**2020 Pastor’s Reading List**

1. **HARRY POTTER:THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX,** J.K. Rowling (2004). Harry’s days as a student at Hogwarts’s School of Magic seem to be numbered. No one from the Ministry of Magic wants to listen to what he has to say…in fact, they want him out of the picture all together. When that fails…those around him that he trusts most seem to not want to listen him as well…so as usual he seeks to take matters into his own hands. After the trauma of Cedric’s death and Voldemort’s return the adults around Harry act as most adults do: 1. They over protect and keep the one traumatized out of the loop...2. They seek to deny the event by not talking about it at all... delegitimizing the one traumatized account... 3. They even go so far as to either call the person a liar because they don’t want to admit the truth of the event or they make the victim feel guilty in how they interpret the event. In fact, the book is full of people taking things into their hands without regard for the consequences which leads at least in one case to a dire ending. However, there is always Dumbledore with a calming effect even when Harry doesn’t want to be calm. At one point Dumbledore says to Harry, *“There is no shame in what you are feeling, Harry,” said Dumbledore’s voice. On the contrary . . . the fact that you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength.”* As usual this book has a number of twists and turns that keeps their reader entertained and spellbound (pun intended). This book is almost 900 pages long but felt like the much smaller ones because of all the action and intrigue throughout.
2. **THE MICAH MANDATE,** by George Grant (1995). This is my third or fourth time through this book. While some of the illustrations may be out of date at this point the material is still relevant as he seeks to speak to the Church on topics of desperate importance. Since we live in what he calls a fractured world this book calls us back to a time tested truth that will enable the Church to actually once again speak into the world. Micah 6:8 states; ***“What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*** This phrase captures what our author wants us to understand as the Christians calling or worldview. He asks the question, *“Can social involvement and spirituality come together?”* And he answered this question with yet another question; *“Can they ever truly be separated? Justice without mercy, or mercy without justice or either without spiritual humility are biblically impossible.”* This book shows us how the principles from this passage are a consistent theme throughout Scripture. It has been used by prophets and by Presidents to call God’s nation or later God’s Church to arms in how we are to live before men. How we are to be different. The theology alone would be enough but at the end of every chapter he throws in a section of history on the saints of old…some whose names are familiar but from time to time names that should be but aren’t. this was and is a very timely book for us to have read and re-read.
3. **HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE,** by J.K. Rowley (2006**).** As Harry moves into his sixth year his power continues to grow…but is it enough? Even in the midst of a war that has spilled over into the non-wizarding world life goes on at Hogwarts where we find Harry struggling with himself…his temper and his felling for a particular red-headed girl. Lord Voldemort is growing stronger as is Harry’s relationship with Professor Dumbledore as they seek together to unravel Lord Voldemort’s weaknesses if there are any. Dumbledore’s wisdom even comes forth as Harry and him argue*, “Ah, Harry, how often this happens, even between the best of friends! Each of us believes that what he has to say is much more important than anything the other might have to contribute!” “I don’t think what you’ve got to say is unimportant, sir,” said Harry stiffly. “Well, you are quite right, because it is not,” said Dumbledore briskly.”* The professor also gives Harry great encouragement when he says of Harry; *“You are protected, in short, by your ability to love!” said Dumbledore loudly. “The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort’s! In spite of all the temptation you have endured, all the suffering, you remain pure of heart, just as pure as you were at the age of eleven, when you stared into a mirror that reflected your heart’s desire, and it showed you only the way to thwart Lord Voldemort, and not immortality or riches."* This relationship reaches its climax when the student must carry the Master, *“I am not worried, Harry,” said Dumbledore, his voice a little stronger despite the freezing water. “I am with you.”* Now death has found him from a number of avenues and Harry remains resolute comforted by Dumbledore’s words to him, *"It was important, Dumbledore said, to fight, and fight again, and keep fighting, for only then could evil be kept at bay, though never quite eradicated. . . ."* Harry has come of age… a year early and knows what he must do! Snape a half-blood? Lord Voldemort has been exposed to be a half-blood already. Men of power telling lies about their own heritage to make themselves feel better do evil things…but Severus Snape?!? This is yet another long book(over 650 pages) but the action is seemingly non-stop for Harry, Ron and Hermione as they seek to discover the coming and goings of the usual culprits Malfoy, Snape and of course, Lord Voldemort. A Potions book and a new professor are a great distraction for Harry and the gang but the “fun” also comes with great tragedy as the book comes to an end…heading into the Deathly Hallows.
4. **HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS**, by J.K. Rowling (2009). The heart of Book 7 is a hero's mission--not just in Harry's quest for the Horcruxes or is it Hallows, but in his journey from boy to man. Here Harry faces more dangers than are found in all six books combined, from the direct threat of the Death Eaters and Lord Voldemort, to the subtle perils of losing faith in himself. It seems as this book sums up this whole story line that readers would do well to remember Dumbledore's warning about making the choice between *"what is right and what is easy,"* and know that Rowling applies the same difficult principle to the conclusion of her series. It is in this book that you will find the answers to hotly speculated questions about Dumbledore, Snape, and Lord Voldemort, but Rowling's skill as a storyteller is revealed in that even the most astute and careful reader will be taken by surprise even after multiple readings. There is an interesting exchange of note between the main characters that really got me thinking, *“’But even if we wreck the thing it lives in,” said Ron, “why can’t the bit of soul in it just go and live in something else?’ ‘Because a Horcrux is the complete opposite of a human being’, says Hermione. Seeing that Harry and Ron looked thoroughly confused, Hermione hurried on, ‘Look, if I picked up a sword right now, Ron, and ran you through with it, I wouldn’t damage your soul at all.’ ‘Which would be a real comfort to me, I’m sure,’ said Ron. Harry laughed. ‘It should be, actually! But my point is that whatever happens to your body, your soul will survive, untouched,’ said Hermione. ‘But it’s the other way round with a Horcrux. The fragment of soul inside it depends on its container, its enchanted body, for survival. It can’t exist without it.’”* I am always interested by how fiction, as in this case, mirrors the truth….for our body may die but our soul lives on. This book has been, as all the books, a fun read and enlightening as well…the themes that work best have always been creation, fall and restoration and they are evident throughout these books and especially this one. Another long book (almost 800 pages) but a page turner to be sure. Again, thank you J.K. Rowley for a good month of reading. Such a classic story.
5. **THE DISCOVERY OF THE PLAGUE OF OUR HEARTS!** By Matthew Mead (1665…digitally formatted by Monergism.com 2019) This is an interesting book for all Christians who fear for their salvation…and for all Christians who are still wondering what the big deal is concerning the people around you who don’t believe. Rev. Mead plainly lays out the “horrors” of the sins of our heart and the consequence for all who don’t repent. After reading such an account I cannot believe that any of us even the hardest hearted Christian could not desire to share the gospel with all who we meet and wish upon all hope that God would see fit to save them as He alone saved us. He paints a clear picture of what it is we bring to Christ on the Cross…the plague of our hearts…the sinful behavior that can take us cleanly to hell or lead us to repentance before a holy God who has decreed our deliverance. How does God use sin to heal us who are His? Listen to these words; *“It cannot be well conceived how man should ever be the subject of pain or sorrow. Such would not have happened, if sin did not render him changeable, and open a way for the sword to enter his affections, and give it that edge and force which causes it to pierce deeper, and to wound more sensibly. This is like a malady that arises from a wound of some kind, to be looked at only as an effect of intemperance, and is not to be quarreled at, but its cause to be blamed. It is like the surgeon searching into the festered place—it is not a wound, but a discovery of the depth of the sore, in order to aid in its cure. In this way the judgments which God sends on a people are only to be regarded as the symptoms of, and means to cure that disorder, and the distemperedness within ourselves…for those who are His.”* He lays out 7 main sins that are national sins at the time but also sins that affect all people in general…but many were wondering about why the nation was falling apart so he says these are the root of God’s dissatisfaction and judgment upon England and all who live by these: 1) Adultery, fornication and immorality, 2) the licentiousness of the theater (reminds me of how many Christians felt about movies through the years of my life); 3) pride of apparel; 4)shamelessness; 5) drunkenness and gluttony; 6) swearing/cursing and profaning His most holy Name; 7) covetousness along with 4-5 lesser sins in the midst of these. But he doesn’t just point out sins he also points his readers to how they might remedy them through the power of Christ’s converting Spirit of repentance. His arguments for how people are to react to God’s judgments revolve around 3 specific texts Jeremiah 3:39-4; I Kings 8:37-39 (specifically the last part of vs. 39) and Micah 6:9. I know this is long but I must add one more quote. He is long and unabashed about the judgment of God for the unbeliever but just as verbose is he concerning the salvation of the believer and how we should look forward to death as a way to testify to the goodness of God. *“Sin and Satan, the world and the flesh—shall never trouble you anymore forever! Now shall your prayers at length be all heard, your complaining ended, your expectations and longings satisfied, and accomplished. Cheer up, cheer up, brave souls—but one step more, and then you are at your Father's house. I think I see the arms of Christ stretched out to receive you, and angels waiting to conduct you to his arms. Do not fear, nor be dismayed. Confidently resign your souls to him —who laid down his life for you. The darkness lasts but a little while, and shortly you will come into the open light.”* In this formatting it is only 71 pages but the published book is between 130 and 150 pages so not a long book but filled with excellent material for all to hear and read.
6. **INCREDIBLE VICTORY:****THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY,** BY Walter Lord (first publish 1967 this publishing 2012). This book being as old as it is was still able to capture most of the men from both sides that survived this horrendous day but a day that turned the War in the pacific to our favor. By the end of the battle everyone knew that this was the beginning of the end of the Japanese domination in the pacific. From the book*; “In ticking off the things that weren’t done, it was easy to forget the big thing that was done. Against overwhelming odds, with the most meager resources, and often at fearful self-sacrifice, a few determined men reversed the course of the war in the Pacific. Japan would never again take the offensive. Yet the margin was thin—so narrow that almost any man there could say with pride that he personally helped turn the tide at Midway. It was indeed, as General Marshall said in Washington, “the closest squeak and the greatest victory.”* Oh, it would take 3 hard cruelly years to finally win back all that the Japanese Empire had taken on their treck to world domination but this was THE decisive battle. Mr. Lord captures so much of what led up to the battle from both sides because he was given access to a tremendous amount of war correspondence from both sides. This was also true concerning the battle itself. As I said there were so many of the men still alive for him to interview and they thoughts words and deed s are here memorialized by the men who fought hard for their respective sides. The Book is well worth any WWII buffs time…in fact the stories and the section entitled Riddles of Midway where the author takes a stab at which group of fliers actually took out the first 3 Japanese carriers that day is worth the time of the reader…but then there is the pride that comes from the interviews *“AFTER 24 YEARS, I can still feel like weeping with pride, admiration, and humility when I recall the courage those men displayed,” writes Daniel Grace, then a Marine Pfc stationed on Midway. He was referring to the American fliers, but judging from the correspondence, it could have been almost anyone speaking of almost anyone else at the Battle of Midway.”* This book is just over 300 pages so it is not a hard read at all.
7. **CHANCELLORSVILLE**, by Stephen W. Sears (1998) First, of all I need to look closer when a recommendation comes up on Kindle for what I perceive to be a “new” book. This is the second time in recent weeks this has happened though the first book **INCREDIBLE VICTORY:****THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY,** by Walter Lord was by far worth the read. Obviously given the date of publishing this is not a new book…and there is nothing new here in this book. This book seems to be a running account of events almost as if it was taken from official military records with a bit... just a bit... of personal thoughts thrown in. I guess one of my problems is that I am so heavily influenced today by writers such as Ken Burns, O Reilly, and Kilmeade, that an academic book like this becomes tedious. It reads so much like a textbook that I have had to work hard at gleaning what the author is trying to tell me. There is an occasional moment of excitement as he engages in particular skirmishes and he almost get the reader involved in the shooting of Stonewall Jackson by his own men but he quickly moves on and doesn’t get back to Stonewall until many pages later. Here’s an example of the kind of writing I am talking about, *“Hooker rode his favorite horse, a milk-white charger named Colonel, and (as Private Silliman put it) “he made a fine appearance.” At every position he was cheered to the echo. Sickles remarked on the “irrepressible enthusiasm of the troops.” It is said that this morning, May 2, 1863, was the last time the Army of the Potomac would ever raise a spontaneous battlefield cheer for its commanding general.”* This is the way most of the book is written…uninspiring in my view. Now if all you want is an accurate running historical account of the battles and the battle decisions...this is definitely your book. (Over 600 pages)
8. **ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE: God’s Promises to every Christian,** by Charles Spurgeon (1887, digitally formatted in 2013). So this is a re-read for me. I love this classic work. This work is extremely hopeful for the believer who is struggling with actually believing God’s promises…for he actually deals with his doubts and our doubts that keep us from experiencing the fullness of our salvation because we have such a hard time “believing” the promises of God. He says at the onset of this book*, "I desire to help you examine yourself spiritually. I want you to go further than examination, though, and attain such abundance of grace that your holy and happy condition will become a witness to yourself."* He speaks without hesitation as one who has struggled himself which history tells us that he did while at the same time never straying too far and being used by God to bring the gospel message to hundreds of thousands of people during his short life. It is clear to him that we often struggle because we are unwittingly still too connected with the world. At one point he goes so far as to say, *"If you would feel freer and more at home in society than in the church of God, then know assuredly that you belong to the world. Do not deceive yourself. As your heart is, so are you. No amount of force or work can turn Ishmael into Isaac, or a person of the world into an heir of heaven.”* His candidness is there because of the times in which he lived…similar to our times where people were questions the Word of God and as such questioning the promises of God which leads to a lack of assurance and a weakening of the influence of the Church. One last quote, *"God’s promises are so timed as to secure His glory in their fulfillment, and this must be good enough for us when we can see no other reason for delay."* **This version is a real gem and is being offered as a free Kindle download through Amazon and Kindle Unlimited but I don’t know for how long!**
9. **THE GOSPEL IN GENESIS,** by Henry Law (first published in 1867 as the **Christ is All: The Gospel in the Pentateuch**, now reformatted by the individual books 2019 by Monergism Books). Henry Law was a 19th Century English, pastor, theologian and Dean of Gloucester. His best known work is **Christ is All: The Gospel in the Pentateuch.** As I said Monergism has set out to digitally separate this one book into five, I suspect for easy reading and study. Dr. Law was masterful in seeing the types of Christ in the genesis passages that he chose from Adam to Joseph and the work of God in each expressly revealing to us the Gospel in each section of Genesis from beginning to end. There have been many books that have tried this but this one seems to be the most flawless in revealing Christ in Genesis. Here is a quote concerning Abraham and how this situation referred is can be tied to Christ, *“So Abraham called that place 'The Lord Will Provide.' And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." Believer, this memorial proclaims the full provision, which is laid up in Jesus for His waiting people. They are indeed loved, and cared for, and enriched. Jehovah-jireh is this sweet mountain of spices, on the many slopes of which they delightedly recline, and find all blessings strewn around them. These pages are written to exhort you to make this spot your daily and your holy pleasure-ground. Intimately acquaint yourself with these green pastures. Be assured, that here sufficiency abounds for you, while time shall be, and when time shall be no more—sufficiency for every need of body and of spirit, which has been, or shall be, or can be.”* Concerning Genesis 49:10 he says, *“Shiloh introduces us to a solemn scene, in which death and joy stand hand in hand. The aged patriarch had known the perils and tossings of a stormy voyage. But the longed-for haven now opens to receive him. Our billows, too, may rage and swell. But let us struggle on in hope. They waft the believer by rapid tide to the calm water of eternal rest. Shiloh is almost the last testimony of the expiring parent. Happy is it thus to leave a legacy of cheering blessings to those who watch around us! Happy to direct the mourner's thought to Him, who has abolished death, and who will gather all His children into one home of blessed union—where union is eternity. Shiloh. It is a sweet and mighty name. Sweet, for it is His, whose name is as ointment poured forth. Mighty, for it is His, whose name is above every name.”* These are free right now from Monergism and they are a wealth of great devotional as well as helpful study materials for all of us. (depending upon your devise 164 pages to about 250 pages)
10. **THE HOBBIT,** by J.R.R. Tolkien (75th Anniversary issue 2012 digitally formatted) What a journey from there and back again! This volume is one of great adventure and is a delight to read of such loyalty, valor and good men and elves and dwarves standing in the face of such evil. Hobbits don’t do anything troublesome or heroic…it is not done. Then Bilbo Baggins meets a troop of dwarves seeking to re-claim their home and all of that changes*. “As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and a jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick.”* Tolkien’s own description speaks of a time between faerie and the dominion of men…a time of great wonder, great tragedy, and greater still victories over evil. Not as hard to read as say **The Silmarillion** or **the Unfinished Tales** so reading is enjoyable and relaxing as we encounter a world of Hobbits, trolls, dwarves, dragons, elves and wizards in an journey for the ages as well as timeless life lessons that we should all adhere to, like: “Never laugh at live dragons!” That is a truth to hold on to whether in Middle-Earth or in the real world.
11. **THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ,** by L. Frank Baum (1900). This is yet another classic that I have never read. I have like millions of people my age seen the movie a dozen or more times but this is the first time reading the book. Much like with the book **PRINCESS BRIDE** there is a whole lot more in the movie than in the book. For instance one of my favorite scenes in the movie is Dorothy and Toto on the bed n the midst of the tornado and you see all the stuff flying by her window. That’s not in the book we go from tornado in Kansas and Dorothy not getting in the root cellar in time to Munchkin Land having landed on top of the Wicked Witch of the West. This book contains a lot of things that aren’t in the movie as well…like Dorothy getting back to Kansas in the end and the adventure that ensues and all the strange people and creatures that are encountered along the way…think a land of fine china and what happens when a group made up of a Lion, a Scarecrow and Tin Man and a little girl with a dog going through it. Also, for those who love the movie and have ever read the book you come away with a whole new appreciation for the flying monkeys…I am thankful that I read this boo to be sure.
12. **SHORT STORIES FROM HOGWARTS: OF HEROISM, HARDSHIP, AND DANGEROUS HOBBIES,** by J,K, Rowling (2016). These were fun…who knew that Professor McGonagall was a half-blood…though Hagrid says at one point in the books that most witches and wizards would be surprised at the number of half-bloods…in fact if it wasn’t for wizards and witches marrying Muggles, Hagrid was known to say there might not be and wizarding folk anymore. Interesting fun fact is that Professor M’s father was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor which made for an interesting life when her mother finally got around to telling her dad that she, the pastor’s wife, was a witch. In this book as well we learn a whole lot more about Remus Lupin and his struggle as a werewolf as well as all of his heroism in the last fight to take down Voldemort. He too, is from a mixed marriage, *“Remus Lupin was the only child of the wizard Lyall Lupin and his Muggle wife Hope Howell”*. We get to know a it more about Sybill Trelawney my least favorite character in the series…and before we knew of Newt Scamander we read of Professor Silvanus Kettleburn and his hobby with magical beasts. There is within these pages a notable chapter on werewolves as well. Great little books 7- to 100 pages depending upon formatting.
13. **SHORT STORIES FROM HOGWARTS: OF POWER. POLITICS AND A PESKY POLTERGEIST,** by J. K. Rowling (2016) This little book is chock full of information the harry Potter reader could not get anywhere else. The book begins with many surprises as we are re-introduced to one of the most vile women in the harry potter series Delores Umbridge. We are treated to a list of all the Ministers of magic through the ages and a history of Azkaban which iis extremely helpful in wondering why the place exists and where the Dementors began and further information on their purpose. We are also reintroduce to Professor Horace Slughorn with much of the information dating to his first time at Hogwarts when he got too chummy with Tom Riddle. The Slughorn family is actually one of the few pure-bloods that can actually trace their linage back generations. Along with this since Prof. Slughorn was a master at potions she throws in a couple of chapters on potions and one on cauldrons. For some reason she includes a chapter on Professor Quirinus Quirrell. Quirrell a half-blood as well led a rather pitiful life. But then we get to the fun…Peeves the Poltergeist which seems that this is a interesting breed that they are generated depending the type of activity in a place. It is said of Peeves, *“It was inevitable that, in a building bursting with teenage witches and wizards, a poltergeist would be generated; it was likewise to be expected that such a poltergeist would be noisier, more destructive and harder to expel than those that occasionally frequent Muggle houses. Sure enough, Peeves is the most notorious and troublesome poltergeist in British history. Unlike the overwhelming majority of his colleagues, Peeves has a physical form, though he is able to become invisible at will. His looks reflect his nature, which those who know him would agree is a seamless blend of humor and malice. Peeves is well-named, for he has been a pet peeve of every Hogwarts caretaker from Hankerton Humble (appointed by the four founders) onwards.”* Both of these books are well worth the price for any Harrry Potter fan. While you may not have been a fan of her screen plays these books take to reader right back to the wonder and humor and intrigue of the original books.
