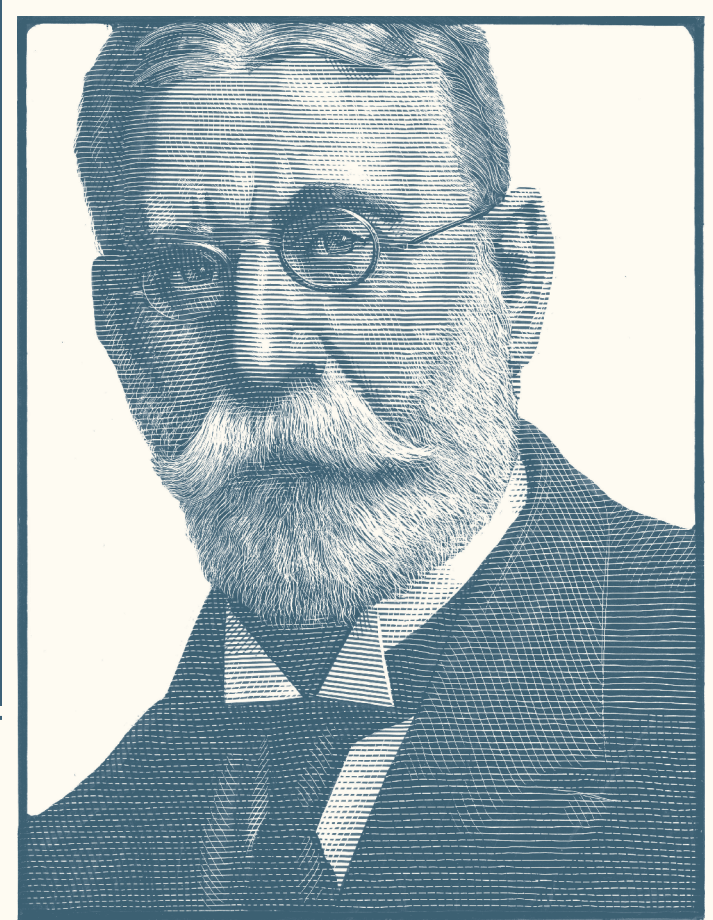


FOREWORD BY MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN

FRED G. ZASPEL



WARFIELD

*on the Christian Life*

LIVING LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

“If the only thing Fred Zaspel had accomplished in these pages were to point us to B. B. Warfield’s masterpiece sermons in his too-little-known *Faith and Life*, he would have done the church yeoman service. But he has done much, much more! In *Warfield on the Christian Life* we are given the privilege of sitting at the feet of a Christ-centered, Bible-saturated, gospel-loving theologian of the first rank and learning how to say, ‘To me to live is Christ.’ A very welcome addition to what promises to be a valuable series.”

**Sinclair B. Ferguson**, Retired Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina

“We are already indebted to Fred Zaspel for his work *The Theology of B. B. Warfield*—a book that has introduced a new generation to the voluminous writings of a Princeton scholar who was both New Testament interpreter and systematic theologian. Warfield’s style feels a tad impenetrable to many contemporary readers, but through Zaspel, Warfield, though dead, still speaks. But can any devotional and practical guidance come out of old Princeton? Zaspel’s latest contribution, *Warfield on the Christian Life: Living in Light of the Gospel*, does not simply answer with a resounding affirmative, but again faithfully unpacks Warfield and shows him to be a theologian of head and heart. Above all, Warfield is an integrated thinker, so he is ideally equipped to show how that which is central to the Bible, the gospel of God, rightly shapes the Christian’s entire life. And Zaspel makes this accessible.”

**D. A. Carson**, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“B. B. Warfield was one of the great thinkers in the history of the church, and his writings are a gold mine of biblical truth. Unfortunately, the sheer volume of his writings makes them largely inaccessible to today’s busy reader. But now, Fred Zaspel has done us a great service by distilling—into one volume—the essence of Warfield’s writings on the Christian life. This book should prove to be a valuable asset to all Christians serious about growing in Christ.”

**Jerry Bridges**, author, *The Pursuit of Holiness*

“B. B. Warfield looms large in the Protestant imagination as a theologian, one of the giants in the land. What is less well known are the details and dynamics of his own approach to the Christian life. Fred Zaspel has already written a substantial volume on Warfield as theologian; now he opens up for us the world of Warfield’s practical Christianity. Once again, fans of the great Princetonian are in for a treat, and are deeply and delightfully in debt to Dr. Zaspel.”

**Carl R. Trueman**, Paul Woolley Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

“Following the publication of *Warfield on the Christian Life*, it will be impossible to continue to claim that Princeton theology was ‘all head but no heart,’ or that Warfield himself was little more than an Enlightenment rationalist.”

**Paul Helm**, Teaching Fellow, Regent College; author, *The Secret Providence of God*

“B. B. Warfield is among the greatest theologians America has ever produced, and Fred Zaspel is among his greatest living interpreters. Comprehensive, insightful, and remarkably compelling, Zaspel’s *Warfield on the Christian Life* is a masterful presentation of an understanding of the Christian life that values Christian experience and at the same time is ‘deeply

and thoroughly theological.' While Zaspel's Warfield is a theological giant who enjoys the well-earned reputation as 'a theological army of one,' he is also 'a theologian of the heart' who recognizes that believers 'live unto Christ . . . not out of a vacuum but out of a mind and heart captivated and inflamed by an understanding of God's . . . saving activity in Christ.' This book is an important sequel to Zaspel's systematic summary of Warfield's theology, for it explains how Warfield could insist that truth 'fuels Christian living from beginning to end' without falling prey to a kind of Enlightenment rationalism. Enthusiastically recommended."

