

Foreword

Everyone is a theologian, like it or not. The atheist who says, “There is no God” is a theologian of sorts. His theology is that the God of the Bible does not exist. For the Christian, the atheist is easy to peg. We know hands down that his theology is bad. We are not likely to be deceived by him.

But what about the Christian who says something like, “My God is a God of love,” meaning God wouldn’t send anyone to hell? That’s also bad theology, but not as easy to spot as that of the atheist. The problem is, it’s partly true. God *is* a God of love. In fact, the Bible says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Love is not an add-on to God’s character. It is part of His essential nature.

So what’s wrong with the statement, “My God is a God of love”? First are the words “my God.” “My God” is the product of one’s own personal belief of what he or she thinks God is like. It is not based on any external, objective information.

The second error in “my God is a God of love” is that it ignores the fact that God is also a God of justice and righteousness. It ignores the fact that the Bible says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18). Because it ignores the bad news of God’s righteous judgment, it fails to tell us the really good news that the God of love did indeed love us so much that He sent His Son to die for our sins (1 John 4:10, 1 Corinthians 15:1–3).

This is just one illustration of the bad theology abroad among Christians today. There are others. There is the theology that denies the divine inspiration and consequent authority of Scripture. There is the theology that denies or downplays the substitutionary death of Christ for our sins. There is the theology that belittles the importance or relevance of the local church. There’s a lot of bad theology among us today because Christians are not getting their theology from the Bible. That’s where *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, by Kevin DeYoung, can help us. This book is based squarely on the Bible. It can help make us Bible-based theologians. How is this so?

Well, Pastor DeYoung’s book is about a catechism, and a sixteenth-century catechism at that. I suspect some Christians today might ask, “What’s a catechism?” For many others, catechism might sound like something out of grandma’s attic; old and dusty, and hopelessly out-of-date. And for a large group of Christians today a catechism seems like a man-made add-on to the Bible.

Some responses: A catechism is simply a means of instruction by posing a series of questions about God and humankind, and answering those questions from the Bible. A catechism is never out-of-date as it seeks to teach us the eternal truths of Scripture. And a catechism is not a man-made add-on to the Bible; it’s instruction in good theology derived from the Scriptures. None of us are smart enough or spiritual enough to dig out various truths of Scripture by ourselves. We need sound instruction, and a good catechism provides that.

I’ve said that Pastor DeYoung’s book is about a catechism. More specifically it is about the Heidelberg Catechism, written by a team of theology professors and pastors, and first published in Heidelberg, Germany, in 1563. I’ll leave it to pastor DeYoung to expand further on this in his excellent introduction to this book.

I myself belong to a church that uses a different catechism, but for many years I have been an admirer of, and have profited from the Heidelberg Catechism. I like its structure which, as pastor DeYoung points out, fits into the pattern of salvation found in the book of Romans; namely *guilt*, *grace*, and *gratitude*. It is the same pattern so clearly seen in Isaiah's vision of the holiness of God in the temple (Isaiah 6:1–8). In fact I would say that these words form the overall storyline of the Bible.

I believe this sequence of words, or better, concepts, is the only proper way to understand and apply the Bible to our lives. Yet my perception of the Christian community today is that we are largely imperative driven. We major on the “ought to” and “how to” with little regard for that which makes us “want to.” But the Bible does not do this. Considering its overall message, it teaches us that our obedience to the moral imperatives of the Bible should be a response of gratitude more than of duty. Not that duty is wrong. It's just that God wants us to delight to do that which is our duty to do. And that which makes us delight to obey and serve God is gratitude for his grace shown to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Strange as it may seem, Christians need the gospel as much as unbelievers do. We do not need the gospel to “be saved.” We need the gospel to keep us from lapsing into a performance mind-set in our day-to-day relationship with God. We need the gospel to remind us that we are still practicing sinners whose only hope for both eternal life and today's blessings from God are “Jesus' blood and righteousness.”

The *Heidelberg Catechism*, rightly reflected on, will help us keep the concepts of our guilt, God's grace, and our response of gratitude in the correct sequence in our lives. And Kevin DeYoung does a masterful job of showing us what each of these three concepts look like in everyday life.

Pastor DeYoung is a minister in the Reformed Church of America, a denomination with roots in the Dutch Reformed Church, and he writes from the perspective of this historic confessional tradition. Consequently there will be a few points in this book that readers from a non-Reformed position will disagree with. But don't be put off by these few points of disagreement. Overall this is an exciting book that will prove helpful to people of all theological persuasions. I commend it to you as a book that will help all of us be better Bible-based theologians.

JERRY BRIDGES

Author of *The Pursuit of Holiness*