14. **FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM,** by Newton (Newt) Artemis Fido Scamander (circa 1970’s). This particular book that I downloaded from Kindle Unlimited has animation and color that make this book very enjoyable. This is a book written as if it is an actual textbook full of dates and events that make it appear to correspond with “real historical” events. A book written to the wizarding world for their knowledge of magical beasts and the legislation surrounding them. This is not like the movies at all…as I said this is more of a animated text book for us Muggles. The book opens with this information concerning the author, “Newton (Newt) Artemis Fido Scamanader was born in 1897. His interest in fabulous beast was encouraged by his mother, who was an enthusiastic breeder of fancy Hippogriffs. Upon leaving Hogwarts School of Withcraft and wizardry, Mr Scamander joined the Ministry of Magic in the Department of regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. After 2 years at the Office for House-Elf Relocation, years he describes as ‘tedious in the extreme’, he was transferred to the Beast division, where his prodigious knowledge of bizzare magical animals ensured his rapid promotion. Although almost solely responsible for the creation of the Werewolf Register in 1947, he says he is proudest of the Ban on Experimental Breeding, passed in 1965, which effectively prevented the creation of new and untameable monsters within Britain. Mr Scamander’s work with the Dragon Research and Restraint Bureau led to many research trips abroad, during which he collected information for his worldwide bestseller Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them. Newt Scamander was awarded the Order of Merlin, Second Class, in 1979 in recognition of his services to the study of magical beasts, Magizoology. Now retired, he lives in Dorset with his wife Porpentina and their pet Kneazles: Hoppy, Milly and Mauler.” Like the book **Princess Bride** the writer is seeking to persuade the reader of its factual ness. The author tells us why they re-printed this book*, “In 2001, a reprint of the first edition of my book Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them was made available to Muggle readers. The Ministry of Magic consented to this unprecedented release to raise money for Comic Relief, a well-respected Muggle charity. I was permitted to reissue the book only on condition that a disclaimer was included, assuring Muggle readers that it was a work of fiction. Professor Albus Dumbledore agreed to provide a foreword that met the case and we were both delighted that the book raised so much money for some of the world’s most vulnerable people. Following the declassification of certain secret documents kept at the Ministry of Magic, the wizarding world has recently learned a little more about the creation of* **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them***.”* Then I think it is important for us to know the purpose he had in writing this book and so I will conclude with these the authors actual words: *“I offer this work as a mere introduction to the wealth of fantastic beasts that inhabit our world. Eighty-one species are described in the following pages, but I do not doubt that more will be discovered, necessitating another revised edition of* **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them.** *In the meantime I will merely add that it affords me great pleasure to think that generations of young witches and wizards have grown to a fuller knowledge and understanding of the fantastic beasts I love through the pages of this book.”* Yet another book that every Harry potter fan ought to have in their library.
15. **ABIDING IN THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY: BUSH PILOTS FOR GOD,** a memoir/ manuscript by George De Voucalla, 2019). The purpose for this “book” is to cover “25 years of flying in some of the world’s most beautiful surroundings, so that some of the ‘Least of these’ might hear the call of God, in a language they can understand.” George began his journey in America but in his elementary years falling in the early 30’s George’s father moved them back to Greece his homeland to seek to take care of His family’s needs. As George would say throughout this “book” the Lord was obviously watching out for him as he and his family were spared terrible suffering during WWII and as he flew into and out of very many harried instances in the jungles of South America as a bush pilot working for JAARS (Jungle Aviation and Radio Service of Wycliffe Bible Translators) as they shuttled Wycliffe Translators from village to village. I keep putting the word “book” in quotations because in most ways it is obviously his flying log notes with a bit of embellishment. The stories that he tells of his career with JAARS/Wycliffe range from extremely exhilarating to mundane as he has catalogued many of his flights during his 25 years as a bush pilot. This was interesting for the most part but the thing I lacked through most of the book was much reference to family and how they faired during these years. There are occasional sightings of the family but way too few for me when thinking of missionaries on the field. But through it all God’s faithfulness certainly is clearly seen.
16. **THE ONE TRUE GOD,** by Paul David Washer (2004). I read this study guide in response to someone asking me about Paul David Washer who I had only heard about but didn’t know much about. Concerning this book I agree with Ian Murray’s assessment of this book, that this is one of the best study guide I have seen in recent years on the person of God. Washer is a Baptist but seems to be very much a Calvinist. He writes and what little I have heard him speak (except for the times he shouts) he is extremely clear in his presentation. Another reason why I like this study guide is because it goes a little deeper than the usual study guide by not skirting some of the “harder doctrinal understanding of God’s nature and person. This is NOT seminary level but it could easily be Bible College level in that it expects more from God’s people than a cursory perusal of the biblical facts. And the fact that he requires the learner to actually use the Bible to get His answers doesn’t take away from this study as being an open book study but rather gets a person engaged with the Scriptures which is absolutely crucial when studying about God. He seeks to have his student use the **New American Standard Bible** which has been an extremely reliable translation at a time that the **New International Version** was still popular and was only a mediocre transliteration at best. The **English Standard Version**, another word to word translation like the NASB had only been around a couple of years by the time he wrote this so he would have still been tied to the NASB which is a sound translation. So all in all a great study at around 200 pages depending upon formatting…not too long either.
17. **GUARDING THE HEART,** by A.W. Pink (1930’s digitally reproduced with study questions added by Chapel Library 2006) This book is a must for all believers…in fact, I think I am going to re-read it next month because the truths that are found here in can not be incorporated with one reading. This is an exposition of **Proverbs 4:23- *“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”*** However, don’t think that this is the only text…this book is filled with Scripture supporting literally everything he says. Pink through this exposition seeks to answer the questions that every Christian asks. We know we need to do this, but how? There are a number of quotes/prayers I could use but this one captures the heart that Pink is seeking to reach in this book. *“Oh Lord, thou requires me to keep my heart with all diligence, and I feel utterly incompetent for such a task: such a work lies altogether beyond my feeble powers; therefore, I humbly ask Thee in the name of Christ to graciously grant unto me supernatural strength to do as Thou hast bidden me, Lord, work in me both to will and to do Thy good pleasure.”* I can’t help it I must add one more quote to show just how practical this text is, “*A very large and important part of heart work lies in observing its first motions, and checking sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at the first, and a little watchfulness and care then, prevents much trouble and mischief later. But if the first movings of sin in the imagination be not observed and resisted, then the careless heart is quickly brought under the full power of temptation, and Satan is victorious”.* This particular digital version is available for free through Monergism or Chapel Library web sites and is roughly 106 pages.
18. **ALL OF GRACE,** by Charles Spurgeon, (first published in 1886 and has been in print ever since). In its original printing **All of Grace** was entitled, ***“An Earnest Word with Those Who Are Seeking Salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ”.*** Such an encouraging read as many of Spurgeon’s reads are. This book highlights the doctrines of Grace without being an overbearing theological treatise. As he says towards the end of this book, *“God’s faithfulness is the foundation and cornerstone of our hope of persevering to the end. The saints will persevere in holiness, because God perseveres in grace. God continues to bless and therefore believers continue to be blessed. He continues to sustain his people and therefore his people continue to keep his commandments. This is good solid ground to rest on and it is delightfully well suited as the title of this little book,* ***All of Grace****.”* This is Spurgeon at his best perhaps. Though the fight was getting harder for him at this time he is still fighting but his own words speak to the times as much as to his own fatigue, *“If my reader has not accepted what I have put forward in these pages, I am truly sorry. Reading a book is of small value unless the truths it contains are understood, taken to heart, and put into practice. It is like seeing lots of food in a store and yet remaining hungry, because it was not taken home and eaten. Dear reader, it is all pointless that you and I have met, unless you have actually taken hold of Christ Jesus, my Lord. My desire in writing was definitely to benefit you and I have done my best to do so. It pains me if I have not been able to do you good, because I wanted to win that privilege.” If you have no desire for the wonderful blessing that I wanted to bring to you, at least do the right thing and admit that the blame for your final doom will not lie at my door. When the two us of meet before the great white throne you will not be able to accuse me of wasting the time you used, which you were kind enough to honor me with while you were reading my little book.”* It is said to be the simplest and most complete presentation of the Gospel that most people have read…and it would seem so since this is perhaps his most re-printed work of the volumes he spoke and had written.
19. **CALL TO ARMS (THE BLOOD ON THE STARS SERIES BOOK 2)*,*** by Jay Allan (2017). The war between the Confederation and the Union has begun…and it is a winner take all confrontation or is it? I know…I know…I said I wasn’t going to read any more of these, even as good as they are, because the author is now up to 16 books in the series and still going. But…the fact is they are so good…and I found myself without anything else “fun” to read so I downloaded from kindle unlimited a couple more just to see. ☺ This one was as the last so full of action. The dialogue moves as if you are actually standing in on the conversations…the subject matter, while in space perhaps in the 24th century, is compellingly contemporary for our place in history now. Listen in on this quote from 2 “framers’ of the current history of the Confederation*, “The problem wasn’t what a scared and mobilized Confederation could achieve when pressed against the wall… it was what a complacent and soft one did between conflicts. The Confederation fleet was only a shadow of what it could have been. But there was no way a Republic could sustain public support for constant wartime levels of military production.”* There is the intrigue and the backstabbing that goes on in politics for “the greater good”…and the cost of service to your country fighting for a righteous cause or not. The extent of loyalty and the heroism that is on display makes this a compelling series for sci-fi geeks like myself.
20. **THE ONLY PLANE IN THE SKY: AN ORAL HISTORY OF 9/11,** by Garrett M. Graff (2019). This is another of those **WOW** books. Every so often one of these hits the market of books and is either lost among the hundreds of books going to print in a given year or it has an impact far beyond what even the author was intending. This book is a very intimate and personal book. The testimony of so many, from those who would be victims to their families and the survivors and so many in between, is absolutely moving. As the author goes from the day before 9/11through the years that followed this horrific tragedy we see, feel and hear from people directly involved to those on the fringes like those in the White House or on the Presidents plane…hence the title...**THE ONLY PLANE IN THE SKY**. All plane traffic had been grounded because no one knew where or if the next murder by plane attack would come from so after the President left Sarasota that morning his plane became that plane as he oversaw all that he could from there…wanting to be back in Washington but not being allowed until given the all clear later in the day. In reading this book you hear the stories of families as the author picks up their stories at the time of the attack all the way through to the reunion with their family members even after they had been pronounced dead. We see individual business people who were in the Towers that day and got out by the skin of their teeth…some saved by firemen or police and others by their fellow business people. We read of great heroism in the face of a great tragedy and deal all over again with those who would never come home again. For those of us/you who remember this day vividly it will move you to tears in multiple places as it did me. In fact, if you are not moved to tears…again…as one person put it*, “… you may need to check your pulse because something may be wrong with your heart.”* But we need to read this book maybe to get our hearts re-started reminding us why we in America do what we do and reminding us further who we really are not what the media is trying to tell us wrongly. I have this in hard back as it was a gift…but I will gladly lend it out to any who would like to read this wonderful book.
21. **THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN: THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF AMERICA’S FIRST BLACK FIGHTER PILOTS IN WORLD WAR II** by Charles River (2015). This book is better than any other book I have read on these wonderful pilots, as it captures the passion and duty of these men for their country, in their own words, even in the face of deep seated segregationist policies within the Armed Forces and the country. This book comes with pictures which are also helpful in meeting some of these guys some of whom are not with us anymore. The struggle is the heart of the story because they never gave up…they had a dream and a desire that overruled all the racial and personal hardship. Their dream was to fly…and their desire was to serve their country at whatever cost. A great little book that should be on everyone Kindle list or their shelf right up there with the other great books on the sacrifices of the men and women who go off to war with the desire to serve their country.
22. **THE MOST IMPORTANT YEAR IN A MAN’S LIFE: What every Groom needs to know…and THE MOST WONDERFUL YEAR IN A WOMAN’S LIFE: What every Bride needs to know** by Robert and Bobbie Wolgemuth and Mark and Susan DeVries (2003). We have been using this wonderful book for many years in our “pre-marital” classes though it is obviously written for the first year of marriage as a couple gets know one another and sets up patterns that will be with them for the rest of their lives. This book aids in helping the couple set up patterns or “normal” that will positively enable them to grow together with a singular purpose of fulfilling what they were created for… to glorify God. I hadn’t read this cover to cover for a while…at least 3 or 4 years…usually relying on memory and highlighted portions when talking with the couple but this tie I decided it was time to go through it again cover to cover for my own refreshment and preparation. This whole book centers on **Deuteronomy 24:5** in many ways***, “When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.”*** But we also recommend this book for couples who are seeking marriage counseling as in many cases those early investments …those “new normal” were never established and this book helps couple to correct some of their past weaknesses. I have often talked about how everyone’s marriage needs regular CEU’s – continuing education units…so we can stay “up” on the ways to keep our marriages healthy…well this is a book that enables couples to do just that. The only thing is that many of the illustrations are getting old but if a couple can look past these to applying the content to their marriage…their marriage will become stronger and will by God’s grace flourish.
23. **THE CRUCIFIED LIFE: HOW TO LIVE OUT A DEEPER CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE,** By A.W. Tozer (edited by James L. Snyder 2018 after many corrections to the 2013 e-version) These are essays and sermons that Tozer gave on a subject near and dear to his heart through the years. James Snyder was able to put many of these into a cohesive book form so that we generations later can see and hear Tozer’s thought pattern on this most important subject to the Christian. One of the criticisms of this book from someone today talks of how Tozer is too blunt in his talking about how weak Christians are…(he was speaking and serving in the1920’s through to the early 60’s up until his death.) But the truth is much of what he says is extremely relevant today as if he was speaking to the church today…and of course, he is…is anyone listening*?* He says, *“What a bunch of unworthy people we evangelicals have become, daring to stand up on our feet and preach to an intelligent audience that the essence, the final purpose and the cause of Christ is to save us from hell. How stupid can we get and still claim to be followers of Christ? The purpose of God is not to save us from hell; the purpose of God is to save us to make us like Christ and to make us like God. God will never be done with us until the day we see His face, when His name will be on our foreheads; and we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. What a cheap, across-the-counter commercial kind of Christianity that says, “I was in debt, and Jesus came and paid my debt.” Sure, He did, but why emphasize that? “I was on my way to hell and Jesus stopped me and saved me.” Sure, He did, but that is not the thing to emphasize. What we need to emphasize is that God has saved us to make us like His Son. His purpose is to catch us on our wild race to hell, turn us around because He knows us, bring judgment on the old self and then create a new self within us, which is Jesus Christ.”* He doesn’t pull any punches because the Church has gotten soft on so many things and this was at least 70 years ago…so it would seem again whether it is 1st century church or the 20th century or 21st century church all of us need the message that he is teaching here. This book forces us to look at ourselves closely requiring repentance of sin and acceptance of the truth that we have been crucified with Christ and we longer live…so we should be living not “our best life now” as if it was about us…but we should be living a crucified life that glorifies God for what He has done, is doing and will do. 250 pages plus or minus depending upon formatting.
24. **RUINS OF EMPIRE**, (Blood on the Stars Book 3) by Jay Allan (2017). This book is yet another shoot ‘em up exciting interstellar adventure where intrigue, loyalty, and dedication to duty is seen clearly*... “Okay… I’ll tell Admiral Striker.” He got up and walked around the desk. “I can’t tell you how relieved I am, Atara. I didn’t want you to go either.” She stood up slowly, facing him. Then he reached out and the two hugged. “One more tour together,” he said softly.”* But that dedication and loyalty can be misguided as well when one side’s goal is the complete over throw of the Confederation. War rages between the Confederation and the Union. Shattered fleets watch each other warily across a war torn frontier. Both sides are licking their wounds, gathering strength to continue the fight. The Confederation and the Union are arch enemies on any day but now they have found something…something that could turn the tide of the war and the known universe in one favor or the other. If the Confederation is able to rediscover the technology of the ancients, it will be safe for generations to come, its defensive forces untouchable by its enemies. But if the Union gets there first, if it can adapt the incredible power of mankind’s lost technology, it will gain the power to enslave all humanity. This time the fight isn’t for territory. It isn’t for position or tactical advantage. It is for the future. These are addicting and they are free so ii keep picking them up.
25. **THE GOSPEL IN EXODUS,** by Henry Law (digital copy 2109, by Monergism Books, first published in 1867 as the **Christ is All: The Gospel in the Pentateuch**,). Monergism has set out to digitally separate this one book into five, I suspect for easy reading and study. Dr. Law was masterful in seeing the types of Christ in the Pentateuch. As we saw with The Gospel in Genesis he has a dogged determination to help us understand the images and types of the Old Testament for us New Testament times believers thus enriching our understanding of the purpose and work of Christ then and today. He takes the images of the burning bush the Passover the Red Sea crossing along with the Pillar of fire and reveals how they are types of Christ or Christs work for His children. Like no other work that I have read he breaks down the Tabernacle into pieces and relates all of them to Christ and His work of redemption without the hint of stretching the truth leaving the reader with the assurance of his words. It is amazing how these words speak loudly to believers but he also speaks to non-believers calling them to salvation or perdition…expecting that non-believers would read this biblical commentaries and that the Spirit would move in their hearts to repent. He ends this work with reference to God Name from Exodus 33 and 34 telling Moses that He will proclaim to Moses His Name. he says to this; *“A retinue of glory issues from the courts of heaven. Each image shows some glimpse of Him, whose full display would blind our mortal sight. The foremost in the group utters the name, 'Lord' or 'Jehovah.' Oh! wondrous sound! It casts the mind back through the ages of eternity gone by; it bears it forward through eternity to come. It loudly tells that through the past, the present, and the future, One is. It pictures Him as 'I am,' before time was—'I am,' when time shall be no more. It robes Him in all the majesty and dignity and grandeur and boundlessness of changeless unity. It exhibits Him as the sole great fount of every stream of life.”* And then he ends this section with this reminder; ***“The Lord, the Lord God, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.’*** *Reader! such is God's saving Name. Oh! hear it now, and with the ear of faith. It is not heard in hell.”* (Depending upon your formatting around 165 pages)
26. **INSUFFICIENT: PURSUING GRACE-BASED PASTORAL COMPETENCE,** by Randy Nabors (2020). This is the second of Rev. Nabors books I have read of late the last one entitled **MERCIFUL** caused me to reflect on how I look at the “Love thy Neighbor” command. This book has caused me great reflection on my ministry style and commitment. As I have read this book that is written for those considering their call to ministry, to the new minister and to us old crusty types as well. Like CEU’s for the medical profession this book is one of those for the professional ministry with extremely helpful questions of reflection at the end of each chapter. This will be a book that I recommend to my colleagues for sure. Randy is a down to earth guy that doesn’t mince words because there is too much at stake from our own spiritual health to the health of those we have been called to lead. He says after it is all said and done, *“I have tried to speak realistically about the challenges of ministry. So many pastors pursue a call to ministry but don't make it past Year 5. Very few make it for a lifetime. The odds go up if a pastor is in a denomination that requires training, provides accountability, and offers some measure of support. The odds also go up if a pastor is privileged to shepherd a church that has loving and loyal leadership that cares for both the pastor as a person and for the congregation. Few people would neglect maintenance on their home, car, or tools if they valued them. Pastors need maintenance as well. The task of ministering the Gospel is indeed a special one. But the Gospel ministry, the pastoral call, and the gifts of pastor/ teacher are given to real flesh and blood people. We are all insufficient in fulfilling that office and calling, no matter how much public success we have enjoyed.*
27. **ECHOES OF GLORY (BLOOD ON THE STARS BOOK 4),** by Jay Allen (2017). And Tyler Barron and the Dauntless are caught up in the fight of their lives. So much of this book speaks of the Romanesque society of the Alliance and the coupe that takes place there. This is like something out of a Greek tragedy to be sure; people’s names, city names and even the struggle in their early history to become the most powerful warriors in the universe. The Union, of course, is behind all the underhanded deeds that are going on turning “brother against brother” by buying off the powerful so that they can work the puppet power put in place to their advantage with the war against the Confederation. But there is a faction of the Alliance that has gotten a way to fight for the “true honor” of the Alliance. One that wasn’t bought and paid for by the Union one to which who will begrudgingly look to the Confederation for help which is not their “way”. “The way is the Way” or is it? This is yet another well written book that continues this long series from which I will be taking a bit of a break from for now…But, alas, “I will be baaack!”