**Paul K. Helseth**, Associate Professor of Christian Thought, Northwestern College;  
author, *Right Reason and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal*

"As Fred Zaspel shows, the Princetonians—and Warfield in particular—were very far from arid scholastics. The Princeton theology was wedded to a Princeton piety that was warm, spiritual, and gospel centered. Warfield's spirituality in particular grew from a profound encounter with Christ that was both personal and theological. Thank you, Dr. Zaspel, for showing us Warfield the christologian and man of God."

**Kevin T. Bauder**, Research Professor, Central Baptist Seminary of Minneapolis

"'For Warfield the Christian life is but the outworking of the gospel.' Thank you, Fred Zaspel for bringing back to us the rich, contagious life and work of Benjamin Warfield. It satisfies the thirst this generation has for an authentic Christianity that flows from the deep well of a strong and informed theology."

**Matthew R. Olson**, Former President, Northland International University

"Scripture and history show that spirituality rests wholly on a foundation of revealed truth, cordially received and loved. The best theologians have always been the most profound, trustworthy promoters of vital piety and transformation of life. We look to Augustine, Anselm, Calvin, Bunyan, Edwards, and a host of Puritan pastor-theologians as determinative of the truth of this observation. Now we must include B. B. Warfield in that imposing list of those who make clear the path, not only to live by the Spirit, but to walk by the Spirit. Fred Zaspel has condensed the marvelous insight contained in *The Theology of B. B. Warfield* and served it up as foundational to a robust practice of piety analyzed in this present work. Zaspel has laid out both the doctrinal and exegetical expertise of Warfield in showing how seriously he pursued true worship as the *summum bonum* of life. From divine revelation to the imitation of the Christ and the consummation of Christian hope, the Christian finds substantive truth on his side and is assured by that truth that God himself is near, to protect, direct, and finally perfect all the sheep for whom Christ died."

**Tom J. Nettles**, Professor of Historical Theology, The Southern Baptist  
Theological Seminary

"I will reread, assign to my students, and give away Fred Zaspel's book *Warfield on the Christian Life*, not because it is an excellent commentary on Warfield—though it is—and not because it is highly readable—though it is—but primarily because I am a better Christian for having read it. I was mentally and spiritually invigorated, and you will be as well."

**Joseph A. Pipa Jr.**, President, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

*Warfield on the Christian Life: Living in Light of the Gospel*

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## SERIES PREFACE

Some might call us spoiled. We live in an era of significant and substantial resources for Christians on living the Christian life. We have ready access to books, DVD series, online material, seminars—all in the interest of encouraging us in our daily walk with Christ. The laity, the people in the pew, have access to more information than scholars dreamed of having in previous centuries.

Yet for all our abundance of resources, we also lack something. We tend to lack the perspectives from the past, perspectives from a different time and place than our own. To put the matter differently, we have so many riches in our current horizon that we tend not to look to the horizons of the past.

That is unfortunate, especially when it comes to learning about and practicing discipleship. It's like owning a mansion and choosing to live in only one room. This series invites you to explore the other rooms.

As we go exploring, we will visit places and times different from our own. We will see different models, approaches, and emphases. This series does not intend for these models to be copied uncritically, and it certainly does not intend to put these figures from the past high upon a pedestal like some race of super-Christians. This series intends, however, to help us in the present listen to the past. We believe there is wisdom in the past twenty centuries of the church, wisdom for living the Christian life.

Stephen J. Nichols and Justin Taylor

## FOREWORD

Theology, like clothing, has its fashions. And in the current climate of occidental evangelicalism, authors like B. B. Warfield seem increasingly out of place. Their interest in a rational defense and explication of the faith hardly appeals to various postmodern evangelical authors and their brave new world, which consists of mostly questions and few answers. In short, for far too many professing evangelicals, Warfield is simply passé. Why then take the time to remember him? What on earth can such an outmoded thinker have to say to a new generation that has moved far beyond both his interests and his way of expressing them?

Well, first of all, though theology has its fashions, we are not slavishly bound to wear the new duds any more than we are wed solely to the apparel of a bygone day. Wholesale rejection of past theological viewpoints simply because they are old is just as narrow-minded a perspective as the refusal to consider anything that is new.

Then, there are certain perennial issues in the history of the church, and Warfield, great theologian that he was, tackled them in a manner eminently worthy of serious consideration. The irrefragable power and infallibility of Scripture, for example, was just as much a concern of Augustine and John Calvin as it was of Warfield, and the latter's mode of affirming such was not as foreign to biblical categories as some think. In other words, because Warfield was widely read in the history of the church—witness his still-valuable treatises on Tertullian and Augustine—his defense of biblical inerrancy cannot simply be explained by tagging his thought an expression of modernity. And the same is true of other areas of Warfield's thinking.



## FOREWORD

Although his explication of inerrancy is a key reason for his being remembered, Warfield wrote about the entire range of theology, as this work by Fred Zaspel ably demonstrates. And because Warfield is indeed one of the great thinkers of the Christian church, his commentary on all matters Christian is great food for the soul of the contemporary believer seeking to live a life of faithfulness to Christ today.

Finally, a book like the one before you is necessary because reading Warfield, along with other Christian authors from the past, helps break the spell that the modern world casts over us. To paraphrase a recent comment that appeared in a *Washington Post* piece about classical school education: If you're not well versed in the history of Christian thought, you simply cannot be self-critical.<sup>1</sup>

So, take up and read this masterly overview of Warfield's perspectives on the Christian faith. There are riches here that will delight, enthrall, and edify.

