He offers some practical ways that Christians can begin conversations with Muslims and direct those conversations to the one true God and the gospel. One word of caution - Masri places too high a premium on tales of Muslims being converted through dreams and private revelations. In a couple places he seems to

give credence to continual revelation. He also offers several illustrations of the doctrine of the Trinity (states of water, 1x1x1=3, triangle), which is a practice I have cautioned against.

I have followed the ministry of Scott Klusendorf for a number of years. I was excited to hear that he was filming a series of TV episodes called *Life Is Best* to equip Christians to defend unborn life and offer persuasive arguments against abortion. I purchased his book, **The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture** (Crossway, 246 pgs) and was not disappointed. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. *Every Christian should own this book, read this book, and study this book* if they want to be effective defenders of precious unborn human life. This is the single best volume on the abortion issue that you could have on your shelf.



Scott engages every argument that has ever been offered in defense of abortion. There is no argument you will ever face that is not answered in this book. Further, Scott masterfully teaches you how to think about the issue so you are always able to reduce every conversation about abortion down to one key question: "What is the unborn?" I have read many books on this subject, and this is the simplest, most thorough, and easy to read book of them all. **Get it.**

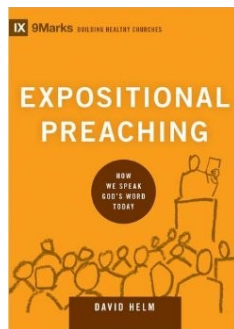
Old-Earth Creationism on Trial by Tim Chaffey and Jason Lisle (Master Books, 200 pgs) is a GREAT book dealing with the age of the earth. The book is laid out in a prosecution/defense format making and answering arguments from both sides of the debate. There is a chapter dealing with the extent of Noah's Flood and whether it was universal or only a local flood. One of the understated values of the book is the way in which the author's analyze arguments. This has the effect of honing your thinking skills and

teaching the reader how to think logically and critically and to identify hidden assumptions.

In preparing to preach through the account of the Resurrection of Christ in the Gospel of John, I picked up **Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?** By John Wenham (Baker, 158 pgs). This book covers the details of the Resurrection of Christ provided in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 15, and harmonizes the apparent contradictions between the accounts. Wenham begins with the presupposition that though there are differences in the narratives, these differences are not inherent contradictions. The book walks through the events of that Sunday morning and the chronology of all the subsequent appearances. Wenham concludes, “these records [the gospels] exhibit the characteristics of accurate and independent reporting, for superficially they show great disharmony, but on close examination the details gradually fall into place” (pg. 124).

Leadership/Preaching

Every year I try to read a book on preaching. This year I read **Expositional Preaching** by David Helm (Crossway, 112 pgs). It is not long or complex. In fact, it is a simple, easy, concise treatment of expository preaching. Helm offers a great primer on the subject contrasting true preaching (expository) with what typically passes for a sermon in the modern pulpit. This book will help you identify an expository sermon and serve as a good introduction to the subject for those who wonder what they should look for in a church sermon.



Miscellaneous

Because my blood pressure is not nearly high enough, I read **Undemocratic: How Unelected, Unaccountable Bureaucrats Are**

Stealing Your Liberty and Freedom by Jay Sekulow (Simon and Schuster, 336 pgs). The title describes the book. If you enjoy being reminded of the IRS Targeting scandal, the VA scandal, and the government's entrenched leftists bureaucracy, you'll love this book.

I regularly listen to the Steve Deace Radio Program. I enjoy his analysis of politics, culture, and headlines from a Christian Worldview. His book **Rules For Patriots: How Conservatives Can Win Again** offers a game plan for winning elections and arguments on policy in the public square. I appreciated Deace's ruthlessly honest lampooning of spineless politicians who have disappointed the electorate time and again. I found value in observing the way in which some of his pointers for winning arguments can translate into being an effective apologist for the Christian Faith. That is not a connection that Deace directly makes, but one I saw as I compared some of his pointers to those offered by Greg Koukl in his book on **Tactics**. This is an enjoyable book if politics is either your hobby or your bloodsport.

Audiobooks

In **Nullification: How to Resist Federal Tyranny in the 21st Century**, (3.5 hours)² historian and New York Times bestselling author Thomas E. Woods, Jr. explains not only why nullification is the constitutional tool the Founders envisioned, but how it works. He cites instances where it has already been employed in cases ranging from upholding the First Amendment to knocking down slave laws before the Civil War. If you are interested in learning about a constitutional, lawful, historically tested and Jefferson approved way of resisting federal tyranny, I would recommend this book.

John Trapp once said, “*As water tastes of the soil it runs through, so does the soul taste*”

² The audiobook is available from The American Conservative University website at <http://acu.libsyn.com>. The audio is available free in episodes 1252 and 1253.

of the authors that a man reads.” 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 -