28. **INVASION DIARY: A DRAMATIC FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF THE ALLIED INVASION OF ITALY,** by Richard Tregaskis (1944 originally- 2016 digitalized). This book much like the last one of his that I read, **GUADALCANAL DIARY,** by Richard Tregaskis (1943 and then for digital formatting 2016) is exactly as the name suggests a diary that he would turn into news stories concerning the war effort which then were turned into a book to get a wider audience. He has just gotten to northern Africa from the Pacific theater in time to see and be a part of the invasion of Italy in 1943 which would tie up a large segment of the Nazi wat machine that could have been used in Russia and or in France after D-Day. He honors so many heroes from the Generals like Gen. Lucian Truscott, to Gen. Mark Clark, General George Patton to Gen. Eisenhower along with the colonels, majors, captains, lieutenants, and non-commissioned officers all the way down to the private…from bombardier to artillerymen to drivers to doctors to chaplains. He captures these people well because he was there with them in the trenches and on hills being shelled and shot at…in planes during bombing runs and maneuvers and even during times when ground crews of the enemy were shooting at them. Then eventually in a hospital for a long time of convalescence after a near fatal dance with an artillery shell. He was asked this question often once people find out he had come from the Pacific War theater, *“Are the Japs tougher than the Germans?” Answering that question has helped me formulate my own thoughts on the war against the two Axis powers. The answer runs something like this: The Germans are a great deal smarter. They have far better equipment. But the Japs are more stubborn—sometimes unbelievably stubborn—and they have plenty of manpower to throw away. The terrain in the two theaters is so different that you have two distinct kinds of fighting. In Europe the fighting is all in the open. In the jungle the vegetation is like a wall; you have to hack your way through it—and, therefore, tanks and artillery are relatively ineffective. Because tanks and artillery can be used so extensively in Europe, the fighting is much more dangerous. The Japs, on the other hand, depend mostly on rifles, machine guns and mortars; the Nipponese artillery I have seen is, by our standards, extremely primitive. But the jungle itself is a constant menace.”* His writing is so compelling that I will be looking to read his other works, because form the beginning to the end he brings you in and you “feel” like you are going with him to all the places he goes and experiencing all the things he is experiencing on the battlefield or in the hospital or in the officers club. He writes what he sees but it is personal and compelling, not just simple time watch through the day …he has a connection to the people he runs into. His writing style even in his diary is such that you just want more. This particular event in WWII has not received a lot of coverage but this coverage rates right up there with another book I have read on the invasion entitled **COMMAND OF HONOR: General Lucian Truscott’s path to Victory in World War II,** H. Paul Jeffers. Because of his injuries he is unable to see the invasion through to the end but after a brief time of rest and healing in the States he comes back and covers the rest of the war…then the Korea War and lastly Vietnam…with many conflicts in between.
29. **ARMATURA DEI, or, A PREPARATION FOR SUFFERING IN AN EVIL DAY SHEWING CHRISTIANS ARE TO BEAR SUFFRERING, AND WHAT GRACES ARE REQUISITE THEREUNTO: SUITED FOR ALL CHRISTIANS IN THIS PRESENT TIME,** by Edward Polhill (1682 digitalized by Monergism Books 2019). Edward Polhill (1622-1694) was the son of a clergyman of the same name, rector of Ellington, Kent. He studied law and was justice of the peace in Burwash, Sussex, where he owned considerable estates. Polhill was a very methodical writer who sets forth his position and provides scriptural and logical evidence for it, then discusses objections. Polhill is among the most learned and expressive Puritan writers like Richard Baxter, James Ussher, Lazarus Seaman, John Arrowsmith, Stephen Marshall, and others who were highly used and criticized at the time. John Owen disagreed with him on certain points but lauded most of his writings. Cotton Mather once said, *"Everything of Polhill is evangelical and valuable."* I found his writing to be a fresh of breath air to be sure, but he would not be every ones cup of tea to be sure. Some of his paragraphs go on for pages and the English language has not been updated though if you are used to reading the Puritans this would not be a complication. He extensively uses Latin as he recounts the generations of old to support points. There is also a wide use of Scripture in support as well…then there is the history...specifically the history of martyrs that aren’t found even in **Foxx’s Book of Martyrs** all of it written to support this treatise. As an example he says, “Paul was ready to be bound and die for the name of Jesus. Polycarp, when threatened with various deaths, made this reply, Quid tardas? ‘Why dost thou delay? Inflict what thou wilt’" The prepared Christian is ready for all the will of God, which is a happiness that no suffering can interrupt. He is in a posture to overcome all the world, and he will do it. The very pagan emperors did observe the primitive martyrs to be victors in death. It is said of the martyr Vicentius, that according to his name, he overcame in words, and overcame in punishments; overcame in confession, and overcame in tribulation; overcame in fire, and overcame in water; overcame living, and overcame dying. The prepared Christian is a Vincent, a conqueror of the world; his love is above the smiles of it, his fear above the terrors of it. Nay, he is more than a conqueror, he overcomes by suffering, and lives by death; nay, being dead, he yet speaks forth the truth he suffered for, and propagates it to all posterity.” This treatise as originally written was approximately 164 pages but now through the wonder of digital media is down to plus or minus 100 pages depending upon what format it is downloaded in. this is probably going to be one of those books I put on my yearly or every other year list.
30. **THE LONGEST YEAR: AMERICA AT WAR AND AT HOME IN 1944,** by Victor Brooks (2018). This is a highly acclaimed book on what the author calls “the longest year” for Americans of that era. It was this year that saw the turning of power and control from the Axis to the Allies. It was a year where the most Allied troops would suffer and die but their commitment did stem the tide of invaders set on “ruling the world from the worldview and depravity. We begin the year in this book with the offensive in Italy and then the offensive in the Marianas a whole world away as well as a plan to invade Europe on a summer’s day in June. Historian Victor Brooks tells a good tale of that year intertwining events as they occurred concerning the Allied nations that had a new air of commitment and drive to deal with the Axis powers decisively. While he has been acclaimed I find his writing not to be as compelling and other authors who write on that time…I am thinking here of the book **1942: The Year that Tried Men’s Souls.**  I struggled as well with the little that someone like Gen. Lucian Truscott made it into his on-going history of the Italian Invasion and the fact that he doesn’t get even obvious facts right like when he writes of the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo he says that they flew off of the USS. Enterprise when it was the USS Hornet. This and more were distracting…like his incessant references and comparisons to the Civil War battles. However, having said that the chapters where he focused on what was going on at home and on America’s “invasion” of Britain is where he really shines. He seems to grasp the human story here in these two nations…how the war was changing America from Depression to World power…listen to this quote*, “The most optimistic or hopeful pundits suggested that perhaps this huge spending spree would be translated after the war into an upsurge in purchases of refrigerators, automobiles, and houses that might prevent the still-hovering specter of economic depression from returning. Critics also admitted that the same people who were overpaying for often frivolous purchases were also largely responsible for already producing two hundred thousand airplanes, fifty-one thousand landing craft, eight thousand ships, sixty thousand tanks, three hundred eighty thousand artillery pieces, two million machine guns, and ten million rifles within thirty-three months of Pearl Harbor—enough not only to lavishly equip American armed forces but also to supply much of the Allied war needs as well.”…* and how Americans were changing British society (…with the good, the bad, and the ugly but mostly good since we brought with us supplies and food stuffs that were rare on the island during the War)while we trained and lived in preparation for what would become the Normandy Invasion D-Day in Europe. These 2 chapters are worth the price of the book to be sure, otherwise the other information has been told so much better by individual war historians in other works.
31. **FORTITUDE: AMERICAN RESILIENCE IN AN ERA OF OUTRAGE,** by Representative Dan Crenshaw (2020). Rep. Crenshaw a former Navy SEAL commander speaks of his upbringing and how he received a great education in good ol’ fashioned common sense and work ethics. It was from humble but honorable upbringing that he early developed the certainty of wanting to become a SEAL team officer and how through diligence and adversity (the ability to fail and learn) he was able to survive what could have been at the least 100% disability from a IED explosion that tried (and failed) to take his life and his sight). As a SEAL but also as a young man taught well there was not any “give up” in him even at his lowest when he was uncertain what life would bring he would not stop fighting for his sight so he could get back with his brothers on the TEAMS. Then because of his injuries the Navy finally decided to medically retire him even though he had a lot more fight left in him for his brothers and the country he loved. He went back to school got another degree and ran for Congress and the rest as they say is history. But he realizes all of that comes with a cost. He says, *“As a consequence of doing something hard, I was rewarded with meaning. It is self-evident that success won through hard work and sacrifice are more appreciated and more meaningful than success simply given. Suffering and hardship, taken on with purposeful intent, lead to a sense of meaning. Finding meaning is what I think Thomas Jefferson meant when he wrote the words “the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence. In exchange for the promise that our government shall protect this right, it is expected that our citizenry live responsibly and pursue that which is meaningful. It is rare that something meaningful is found without a degree of hardship.”* So he takes what he has learned and has applied it to how we need to live our lives better so that the outrage culture (the enemy of the American story) doesn’t win the cultural war they are fighting right now against the ideals handed down by the LORD from the Bible and from our founding Fathers. He says concerning this outrage culture and how we are allowing it to exist, *“We aren’t acting the way we are supposed to. We mock virtue, without considering how its abandonment accelerates our moral decay. We aren’t acting as a culture that is mature or enlightened or educated, we aren’t acting worthy of this beautiful country and the political system we inherited from our revolutionary ancestors. Rather, we don the mantle of fragility, of anger, of childishness and are utterly shameless in doing so.”* This is a great read for our time…one that we all should read so we can get back to things like common sense and fortitude.
32. **WHOM SHALL I SEND? A TREATISE ON THE COMMISSIONING OF ISAIAH, FROM ISAIAH 6,** by Eric Alexander (2020) Rev. Alexander has been a minister in the Church of Scotland for over 50 years. It seems that this particular treatise was preached and taught many years ago to seek to stimulate the man pursuing the pastoral call to full time ministry but it applications are for all of us as we regularly assess our work in the Lord. He says it best, *“It is only a profound work of grace that has opened our eyes to see the depths of God’s atoning mercy which in our own generation propel us into a glad abandon to God in thankfulness and joy, ready to do anything, go anywhere, make any sacrifice and respond joyfully to any command...We need to catch something of that spirit, that wide-eyed wonder at the possibility of serving God. We need a continual sense of the unbelievable privilege it is to serve ‘…the high and lofty One, whose name is holy.’ Is it something that abides with you? The costliness of serving God is very great; the pain involved in pastoral ministry especially can be quite overwhelming. But I want to say that above and beyond all that there is no greater privilege in all God’s universe than to be a servant of such a God!”* Amen to that statement…God’s grace gets me up in the morning and it is God’s grace that keeps me seeking to do His will as he continually describes as he exegetes this passage from Isaiah 6:1-13. This treatise takes us to the depths of wonder in the throne room of God to the pit of depravity and judgment among God’s people all along exhorting us to preach faithfully rather than seeking the success of the world. We are to proclaim the Word of God faithfully with the expectation that it will be rejected and misapplied so we can actually see the work of the Spirit on peoples lives and not take any credit for it.
33. **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING,** by J.R.R. Tolkien, (50th Anniversary edition, 2004, 1st published in Britian1954). I decided to take Jerram Barrs advice and re-read these classics…this time same edition but the Kindle version saving my 50th Anniversary Edition from too much use. As I have said as I have read through again all my Middle-earth books this year and last…these are stimulating reads…some harder than others, which engage my mind much like the Bible does. There are only a handful of authorized versions which even in themselves do not capture the original writings some of which have gotten lost in printing according to the introductions of the 50th Anniversary edition. This fullness of story has been a delight to read once again…I have been able to see clearer the story and intent of its author seeking to remind people and cultures of things we have lost along the way…important things like basic civilities and hospitality and fortitude and strength of character things that used to be highly prized in a civilized society. Tolkien obviously believed in the depravity of men, but he also saw the worth of men who are guided by a higher principle and how worthy they are to follow and imitate. A good reminder even for us today. This particular tale **The Fellowship of the Ring** …the first of 3 books for the novice or the first 2 books for the hardcore reader looks at these qualities along with the weaknesses of men….but it is the strength found in likeminded though imperfect men banded together…a band of brothers…on a common quest for the good of others that rises above all. *“‘Tell me, Legolas, why did I come on this Quest? Little did I know where the chief peril lay! Truly Elrond spoke, saying that we could not foresee what we might meet upon our road. Torment in the dark was the danger that I feared, and it did not hold me back. But I would not have come, had I known the danger of light and joy. Now I have taken my worst wound in this parting, even if I were to go this night straight to the Dark Lord. Alas for Gimli son of Glóin!’ ‘Nay!’ said Legolas. ‘Alas for us all! And for all that walk the world in these after-days. For such is the way of it: to find and lose, as it seems to those whose boat is on the running stream. But I count you blessed, Gimli son of Glóin: for your loss you suffer of your own free will, and you might have chosen otherwise. But you have not forsaken your companions, and the least reward that you shall have is that the memory of Lothlórien shall remain ever clear and unstained in your heart, and shall neither fade nor grow stale.’”* Together we prevail…alone we fail! Failing is not an option so Sam and Frodo are off on the next part of the journey leaving the fellowship to find its own journey to save Middle-earth. Now I move onto **The Twin Towers.**
34. **THE TWO TOWERS,** by J.R.R. Tolkien. (This edition 2004, 50th Anniversary edition pit into digital form 2012 or sometime after). As I have said before, these are stimulating reads…some harder than others, which engage my mind much like the Bible does. There are only a couple of authorized versions with the many and various other versions losing much of the story along the way according to the introductions of the 50th Anniversary edition. However, this edition, this fullness of the story, preserved and faithfully restored to the 1954 original by Christopher Tolkien, has been a delight to read once again…I have been able to see clearer the story and intent of its author seeking to remind people and cultures of things we have lost along the way…important things like basic loyalty and courage and fortitude and strength of character things that used to be highly prized in a civilized society. Tolkien obviously believed in the depravity of men, for the one ring of power to rule them all seems to be the overwhelming power of sin in the life of men…some can overcome it with the aid of a higher power of friendship and providence but most cannot. Those who can overcome are worthy men who are guided by a higher principle and they are to be followed and imitated. When one team member falls it is no reason for the mission/quest to fail because the completion of the task is what is good for everyone else even if it is not so good for the Ring bearer and his loyal Sam. We saw this after Gandalf fell in the last book and as we see Sam doing at the end of this book in the bowels of Mordor. The way Tolkien describes the way where they walk is so consuming in that you feel like you are there and then there is the smells of Shelob’s lair and Mordor and the images of the place and once again you are there. One could get caught up in despair but along the way we see Sam cheering up Frodo along the way, at just the right time which iis what a friend does. I love this line*; “‘Maybe,’ said Sam; ‘but where there’s life there’s hope, as my gaffer used to say; and need of vittles, as he mostways used to add. You have a bite, Mr. Frodo, and then a bit of sleep.’* Sam never forget where “they” came from, he holds the hope for both of them. Everyone needs at least one friend like that…for many of us it is our wife given to us by God as our helpmate. A great read, now on to **The Return of the King.**
35. **THE SEAMLESS LIFE: A TAPESTRY OF LOVE AND LEARNING, WORSHIP AND WORK,** by Steven Garber (2020). Even the Christian wants all things to make sense in life, of who we are and why we are, and to know that what we do―day in and day out―matters, problem is we only seek to know from our limited, fallen perspective on life. So the daily demands―work, eat, sleep, repeat―often lead to a life that feels void of meaning and disjointed from our deepest beliefs about faith, hope, and love. As he says, *“Born of our unwillingness to see seamlessly—to see everything as sacred, everything as born with meaning and purpose and yet and yet, broken, terribly and tragically broken, because we are—we live our lives as lies. In the Christian vision of reality, of what it means to be human living in this world, the deepest hope is that someday what is broken will be made whole, that all the sorrows and sadness will be finally healed. Our hope is for more than “heaven,” but for a cosmos renewed, a new heaven and a new earth, a promise born of the conviction that a final redemption will happen, that a reconciliation of all things will someday become what everyone will see and hear, that every knee will someday bow to this truth brought about by the blood of Christ.”* Steven Garber challenges us to move beyond our fragmented sense of reality and begin to see all we are and all we do (the Christian, that is)―our work, our play, our relationships, our worship, our loves―as significant to God and to what God is doing in the world. All of this is to be literally seamless for there is no separation between the sacred and the secular for the Christian especially but his argument goes out to the very basic nature of all men as image bearers of God whether believer or not. This is the seamless life―to recognize the hand of God and the handiwork of God right in the middle of our ordinary lives. To see all of life as sacred. His collection of essays guides us in understanding the meaning of vocation and affirms our humanness; made in the very image of God. This work is as philosophical as it is theological…but the questions he asks are not beyond our daily reflection as people no matter our station and stature in life. I love this quote as well, *“MOST OF MY LIFE AGO I decided that I would believe only things in my truest heart that honest Christians had believed in every century and every culture. That has been my hope, stumbling along as I do. Good folk such as Richard Baxter and C. S. Lewis argued for this in their times, seeing a “central hallway” running through history—calling it “mere Christianity”—with the most important beliefs about God, the human condition, and history at the center of this long conversation among people of honest and historic faith.”* We see how he sees life through the lense of Scripture and of faith and how all of this affects vocation and love and worship…LIFE, especially of the Christian. This book is so much like a modern day version of Thomas a’ Kempis’s book **The Imitation of Christ.** I was not aware of him before this book…I will be looking for more of his stuff in the future.
36. **THE VALLEY OF VISION:** A COLLECTION OF PURITAN PRAYERS AND DEVOTIONS, edited by Arthur Bennett (this edition 2005). I have read through these prayers, which are a collection wonderful Puritan prayers, meditations and aspirations. They show us exactly how people prayed through that period of time…what they thought of prayer…and what they thought of the God to whom they prayed. I have read through this many times since seminary and I am not sure that I have ever put it on my Pastor’s reading list for I use this regularly in my morning devotions. These prayers have been used in worship and in books written on prayer to describe the types of prayers that are God honoring. This is more than an historical exercise when reading these prayers…it is a deeply spiritual exercise when we actually contemplate the prayers by reading them out loud as if they are ours. And in some ways it is ours…it is part of the heritage and treasure passed on to us by this particular generation. While most of us do not talk this way any longer the content of these prayers ought to be the content of our prayers. These prayers can also teach us a vocabulary that will enable us to articulate our thoughts as we pray…often a hard thing especially for folks that have been out of the habit of any kind of in-depth praying or have never known how to pray anything more than a simple “Help, LORD!” This has its place…but is not sufficient for regular discourse with the Godhead who delights in our conversing with Him. As you read through this word daily for a year or a life time you will see unity of spiritual language even though the writers come from a cross-section of the Church at that time: New England Presbyterians, Congregationalists, English Dissenters(non-conformists-think Calvinistic Baptists) and evangelical Anglicans with all their differences in worship style, discipline and polity. You will find prayers from the likes of Thomas Watson, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, David Brainerd, William Jay, Henry Law and Charles Haddon Spurgeon. The only critique of this work for me is that we do not know who wrote the particular prayers that we are reading. This copy does not record the names of the authors. This book is and has been highly recommends for decades and I place my voice of recommendation alongside those voices as well.