Michael A. G. Haykin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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<sup>1</sup>Julia Duin, "Embracing a Classical Education," *The Washington Post*, April 8, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/embracing-a-classical-education/2011/03/09/AFj6amwC\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/embracing-a-classical-education/2011/03/09/AFj6amwC_story.html)). The quote is from Jonathan Beeson, principal of St. Theresa Catholic School, Sugar Land, Texas.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On one level, of course, the subject matter of this book is already largely available in my previous volume, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary*. There I surveyed the whole of Warfield's theological outlook and emphasized that, for Warfield, Christianity is a redemptive religion and that Scripture is given not simply to make us wise but to make us wise unto salvation. In all this I think it became clear that Warfield's view of the Christian life was deeply and thoroughly theological.

Even so, when Justin Taylor contacted me on behalf of Crossway to write this volume, I was eager to take it up. Certainly there is overlap, and if you have read the previous volume, you will notice that in places. But here not only is the material more condensed; the focus is more specific. And the nature of this volume also allows more extensive use of Warfield's published sermons. In the end, I trust our goal will have been reached: to provide a faithful representation of Warfield's understanding of the Christian life.

Many thanks to Justin Taylor and Steve Nichols for overseeing this project. This series, *Theologians on the Christian Life*, is a wonderful idea that I trust will prove of benefit to many. Many thanks also to Michael Haykin both for providing the foreword to this book and for his input and encouragement. He has been a wonderful and valued friend throughout my years of Warfield studies and writing.

# ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Banner of Truth</i>
<i>BTS</i>	<i>Biblical and Theological Studies</i> . B. B. Warfield. Edited by Samuel Craig. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968
<i>CT</i>	<i>Christian Thought</i>
<i>FL</i>	<i>Faith and Life</i> . B. B. Warfield. 1916. Reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974
<i>JGM</i>	<i>J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir</i> . Ned Stonehouse. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954
<i>PGS</i>	<i>The Power of God unto Salvation</i> . B. B. Warfield. 1903. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930
<i>PR</i>	<i>The Presbyterian Review</i>
<i>PRR</i>	<i>The Presbyterian and Reformed Review</i>
<i>PrS</i>	<i>Princeton Sermons</i> . B. B. Warfield. Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009
<i>PTR</i>	<i>The Princeton Theological Review</i>
<i>PWC</i>	<i>The Person and Work of Christ</i> . B. B. Warfield. Edited by Samuel Craig. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950
<i>SSW</i>	<i>Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield</i> . 2 vols. Edited by John Meeter. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970, 1973
<i>SW</i>	<i>The Saviour of the World</i> . B. B. Warfield. 1914. Reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991
<i>TBS</i>	<i>The Bible Student</i>

## ABBREVIATIONS

- W        *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield*. 10 vols. 1927–  
1932. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981
- W, 1    *Revelation and Inspiration*, 1927
- W, 2    *Biblical Doctrines*, 1929
- W, 3    *Christology and Criticism*, 1929
- W, 5    *Calvin and Calvinism*, 1931
- W, 7    *Perfectionism, Part One*, 1931
- W, 8    *Perfectionism, Part Two*, 1932
- W, 9    *Studies in Theology*, 1932
- W, 10   *Critical Reviews*, 1932

# INTRODUCTION

## **Christianity as a Supernatural Religion**

In his classroom lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary, B. B. Warfield enjoyed saying to his students, “Gentlemen, I like the supernatural!” He reveled in the fact—and loved to emphasize in his teaching and writing—that Christianity is a thoroughly supernatural religion.

This may seem strange coming from the man who wrote the famous *Counterfeit Miracles*, a powerfully influential denial of the continued presence of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in the church beyond the apostolic era. But for Warfield his discounting the continuation of the miraculous gifts reflected no embarrassment on his part concerning Christian supernaturalism. He was deeply convinced and passionately committed to the thoroughly supernatural character of Scripture, Christianity, and the Christian life itself. It is no exaggeration to say that his career was given to the defense of Christian supernaturalism. Throughout all his work he emphasized that the Christian faith and the Christian life are pervasively supernatural. Indeed, he insisted that the Christian himself is a walking miracle.

Nor in saying this did Warfield resort to “dumbing down” the definition of *miracle*. For him a miracle is nothing less than the immediate working of God above nature and apart from second causes. A miracle is that which cannot occur or be explained in terms of anything natural. And for him this is Christianity exactly—a supernatural religion, grounded in supernatural revelation, delivered and written for us by supernaturally inspired apostles and prophets, accomplished in a supernatural redemption by a supernatural Redeemer, and lived out in us by the supernatural influence and enablement of none other than the Spirit of God himself.

## INTRODUCTION

Historic Christian faith in Warfield's day had come under stringent attack. The modern "enlightened" mind could no longer tolerate such notions as incarnation, resurrection, and miracles. After Darwin it became increasingly difficult to speak of creation and divine involvement in the world and the affairs of men. Naturalism reigned, and many professing Christians began to feel embarrassed by their traditional doctrines, believing that in order to survive in this scientifically minded world Christianity would just have to make concessions or be left to the ghetto of outdated and discredited superstition. Centuries earlier Pelagius had taught a system of self-salvation, and Warfield frequently remarked that in the hands of Pelagius Christianity had become less a religion than a mere system of ethics. So also, he complained, in the anti-supernaturalistic atmosphere of his own day "the Christian life" became little more than an adherence to so many ethical notions. And so with genius of mind and great zeal of heart Warfield poured his energies into what was for him the delightful task of defending and expounding the Christian faith. And this he did at great length, always emphasizing that just as the Christian religion is in a class alone, apart from all other religions in that it is divinely given, so also the Christian life cannot be explained in terms other than divine activity for us and in us.