37. **THE GOSPEL IN LEVITICUS,** by Henry Law (digital copy 2109, by Monergism Books, first published in 1867 as the **Christ is All: The Gospel in the Pentateuch**,). Monergism has set out to digitally separate this one book into five, I suspect for easy reading and study. Dr. Law was masterful in seeing the types of Christ in the Pentateuch. As we saw with **The Gospel in Genesis** and **The Gospel in Exodus** he has a dogged determination to help us understand the images and types of the Old Testament for us New Testament believers thus enriching our understanding of the purpose and work of Christ then and today. In this work he takes the offerings of Leviticus through to the feasts and reveals how they are types of Christ or Christs work for His children. I wish I had seen this work when I was teaching from Leviticus so that I could have been taught more types for the good of the Church. He says, *“Each offering in this court is a full page of Gospel-truth. Christ in His grace and work is the golden key to open every part. Leviticus is Calvary fore-shown. Calvary is Leviticus unfolded. The one casts forward the morning ray. The other pours down the mid-day blaze. But the early and the brighter beams stream from one Sun—Christ Jesus. The brazen altar is the herald of the cross. The cross re-echoes to the brazen altar's voice.”* His breakdown of the Sabbath is like no other. *“Reader, review now its position. It is God’s first command (don’t agree with this…first command seems to be concerning marriage and being fruitful and multiply et al). The patriarchs kept it. Sinai preached it. The holy tables gave it a central place. The holy ark encased it. The Jewish church revered it. Prophets enforced it. Jesus upheld it. The Apostles sanctioned it. The Christian Church throughout all time has prized it. The prophetic finger still points to it as a last-day blessing. (Isaiah 66:23.) Eternity waits to be an eternity of Sabbath.”* But he deals with other images as well like the strange fire of Leviticus 10, leprosy in chapter 13, the Kinsmen Redeemer in Leviticus 25 and many other things right down to the last verse, ***“These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.”*** He says about these words*, “These last words fall with solemn weight. They are the farewell of these pages. They seem to seat us on some height, whence we survey the traversed plain. They bring the whole into a narrow view. They bid us to cast back a parting glance, and count our gain before we onward move. As we reflect, one truth is obvious. The main lesson of this Book is Christ.”* One more, I can’t help it*… “Now read Leviticus again. Its pages cry, 'Sin need not be your ruin.' There is a death which saves from death. There is a stream, which cleanses from all stains. There is a wounded side, which shelters—hides—redeems. A Savior dies. And, if through grace you clasp His cross, all—all—is pardoned. Leave not Leviticus, until you shout, ‘I see salvation's glorious scheme. I see a God-man bleeding in my place. I see transgression laid on Him. He has endured my hell. He calls me to His heaven.’ Then will these types be chosen pleasure-ground, and steps to ever-brightening views.”* (Depending upon your formatting around 165 pages)
38. **THE RETURN OF THE KING,** by J.R.R. Tolkien (2004 anniversary issue complete with annotations) . The take away from this book while reading this book in the light of Covid 19, racial unrest and the desire to rebuild our economy after Covid, is that these are cycles of life that men seem to be always going through. Along the way, God raises up men and women to “rally” the troops…whether that be for the Reformation of the Church or the restoration of an economy. But through it all there are always tensions with people that ebb and flow through this constant cycle of life at least here among the men of the West. Even after Sauron is finally defeated that is still tension among men, and then as well between the manifestations of evil that still remain…orcs, goblins, and trolls. *“‘Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule.”* No matter what successes a society have they are always at the mercy of their weakest and vilest selves and yet there are times of joy and celebration for not all is lost…even when things are times are the darkest. This has been the story of men throughout time…even the story of God’s children. This is the way that God planned it and this is the way the Tolkien planned his Middle-Earth world. *“Already the Ring tempted him, gnawing at his will and reason. Wild fantasies arose in his mind; and he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dûr. And then all the clouds rolled away, and the white sun shone, and at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit. He had only to put on the Ring and claim it for his own, and all this could be. In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him.”* As I was once again reading this amazing tale,I was impressed with the vivid word pictures that he paints as he describes the forest lands of Ithilien, the city of Minas Tirith as well as the ugliness of the towers of Mordor, the orcs and their spawn. But as I said, through it all, through all of this tale there is hope best expressed by this statement that has warmed the hearts of so many readers, *“There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach.”* A classic that I will come back time and again.
39. **HOW CAN I BE RIGHT WITH GOD?** , by R.C. Sproul (Kindle 2017) This is classic R.C….this is #26 in an extended series calls Crucial Questions. This is one deal with his classic theme “justification by faith”. Breaking down this statement to its lowest common denominator. This booklet also summarizes most everything he has printed concerning the comparison and contrast between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation on this critical issue. He says, *“While the Roman Catholic Church denies the doctrine of justification by faith alone, it does not deny the importance of faith; it does not teach that justification is by works alone. But it does insist that certain works are necessary in order for a person to be deemed just by God, which can be seen most clearly in its doctrine of penance, as we saw in the last chapter.”* But you have to love this, for it shows that he is not always one side in his critiques, *“In defense of the Roman Catholic Church, the Roman theologians of the sixteenth century were terrified that some people would hear justification by faith alone and think that it means that all a person needs to be saved is a casual acceptance of the truth claims of Christianity, with no accompanying change in the person’s life. They were concerned that this formula would open a floodgate of iniquity. So it was imperative for the Reformers to define the character and nature of saving faith. The Reformed theologians discerned ten distinct dimensions to the concept of faith as it is found in the New Testament, which have been condensed to three major aspects of saving faith.”* Concerning Sproul’s works, I would say, rather than picking up his other longer and protracted works on the subject this one will suffice for those who are new to the Reformed faith and also for those of us who need a refresher on such subjects so we might be able to articulate this doctrine the easiest way. In this booklet, Dr. R.C. Sproul delves into Scripture and church history to explore the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In so doing, he explains that by faith alone in Christ alone, sinful men and women can be justified and stand forgiven before a holy God. R.C. says, *“This Apostle (Paul) was a man who was constantly extolling the virtues of patience, gentleness, meekness, charity, and tolerance; who, conversely, constantly rebuked the sins of contentiousness, divisiveness, quarrelsome spirits, belligerence, and so on. This man said that we ought to strive as much as we possibly can to live at peace with all men; he was known as the Apostle of peace and unity. Yet suddenly he came to a point over a doctrine (justification by faith) where he said, ‘There can be no toleration here. To tolerate the distortion of the gospel into another gospel is to tolerate the intolerable.’”* This is well worth the 90 or so pages depending upon your formatting.
40. **SACRED DUTY:A SOLDIERS TOUR AT ARLINGTON CEMETARY,** by Sen. Tom Cotton (2019). An amazing journey behind the scenes of Arlington National Cemetery. Senator Tom Cotton’s **SACRED DUTY** offers an extremely close and personal portrait of “The Old Guard,” the revered U.S. Army unit whose mission is to honor our country’s fallen heroes on the most hallowed ground in America. Cotton was a platoon leader with the storied 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment—The Old Guard—between combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the height of the Iraq Surge, he carried the flag-draped remains of his fallen comrades off of airplanes at Dover Air Force Base, and he laid them to rest in Arlington’s famed Section 60, “the saddest acre in America.” He also performed hundreds of funerals for veterans of the Greatest Generation, as well as the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He gives his readers an inspiring history lesson of the oldest Infantry Regiment within the U.S. Army as well as a wonderful history of Arlington for the histories interchange in so many places even to them being the soul caretakers of our war dead in all generations of soldiers that are privilege to be laid to rest in Arlington Cemetery. This is a fascinating look into a world unknown to most of us one that leaves the reader proud of such men and women who care so deeply even down to the lack of specks on their matching shoes. This is literally all about the Old Guard and what is required of them in each of the various functions. We think of our military as a fine machine but this book reveals that we haven’t a clue as to the detail that our military take in their pride for country and in this case the pride they take in caring for our war dead who have given the ultimate sacrifice and ought to be honored. He spends a lot of time talking about one “Sentinels” or the Tomb Guard and the select few who ever chosen to fulfill such duty. He says at one ppoint when talking about the Tomb Guard, *“In everything they do, Sgt. Dickerson added, the Sentinels try to embody a platoon motto carved into the M14 stock he had received after his Last Walk. “Soldiers never die until they are forgotten. Tomb Guards never forget.” Among those soldiers never forgotten are three Sentinels who have fallen in defense of our nation. These Sentinels, who returned to regular infantry units after they left The Old Guard, are legendary within the Tomb’s brotherhood. Their names and the dates of their deaths are among the first things a new man learns in training. And the Tomb Platoon continues to honor them in ways big and small.”* This book is well worth reading. Every age group of reader would find it hard to put down.
41. **7 BIG QUESTIONS Your Life Depends On,** by Dr. William J. Edgar (2020). I was first introduced to Dr. Edgar years ago by my then mentor Don MacNair and I have tried to read whatever he produces since. As a pastor and mathematics teacher for years then served as president of Geneva College he is uniquely prepared by God to explain some of the most difficult passages of scripture as well as some of the simplest but profound. This little book is an example of this. In his own words he says of the reason he wrote this book, *“This book does NOT deal with the questions people often ask, such as, ‘Is there a God?’ It does NOT summarize the Bible’s teaching, like the* ***Westminster Shorter Catechism*** *does, with questions like, ‘What is the chief end of man?’ (Question #1) or ‘What is God?’ (Question #4). Instead, it considers seven questions asked in the Bible. Loudly and softly, you hear each question throughout your life. Together, they describe the human condition and what God has done about it. Read this short book at a leisurely pace, and ask yourself, ‘How do I hear, and how do I answer, each question?’”* The questions he asks are these: Satan: Did God really say? (Gen. 3:1-7); God: Where you? (Gen. 3:8-24); Isaac: Where is the Lamb? (Gen. 22; Jacob and Joseph: Am I in the Place of God? (Gen 30:1-2, 50:15-21); Astrologers: Where is the baby Born to Be King of the Jews? (Matt. 2:1-12); Jesus: Do You Want to Be Healed? (John 5:2-17); Angel: Why Are You Looking among the Dead for One Who Is Alive? (Matt. 27:55-28:8; Mark 15:47-16:8; Luke 23:50-24:11; John 20:1) The way he attacks each of these questions is refreshing and insightful. There are also a couple of bonuses in this book…that is… in the center, between the Old Testament and New Testament questions, he gives one of the best overviews of the period of time between Joseph and Jesus I have ever read. Also, at the end of the book he provides study questions for each chapter some questions that are answered from the chapter but others that require a bit of work from the rest of Scripture to answer. This would be an excellent 7 week book/Bible study, one that hopefully we can incorporate into our teachings at the church. Other books by Dr. Edgar that I would highly recommend are; **LIFTING THE VEIL; THE FACE OF TRUTH** where he seeks to help his reader s seek the truth, the ultimate truth and then seeing it will love it since the truth, in fact, is a person…Jesus Christ, the 2nd person of the Trinity; and **REASONS OF THE HEART: RECOVERING CHRISTIAN PERSUASION**, which seeks to help his readers understand that the Christian message is NOT irrelevant but that as followers of Christ we have the answer to the questions people seem not to want to ask. This one is a book on apologetics, but then it explores why people resist considering the most basic questions about life. Dr. Edgar is a man of his times but a man of God who’s desire is that Christians would understand what we have been given in Christ…so we can love God and our neighbor as God directs.
42. **TRUTHS WE CONFESS; A LAYMEAN’S GUIDE TO THE WESTMINISTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, VOL.1, THE TRIUNE GOD, (2006).** This is volume one of 3 volumes of one of the best commentaries on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Dr. Sproul has done a masterful job including contemporary illustrations as well as historical recollections from the different writers to make this work an easy work to follow and comprehend. This particular volume covers chapters 1-8 breaking the section apart and putting them back together so that it is easily understood making it easy as well to teach from which I believe was one of the main purposes for writing this commentary series…to make sure people could clearly grasps the truth that were so well thought out and put together by the Westminster Divines. It has been extremely helpful reading as I continue to work my way through the WCF with our Men of Valor. I would highly recommend this set to anyone wanting to know more about the confession of faith.
43. **ON HALLOW GROUND: THE STORY OF ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY**, by Robert M. Poole (2010). This book is interesting from the very beginning. As the reader journeys through this book you are hit immediately with the immense amount of controversy and politics that surrounded this national treasure at least for the first hundred years up to the internment of Pres. John F. Kennedy. Concerning President Kennedy’s funeral Mr. Poole writes extensively but here is a small quote that wraps up much of what he says, *“He (President Kennedy) had helped to put Arlington on the map again, transforming the place as events of the past had done—like Robert E. Lee’s departure in 1861, the establishment of Freedman’s Village in 1863, the creation of the national cemetery in 1864, the first Decoration Day in 1868, the return of the dead from the Spanish-American War in 1899, and the succession of all the wars since, each of which added new graves, new monuments, new traditions, and new layers of meaning to the nation’s cemetery. After President Kennedy joined the ranks there, nothing would be the same.”* There is also an extensive history of the Washington and Lee’s family connections to Arlington that can’t be found in one book as it is here displayed. I love this quote from one of those reviewing the book*; “Almost every day we hear about the burial of one of our countries fallen hero's at Arlington Cemetery, the changing of the guard ceremony. Few of us have actually taken the time to learn the history of Arlington. This is a fantastic historical story of how the land was confiscated, became a place for encampment, a place for burial, a camp for ex-slaves after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Over time, our fallen from every war and action have been laid to rest there, making this our countries most 'Most Hallowed Ground'.”* But all of that intrigue and battling really is in the background to the numbers of people that are talked about that are interned there starting from the first soldier from the Civil War to the now famous section 60 with so many from the War on Terror. There are close to 300,000 soldiers interned at Arlington from every major engagement that this country has ever fought. Mr. Pool has presented a story that is so detailed and personal that putting this book down is almost impossible and should be read by any and all history buff or not. Along with Sen. Tom Cotton’s book **SACRED DUTY:A SOLDIERS TOUR AT ARLINGTON CEMETARY** these two book clearly tell a story of commitment, loyalty, sacrifice and duty like no other. The stories in this book **ON HALLOW GROUND** surrounding some of the soldiers interned are definitely worth the price of the book but the whole book is an absolute gem. The tribute that is paid to the private and general alike, especially those fallen in battle reveal the devotion that this nation has to its war deads commitment even in light of recent riots that might seek to undermine their sacrifice. But the ignorance of people simply reveals their lack of connection to history and this is a book that seeks to reconnect us to a on-going history that reveals just how great our nation is even with its warts.
44. **HEY DOC!: THE BATTLE OF OKINAWA AS REMEMBERED BY A MARINE CORPSMAN,**  by Ed Wells (2006). This was put to paper 60 years after the events occurred and the memories seems as clear as you read them as the on the days they occurred. He saw 100 days of continuous combat during one of the bloodiest battles which was near the end of the war in the Pacific…The Battle of Okinawa including the battle of Sugar Loaf. He served as the corpsman and then later the Gunnery Sargent for Company “B”, of the 6th Battalion of the 4th Marine Regiment*. “Mr. James appointed me to be the B Company Gunnery Sergeant. This was in addition to my duties as the senior corpsman. We had two hundred sixty men when we landed on Okinawa. We were down to thirty-two for a couple of weeks. Military Doctrine says that, “a reduction of twenty-five percent made a company ineffective as a fighting unit.”* This story is horse feathers! This account should be placed right up there with E.B. Sledge’ **WITH THE OLD BREED** with a firsthand account from a senior corpsman’s perspective. In his own words, *“My overall purpose in writing this story was to provide a true report of the hospital corpsmen in combat. I did not intend to glamorize the corpsman, but to show their purpose as reinforcement to the Marine in combat. I never met a Marine that I did not admire and respect. Marines are the best fighting men in the armed forces. War is the most exhilarating human emotion, excluding the problem of avoiding death, which is always nearby to take the careless or those who made unwise choices. You can consider yourself made of good material if you were not traumatized by the events you had been through. These events prepared you to face civilian life eagerly. Nothing could be as difficult as war. Can the world endure another conflagration of this proportion? Perhaps diplomats will thrive where war has already failed to enable the world’s populations to settle disagreements. The lives of my great-grandchildren will depend upon this becoming a reality. Wars are started by old men and carried out by young men.”* This is a short account that moves even faster than the number of pages. Once again to hear from this now deceased veteran keeps his memory, and those who died in those 100 days, alive for all who read such books.
45. **THE GOSPEL IN NUMBERS,** by Henry Law (digital copy 2109, by Monergism Books, first published in 1867 as the **Christ is All: The Gospel in the Pentateuch**,). Monergism has set out to digitally separate this one book into five, I suspect for easy reading and study. Dr. Law was masterful in seeing the types of Christ in the Pentateuch. As we saw with **The Gospel in Genesis** and **The Gospel in Exodus** he has a dogged determination to help us understand the images and types of the Old Testament for us New Testament believers thus enriching our understanding of the purpose and work of Christ then and today. Once again, this reading is so inspiring for both the pastor/teacher and for all of us as students of God’s Word. Beginning with the numbering of God’s people from the books beginning and running its course he makes clear parallels and defines types so that we can be edified and God is glorified. Speaking of the construction of the camp he says*, “The Camp. THE POSITION.(positioning) But all these tents share one grand privilege. ‘Around the Tent of Meeting shall they camp.’ They all have common focus. As the planets circle the sun, so these surround the sanctuary. God is the center. They form the wide circumference. And from each door one sight--the holy tent--is visible. Is there no meaning here? There is!--and it is precious. God in Christ Jesus is the center--the heart--the life--the strength--the shield--the joy of His believing flock. In their midst He dwells--their glory and delight. When they go forth, their eyes are fixed on Him. When they return, it is to nestle round His presence.”* When talking about the grapes that the spies brought back and then subsequently voted against entering the promised land (Numbers 13,32) he writes, *“Reader, are you a traveler towards this heaven? When you behold the grapes of Eshcol, do you know, that the vineyard is your sure heritage? The question may be solved. This kingdom is for the subjects of the King—this palace is for His sons. Are you, then, His by faith? They, who are in Him now, will dwell with Him forever. They, who live Christ on earth, go to Him in the upper world. Then ask, ‘Is your soul knit to Him? Are you a branch engrafted in the heavenly stem? Are you the bride espoused to the Lamb?’ Conscience well knows.”* He probes and he prods seeking our true heart. A great read!
46. **CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS UNTO GOOD WORKS,** by Thomas Manton (1660’s; digitized and re produced by Monergism.com 2020). I have included a brief bio of Rev. Manton before, but here it is again. Thomas Manton (1620–1677) was an English Puritan clergyman. He was a clerk to the Westminster Assembly and a chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. After a very strong career in ministry for the Lord history tells us, The Act of Uniformity led to the "Great Ejection" of Calvinistic and reformed pastors and elders from the Church of England. In August 1662, Manton preached his last sermon at Covent Garden on Hebrews 12:1. He also continued to write even when imprisoned for refusing to cooperate for six months in 1670 in violation of the Conventicle Act. 1672 saw the Declaration of Indulgence, in which men like Manton were granted a license to preach at home. Manton then became a lecturer at Pinner's Hall for the so-called "morning exercises." Parliament, though, revoked this Indulgence the year after. Manton would later die on 18 October 1677, and was survived by his wife and three children. Most of his works that have survived (and that is a lot) have been placed in a multi-volume work called **The Complete Works of Thomas Manton** from the mid-19th Century.Monergism.com is taking it upon itself to slice out sections of this vast work and placing expositions like this one of Ephesians 2:10, ***“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*** out digitally since to pick up the volumes would simply scare off even the most avid reader by its sheer size. These 2 sermons are the best exposition of this much beloved text that I have seen. I underlined so much in this short volume that I find it hard to give examples of his exposition*.* I love these 2 quotes, (1) *“For explication of what is here asserted, three things must be explained:— 1. Our relation to God. 2. His way of concurrence to establish this relation. 3. How far the mediation of Christ is concerned in this effect. First, Our relation to God: 'We are his workmanship.' We are so two ways:—(1.) By natural creation; (2.) By supernatural renovation. 1. By natural creation, which giveth us some kind of interest in him, and hope of grace from him. As Ps. 119:73, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn thy commandments.' God is our Creator, and the end of our creation is to serve God; therefore he gives some kind of encouragement to ask the grace whereby we may serve him. But the apostle speaketh here not of the first creation, but— 2. Of regeneration or renovation, which is called a second or new creation. As 2 Cor. 5:17, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,' καίνη κτίσις; a new creation hath passed upon him. By the first creation we are made men; by the second, holy men. Holiness is a thing of God's making…”* and then this one, *(2) In the first conversion we are mere objects of grace, but afterwards instruments of grace. First God worketh upon us, then by us.”* His use of the Greek is also stellar even without much of the updates that we have today. His translating is very similar to John Calvin and even Erasmus bth of whom sort of set the stage for modern translating. Such good stuff. Monergism seems to be coming out with a new “slice” of this vast work every couple of weeks.
47. **PERSONAL MEMOIRS OF ULYSSES S. GRANT,** by Ulysses S. Grant,(published by Mark Twain 1885) U.S. Grant has historically been misunderstood and mischaracterized. In too many cases he has been caricatured as a chronic loser, alcoholic and an inept businessman…the latter one probably being the most truthful of the 3. He was extremely loyal to his wife, too his nation, especially to his president, and to the many generals and soldiers that fought under his command. This volume like no other is from the man’s mouth as he chronicles his early childhood through to the end of the Civil War. Along the way he alludes to his 2 term presidency but he highlights mostly the days where he was most comfortable…as a young man and as a soldier and as a husband and father. He had many maxims that steered his life along the way up and through his presidency, *“One of my superstitions had always been when I started to go anywhere, or to do anything, not to turn back, or stop until the thing intended was accomplished. I have frequently started to go to places where I had never been and to which I did not know the way, depending upon making inquiries on the road, and if I got past the place without knowing it, instead of turning back, I would go on until a road was found turning in the right direction, take that, and come in by the other side.”* And again he says, *“There was nothing left to be done but to go FORWARD TO A DECISIVE VICTORY. This was in my mind from the moment I took command in person at Young's Point.”* He writes this memoir to recount the truth*. “I would not have the anniversaries of our victories celebrated, nor those of our defeats made fast days and spent in humiliation and prayer; but I would like to see truthful history written. Such history will do full credit to the courage, endurance and soldierly ability of the American citizen, no matter what section of the country he hailed from, or in what ranks he fought. The justice of the cause which in the end prevailed, will, I doubt not, come to be acknowledged by every citizen of the land, in time. For the present, and so long as there are living witnesses of the great war of sections, there will be people who will not be consoled for the loss of a cause which they believed to be holy. As time passes, people, even of the South, will begin to wonder how it was possible that their ancestors ever fought for or justified institutions which acknowledged the right of property in man.”* This book is masterfully written and ought to read by all who seek to understand the Civil War or the war to crush the “rebellion”. Books about Grant are fine like Ron Chernow’s book entitled **GRANT,** but reading his own words is much more rewarding. At the end of the book there are also all the orders/correspondence of Grant concerning the movement of the war after he took over the control of the Eastern Forces of the US Military. It is long because it is both volumes of his work which he finished just days before his death so that his family would be taken care of financially after his death and Mark twain made sure of that.
48. **THE GOSPEL IN DEUTERONOMY,** by Henry Law (digital copy 2020, by Monergism Books, first published in 1867 as the **Christ is All: The Gospel in the Pentateuch**,). As with the similar volumes relating to the other 4 books of the Pentateuch, Dr. Law was masterful in seeing the types of Christ in the Pentateuch. As we saw with **The Gospel in Genesis, in Exodus, in Leviticus and in Numbers,** he has a dogged determination to help us understand the images and types of the Old Testament for us New Testament believers thus enriching our understanding of the purpose and work of Christ then and today. This volumes starts at Chapter 18 looking at Moses the prophet and finishes with chapter 34 with Moses the prophet dying on Mt. Pisgah, or Mt. Nebo. revealing for us the symbolism lost and forever seen for our edification. From chapter 1 we read, *“The case of need, then, is most clear. But all is met by Jesus. He undertakes to save, and undertakes to teach. The Church's Savior is the Church's Prophet. He is not slow to enter on His work. In Eden's garden, where the light expired, He strikes a new spark. There He is quick to speak of remedy and rescue—of a woman-born Savior—and His final triumphs. As time rolls on, He adds fresh light. By types, by prophecies, by figures, and by signs, He pictures redemption. He raises holy men, and puts His words into their mouths. He shakes a torch of truth in the world's night. He shows His Calvary through vistas of long time—and so guides many a benighted pilgrim in the path to heaven.”* From the last chapter**,** *“****And ends in the last chapter with, Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah. Deut. 34:1.*** *PISGAH is crowded with instructive thoughts. The scene is solemn, because death appears, and a wondrous life finds here a wondrous end. It is holy, for God Himself attends the dying saint, and closes the dying eyes. But its main interest is the marvel of the distant prospects thence discerned. Moses ascends the mount. God meets His faithful servant. All the beauties of the promised land are spread, as a map, before him. And then he is translated to the heavenly reality. What annals record similar events! My soul, with reverence open this treasure-house of profit. Great Spirit of all light descend, for without Your rays, even Pisgah must be dark! Moses lived long. He passed a spacious sea of trial. He trod a tedious course of trouble. His sighs were many. His spirit was often pained. But the last step came, and landed him in glory!...* *Add Pisgah to the many proofs. The goodly land, so often pledged, lies at its base. The happy tribes now reach their lots. So, too, a rest is promised to the saints of God. There was no failure to Israel. There will be no failure unto us. Jesus has entered as the forerunner. He holds possession in His people's name. The keys are in His hands. He beckons forward. He soon will give the welcome. The prize is sure to faith.”* As I have said these “books” are true treasures for the Bible scholar but also for the regular learner wanting to “SEE” more of Christ in the Old Testament.
49. **CAULDRON OF FIRE**, **(Blood on the Stars Book 5)** by Jay Allan (2017). Once more “unto the breech”. I find myself strangely drawn back to these books when I am between other reading of much more sufficient and edifying content. These 400 plus page books are written so well that they can be consumed very quickly while all the while you stay mesmerized by what is coming on the next page. There are obviously some things that are predictable…but then we like predictability to a certain extent because we always like to at least think we know what is going to happen, but even with that there is that twist…that turn, that keeps you/me coming back for more. As in the 1st book the Marines are probably my favorite characters who are not often highlighted since so much of the action takes place in space among the battleships and the spacers in their fighter ships. Here is a quote that illustrates why I like them, *“All right Marines, we’ve got sixteen minutes ’til we land. Let’s not waste it. Check your weapons, your ammo… and say whatever the hell you want to whatever god you think gives a shit, because when we hit ground, it’s on.” Col. Bryan Rogan’s voice was coarse, his words harder than his usual. A chorus of half-gripes came back over his comm—pretty standard from Marines who’d just been told to check their kits for third time—but Rogan wasn’t in the mood for it, and he shut them down with a savage, “That’s enough… you’ve got your orders.”* It seems Marines are the same no matter the “time” or the “place” in the universe. Lol! Now this particular book deals with the ending of the Civil War within the Alliance began in the last book…a Civil War began by the Union forces trying to bring the Alliance into the war against the Confederation but with the help of the Confederation namely Commodore Tyler Barron the Civil War is decided by the rightful ruler of the Alliance forging a friendship for now against the Union. As with all Civil Wars you find friends and family on opposite side as those fooled into a lost cause and those who are out and out traitorous. That is true with this war as well that pits two men who had been close friends but one longed for power over his own people, *“’You have won, Vennius,’ Calavius said simply. ‘There was a time I could not have imagined facing you as an enemy. I will not apologize, nor will I ask again pointlessly for mercy. What has passed between us cannot be undone, and I die as your enemy… but even among enemies, there can be respect. I thank you for granting me a warrior’s death. Accept now this farewell, from one who fought at your side for far longer than he struggled against you.’ ‘And farewell to you Gratian of the Calavii. Vennius felt anger, rage… a hatred he knew would never leave him for all his old friend had done. But there was remembrance too, of a different time, and for this moment, he focused on that. ‘May you find in death what eluded you in life.’ He turned toward Egilius, his eyes cold, and he said grimly, ‘Open fire.’”* This page of fighting has turn and now onto the next front to meet a weapon far more powerful than anyone in the galaxy has ever seen.
50. **FORGIVENESS OF SINS: OR GOD RECONCILED IN CHRIST,** by Henry Law (mid 1800’s, reformatted and digitalized by Monergism for Kindle use in 2020… 150 pages plus or minus) In this volume Henry Law treats in great detail the amazing truth that sin can be forgiven. There are many aspects to this truth and to mistake one at any point is to corrupt the gospel of Jesus Christ. All that endeavor to read this volume will be richly blessed by the wonderful truth that Henry Law expounds concerning our blessed hope of salvation from sin--in and by--our Savior. He states, *“Religion not framed in Gospel-mold gives neither peace nor hope--its course is joyless, and its end is woe. This deep conviction prompts me thus to write. It may be said this book repeats the truths which constantly I preached. From the pulpit it was indeed my aim to point to Christ, and woe would be to me if now I gave other direction. Another Savior or another Gospel is a fiction beguiling to sure ruin--it is better to be mute than gratify a craving for the conceits and fallacies of man. A Christless bauble glitters only to destroy--such trifling is, I trust, far distant from these pages. Their instant substance is to urge you to seek forgiveness of your sins, and every benefit of Christ's passion at the Atoning cross. Turn not from the humble effort because no eloquence or novel views attract--my yearning is not to excite vain feelings, but eternally to save. It matters little what I think--it matters much what Christ's revelation says. I trust it is our common prayer, Let Christ increase, let man lie low.”* In typical Puritan fashion he seeks to dispel every argument of claim to the contrary of the absolute truth of Scripture. I this volume he takes his readers through a thorough argument on the need for forgiveness through to the completeness and blessedness of forgiveness which enables us to see the Scriptures come alive on such a necessary doctrine. In the section on the means of forgiveness he tells us, *“The holy link which connects forgiveness and repentance has been marked. The Gospel-warning has been heard--that none sit down at the rich banquet of the pardoned, but lowly penitents, with hearts bleeding for sin, and lips humble in contrite confessions, and feet fleeing every evil way. But now the kindred truth appears. The pardoned not only walk in the low valley of penitence; they moreover mount upward on wings of faith. The graces of repentance and faith may not be separated. Where the Spirit plants one, He surely adds the other--where one lives, the other thrives. If one be absent, the other has no place--they lead in concert to forgiveness.”* All in all I would have to say that this is the most comprehensive little work on forgiveness of sins that I have ever seen.

1. **SECTION 60: ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMEMTERY: WHERE WAR COMES HOME,**  by Robert M. Poole (2014) This book is written for all the Gold Star families in this country, especially for all those who have loved ones buried at Arlington in what has been dubbed “the saddest acre” Section 60 which is actually 14 acres in size*. “Heroes are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. One dodges fire to pull a wounded soldier to safety; another parachutes behind enemy lines to rescue stranded comrades; another walks point through fields seeded with improvised explosive devices—all deeds you hear about if you hang around Section 60 a few days.”* I have been to Arlington...all 640 plus acres are sad, on one hand, but it is also a testimony to how our country, unlike other countries, care for its fallen heroes of all wars. Section 60 houses the lost loved ones of many wars but it has grown familiar as the section for those who have died in the War on Terror. This book needs to be read in conjunction with another of the author’s books, namely, **ON HALLOW GROUND: THE STORY OF ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY,** combined, both of these works shed light …a much needed light… on this national treasure known as Arlington Cemetery. He opens the book talking about a memorial day at the Cemetery which is always a big event. This is not just a place of the dead but it has become a place, as has been explained many times, that is a living, breathing community of fellow members of the military, family members, friends, and loved ones of those who have fallen to the new weapons of war: improvised explosive devices, suicide bombs, and enemies who blend in with local populations… can come and fellowship and share common experiences. Several of the newest recruits for Section 60 have been brought there by suicide or post-traumatic stress disorder, a war injury newly described but dating to ancient times. He says, *“Friends and comrades kneel by graves to share drinks with a buddy, one sip for the living, one in the ground for the dead, and so on until the bottle or can runs dry. At times the good earth of Arlington fairly squelches underfoot. Authorities usually look the other way, but on occasion an officious person will drive up, emerge from his patrol car, and remind grieving visitors of the prohibition. ‘So this cop walks up, tells me there’s no drinking allowed, and says he’ll have to take the bottle,’ said Mary Coyer, a buoyant, no-nonsense mother who had driven all the way from Michigan to have a beer with her dead son Ryan, an Army Ranger who finished six deployments before his arrival at Arlington on May 2, 2012. ‘Really?’ she said, fixing the young officer with a stare and pouring half of the beer onto her son’s grave, then half into herself before passing the empty bottle to the cop. ‘No way was that guy getting Ryan’s beer!’”* Within these pages he tells the personal stories of many families like that of the first combat casualty of the Iraq War to be buried in Arlington, Captain Russell Brian Rippetoe, Army Ranger (April 2003). There is many pages devoted to this and other family stories but this little quote captures the essence of the rest, *“Joe Rippetoe, disabled from his Vietnam service, struggled to stand and gripped his right wrist with his strong left hand, guiding his weaker arm into position for a final salute to the boy he knew as Rusty, with whom he had been particularly close. Just before Russell’s final deployment, Joe had showered him with hard-won advice. ‘Never handle a body, yours or theirs, unless you see it fall in front of you,’ he wrote, signing his memo Ranger Rip Senior. ‘Keep weapons and feet in excellent condition, all else will follow . . . Make every shot count . . . When you have nothing to do, dig a deeper hole, rest, eat, ready weapon, study map . . . Don’t wait to introduce yourself to the Lord, get to know him now. In combat you want to be on a first name basis.’”*
2. **SPIRITUTAL COUNSELS,**  by Thomas Charles(1838) Rev. Charles (October 1755 –October 1814) was a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist clergyman of considerable importance in the history of modern Wales. In fact, many attribute the growth of the Protestant Church in North Wales during this time to his work for the Lord. *“The North of Wales in the 1770s was one of the least Christian parts of Britain. The next three decades brought a transformation akin to that of the apostolic era and at the center of the change was Thomas Charles, ‘the Lord’s gift to North Wales.”* As he counsels on various subjects that are important to the Christian he very seldom uses Scripture references except at the beginning of his treatises/sermons. Is this because the people knew the references so well…or is this because he expects that they would go look them up…or perhaps that his view was in the power of the spoken Word to strengthen and transform. He gives great counsel on pride at the beginning of this book and says, *“Thus we are like Satan. We are practical atheists, seeking for sufficiency and comfort in ourselves, and not in God—in the creature, and not in the Creator. No temper or frame of mind can be more opposite to God than this, or further from true godliness. While this self-sufficiency influences the heart, there is an utter impossibility of any reconciliation between us and God. ‘****God resists the proud.****’ And hence our Savior says, ‘****Except you are converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.’*** *We must be* ***‘converted’****, and become what man was at his creation,* ***‘as little children’****—that is, dependent on God, submissive to his will, seeking all our happiness in him alone, being contented, that he should forever be the source of all our happiness, and that he should communicate it in the time, way, and degree he pleases. When thus converted, we, as the creatures of God, become humble in spirit, and, as forgiven sinners, we become contrite in heart.”* Then he counsels on humility making just as clear a case, *“Pride is apt to think poorly of others; but humility leads a man to think poorly of himself. While pride is observing the defects of others, their coldness and deadness, their ignorance and weakness, and is ready to condemn them without mercy; humility has work enough at home; is most jealous of itself, and most suspicious of the deceit of the heart which it occupies. The humble man knows that in him dwells no good thing. He sees sin so prevalent, and has so much to do to watch against all its motions, that he cannot at the same time attend much to others. His complaints are against himself; and with sincere grief he laments his own coldness and deadness, his great unfruitfulness and slow progress in the divine life. He is ready to think others better than himself, and is willing to hope, that there is no one so barren and so devoid of love and gratitude as himself.”* Interesting side note, since he is today one of the lesser known pastors of this period, this was one of the last books in the hands of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones before his death and it led him to conclude that Thomas Charles *“…is definitely one of the most neglected of the spiritual leaders”*. As he wraps up all of his counsel to the Church he prays a simple prayer, “*Good Lord, deliver me from this cursed state of soul! Rather empty me from vessel to vessel, put me in the furnace, let me rather die—than live thus to dishonor you and your cause.”* Excellent book that I will always keep at the top of my reading and re-reading list.
3. **SAM HOUSTON AND THE ALAMO AVENGERS: THE TEXAS VICTORY THAT CHANGED AMERICAN HISTORY,** by Brian Kilmeade (2019,2020). There wasn’t really anything new here in this book but Brian’s writing style made it engaging and seemingly new. When Brian writes about Texas he does so in a way to maintain its dignity even when dealing with some of its messier events. He says, *“Texas was a place where a man could make his fortune. But it was a place for adventurers, for men like Houston, who might also be called second-chance men. Some of those who headed for Texas looked to leave past misdemeanors—or worse—behind. Others wanted success and to accumulate wealth. Some were running away; some were seekers, just looking for a chance to prove themselves. Texas had become a place for new beginnings, for men on the make and for families—and for Sam Houston. In Texas, everyone lived in the present and nobody cared about your past.”* This book moves with the pace of the short war that Texas fought for Independence and as has been said, it feels more like a historical novel than non-fiction. Brian says in the title and in other places in the book that the Texas Victory changed American history and it did, and I for one am thankful for this book that brings it all to the forefront again. At a time when we need heroes again, Houston and many of the men highlighted from Deaf Smith, Davey Crockett, James Bowie, William Barret Travis to Ben Milam are great candidates. Brian Kilmeade has come forth as an able historian using the language of the common people to energize us about history. I have read Brian’s other histories, **GEORGE WASHINGTON’S SECRET SIX: THE SPY RING THAT SAVED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION,** (2016), **THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE TRIPOLI PIRATTES:THE FORGOTTEN WAR THAT CHANGED AMERICA N HISTORY,** (2017), and **ANDREW JACKSON AND THE MIRACLE OF NEW ORLEANS: THE BATTLE THAT SHAPED AMERICA’S DESTINY** (2017). All of these are great books and ought to be read by avid historians and novices alike. Brian ends with this, *“IN THE END, this isn’t a story of politics, local or geopolitical. The brief war of independence is a story of redemption: The slaughter at the Alamo was avenged with the stunning victory at San Jacinto. An unlikely hero emerged in the process and, schooled by Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston performed the role of Texas’s George Washington.”*
4. **INTRODUCTORY ESSAY TO JOHN OWEN’S DEATH OF DEATH IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST,** by J.I. Packer (1958). I picked this essay up once again this week just after God called his servant J.I. Packer home to heaven. This is, as the title says, an introduction to the 1958 modern reprinting of the Owen’s classic **DEATH OF DEATH IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST** from around 1684. The introduction was so good that the publisher determined that it needed to be published as well (1971) because of its clear and concise explanation of the doctrines of grace…often called the 5 Points of Calvinism. The essay is much more; it is a direct refutation of what has become a watered-down man-centered gospel, and a right step on the path to recovery of the God-centered Gospel contained in the Scriptures. All through this short but profound work he contrasts the “old gospel”- the Bible… to the “new gospel” how evangelicalism is changing to keep up with the times and showing how there really is nothing new under the Sun when we seek to modify the Word of God. “*There is no doubt that Evangelicalism today is in a state of perplexity and unsettlement. In such matters as the practice of evangelism, the teaching of holiness, the building up of local church life, the pastor’s dealing with souls and the exercise of discipline, there is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with things as they are and of equally widespread uncertainty as to the road ahead. This is a complex phenomenon, to which many factors have contributed; but, if we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the biblical gospel. Without realizing it, we have during the past century bartered that gospel for a substitute product which, though it looks similar enough in points of detail, is as a whole a decidedly different thing. Hence our troubles; for the substitute product does not answer the ends for which the authentic gospel has in past days proved itself so mighty.* *The new gospel conspicuously fails to produce deep reverence, deep repentance, deep humility, a spirit of worship, a concern for the church. Why? We would suggest that the reason lies in its own character and content. It fails to make men God-centered in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts because this is not primarily what it is trying to do. One way of stating the difference between it and the old gospel is to say that it is too exclusively concerned to be “helpful” to man—to bring peace, comfort, happiness, satisfaction—and too little concerned to glorify God. The old gospel was “helpful,” too—more so, indeed, than is the new—but (so to speak) incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God. It was always and essentially a proclamation of Divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its center of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the center of reference is man”* Just one more quote that wraps up this thought, *“Whether we call ourselves Calvinists hardly matters; what matters is that we should understand the gospel biblically. But that, we think, does in fact mean understanding it as historic Calvinism does. The alternative is to misunderstand and distort it. We said earlier that modern Evangelicalism, by and large, has ceased to preach the gospel in the old way, and we frankly admit that the new gospel, insofar as it deviates from the old, seems to us a distortion of the biblical message. And we can now see what has gone wrong. Our theological currency has been debased. Our minds have been conditioned to think of the Cross as a redemption which does less than redeem, and of Christ as a Savior who does less than save, and of God’s love as a weak affection which cannot keep anyone from hell without help, and of faith as the human help which God needs for this purpose. As a result, we are no longer free either to believe the biblical gospel or to preach it.”* Such a good and blessed reminder.