### **Warfield Lived in Light of the Gospel**

Warfield not only taught that the Christian life was supernatural, but he also lived in this reality. He "liked the supernatural" because he had tasted of it himself. Having professed faith at age sixteen, and later having experienced a powerful revival that swept the campus of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), he told a friend that he gave himself to the Christian ministry simply out of a deep sense of love to Christ. He knew he was a sinner rescued by divine grace, and he knew the experience of one whose heart had been arrested by the Spirit of God and mysteriously drawn into loving communion with him. Frequently we read his joyful expressions of vibrant worship, of freedom from sin's enslaving grip, and of the continuously purifying work of God within his own heart and life. And those who knew him best report that more striking even than his towering intellect and academic powers were his deep love for Christ and his keen sense of dependence upon God for that supernatural aid promised and provided in the gospel.

In short, Warfield understood the Christian life in consistently gospel terms. "Living in light of the gospel" captures his thinking exactly. Chris-

## *Introduction*

tianity, he repeatedly insisted, is a redemptive religion, and the Christian life is but the outworking of that redemption. His firm grasp of the Christian faith, his fervent heart for Christ, his deep appreciation of grace, and his own Christian experience all served to make him one from whom we can learn not only what Christianity is but also what a *Christian* is and what the Christian life, by God's grace, can and ought to be.

PART I

# PERSONAL BACKGROUND





## CHAPTER I

# BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD

## The Man and His Work

At important moments in the history of the church, God has raised up men to give voice to his Word. There is Augustine, the theologian of sin and grace. He did not invent these doctrines, of course. But in his battle with Pelagius he gave them such clear and cogent articulation that ever since he has been recognized as the one who bestowed these doctrines to us. So also there is Anselm, the theologian of the doctrine of the atonement. And there is Luther, the theologian of justification. And there is Calvin, the theologian of the Holy Spirit.

### **Warfield: The Theologian of Inspiration—and More**

In this same sense Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851–1921) of “Old Princeton” is known as the theologian of the doctrine of inspiration. Those who hold to the historic doctrine today add very little to what Warfield said about it a hundred years ago. So also, any who reject that doctrine must contend with Warfield before their work is complete. He was the theologian of inspiration. This was his gift, in God’s kind providence, to the modern church.

Impressive as all this is, it does not provide anything close to an adequate representation of this man, who was certainly one of the greatest—arguably the greatest of all—theologians America ever produced. Although the doc-

## BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD

trine of inspiration was largely *the* issue of his day, and although he above all others provided exposition and defense of it, this was not what he would have considered his “center.” And despite his many hundreds of published pages devoted to this cherished theme, it was not his leading area of theological attention. Staggering as his output on this theme was, Warfield was no mere single-issue specialist. His learning was massive, and he excelled in virtually every department of biblical studies. In terms of both the breadth and depth of his scholarship he was virtually without peer.

### **Warfield’s Life**

Warfield’s life story, in one respect, is not particularly spectacular. He was not an activist, he rarely traveled, he founded no movement, and although immensely influential in his Presbyterian church (PCUSA) he was never one of its official leaders. He was a theologian in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey, and he did scarcely little else. His story and his legacy are found, rather, in the many thousands of pages of theological writings that streamed from his pen for some four decades (from roughly 1880 to 1921). It is by his voluminous writings that he became one of the most outstanding and influential theologians of his day. And it is by means of these writings that his impact continues today.

### ***Early Life and Education***

Warfield’s boyhood home was marked by the best of vital, Reformed piety and genuine godly concerns. Both his mother’s and his father’s families were rich with heritage: behind him were military officers, educators, influential ecclesiastical leaders, and governmental and political figures, even a United States vice president. Warfield’s mother, Mary Cabell Breckinridge, was from the famous Scotch-Irish Presbyterian Breckinridge family of Maryland and Kentucky. Warfield’s father, William Warfield, was descended from English Puritan forebears who had fled to America to avoid persecution. The Warfields were members of Lexington’s Second Presbyterian Church, and it was here at age sixteen that young Benjamin made public profession of faith.

William Warfield was a successful cattle breeder, and Benjamin was reared in some degree of privilege. He received a private education and developed particular interest in mathematics and especially science, devouring with intense interest the newly published works of Charles Darwin. Because he

was so intent on a career in science, he strongly objected to studying Greek. But with a touch of humor his brother Ethelbert (1861–1936) reports that

youthful objections had little effect in a household where the shorter catechism was ordinarily completed in the sixth year, followed at once by the proofs from the Scriptures, and then by the larger catechism, with an appropriate amount of Scripture memorized in regular course each Sabbath afternoon.<sup>1</sup>

This early despising of Greek is ironic, given that Warfield was to become one of the great New Testament Greek scholars of his day!

Warfield was still just sixteen years old when he entered the sophomore class at the College of New Jersey in the fall of 1868. Mimicking his southern drawl, his college friends called him “Wo-field.” School records indicate his involvement in a Sunday afternoon fistfight, of which it seems Warfield was the instigator! His maternal grandfather, Robert Jefferson Breckinridge (1800–1871), had been suspended from the school for a similar incident many years before. This incident earned Warfield the nickname “pugilist”—which some have found somewhat prophetic in light of the reputation he would earn as the great contender for the faith.

But Warfield evidently applied himself well as a student. He attained foremost rank in every department of instruction and perfect marks in mathematics and science, graduating with highest honors and first in his class in 1871 at age nineteen. He also won awards for essays and debate in the American Whig Society and was an editor for the *Nassau Literary Magazine*, for which he wrote several poems and other pieces.