5. **VIETNAM DAIRY,** by Richard Tregaski (1963, republished in digital form 2018). Tregaskis served as a war correspondent during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. This is a 3 month overview written in the early stages of the War in Vietnam taken especially from the point of view of helicopter pilots both Army and Marine Corps as we “assisted” the South Vietnamese government with “advisors” as part of our NATO obligations. He says, *“It was exciting to be part of something as new as this: the helicopter war, in one of its largest implementations.”* This is a very different operation than the one that would come. He is in Vietnam in 1962 so there are many Korean Vets and still quite a few WWII vets... men who saw and knew combat... and in this case with few casualties at this stage of the War... that would come later when most of the veterans had been rotated home replaced by mostly novices to being a warrior in a War that the politicians wouldn’t let us win. His previous books review in this list **INVASION DIARY** and **GUADALCANAL DIARY** were powerful recollections of the acts of courage and the deaths of heroes in WWII from the Pacific to Italy. Those were particularly gripping as they were as fast as the war in those areas were. This one … not so much. There really wasn’t much happening at this time news worthy and that is seen in this diary. Oh, men were still brave if life and in death but the casualties had not begun to mount up yet. Having said that there are still heartwarming and funny stories told*, “Watson came from a farming family, although he had worked as an auto and tractor mechanic. His home town was a source of much merriment among his squadron mates, but Billy had an answer to that kind of kidding. If some unwary wit sought to discomfort him by asking where Horsebranch, Ky., was, Billy would say: “It’s six miles from Dogwalk, seven-eight miles from Possum Trout, and six miles from Jugville. And the population just went down by one-half. A family moved away from there.”…* to profound and thoughtful as we have always sought to understand what happens in war, *“I have heard lots of servicemen talk about this strange feeling of the imminence of death or injury, and I know it from my own experience. You might call it the Purple Heart syndrome, because it comes after a wound. At first, the natural assumption of the soldier is that the wounds will happen to anybody else but him, that he is not a statistic, and that somehow some unquestioned magic will keep him safe, no matter how bad the casualties get or how scared he is. Then comes the day of the realization, the shock of the wound, the disbelief, the pain. And very often, if he is not given to powerful flights of imagination, if he is not the imaginative type, more a man of deed than thought, the shock can be very profound. The idea is burned in letters of fire in his brain: I can get hurt too. From this point on, frequently there emerges the very brave man, who keeps on taking the chances of being killed or hurt (on the average the chances of being hurt as compared to being killed run from 4 or 5 to 1 to 20 to 1, depending on the kind of war).”* On his way home he received disturbing news while in Hawaii*, “I was poor company, kept thinking about Don Toth, Lew, and Charlie. Finally, I explained to Moana and Patti that I had lost some good friends in Vietnam—and that it had been a great shock. But later a thought came to me which seemed to make it better. I said to Moana: “At least they died like men, like soldiers—doing their jobs well and bravely—for something bigger than they were. I hope that when I die, I can die as well, and that people will be able to say as much for me.” No matter what happens in Vietnam, nobody can subtract credit from men like Don Toth, who died there valiantly.”* There is much to commend this book but not as much as his others.
6. **WEAKNESS IS THE WAY: LIFE WITH CHRIST OUR STRENGTH,**  by J.I. Packer (2013). The simple premise that Dr. Packer seeks to speak to is this, *“For Christians, weakness should be a way of life. Yet most of us try desperately to be sufficient on our own, and we resent our limitations and our needs.”*  With this book he seeks to teach the Christian the importance of embracing our own frailty, and also to help us look to Christ for strength, affirmation, and contentment…and he does this by exegeting II Corinthians through the eyes of Paul’s weakness and thorn. As people, even as Christians we do not like to have our weaknesses highlighted…our pride gets in the way…but on the other side of our pride we know we are weak and so we are discontent until we rest in Jesus Christ as Dr. Packer points out. It is only in fully embracing the reality of our weakness and turning our full need to God that we can start to glorify Him and allow change to be worked in ourselves. He states, “*For what is weakness? The idea from first to last is of inadequacy. We talk about physical weakness, meaning that there is a lack of vigor and energy and perhaps bodily health so that one cannot manhandle furniture or tackle heavy yard jobs. We talk about intellectual weakness, meaning inability for some forms of brainwork, as for instance C. S. Lewis’s almost total inability to do math, and my own messiness in that area. We talk about personal weakness, indicating thereby that a person lacks resolution, firmness of character, dignity, and the capacity to command. We talk about a weak position when a person lacks needed resources and cannot move situations forward or influence events as desired. We talk about relational weakness when persons who should be leading and guiding fail to do so—weak parents, weak pastors, and so on.”* And then to further humble us if we don’t see ourselves in any of these he gives an illustration, *“A Peanuts cartoon from way back when has Lucy asking a glum-looking Charlie Brown what he is worrying about. Says Charlie, ‘I feel inferior.’ ‘Oh,’ says Lucy, ‘you shouldn’t worry about that. Lots of people have that feeling.’ ‘What, that they’re inferior?’ Charlie asks. ‘No,’ Lucy replies, ‘that you’re inferior.’”* In this work he sees the deeply theological as well as having enough humor to be able to laugh at ourselves…the practical side of such an issue. We seek not to be weak, but Paul and Packers argument is that is where we will be strongest…as we rest in the Lord of glory’s strength no matter what is going on. *“While we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord . . . . and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (5:6, 8). All believers should feel that way, for no matter how old or sick we are, thoughts of our future with Jesus will bring fortitude and joy into our hearts. Jesus himself, from his throne, will see to that.”* He ends his book with this, *“Looking forward to this is the hope that will sustain us, as evidently it sustained Paul, while we grow older and our weaknesses, limitations, and thorns in the flesh increase. ‘So we are always of good courage’ (2 Cor. 5:6). May it ever be so. Meantime, the path that we tread daily is overshadowed—no, the appropriate wording is lit up—by Christ himself, our Savior and Lord, who in alliance with the Holy Spirit indwelling us really though invisibly walks beside us all the way. He, our sin-bearing Mediator with the Father, is our shepherd, guide, and model. He is the source of our strength in weakness and of our hope of heaven. He sustains us when our life and well-being are under threat, and his redemptive self-giving for us teaches us generosity in financial giving to relieve others’ needs, one way in which we express our gratitude for grace. Such are the aspects of what is sometimes called the all-sufficiency of Christ that 2 Corinthians displays. For Paul, the Lord Jesus is the controlling center of life in every respect, being both example and enabler throughout.”* An excellent book that helps to clarify what the Christian NEEDS!
7. **SEA STORIES: MY LIFE IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS,** by Admiral William H. McRaven (2019). This book is by the man that wrote a favorite of mine in recent years, **MAKE YOUR BED: LITTLE THINGS THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE AND MAYBE THE WORLD**, (2017). This book while cataloging his life in the SEALS and his rise in rank to 4 star Admiral is really about his life and the lessons he learned along the way. This is a memoir of the admiral’s life from simple beginnings to the longest serving SEAL. In his 37 years as a Navy SEAL, he commanded at every level. As a Four-Star Admiral, his final assignment was as Commander of all U.S. Special Operations Forces. After retiring from the Navy, he served as the Chancellor of the University of Texas System from 2015 to 2018. It is interesting, when, in the beginning of the book, he speaks of his early years prowling around base in the 60’s that could have been me on any number of Army posts that my dad was stationed at...except I wasn’t the ring leader ... I was the sidekick in most “operations” and so I hardly ever got in trouble ... but the relentless wandering on post was a thing to be sure...that a boy from 8 to 13 looked forward to. From early on he says, *“I pushed the spring-loaded knife back into the bottom of the black attaché case. It clicked firmly into place. Rotating the dials to the coded numbers, I turned the two buttons horizontally and the lid to the case popped open, exposing my Luger pistol and a twenty-round magazine. A spotting scope was lashed to the inside along with my passport and several thousand dollars in unmarked bills. Confident that everything I needed was there, I closed the case, checked the safe house one final time, and then stepped outside into the fading sunlight. Traffic on the street was light. I looked over my shoulder to ensure no one was following me. A lot was riding on this mission and there was only one thing that could stand in my way. ‘Bill, time for dinner!... Mom… In a minute, I yelled back. ‘Five minutes, no more. Your food is getting cold.’ Pulling the spotting scope from the James Bond Attaché Case, I looked for my sidekick, Dan Lazono. Dan was supposed to be concealed in the bushes across the street, ready to provide backup if the mission went awry, but apparently his mom had called him back inside as well… Mothers.”* But from those early days he learned things that would always be helpful in his life in general and in his leadership of the Teams. In BUD/S he learned, *“Calmly, with a look of complete confidence, he said, ‘Just take it one evolution at a time.’ One evolution at a time. One evolution at a time. These words would stick with me for the rest of my career. They summed up a philosophy for dealing with difficult times. Most BUD/ S trainees dropped out because their event horizon was too far in the distance. They struggled not with the problem of the moment, but with what they perceived would be an endless series of problems, which they believed they couldn’t overcome. When you tackled just one problem, one event, or, in the vernacular of BUD/ S training, one evolution at a time, then the difficult became manageable. Like many things in life, success in BUD/ S didn’t always go to the strongest, the fastest, or the smartest. It went to the man who faltered, who failed, who stumbled, but who persevered, who got up and kept moving. Always moving forward, one evolution at a time. ‘Never quit. Never quit. Never quit’!”* And he was still learning at the end of his career, *“In my journey, I found that there was always someone better than me: someone smarter, stronger, faster, harder-working, more talented, more driven, more honest, more pious—just better than I was. It was humbling, but at the same time immensely reassuring. There were so many problems in the world that I could not solve, but maybe someone else could. I learned that life is fragile and that we should take each day as a blessing. ”*
8. **OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET: A Space Trilogy, Part 1,** by C.S. Lewis (1938, ePub.2012). I thought that I had read this book before…I have even told people I have read this book before…confession and full disclosure…I do not believe, after having read this book, that I have ever read this book or any part of this trilogy. I have read ABOUT them but never read them. So I apologize to all that I have said that too in the past. So with that out of the way, this is an excellent read. I do not know why I should have been surprised by this since I have enjoyed so many others of C.S. Lewis’ works in the past. He, of course has a string of literary successes in multiple genres, like, **Mere Christianity, The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters, A Grief Observed** and perhaps his best known work **The Chronicles of Narnia.** But this is so different than what you normally think of Lewis…this is truly a masterpiece in science fiction that started out as an exercise among friends. J.R.R.Tolkien, a personal friend, colleague and an Oxford Inkling with Lewis wrote to Lewis’ publisher in 1938, *“Mr. C. S. Lewis tells me that you have allowed him to submit to you* ***Out of the Silent Planet****. I read it, of course; and I have since heard it pass a rather different test: that of being read aloud to our local club (which goes in for reading things short and long aloud). It proved an exciting serial, and was highly approved. But of course we are all rather like-minded. It is only by an odd accident that the hero is a philologist (one point in which he resembles me). . . . We originally meant each to write an excursionary “thriller:” a space-journey [his] and a time journey (mine) each discovering Myth. But the space-journey has been finished and owing to my slowness and uncertainty the time journey remains only a fragment, as you know. I read this story in the original manuscript and was so enthralled that I could do nothing until I had finished it. My first criticism was simply that it was too short. I still think that criticism holds. . . . But the linguistic inventions and the philology on the whole are more than good enough. All the part about language and poetry—the glimpses of its Malacandrian nature and form—is very well done, and extremely interesting, far superior to what one usually gets from travellers in untravelled regions. The language difficulty is usually slid over or fudged: here it not only has verisimilitude but also underlying thought.”* As a young boy I was a fan of H.G. Wells, **The War of the Worlds,** **The Time Machine** and **The First Men of the Moon** along with the Edgar Rice Burroughs series on Mars called **The Barsoom series** of novels from the early 20th Century. This particular book chronicles the unwilling trip of a professor/Dr. Ransom from Earth to Malacandra, the planet he knows as Mars. His shipmates set out to do him harm and end up receiving grace though their ship is destroyed by the one who shows them grace. But it all comes to good especially for Dr. Ransom setting him on a path of life that he would have never imagined or expected. Earth or Thulcandra is the Silent Planet and much is made of how evil it is and how much in need it is of shedding the evil influence that took it over millennium ago. Interesting play on man’s inherited sinfulness is seen throughout along with mans need of a “savior”. When reading this book you will also see the touches of Tolkien in some of the characters found in the book as they were reading both this work and Tolkien’s early editions of what would become **The Hobbit** and the **Lord of the Rings** series, along with some of his earlier works about Middle Earth. This is a work for those who love sci-fi but have never known what it was before it was became a sensational CGI experience. Lewis paints such substantial pictures that you can see, feel, hear and taste the world he creates. I look forward to reading the other two in this series.
9. **WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, SHALOM, AND THE GREAT COMMISSION,** by Kevin De Young and Greg Gilbert (2011). This book is written for all of us who over the years haven’t gotten sidetracked concerning the absolute MISSION of the Church. There are so many things to do in this fallen world and the devil likes nothing better than keeping the Church busy chasing its tale so we are not focused on the main thing of proclaiming Christ and Him crucified while making disciples for Christ. My mentor Donald J. MacNair used to say that every church has the same purpose and that is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever…the same purpose of all Christians and then the mission of the Church is how the local church does that…but our authors make the point that every Bible-believing church has the same mission. And they say it rather well in wrapping up the book; *“THIS BOOK HAS BEEN BUILT around a single question: What is the mission of the church? We’ve argued, to put it succinctly, that the Great Commission is the mission of the church. Or a bit longer: the mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship and obey Jesus Christ now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father. In contrast to recent trends, we’ve tried to demonstrate that mission is not everything God is doing in the world, nor the social transformation of the world or our societies, nor everything we do in obedience to Christ.*

*This may sound like mere semantics, but it’s not. In a world of finite resources and limited time the church cannot do everything. We will not be effective in our mission if everything is mission.”* Christ sent His disciples into the world to make disciples and that is the easiest way to see how this is the mission of the Church. Also there is a great chapter in this book on the kingdom. *“If the kingdom of God is all it’s cracked up to be in Scripture— God’s benevolent, joy-filled, happy reign over his redeemed people—and if it’s true that you can be either in or out of that kingdom, then it’s hugely important to be clear about how one gets in it. We’ve already seen how the kingdom is specifically the reign of Jesus the Messiah, and that leads us to a simple answer to our question: Inclusion in the kingdom of God is wholly conditioned on one’s response to the King.*

*It is not based on a life well lived, or a comparatively non-evil life next to the worst person you can think of. If you want to be included in the kingdom of God, you must respond rightly to the King of the kingdom. That is the consistent message of both Jesus and the apostles.”* The chapters dealing with justice and peace are excellent and are enough reason to purchase this book. Just one more affirmation of their position: *“So what is the mission of the church? We’ve kept you in suspense long enough. In short, we will argue that the mission of the church is summarized in the Great Commission passages—the climactic marching orders Jesus issues at the ends of the Gospels and at the beginning of Acts. We believe the church is sent into the world to witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations. This is our task. This is our unique and central calling.”* Or as was referred to often in this book, *“If everything is missions, nothing is mission.”* (Stephen Neill).

1. **THE SAINTS TRIUMPH OVER DEATH,** by Thomas Manton, 17th Century English Puritan pastor (1651, but digitalize by Monergism for Kindle 2020). This was the funeral message for the Rev. Christopher Love martyr at Lawrence Church in August 25, 1651. It is also a treatise and sermon on I Corinthians 15:55-57 and a great comfort to all who seek hope in the face of fears. Christopher Love (a Welsh Presbyterian minister) had been locked up in the Tower of London for insurrection and for preaching the Word of God as a Presbyterian. Rev. Thomas Manton took this opportunity during a difficult time in England to help people deal with their fears through the Scripture. Manton was know as a master at expositional preaching and this work along with the other works I have read by him clearly illustrate that fact. In expositing I Cor. 15;57 he says briefly by way of an outline, ***“‘Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'*** *In this thanksgiving you may observe:— 1. The author of the mercy: God, by Jesus Christ. 2. The manner how we come to be interested in it: 'He giveth us victory.' Or rather, you may observe:—(1.) The act of the Father as to Jesus Christ, in that he appointed him to get the victory. (2.) The act of the Father as to us, in that he applieth this victory to our souls. Christ's victory, and the application of it, are the two grounds of this thanksgiving.”* He continues to let his listeners and reader know about this thanksgiving and how important it is to our triumph over the fear of death*, “The next reason of the apostle's thanksgiving is the application: he 'hath given us victory;' for understanding of which you must note that (1.)—Christ's victory is imputed to us as if it were done in our own persons. When we are actually united to him, we are possessed of all his merit. Christ fought our war and joined battle in our stead. We have a mystical victory in Christ, and are said to overcome when Christ overcame. This is the reason why the acts of believers are complicated and folded up with Christ's acts in the expressions of scripture: 'Crucified with him,' 'quickened with him,' and 'raised with him,' and 'set down with him in heavenly places,' Eph. 2, &c.—all which are terms proper to the judicial union, which is different both from the moral and mystical, as I could easily show you, were it not a matter of another nature. If the law challenge, Satan and conscience say, Thou art a sinner under a curse, thou mayst answer, I am a sinner, but I am crucified in Christ, in my surety—his payment and suffering is mine. If death or the world discourage, you may say, This is a beaten enemy; I foiled it in Christ, I ascended in Christ, &c. (2.) The benefit of this victory is imparted and applied to us, by which he maketh us conquerors over sin and death. All Christ's work was not done upon the cross; there is much to be accomplished in our hearts: Rom. 16:20, 'The God of peace shall tread Satan under your feet,' &c.—not only under Christ's feet, but ours; as Joshua called his fellows to come and tread upon the necks of the Canaanitish kings: Josh. 10:24, 'Come, put your feet upon the necks of these kings;' so Christ will see us conquer. He that got a victory for us, will get a victory in us, over sin, and death, and hell.”* I love what he has to say about the funerals of believers, *“The funerals of the godly are but the funerals of their sins and frailties and weaknesses. Peccatum moritur, miseria moritur, homo non moritur. It is not the man dieth, but the sin, the misery dieth. All other means and dispensations do but weaken sin, but death destroyeth it. When God justifieth, the damning power is gone; when God sanctifieth, the reigning power is gone; but when by death we come to be glorified, then the very being of it is gone. What remaineth, then, but that we die by faith, as well as live by faith; but that we welcome death with confidence, and breathe out our souls in triumph? Moses, when he took up the serpent in his hand, it was but a rod; death thus welcomed and entertained by faith will prove at most but a correction, yea, rather a blessing of the covenant, a means of passage into glory.”* This book is a gem to any and all who read it. He never mentions the man Christopher Love during the sermon but much of what he endured in the Tower of London while he awaited his execution is symbolic of the things people are fearful of and that have been overcome in Christ for us.
2. **PERELANDRA: Voyage to Venus, A Space Trilogy, Part 2,** by C.S. Lewis (1943, ePub.2012). Lewis says, *“This story can be read by itself but is also a sequel to Out of the Silent Planet in which some account was given of Ransom’s adventures on Mars—or, as its inhabitants call it, Malacandra. All the human characters in this book are purely fictitious and none of them is allegorical.”* Having heard him it would be unwise of the reader not to begin at the beginning with the first book otherwise you would rob yourself of the “back story” as they say. While **Out of the Silent Planet** was mostly about earthlings going to Mars to possibly colonize…read spoil it…by and for men…this book is about Venus, a newer planet one that is yet unspoiled by man or by evil. We find Ransom once again…the “hero” of the first book being transported to Venus to engage in a cosmic war for the soul of this planet in it is infancy…at a time much like the time on Earth before ADAM AND Eve fell into sin and corrupted God’s creation. This one is so full of the imagery that would be there in a new world if you will. He re-imagines an old creation new again since he is seeing it for the first time through the eyes of Dr. Ransom who sees between his encounters with the world and the Queen the innocence of a pure life and a pure and perfect creation. The detail is almost tiring but then just before you tire of it something happens to spur you on to the next page. This work like **The Chronicles of Narnia** combine Lewis’ understanding of myth with the biblical/theological touching on the story of Genesis from the perspective of what we understand as alien and mythical. We once again meet the insufferable Prof. Weston from the first book and what ensues are events for the ages… or has this all happened before? As a momentary observer…only having read many of his book but never knowing the man…it seems in these early days not only was he seeking to produce this space trilogy for the Inkling meetings to read…but it also seems he is “working” out his faith in the best way he knew how, at the time. He like Ransom/Tolkien are discovering their faith through their writing. He writes in chapter 16 at almost the end of his work in Perelandra, *“Look on him, beloved, and love him,” said the first. “He is indeed but breathing dust and a careless touch would unmake him. And in his best thoughts there are such things mingled as, if we thought them, our light would perish. But he is in the body of Maleldil and his sins are forgiven. His very name in his own tongue is El win, the friend of the eldila.”* This book is less than 200 pages and like the first are rather fast reads with little work in seeing the point of each book.