### ***Calling to Ministry***

Following Warfield’s graduation his father persuaded him to study in Europe, and in the spring of 1872 he began study in Edinburgh, Scotland, and then Heidelberg, Germany. His family was surprised to receive word from him midsummer that he would enter Christian ministry. It seems that a genuine revival swept the campus in his undergraduate days at the College of New Jersey and many young men went on to serve in Christian ministry. We have no record of Warfield’s attributing his decision to this event, but a friend does recall his remark that he felt compelled out of love for Christ to serve him in this capacity. So in 1873, after a brief stint as editor of the *Farmer’s Home Journal* in Lexington, he returned to Princeton, this time to the famous

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<sup>1</sup>W, 1:vi.

## BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD

theological seminary there, where he received instruction from men whom he came to admire deeply—especially the famous and by then elderly Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and his son Caspar Wistar Hodge (1830–1891). The younger Hodge was professor of New Testament, and he became something of a personal mentor of Warfield, their relationship forming an intimate and lasting friendship. It would be C. W. Hodge who, on behalf of the seminary, would write to Warfield in late 1886 inviting him to consider joining their faculty. For his entire life Warfield maintained deep affection for both the college and the seminary at Princeton, appreciating both the illustrious history of each institution and what he had learned from them.

In May of 1875 Warfield was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Ebenezer, meeting at Lexington, Kentucky, and he served that summer as interim pastor at Concord Church in Nicholas County, Kentucky. After graduating in 1876 Warfield was the interim pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio, from which he received a unanimous call to the pastorate. Warfield declined the call, determining instead to return to Europe for further studies.

### *Marriage*

He was married on August 3 of that year to the brilliant, witty, and beautiful Annie Kinkead and then very soon took up studies in Leipzig. Warfield endured extended health problems that kept him from some studies while in Germany, but over the winter of 1876–1877 he took in various lectures.

His new wife was the daughter of a prominent Lexington attorney who in 1855 defended Abraham Lincoln. In the brief biographical sketches of Warfield that are commonly available, Annie is often reported to have been an invalid their entire married life, but it does not seem that this degree of debilitation came until perhaps 1893 (seventeen years into their marriage). A notice in the *New York Times* dated May 1, 1892, notes that Mrs. Warfield, Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, and other prominent ladies of Princeton served as “Patronesses” at a lecture event sponsored by the American Whig Society in Princeton on April 30. But about a year later, in July of 1893, Warfield sent a paper to be read at an event in Staten Island, New York, which he was unable himself to attend, the published version informs us, “owing to illness in his family.”<sup>2</sup> It would seem that Annie’s illness became severe during this period. There are reports of Annie’s ill health from others at Princeton at the time, and by all accounts Warfield was a devoted husband in a very

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<sup>2</sup>CT 11 (1893–1894): 163.

happy marriage. The Warfields had no children, and for many years he left his home only for the classroom. He was otherwise home nearly always in the company of his wife. And in the providence of God, without doubt, this contributed to his time in writing so extensively on so many subjects. It was reported by those who knew him that “he has had only two interests in life—his work, and Mrs. Warfield.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***Career and Stature***

Following a stint as stated supply at the historic First Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, Warfield began his teaching career as professor of New Testament at Western (now Pittsburgh) Theological Seminary in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in September 1878. Greek had now become his leading area of interest. And by the early 1880s Warfield had already begun to gain international recognition as a force of conservative Reformed theological scholarship. His landmark “Inspiration” (1881), coauthored with Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823–1886), and his “Canonicity of Second Peter” (1882) were especially noted, portending the brilliant career that quite obviously lay ahead for this young scholar. And in 1886 he became the first American to publish a textbook in New Testament textual criticism, a title that received accolades from all quarters and established him as a leading authority in the field.

His masterful work in New Testament studies, however, would prove to be the foundation of his famous life’s work in theology. In 1887 Warfield returned to his beloved alma mater, Princeton Seminary, assuming the historic and prestigious chair of Didactic and Polemic Theology. We call it systematic theology today, and they did then also, but at Princeton, at least, the “polemic” dimension—establishing and maintaining the doctrines of Scripture at given points of controversy—was an especially important aspect of the theological task. And it was a work Warfield took up with great vigor.

The Theological Seminary at Princeton was now long and widely recognized as a land of biblical and theological giants. But both friends and foes of Old Princeton to this day acknowledge Warfield as the giant standing out above all the others. The breadth and depth of his voluminous works have impressed Christian students and scholars of all theological persuasions. Warfield was by all accounts one of the most outstanding and influential orthodox theologians of the era. Among Reformed orthodox theologians few have stood taller. This was the reputation he earned in his own lifetime, and the breadth and depth of his scholarship and exhaustive acquaintance

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<sup>3</sup>JGM, 220.

with the theological, scientific, and philosophical literature and thought of his day constituted the high-water mark of Old Princeton. He was well equipped with all the tools of modern scholarship, thoroughly abreast of all the latest theories and methods of the critics, widely—indeed, seemingly exhaustively—read in all the various theological disciplines (whether of theological friend or foe), deeply informed by the historical development of Christian doctrines—Patristic (Greek and Latin), Reformed, and modern; German, French, Dutch, and English—and most of all demonstrating throughout his career an exhaustive exegetical grounding. Warfield was not only a well-informed theologian; he was a theologian perhaps without peer, certainly unsurpassed in all the English-speaking world.

### **The Naturalistic Worldview of Warfield's Day**

“Enlightenment” thought in Warfield’s day had come to its own, and naturalistic ideas dominated. The thoroughly supernatural character of the Christian faith was under assault at every point, the nature of inspiration most famously. Various “kenosis”<sup>4</sup> theories explained our Lord in purely human terms, and redemption had become much less than expiation through his substitutional sacrifice. Virtually the entire faith was being recast in thoroughly naturalistic terms, and Warfield vigorously gave himself to the exposition and defense of Christian supernaturalism—a supernatural God, a supernatural revelation, a supernatural Savior, and a supernatural salvation produced by nothing less than the supernatural workings of the Spirit of God. All this and nothing less, Warfield was deeply convinced, could enable us to sing not only *Deo gloria*, but *soli Deo gloria*. He understood that in this wide-ranging debate that raged, Christianity itself was at stake.