3. **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY,** by Michael J. Kruger (2019).This little book (60 plus pages depending on formatting) captures the mind and heart of progressives that live within the Church. It is hard for me to call it Progressive Christianity as he does for the many things the toss away like the True Jesus, His Word and the Church run to the core of being anti-Christian. These are those to whom Paul writes about in I Corinthians ... “the natural man” where the truth of Christ and Him crucified is folly to them as they are perishing in this life. The shortness of this book really is part of the genius of the writer for this is a book that people can easily refer to time and time again for a refresher. Interesting, though, one could read the Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis and pretty much cover each of these “10 Commandments” as from the devil to weaken and in his mind destroy the un-destroyable…but then like these progressives they are blind to the truth so they strive to weaken and destroy the un-destroyable Church of God. I should probably just stop here but I must write out these “commandments” so my reader knows to what is being referred: (1) Jesus is a model for living more than an object for worship. (2) Affirming people‘s potential is more important than reminding them of their brokenness. (3) The work of reconciliation should be valued over making judgments. (4) Gracious behavior is more important than right belief. (5) Inviting Questions is more valuable than supplying answers. (6) Encouraging the personal search is more important than group uniformity. (7) Meeting actual needs is more important than maintaining institutions. (8) Peacemaking is more important than power. (9) We should care more about love and less about sex. (10) Life in this world is more important than the afterlife. The problem here, of course, is these progressives view of Jesus and His Word. He states*, “The problem is that hidden within this approach is an enormous (and unspoken) assumption, namely that God has not clearly revealed himself. Nor has he clearly revealed a message about salvation. Indeed, the assumption underlying this entire progressive narrative is that religion is about humans finding God, rather than about a God who has revealed himself to humans…So we see that Gulley’s final commandment masterfully encapsulates three hallmarks of progressive Christianity. It focuses on man instead of God, downplays doctrine for morality, and claims uncertainty while all the while being very, very certain of itself. Tragically, the progressive position clouds the real message of Christianity—the real message of Jesus. Jesus cared about the suffering of humans, and he has called Christians to do the same. We do not, however, address human suffering as an act of moralism, but as a response to the grace shown to us at the cross. Moreover, we don’t address temporal human suffering exclusively. For even if we could somehow alleviate all human suffering, it would do exactly nothing to meet humanity’s greatest need. As Jesus reminds us,* ***“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16: 26).”***
4. **THE SAINT’S SECURITY AGAINST SEDUCING SPIRITS, OR THE ANOINTING FROM THE HOLY ONE,** by William Ames (given 1651 published 1652, EPub. Monergism 2018).This is a long sermon or small treatise given on **I John 2:20- *“But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.”***This is the text he uses and expounds along with dozens of other texts to “prove” even when seduced by evil because we have been anointed by Christ with the Holy Spirit we can overcome because Christ overcame and we are in Christ and have the mind of Christ. This is an exclusive look into the assurance of believers in and through the work of the Holy Spirit. I struggled with the dating of this work (1651) which is attributed to the Puritan author William Ames who is said to have died in 1633, so the dating would put this within the possibility of the Quaker William Ames(d. 1662). However, the theology is thoroughly Calvinistic which would fall more in line with the Puritan writer and theologian. He makes clear the perseverance of the saints over those who aren’t named in Christ’s book of the elect. This is a grand booklet on assurance for all who might wander from this truth because of a besetting sin or affliction that has caused them otherwise to begin to question their faith. His words are so helpful and so contemporary, *“One great snare, that the Devil hath laid to entangle souls, hath been, to put them upon it to call every thing into question; which hath been the more dangerous, because such enquiry doth pretend to ingenuity, and is like that Tree of Knowledge, a tree to be desired to make one wise, and certainly it is far better to be humbly and modestly inquisitive, than popishly and sottishly ignorant, for the wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool destroys himself by a strange implicit faith, and blind obedience: But when a proud spirit shall become one of those hesitating questionists, how will he vaunt and triumph in his conceits, as if he had posed and non-plussed truth itself: When such a one is gotten into this strong hold, what will not his bold confidence dare to question?”* After reading this the only natural conclusion for the Christian is that I have been anointed by the Spirit of God and I am His! He states, *“The Apostle in Galatians 4 doth thus express it: My little children, with whom I travail in birth, until Christ be formed in you; that is, until the spirit of our Lord Jesus comes to be that to your souls, which your souls are unto your bodies. The reasonable soul in man is the principle of life, and that by which he is denominated to be a man, and distinguished from a beast, so doth the spirit of Christ working it self into the soul of man, transform him into his own image, and this new creature hath the same spirit, nature and disposition with Jesus Christ, whereby he is denominated a Christian, and distinguished from other men.”* These works of exposition no matter how long they are (55 plus pages on this one text) are extremely uplifting and helpful…perhaps of more help than a commentary.
5. **THE SAINTS COMFORTS: An Exposition of Psalm 130,** by Ricard Sibbes (1639 ePub by Monergism 2020) the comfort in the Lord is crucial to Ricard Sibbes…that is he wishes that all God’s children be able to take comfort in the lord. This exposition of Psalm 130 goes a long way to that end as he systematically and expositionally breaks this psalm down to where no believer reading it can miss the point he is making which is ALL our comfort in life comes through the Holy Spirit of God in Christ. He begins by talking about why is hard for us to always “believe” that this comfort exist as He talks about our sin… *“We may from hence observe, that the best Christian and most gracious man alive needs forgiveness of his sins; for where the conscience is enlightened it will discover what corruption it finds, and so the necessity of being delivered. So 1 John 2:1, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate;' that is, such as I am, have need of an advocate; and one reason may be, because indeed such see in their sins much more ingratitude than others, for they sin against the knowledge of God's love to their souls in forgiving former sins; and then to fall into sin again, it is as broken bones, Ps. 51:8. And the apostle, 2 Cor. 5:20, speaking to the believing Corinthians, 'I beseech you to be reconciled to God;' for Christ was made sin for us; for you, and for me. Even we sin daily, and stand in need of reconciliation. We must daily pray, 'Forgive us our sins,' yea, the best of the disciples must do it. If we come not with this petition, 'our sins are written with a pen of iron, and with the claw of an adamant,' Job 19:24.”* But yet he quickly moves on to talk of the work of the Spirit in enabling us to “know” this comfort is not only available to but is ours even when we don’t “feel” it. He ends with this for all his hearers and readers, *“This (comfort) should whet in us our desires and prayers for our heavenly estate; and not make our heaven here on earth, but desire earnestly the full harvest, by considering how excellent the first-fruits of glory in this life are; and with the creature, Rom. 8:19, 'wait, and expect, and long, and groan for the time of the dissolution of all things;' and make this a note to discern of our estate; for it is a certain infallible token of a good frame of spirit in us, if we can long for that better life in the fulness, that we have here; that we can desire to be with Christ. Furthermore, note this as a difference between the estates of the wicked and the godly. The wicked must look for worse and worse continually. His best is here, and while he hath this world; but the godly, their worst is here, their best is to come.”*
6. **THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH: A Modern Fairy Tale for Grown-ups, A Space Trilogy, Part 3,** by C. S. Lewis (Copyright © 1945 That Hideous Strength was originally published in 1945 by John Lane (The Bodley Head) in the United Kingdom. EPub Edition © APRIL 2012 ISBN: 9780062196941 The EPub Edition is titled, **The Space Trilogy, Omnibus Edition: Three Science Fiction Classics in One Volume: Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength** by C. S. Lewis, EPub Edition FEBRUARY 2014 ISBN: 9780062340870). This 3rd book starts off extremely slow with new characters that have to be placed and developed beyond the regular cast of the first 2 books. Having just finished **Perelandra**  it seems a bit out of place since the reader has been working with consistent main characters like Prof. Ransom and Weston and Divine who have not shown up yet...actually Divine shows up but with another name, Lord Feverstone…this beginning is a bit disconcerting in my reading. But he changes things up here with 2 new characters actually becoming the protagonists of this book with Ransom finally coming into view as a secondary and yet extremely important role as “the Director”. This book was written as a novel form of an earlier book **The Abolition of Man** where Lewis makes the point that our children need to learn the nuances of life…in other words be taught to know the differences between good and evil all the way to their core which are often subtle and easily missed. In a conversation between the lead protagonist and Feverstone/ Divine from the first book we read, *“Go on. This interests me very much. Man has got to take charge of Man. That means, remember, that some men have got to take charge of the rest—which is another reason for cashing in on it as soon as one can. You and I want to be the people who do the taking charge, not the ones who are taken charge of. Quite.” “What sort of thing have you in mind?” “Quite simple and obvious things, at first—sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of backward races (we don’t want any dead weights), selective breeding. Then real education, including prenatal education. By real education I mean one that has no ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ nonsense. A real education makes the patient what it wants infallibly: whatever he or his parents try to do about it. Of course, it’ll have to be mainly psychological at first. But we’ll get on to biochemical conditioning in the end and direct manipulation of the brain . . .””* As the story unfolds all of the lore of Tolkien, Williams and Lewis (# original Inklings) come into play…we have the Numenor’s from Tolkien’s Middle earth stories, and also the Atlantean King Arthur and Merlin who interested all 3 of them…all their lives. He makes this point, *“gradually we began to see all English history in a new way. We discovered the haunting.” “What haunting?” asked Camilla. “How something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres. Haven’t you noticed that we are two countries? After every Arthur, a Mordred; behind every Milton, a Cromwell: a nation of poets, a nation of shopkeepers; the home of Sidney—and of Cecil Rhodes. Is it any wonder they call us hypocrites? But what they mistake for hypocrisy is really the struggle between Logres and Britain.”* In fact, the successful ending of this book revolves around the rising of Merlin from his centuries old rest to deal with the evil forces from out of the earth that are housed in a scientific facility bent on “reconditioning society”. We also see some of the old character’s from the first 2 novels as well at the end. Age old wisdom...much of it from the Christian faith comes to bear to overcome and over power the dark evil with the help of a bear named Mr. Bultitude. Some have stated that you don’t need to read the first two books to read and enjoy this one, but I disagree; there is enough cross over that the back story is crucial in making all the players fit into this one. This is Lewis’ longest of the 3, almost 400 pages where the other 2 were less than 200 pages. By the time I finished I am glad to have read all 3 and see how he views men and the need that we have for discernment with biblical truth against the wisdom of the world.
7. **THE EXCELLENCY OF HEAVENLY TREASURES**, by Ezekiel Hopkins (Monergism Copyright © 2020) Ezekiel Hopkins. Never heard of him well as I found out by reading this treatise, he is someone to read and to discover. This work is found in a much larger work entitled **THE WORKS OF EZEKIEL HOPKINS**, but this and many other parts of this great work have been “sliced” out for consumption by a greater populace that wouldn’t sit still for over 1400 pages of works. Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690) was an Anglican divine in the Church of Ireland, who was Bishop of Londonderry from 1681 to 1690. He was a staunch advocate for the Anglican community even though when first cloistered he was a non-conformist, however, later he did conformed after the Act of Uniformity. But his conformity centered around not splitting up the Church of God and also, he preferred the polity…(think J.I. Packer and John Stott) but his doctrine like these 20th Century Anglican’s mentioned was Reformed and biblical to a tee. His exposition of Matthew 6:20-22 is superb especially since so many falter in trying to work this passage out. He, like so many other Puritans write “doxologically” praising God with the written word for God’s people…these are NOT for the most part academic exercises but acts of worship by men who understand their calling before God and His Church. From beginning to end we see him making his case for the simple understanding of this passage, *“The doctrine. That heavenly and spiritual things are, and ought to be, of the greatest value with every true Christian...or…A true Christian doth esteem, and he ought to esteem heavenly things above all things What are these heavenly things, but God and Christ, grace and glory, spiritual and eternal concernments? These are the choice things of a Christian: whatever else he may possess, yet these are his treasure.”* And then towards the end he sums it up this way*, “Their treasures are Invisible. 2 Cor. 4:18. We look not at the things, which are seen; but at the things, which are not seen. The greatest part of what a Christian doth enjoy lies in invisibles: in the love of God; in interest in him; in communion and fellowship with him; in the actings of faith and dependance upon him.”* … *“Their treasure is not only invisible, but Future: it is to come. It is but little, that a saint enjoys for the present: his great estate lies in hope and in reversion: now he lives, it may be, upon glimpses and half smiles; and very restricted communications of God unto his soul: he hath only enough to make him to know what that inheritance is that he expects; and, were it not that his faith tells him sometimes how rich and glorious it is, truly he could not live and subsist upon his present incomes.”…* *Though the waters thereof roar.… and the mountains shake.… yet God will be our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble: (Ps. 46:1, 2, 3)…* *Without this assurance you can never live comfortably. For, though it be sufficient for your eternal safety and security, that God is your treasure and your exceeding great reward; yet it will not be sufficient for your present comfort, unless you know and apprehend him so to be. [2] Without this assurance you can never live generously, and as it becomes a Christian. That is, you cannot live above the world without it: not above the fears and flatteries, above the frowns and fawnings, of the world; unless you have assurance that God is your treasure. A Christian, that knows God is his portion, can do thus: he can rejoice in tribulation, and triumph in afflictions, and live splendidly upon his God, though all the things of this world fail him”* His is a great work...but God’s work upon us is even greater and that is what he points us to in this work.
8. **DEFIANT GRACE: The Surprising Message and Mission of Jesus,** by Dane Ortlund (2011, ePub and Kindle editions first published 2013). Why did he write this book? I love one of his many answers*, “Like a bad back that needs to return repeatedly to the chiropractor for straightening out, our understanding of Jesus needs to be straightened out over and over again as our poor spiritual posture throws our perception of Him out of line—domesticating Himself and conforming Him to our image, rather than transforming us into His.”* Some would not find this book substantial in the way a text book would be found…but it is substantive in that it focuses in on aspects of the life of Jesus from the 4 Gospels that all of us need to have in our hearts. He is laser focused on the “real” Jesus that we all need to know that may surprise us when we look close; so considering Matthew his title is “the surprise of the disobedient obedience”; with Mark, “the surprise of the king as a criminal”; with Luke, “the surprise of outsiders as insiders”; and lastly, with John, “the surprise of the Creator as a creature”. He says, *“The grace flooding out from Jesus Christ is defiant, radically subversive of our intuitive expectations, cultural mores and religious sensibilities. Jesus gives grace—he gives himself—to the undeserving. We have seen this defiant grace in each Gospel account. There is certainly plenty of overlap among the four Gospels. Yet certain emphases rise to the surface as uniquely highlighted in each one. In Matthew Jesus exposes externalized obedience as thinly veiled moral rottenness. In Mark the long-anticipated king takes up the fate of a criminal. Luke shows us Jesus inverting the social assumptions, with insiders ending up outside and outsiders finding themselves inside. And the great surprise of John is that the eternal God who made all things became flesh and blood. Jesus defies our sense of fair play with regard to morality, the atonement, the nature of the church, and his incarnation. His message and mission disrupt all our inherent expectations of who he is and how following him works.”* It is a treasure of a book, because in such brief span we see not only the distinct perspectives of the four Gospels but also the unity they present of gospel-centrality. This is really a unique aspect of the book, as so many authors today, even inadvertently in what they neglect to preach on and write about, have not shown us the central truths of justification by grace alone through faith alone in the four Gospels, unwittingly aiding the assertion that Paul’s gospel differs in substance from Jesus’ gospel. **Defiant Grace** over and over shows us this is not the case. The effect of this is one of worship, a quality sorely lacking in far too many Christian books. If *“grace feels like moral vertigo”* (p. 13), Defiant Grace feels like the physical confusion of the self-interested hearts and minds Jesus keeps confronting and comforting in the stories of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. One reviewer said, *“What we have in this book is four shots of doxological whisky.”* Interesting assessment but then fairly accurate when he ends the way he began with a real surprise, *“Jesus Christ simply cannot be tamed. He is not safe. He demands that we surrender our lives to him, holding back nothing, letting go of the functional lifelines of human approval, bank accounts, sexual pleasure, cultivating a reputation—indeed, of all that beckons to provide a more tangible and immediate security. Let Him expose these lesser saviors as the frauds they are, unable to fulfil us if we have them and unable to forgive us if we fail them. Only Jesus fulfils, and only Jesus forgives. Life with him is the ultimate win-win situation.”* Well, worth the time.
9. **THE LOST HERO,** by Rick Riordan (2010). This is the first book in a series called **The Heroes of Olympus.** These are written for Jr. High age and up but I find them to be extremely delightful. They bring back to mind my earlier readings in Greek/Roman Mythology. These books while adventure/ fantasy books are all bases in a sort of historical fiction format as well. It is not that Greek/Roman Mythology is real but the author maintains the “truths” of what is historical and has been taught of the Greek/ Roman gods. Jason, Piper and Leo discover themselves to be demi-gods and so much literally almost goes off the rails from there as they are sent on a quest…because you know every Greek hero and demi-god or maybe Roman demi-god and hero (time will tell) needs a quest to prove their worthiness. Their quest…well…it is one that causes them to wonder if they want to fulfill it like I suppose all quests do if I remember from my past reading of say Jason and the Argonauts. (Oh, does that give anything away? LOL!) I recently re-read this book because I will be reading the rest of the series on vacation in a few days for they are highly entertaining and engaging. Now I know where Percy is, didn’t catch that the first time through. As I said before, I would recommend them to anyone seeking to either teach Greek/Roman mythology to their children or anyone who simply wants to re-capture their youth. Each of these books are 500 to 600 pages and rip roaring action especially when you get the fighting goat/satyr involved.
10. **THE SON OF NEPTUNE,** by Rick Riordan (2011). This is the first book in a series called **The Heroes of Olympus.** These are written for Jr. High age and up but I find them to be extremely delightful. This book is many about Percy Jackson, the son of Neptune or Poseidon, if you are more Greek inclined. This is the flip side of Jason Grace’s story with not as much explanation about where he came from. Like Jason, Juno/Hera sent Percy to an opposite camp of heroes and demi-gods. Jason to Camp Jupiter from Camp Half-blood. Percy had been in Camp Half-blood and he was sent to Camp Jupiter (Roman for Zeus). There are some rather big differences between the 2 camps and we see this in an exchange between Percy and new friend and teammate Frank Zhang*, “Percy, …so you attack a different fort every night? Frank, “Not every night. We have different training exercises. Sometimes death ball...um, which is like paintball, except with... you know, poison and acid and fire balls. Sometimes we do chariots and gladiator competitions, sometimes war games!”* This is Camp Jupiter ... the Roman camp… which is a warrior camp with the motto- *“Eat bitter, taste sweet. No pain no gain... Duty. Sacrifice. They mean something... they are the hard thing that nets sweet rewards.”* There quests will link them up with the teenage demi-gods from Camp Half-blood and the newly re-constituted Festus the metal dragon that had an “unfortunate accident” at the end of **The Last Hero** and they will fight an initial battle to protect Camp Jupiter and everything goes well…as well as can be expected in these kinds of stories…until…there is always an “until” in a demi=god quest!! Like the first one this is a fast pace book going from one quest to another as the team is solidified moving forward toward a much bigger plan that will ultimately bring the 2 camps together or destroy them altogether, saving or losing the world in the end. But then it is always about saving the world...wouldn’t be a bonafide quest if the world wasn’t at stake.
11. **THE MARK OF ATHENA,** by Rick Riordan (2012). This is the first book in a series called **The Heroes of Olympus.** These are written for Jr. High age and up but I find them to be extremely delightful. This book centers on Annabeth Chase’s and her seeking the Mark of Athena. Finding this has cost the lives of hundreds of Athena children as they have sought it out to no avail…but Annabeth is convinced that she can and will find it. This book also highlights her reunion with her “boyfriend” Percy Jackson as they combine forces with Hazel, Frank, Jason, Piper and Leo along with everyone‘s favorite fighting satyr/ goat... Coach Hedge... on a quest together to save the real Rome and Olympus on the heels of saving Camp Jupiter, before the unfortunate “accident” that sent them on their way faster than they had hoped…but then all quests come with a price…right?!?...as they continue on the quest connected to the Prophecy of the Seven. I absolutely love coach hedges character…he is the perfect non-chaperone chaperone and always willing to “kill!”…something! Along the way they will meet the beautiful and the terrifying as well as seek to save hazel’s half-brother Nico do Angelo from the hands of 2 giants that have been formidable enemies before and are even more so now with the “mother” Gaea seeking to rise from her sleep to take over the world. In all these books there is a heavy emphasis on team building and thinking beyond the “natural” understanding of your parents and title. As with all Roman/Greek gods adventure the “parents/gods” are almost the antagonists of the story while they mostly seem to desire the best for their children. The problem with these books as with all books where the children have to make their own way is that they primarily have to make their own way against the authority figures in their lives which, of course, are not trustworthy. Most kids used to be able to delineate a story from truth but I am not so sure that is true anymore. A critique of these well written books…Yeah! As with the other book Rick Riordan sets the pace of a true story teller captivating his audience with such a sense of adventure that his books are hard to put down. The end of this book may cause a gasp as it happens so quick but it leads directly into the next book as the quest continues.