### **Warfield the Christologist**

Warfield’s own center of interest and concern was the person and work of Christ, and this constitutes his leading area of literary output. We might say that he was first and foremost a christologist. In his own heart of hearts he saw himself as a fallen sinner rescued by a divine Redeemer, and this—the person and work of Christ—is where we find the heartbeat of this great Princetonian. As he did with the doctrine of inspiration, so also Warfield provided for the church a massive exegetical grounding for the great truths of Christ’s two natures, his redemptive work, and so on. Indeed, it was to

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<sup>4</sup>From the Greek, *kenoō* in Phil. 2:7, meaning to “empty.”

this end—God’s redemptive revelation in Christ—that Warfield understood the doctrine of inspiration as so very vital.

Ultimately his was a fight for the gospel. Consistently at the center of Warfield’s attention was the glorious message of divine rescue for sinners. If the attack was on the person of Christ, his concern was not academic only but soteriological—that we would be left without a Savior and without a gospel. If the attack was concerning the integrity of the Scriptures, his concern was not one of party spirit. It was that in the end we would be left without witness to Christ and, indeed, with a Christ who is himself mistaken as to the nature and authority of the book that was written about him. If the attack was an Arminian one, his concern was that the gospel would be so watered down as to devalue Christ and render him much less than the mighty Savior he is. Throughout even his most polemic writings Warfield’s passion for Christ and utter dependence on a divine Savior are plainly evident. It is for this reason that Warfield was so passionate for historic Calvinism. For him, “dependence” on God was the very essence of true religion, and, thus, Calvinism is religion expressed in its purest form. That “God saves sinners” is the heart of both the Calvinistic system and the Christian faith itself.

### **Warfield the Man**

Warfield was tall and erect, pleasant but dignified, rather heavy, something of an imposing figure, with ruddy cheeks, hair parted in the middle, sparkling eyes, and a full graying beard. Former student Charles Brokenshire (1885–1954) recalled, “He walked with head erect and well thrown back, and his face beamed with intelligence and amiability.” He was “somewhat deaf,” which made classroom recitation to him frustratingly difficult, but he was known for this method of teaching nonetheless. Brokenshire continues:

His most interesting method of instruction appeared when he heard and answered some question in the classroom. Sometime he would use the Socratic method on a reciter and lead some student disposed to argue into a series of statements which drove the young liberal into the orthodox corner where “Benny” wanted him.<sup>5</sup>

“Benny” was the name used by his family—and by his students, but only behind his back, of course! He was always of good humor but also serious, somewhat reserved, and, as one former student reports, with a commanding

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<sup>5</sup>Personal letter from Charles Brokenshire to John Meeter, June 25, 1942.



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air of authority. Thoroughly informed as he was, on the one hand he could appear aloof and indifferent to the theological opinions of others, but on the other hand he displayed an obvious love for others and especially children. And he was always demonstrative in his support of gospel endeavors both at home and abroad.

Warfield was a scholar's scholar who enjoyed long hours daily with his books. He did not spend a great deal of time in social pleasantries such as after-dinner conversation. He was something of a recluse with his books and his pen, always diligent in his theological studies, and well read in all other fields of literature also, especially science.

In his writing Warfield would on occasion employ humor, even in his most involved theological works, sometimes a biting wit and even sarcasm. He was well spoken, with a pleasant southern accent. He preached in a conversational tone that was calm, deliberate, and unaffected but marked by deep spirituality and impassioned with the truth he expounded, yet without demonstrative oratory. Not his scholarship only but his Christlikeness also deeply impressed his students, and he was a man who was himself profoundly affected by the gospel he preached. It was written of him that he was a "devout and sweet-spirited Christian" and a "Christ-like man."<sup>6</sup> He was recognized as a Christian and a scholar in the best sense of both.

Overwhelmingly, Warfield is described by those who knew him as a "model Christian gentleman," a man of grace, great personal charm, generosity, kindness, good humor, and wit. One of Warfield's acquaintances summarizes his impressions of Warfield memorably.

After a lapse of more than twenty years, Dr B. B. Warfield stands out as the most ideal Christian Character that I have ever known. . . . Dr Warfield possessed the most perfect combination of faculties of mind and heart that I have ever known in any person. His mind was keen and analytical in understanding facts and thoughts; and it was comprehensive in seeing all sides of a subject. He was so devoted to the truth as a man and teacher that his pupils could always trust his statements implicitly; and their confidence in him was never betrayed in any sense. He not only had the power of thought to comprehend a truth; but he also had a perfect command of language to give expression to his thoughts. His diction was precise and complete.

But if Dr Warfield was great in intellectuality, he was just as great in goodness. Over a long period of years this man stands out in my mind as the most Christ-like man that I have ever known. In spite of his brilliance of mind, there

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<sup>6</sup>*BSac* 78, no. 310 (1921): 124; "Letter from F. T. McGill to John Meeter," in *BT* 89 (Fall 1971): 18.

was no spirit of superciliousness, no purpose to offend the dullest pupil, no haughtiness of heart. With him there was never any sign of pretence [*sic*], or false front; for there was no spirit of hypocrisy in his inner heart. Rather there was always the spirit of humility and meekness and the spirit of kindness and gentleness toward others.<sup>7</sup>

Because of their massive learning and detailed, careful exposition, the theologians of Old Princeton are commonly referred to today as scholastic rationalists. But a broad reading of the Princetonians and of Warfield in particular will quickly demonstrate that this assessment is mistaken. The Princetonians are marked equally by the academic rigor and the fervent piety idealized in the seminary's official "Plan." Men such as Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge, and J. W. Alexander in particular were known for their pastoral instincts. The sermons preached by Warfield and others at the Sabbath afternoon conferences in Miller Chapel, by themselves considered, demonstrate that while the Princetonians excelled in learning, they were at the same time men deeply affected by the gospel, with a keen sense of dependence on God, and consciously aware of the need of the supernatural influences of his Spirit in them. For Warfield himself, as we shall see, all theological learning has as its very practical goal the experiential knowledge of God.

As I have already alluded to, Warfield's heart beat hot for Christ. His passion for Christ and the gospel pulses prominently throughout the many thousands of pages of his works. He adored the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Redeemer, and he loved to say so. And he loved to speak of our utter, helpless need of such a Savior from heaven. He was a "polemic" theologian, yes. And his polemics were powerful, supremely informed, insightful, and unrelenting, devouring the enemies of truth on all fronts. But they were polemics driven by a deep heart of love for and devotion to Christ. He was in fact the ideal of Old Princeton—the highest and best of informed scholarship matched by a humble piety and fervent love for Christ.

Samuel Craig, who was well acquainted with Warfield himself and his writings, affirms this in passing when he says,

What most impresses the student of Warfield's writings *apart from his deeply religious spirit, his sense of complete dependence on God for all things includ-*

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<sup>7</sup>"Letter from F. T. McGill to John Meeter," in *BT* 89 (Fall 1971): 18.

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*ing especially his sense of indebtedness as a lost sinner to His free grace—is the breadth of his learning and the exactness of his scholarship.*<sup>8</sup>

Craig’s remark indicates that it was Warfield’s personal sense of rescue that marked him first, although he is known more broadly for his great scholarship. Warfield said of Calvin, “It was not the head but the heart which made him a theologian, and it is not the head but the heart which he primarily addresses in his theology.”<sup>9</sup> So also Warfield was a theologian of the heart, and tones of adoring worship of Christ mark his works everywhere.

### Final Days

One of Warfield’s closest friends was Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), whom Warfield had helped bring to Princeton for the new chair of biblical theology. It was their regular practice for many years to walk together for refreshment and fellowship. On December 24, 1920, Warfield was walking along the sidewalk to the Vos home, just a few hundred yards across campus from his own home, when suddenly he grasped his chest and collapsed. Warfield spent the next few weeks recovering until, on Wednesday, February 16, 1921, he was finally ready to resume teaching. At the close of the class he returned home, where that evening a heart attack took him, this time fatally.

A former student remarked that Warfield had passed to his bright and happy reward where he can continue his studies to all eternity. J. Ross Stevenson, president of the seminary, wrote of Warfield’s death almost a year later, “The Reformed Theology and the cause of evangelical religion have lost one of the ablest interpreters and defenders which America has ever produced.”<sup>10</sup> Francis Patton remarked in his memorial address that it was a loss unquestionably felt throughout the greater part of the Christian world. “Nothing but ignorance of his exact scholarship, wide learning, varied writings, and the masterly way in which he did his work,” he surmised, could prevent anyone “from uniting with us today in the statement that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel.”<sup>11</sup> J. Gresham Machen lamented in a letter to his mother after Warfield’s funeral that as they carried him out, Old Princeton went with him, and that he was certain there was not a man in the entire church who could fill one quarter of his place.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup>*BTS*, xvii, emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup>*W*, 5:23.

<sup>10</sup>*The Expository Times* 33, no. 4 (1922): 153.

<sup>11</sup>Francis Patton, “Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield: A Memorial Address,” *PTR* 19, no. 3 (1921): 369.

<sup>12</sup>*JGM*, 309–10.

There have been men of God in the past whose voice was needed and, it would seem, were sent of God for just the occasion and context in which they lived. Warfield was such a man. “The spoiler of liberals,”<sup>13</sup> he has been called, “the man who propelled orthodoxy into the twentieth century.”<sup>14</sup> He was a theological army of one. Yet he commands a hearing still today. His vigorous theological endeavors, and his insightful understanding of the Christian life as one lived “in light of the gospel”—and his modeling of the same!—distinguish him as a teacher uniquely equipped to help us in our pursuit of Christ.

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<sup>13</sup>Raymond Cannata, “History of Apologetics at Princeton Seminary,” in William A. Dembski and Jay Wesley Richards, eds., *Unapologetic Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 71.

<sup>14</sup>Andrew Hofferker, “Guardian of the Word,” *Tabletalk*, April 2005, 12.



## CHAPTER 2

# TRUTH AND LIFE

## The Role of Christian Doctrine in Warfield's Christian Life

Warfield was a Christian and a theologian, but for him these two categories are virtually one and the same. And we must recognize this if we are to understand him and profit from his instruction on the Christian life. For Warfield theology is not merely some added, optional dimension to the Christian life: it is the very stuff of Christian living. The Christian life is founded on and fostered by *truth*. Behavior, conduct, service, and personal expressions of godliness are of course essential also, and we will see that Warfield treats these subjects with a lively warmth that evidences their importance to him. But he understands these matters within a context that is distinctively Christian. For him, the practical expressions of our devotion and godliness are the outworking of redemptive truth divinely revealed to us in the pages of Scripture and rightly understood. We will see how this is so in later chapters, but we should note this understanding in Warfield up front. We live unto Christ, to the glory of God, not out of a vacuum but out of a mind and heart captivated and inflamed by an understanding of God's greatness and goodness and his saving activity in Christ. This is what fuels Christian living from beginning to end. Truth leads to life, and it is truth rightly understood that shapes Christian experience.

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If life grows out of understanding, then it follows that *a firm grasp and robust appreciation of Christian truth is of primary importance to Christian living*. We must be very clear on this if we are to understand Warfield. For him, this is basic. Truth comes first. It is truth that God uses to produce and mold Christian living. Warfield's own piety was, at bottom, his response to Christian truth.

For Warfield, this follows from the very nature of the case. The fundamental truth that sets Christianity apart from all other religions is that it is a *revealed* religion. Christianity is not first about our reaching out to God. It is about his coming to us in grace, making himself known to us, his sinful creatures, in order to restore us to fellowship with himself. It is to this end that God has spoken. Thus, Christianity is a creedal, or doctrinal, religion. It is much more than that, of course, but it is a creedal religion at the very least and at its foundation. God comes first and foremost with a message to proclaim. It is a religion grounded in and advanced by the proclamation of divinely revealed truth. And a right understanding of that message is fundamental to all that it offers. The rescue it promises comes to us as this message is embraced, and our deepening acquaintance with this message advances the comforts and blessings it affords.

If the truth of God's sovereignty is intended for our comfort, then we should wholeheartedly search out an understanding of this truth. If we are designed to worship Christ for the enhancement of his praise and for our own joyful satisfaction, then we must increasingly grasp all that we possibly can of his glorious person and work. If faith consists in an utter dependence upon Christ, then we should seek to know all we can of his person and redemptive work. If in grace God has provided for our success and eventual victory over sin, then it is in the interest of our own encouragement to understand these gospel promises and to become fully acquainted with the abundant provision of the Holy Spirit and the prospect of our coming glory. In order for us to render due worship to God, our knowledge of him must be rightly informed, and so it behooves us to explore ever further the depths of his self-revelation in Scripture. The entirety of the Christian life and experience is our response to revealed truth.

So for Warfield, Christian doctrine is primary. God has revealed himself to us for our benefit. He has revealed himself in order to bring himself glory, to be sure. But he brings honor to himself in our redemption, and it is our increasing acquaintance with these truths that gives shape to Christian experience. We do not understand Warfield if we do not understand this.

One of the glories of the Christian life is that God has not only saved us according to his grand and gracious purpose, but he has also in grace revealed that purpose to us. He has not only set out to save us, so that in the end we will be part of his glorious kingdom, but he has let us in on it, so that we might marvel at the wisdom and mercy that lay behind it, so that we would have this to sing about, and so that we could rejoice in its present realization and in the prospect of its future consummation. It would of course have been enough if he had but saved us and let it go at that. But he has done more. He has not held back from us a realization of his redemptive work, but he has in love revealed to us “the mystery” of his eternal saving plan (Eph. 1:9–10) so that we would see his wisdom and grace and power at work on our behalf. And it has been the testimony of Christians for all the centuries that it is a deeper and increasing grasp of Christ’s immeasurable love that grounds and sustains and advances our walk with God (Eph. 3:16–19).

That God has revealed himself in the written Word is a gift to be cherished, and with this blessing comes a corresponding privilege and obligation to learn and understand that Word. We will see how Warfield unpacks this in the next chapter. He complains that it is a symptom of a decaying faith indeed when the teaching of Scripture is neglected. And he judges that attitude of doctrinal indifference as contrary to the very nerve of Christian experience. It is Christian doctrine that gives shape to the distinctive Christian life and experience, and Warfield warns that to be indifferent to Christian doctrine is, simply, to be indifferent to Christianity itself.

Warfield argues that in this sense Christianity aims first at the mind. In terms of both evangelism and Christian growth Christianity offers first a message, a word from God—that is, doctrine. And thus Warfield will not allow a disjunction between doctrine and devotion. He insists, rather, that all Christian theology is itself “directly and richly and evangelically devotional.”<sup>1</sup> Not every Christian is called to be a professional theologian, of course. But theology is nonetheless the business of every believer. It is the stuff of the Christian life.

This is not only Warfield’s specific teaching on the matter; it is the character of his own Christian experience also. For him, the Christian experience is one that is shaped throughout by truth, truth that has deeply affected the mind and heart. And throughout his writings the doctrine he expounds is consistently an exercise of and an expression of devotion to Christ. Communion with God is not a mere feeling for him. It is the experience of God himself,

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<sup>1</sup>SSW, 2:286; here Warfield cites the words of Alexander Whyte.



## TRUTH AND LIFE

rightly—even if not fully—understood. And the Christian life, more broadly considered, is but the enjoyment of Christian truth rightly understood and gratefully experienced. For Warfield there is no substitute for this. Nothing else can so stimulate the Christian mind, enliven the Christian heart, and satisfyingly mold Christian experience.

We must understand this if we are to understand Warfield and appreciate his teaching on the Christian life. His understanding that Christian life grows in the soil of Christian truth is what shapes this book. We will expand further in the next chapter.

*B.B. Warfield* is well known as one of America's leading theologians, perhaps second only to Jonathan Edwards. But until now, the character of his own Christian experience and his understanding of the Christian life have remained unexplored. Fred Zaspel unpacks these for us here, and what we find is that Warfield's profound theological mind is matched only by his passionate heart for Christ. From Warfield we learn truly what it is to *live in light of the gospel*.

"Here we are given the privilege of sitting at the feet of a Christ-centered, Bible-saturated, gospel-loving theologian of the first rank and learning how to say, 'To me to live is Christ.'"

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"I will reread, assign to my students, and give away Zaspel's book, not because it is an excellent commentary on Warfield—though it is—and not because it is highly readable—though it is—but primarily because I am a better Christian for having read it."

JOSEPH PIPA, President, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

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