12. **THE HOUSE OF HADES,** by Rick Riordan (2013). This is the fourth book in a series called **The Heroes of Olympus.** These are written for Jr. High age and up but I find them to be extremely delightful. Now having said that there is a subject matter in this book that I find disturbing…even more disturbing than the anti- parental authority issues of dealing with Greek/Roman god/parents…and that is the same sex attraction that works its way into the story. It is not huge…as far as amount of content …but it is huge in my book for it basically endorses feeling that “children” need help to deal with properly and biblically rather than simply acceptance that that is the way you are and everyone will be okay with that. Anyway… off my soapbox an on to the story. Our “heroes” have done well, they have procured the “mark of Athena” and stowed it in their flying boat with Festus at the helm. But they have choices…again what quest wouldn’t have impossible choices…one to save their friends and continue the quest and another to leave the quest and save their friends only to have the world end. Finding the House of Hades becomes a crucial part of the story line since 2 of their number have fallen into Tartarus and must make their way through to the Doors of Death…and that is a good thing. We meet some great monsters and ghosts and vampires but mostly we meet Bob…a special friend of Percy’s that is also a close friend of Nico’s who will aid his friends through the toughest parts of their trek through the underworld to the House of Hades. Many lessons are learn in Tartarus but one stands out among the rest…even if they succeed which there are no guarantees of success on a quest they will more than likely have to fight the “bad guys” over again or their children will…for you see there are always monsters to fight…within ourselves and within the world…they are always waiting to pounce and we must stay ever diligent as we walk through this life either as a demi-god or just a regular person…it is never good to be totally unaware of what is a head. Now, included in the book at the end of this story was a short story *PERCY JACKSON and the SWORD of HADES*. Since I have not read the rest of the Percy Jackson stories it might have been good to have led with this since it gives a lot of the back story concerning Nico and Bob…Bob is my favorite character in this one…total loyalty, courage and sacrifice toward his friends…he is the whole package and he is a Titan.
13. **THE CROSS** **: A Call to the Fundamentals of Religion,** by J.C. Ryle, (Kindle edition 2010). J.C. Ryle's big question for us in this book is simple, *“What did the Apostle Paul mean in saying,* ***‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.’****?”* Ryle says to his readers, *“What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ? You live in a Christian land. You probably attend the worship of a Christian Church. You have perhaps been baptized in the name of Christ. You profess and call yourself a Christian. All this is well. It is more than can be said of millions in the world. But all this is no answer to my question, ‘What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ?’ I want to tell you what the greatest Christian that ever lived thought of the cross of Christ. He has written down his opinion. He has given his judgment in words that cannot be mistaken. The man I mean is the Apostle Paul. The place where you will find his opinion, is in the letter which the Holy Ghost inspired him to write to the Galatians. And the words in which his judgment is set down, are these,* ***"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** *Now what did Paul mean by saying this? He meant to declare strongly, that he trusted in nothing but Jesus Christ crucified for the pardon of his sins and the salvation of his soul. Let others, if they would, look elsewhere for salvation. Let others, if they were so disposed, trust in other things for pardon and peace. For his part, the apostle was determined to rest on nothing, lean on nothing, build his hope on nothing, place confidence in nothing, glory in nothing, except the cross of Jesus Christ.”* He fashions this treatise around these 3 statements; (1) Let me show you what the apostle Paul did not glory in. (2) Let me explain to you what he did glory in. (3) Let me show you why all Christians should think and feel about the cross like Paul. All of this brings the believer to question ourselves with *“Do I see the cross of Jesus Christ as Paul did?”* J.C. Ryle expresses the heart of the precious sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross that has been lost today. He captures in this small treatise its significance, and the mighty work of love it accomplished in each of us who truly believe!! This is not a lengthy treatment of the cross and of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. It is a tract. As such, it is brief. Bishop Ryle said what needed to be said in a limited number of pages. This little tract, or booklet, holds up the cross of Christ, connecting it to the will of God, revealed in the Old Testament. Could more have been said about a number of things? Of course, but then it would no longer have been a tract. This little piece takes no time to read, it clarifies the meaning and importance of the cross, it highlights the foolishness of failing to preach the cross, and inspired me to preach more about the cross. In a tract about the centrality of the cross to the spiritual life, Bishop Ryle exalts the cross of Christ and urges us all, across the many years, to major on the doctrinal center of the biblical Gospel. It did me good to read this and it will for you, too, I'm sure.
14. **DAUNTLESS: (Blood on the Stars Book 6),** Jay Allan (2018). Tyler Barron and his crew are once again at the helm of their most prized possess…the Dauntless, their ship. They are once again dealing with the Union and the pulsar that they found in the Badlands and have made it operational. This pulsar can destroy a Confederation Battleship with one burst from its formidable guns…but its weakness is that it must be tethered to an immense amount of energy so it is not mobile…until now. Tyler Barron comes up with a near suicidal plan to stop the pulsar with a significant piece of tech discovered by Andi Lafarge, who was pad quite nicely for it, I might add…so nicely that her and her crew can now retire without a care in the world…except the pending attack by the Union. The whole fleet will be mustered for this one last plunge into the greatest battle to date in the hopes of success…a success that hinges entirely on this desperate plan that can only be carried out by Dauntless and her crew. This massive fleet also includes their Alliance allies after the tremendous battle to win back their home world after their civil war. The Alliance is trying to rebuild and also stand with the Confeds against the Union... and by keeping their oath of honor they may be putting their world and lifestyle in jeopardy against a very old enemies that has decided at this time to lash out with great vengeance. Why now? Well that is part of the intrigue. Will they succeed? That is the story intertwined with the main story. Who dies and who lives this time? That is worth reading this book in pursuit of that answer if you have been reading the series! Once again a very entertaining read that has kept me drawn in. A well written series for any and all sci-fi buffs.
15. **THE WHITE FLEET; Blood on the Stars book 7,** (2018). I know, I know…I said I didn’t know if I would continue with more books coming out every year in this series. Just one more …oh wait, I am already into book #8. Lol! I may stop after that one since it goes off into a whole new story line that is begun here…but I am thinking the Union won’t be such a threat after book 8. Oh well. Now this one begins right after the pulsar is dealt with and the Union begins to come apart economically with multiple civil wars arising with so much energy and money having been spent on bringing down the Confederation. And the least likeliest man rises out of the ashes to form the new Union with one goal in mind…yep you guessed it…the downfall of the Confederation along with the death of Tyler Barron. He hasn’t watched history very well...everyone so far who has set out to bring down Barron has wound up either a lifelong friend and ally or dead! But ..that is the story line…outcome will be predictable…but not in this book. Andi Lafarge will be recruited to help with the growing problem of Union infiltrators seeking to undermine not only the on-going trade of “old-tech” but also the Senate…which by the way when they had the Union right where they needed them to finish the conflict saw it in their power to call off the fleet that was going in to finish the Union once and for all and sign a peace agreement stopping all conflict for the moment. Now the recruitment of Fafarge only happens because Admiral Tyler Barron has been sent on a long and potentially dangerous mission to the outer edge of the Badlands and beyond to discover some form of “old-tech” from before the Cataclysm so that they can defend themselves the “next time” the Union raises its ugly head. Barron and his crew made up of all the best veterans in the entire fleet head out and end up fighting something even more dreaded than they have dealt with up to this point…an enemy that could send the entire Rim…Confederation, Union and the Alliance back to the stone age, servanthood or even death. One of the reasons I like Jay Allan's books is the fact that there is plenty of action, great characters and plot-lines, I also like Allan's ability to manage multiple plot-lines as well as the fantastic world-building that he does which makes his novels so good. **The White Fleet**, as with the other books in Blood on the Stars series, is exceptionally good and left me with the feeling the entire Rim has met its match, particularly with the Union's usual under-hand strategies unbalancing things in the Confederation, as well as the new threat Tyler and the White Fleet discover. I don't want to reveal too much more of the plot-line - so, let's just say the Union's meddling is going to come at cost to the various Rim governments and I'm just looking forward to the next book which I have already started (if you weren’t paying attention above. Lol!) If there is a critique in this series it is simply this…he repeats himself so much. After wonderfully building the characters and the plot he goes back to what he has previously written so that we can understand where the characters come from and why they handle the situation as they do. We know Barron thinks Anya Fritz is the best engineer ever, but every single time the fleet goes into battle (really, not exaggerating), we get treated to several paragraphs on why he thinks that. This is repeated with every character on a regular basis, and it gets really pedantic after a while. When I see one of these sections starting, I think "Oh goody. Here we go again", then I skip forward to where the story picks up again. This can get a bit tedious but I keep on reading. Just one more…just give me one more…that’s all I ask!
16. **THE VANITY OF THE WORLD,** by Ezekiel Hopkins (1685, Kindle Edition by Monergism 2020). This is part of a great work entitled **The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins.** The author says, *“THE VANITY OF THE WORLD,* ***‘Vanity of Vanities, saith the Preacher, Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity.’-*** *ECCLESIASTES 1:2 THE Preacher here mentioned, is no less than Solomon: and this whole book is no other than his Recantation Sermon. The text he preached on, is the same that I have chosen; and it contains the true and severe judgment he passed upon all things under the sun. Certainly, he, who had riches as plentiful as the stones of the street\*: and wisdom as large as the sand of the sea: could want no advantages, either to try experiments, or draw conclusions from them. And yet, when he had employed both, in the critical search of true happiness and contentment, and had dissected and ransacked the whole world to find it, he returns disappointed of his hopes, and tired with his pursuit; and begins the sad narrative of his long wanderings and errors, with Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity…It sufficed not to censure all things to be vain, but they are vanity itself. And this abstract hath another heaped upon it, vanity of vanities. Now this reflexion of the same word upon itself, is always used to signify the height and greatness of the thing expressed, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, denotes the highest King and the most absolute Lord. So, here, vanity of vanities intimates to us the most exceeding superlative vanity imaginable. Again; this is not only once pronounced, but doubled and repeated: partly, the more to confirm this truth to our belief, and thus Pharaoh's dream was doubled\*; and, partly, the more to imprint it upon our consideration. Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. But, though this be expressed in most general and comprehensive terms, yet it must not be taken in the utmost latitude, as if there were nothing at all of solid and real good extant.”* Now he will go on to make clear the difference between the worldly things that are perishable and cannot be relied upon…everything is vanity under the sun…the things of the world are vanity…but He makes an equal case for those things that are not perishable …those things of God …in them is not vanity but power and peace and hope. Some of the questions he asks us to consider are extremely piercing like, *“Do we not shamefully degrade ourselves, when we stoop to admire what is so vastly below us, and barter away our precious souls, souls more worth than ten thousand worlds, only to gain some small part of one? Certainly, the God of this World hath blinded men's eyes, and cast a strange mist before them, that they cannot discern, what is most evident and obvious; even the instability and vanity of all sublunary enjoyments. That I may therefore contribute somewhat to scatter this mist, I shall endeavour to represent to you the native and genuine vanity that is in all earthly things, free from that deceitful varnish, which the Devil usually puts upon them; and so to deform and wound that great sorcerer, that his charms may have no more power to prevail over you.”* This work helps us rise out of the mire of “NOT KNOWING” to the light of God revealed will for His people. He ends with this exhortation*, “Walk humbly with God†. Keep yourselves always in an awful fear of his dread majesty. Be constant in the exercise of grace, and the performance of duty. These are the only things exempted from vanity and vexation: in these alone can the soul find true rest and contentment. And therefore Solomon, after he had pierced and searched through all the world; and pronounced riches, strength, beauty, wisdom, learning, and all to be vanity and vexation of spirit; he rests himself, in the close, and tells us,* ***Chapter 12:13****.* ***Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.*** *It is his whole duty, and his only happiness in this life.”*
17. **THE BLOOD OF OLYMPUS,** by Rick Riordan (2014). This is the fifth book in a series called **The Heroes of Olympus.** These are written for Jr. High age and up but I find them to be extremely delightful for the most part. I have registered my concern especially with the last book.Overall, I must admit for a secular writers these are tame considering the way of the world today to sexualize our kids…but that still does not excuse the tolerance in the last book and the brief encounter with it at the end of this last book. The Prophecy of the Seven turns out to have been a ruse by Apollo to get his father’s, Zeus’, attention but Hera/Juno, Zeus’ wife, decides to use this to get the demi-gods to get the gods and the demi-gods together one last time (for now…for there will always be monsters to fight and Olympus will always be in danger since the gods are so prideful and capricious) to save Olympus and the world. Once again we will see the conflicts between the demi-gods, Jason, Percy, Leo, Annabeth, Piper, Hazel and Frank, and their “parents”…the only question is how will it all work out? The Athena Parthenos will go west and the Argo II will go east…the 7 will split up to complete this quest. This is one moving act of battle and discovery as they move towards the final showdown between the Romans of Camp Jupiter and the Greeks of Camp Half-blood along with the battle to deal with Gaea the angry and awakening Earth mother. Nothing will stop her rising (She cannot be killed!)...blood will be shed… and one of the seven will perish just as the Prophecy foretells…unless they can figure a way around something as final as death. I don’t think I will re-read these books, but I am glad, for the most part, that I did…a fun read especially on vacation.
18. **LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED, Kindle edition,** by Richard Sibbes (Monergism 2018). This treatise is an adaptation of two of his sermons on **John 14:1*-“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”*** This treatise is an excellent reminder of how well this man of God can communicate down through the ages. The whole point of this “book” is to give Christians the truth about how Jesus is our anchor in the troubling times of life. Everyone ought to read this for trouble is just around the next corner in most cases. It is written to believers who have doubts and fears about this life and eternity, since we all do at some point during the day, the week or the year. Sibbes carefully explains how Jesus will take care of our every need when we truly believe in …trust in Him. Charles Spurgeon has said that Richard Sibbes delivers diamonds in one hand and pearls in another. He takes us expositionally and systematically through this “simple text” to show us how important our position “in Christ” is in this troubled filled world. Jesus speaks to us at all times …in our celebrations and in our troubles and of course, it is our troubles that we have a harder time trusting Him just like His disciples when He told them He would be leaving them. He says in the first sermon, *“They loved their Master, who they saw was going away, and they knew it was a shameful thing for them to forsake him. There was love in them towards him all this while. Christ could discern gold in ore, some good in a great deal of ill; and therefore loved them again, and manifested it by comforting them,* ***'Let not your hearts be troubled.'*** *They were right in this principle that all comfort depends on the presence of Christ. And so the main ground of the sorrow was good. For as all heavenly light, and heat, and influence comes from the sun (it being all gathered into that body); so all heavenly comforts are gathered into Christ, and therefore must come to us from Christ's presence, bodily or spiritually. Their error was in tying all comfort to a bodily, a corporal presence; as if it were necessary for the sun to come down and abide upon the earth, to bestow its heat and influence. And therefore he tells them, that though he was to go away, yet he would send another comforter, the Holy Ghost.* *But you will say, religion breeds a great deal of trouble and pensiveness. It is indeed the speech of the shallow people of the world, 'religion makes men sad.' And it is true, that as our Saviour Christ here had made his disciples sad, by telling them that he would leave them; and that a great scandal would be taken at his cross, and shameful suffering; but yet withal, bids them not be troubled, and gives them grounds of comfort; so religion will make men sad; for it discovers truths, and sad truths. Aye, but the same religion will cheer them up again, yea, it casts them down, that it may raise them up. The sun in the morning raiseth clouds; but when it hath strength it scatters them. God intending solid and substantial comfort, doth first beget troubles, and discovers true grounds of trouble; he lets us see that all is not well. But still as religion brings any trouble, so it brings with it great remedies against these troubles.”* The remedies come when we believe in God through Christ Jesus our Lord. ***“Believe in God; believe also in me.”*** He wraps up this sermon with this thought for those of us who believe that we need to remember, *“For when a man is in Christ, and by Christ an heir of heaven, and a child of God, what in the world can befall him, that should deject overmuch, and cast him down? What loss, what cross, what want of friends? Hath he not all in God, and in Christ, and in the promise? Do not the promises weigh down all discouragements whatsoever? Surely they do. And therefore we must strive against dejection. For besides what I spake the last day, it is a dishonour to the profession of religion, which is in itself so glorious; a dishonour to God, and to Christ, that when we have such glorious prerogatives and privileges, which the angels themselves admire, yet every petty cross and loss that we meet withal in the world should cast us down. We should take heed exceedingly of this, and should labour every day to have a more and more clear sight of the promises that belong unto us, and to know the privileges of Christianity, and renew our faith in them continually, that they may be fresh to us in all temptations, and occasions whatsoever.”*
19. **BLACK DAWN (BLOOD ON THE STARS BOOK 8),** by Jay Allen (2018). I thought I would be done with this series after this book but there were, of course, too many unanswered questions at the end of this book. The White Fleet is split up one headed to the Confederation home world to warn of the coming war with an enemy so powerful that the end of the Rim may be in sight…and the other trying to lose the Hegemony in the vastness of space which almost works. Then there is the arrest of a most beloved Admiral and the disappearance of another because the Union has instituted a plan called Black Dawn to undermine the stability of the Confederation government and it works. All along the Hegemony are getting closer. Does the Dauntless crew get away? What happens to the Admirals? Are the Union spies thwarted? Is the hegemony stopped? All questions that NEED to be answered so I will have to at least read the next book, **INVASION,** in the series; which means I am hooked, I suppose. Aargh! Too many books, not enough time!
20. **A BREATHING AFTER GOD: OR A CHRISTIANS DESIRE FOR GOD’S PRESENCE,** by Richard Sibbes, (Monergism 2020). This treatise captures for the Christian a clear understanding of what David felt and what God was saying through him for the future generations concerning the text from **Psalm 27:4*, “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple.”*** He is said to have used the word “Breathing” in the title because it meant then *“a passionate longing for or a desperate cry to the Lord”.* And then he goes on to describe how it is that this can be true and should be true for all Christians. He breaks this passage down I its three main points…the desire itself, the house of the LORD and the beauty/majesty/glory of Lord. He says, *“Now, in the words of the text that I have read, there is contained the holy prophet's care and desire, set down first in general,* ***'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that I will seek after.'*** *And then a specification of that desire he specifies. What is that one thing he desired? That* ***'I may dwell in the house of the Lord,'*** *with the circumstance of time,* ***'all the days of my life.'*** *Now, after the desire in general, set out here by the object in general, the transcendent object,* ***'One thing have I desired of the Lord,'*** *and likewise by the frequency and fervency of the desire,* ***'I will seek after it still.'*** *I have desired it, and I will not cease. So my desire, it shall not be a flash soon kindled, and soon put out. No; but* ***'one thing have I desired of the Lord, and that I will seek still.'*** *I will not be quiet till my desire be accomplished…One thing have I desired, and that will I seek after,' not by prayer only, but in the use of all means; as, indeed, he was never quiet till he was settled again in Sion, nor then neither till he had gotten materials for the temple, and a place for God's honour 'to dwell in,' Deut. 12:11. If desires be not the desires of the sluggard, there will be endeavour; as we see in the desire of David here, 'One thing have I desired, and that will I seek.' He used all means to enjoy communion with God sweetly.”* He asks many questions of the reader, because he wishes his readers to think through some of the questions that he has had brought to him like, *“But to come nearer, to make an use of trial, how shall we know whether we have benefit by, and whether we be truly in love with, the beauty of God's house or no, because many come hither? As in Noah's ark there were beasts that were clean and unclean, so there are many that come to the visible congregations; they are in the church* ***(as excrements are in the body),*** *but they are not of it.”* Or, *“If we find that we have little comfort and strength by the word of God, that we have not seen the beauty of it, what shall we do, what course shall we take? Wait still. Wait still at the pool for the angel's stirring, John 5:4; for God at length will discover his power by his Spirit; he will discover his goodness, if not at the first, yet at length. Therefore let us use all sanctified means. And know this for a rule, that God's Spirit is an excellent worker. He will only work by his own instruments.”* He is clear and concise so that his readers don’t miss the crucial points. This comes numbers from 75-200 pages depending upon the format and which version you find.
21. **INVASION (BLOOD ON THE STARS BOOK 9)***,* by Jay Allan (2019). Again, I thought I would be done with this series after this book but there were, of course, too many unanswered questions at the end of this book, just like the other books. Here we are the Hegemony has invaded and they are slowly but surely moving toward the home world of the Confederation with a mission to assimilate them into their great society. The White Fleet returned just in time to aid the small fleet at Dannith who had received word that the Hegemony were on the way and they have been being chased and battling to keep the Hegemony at bay even though their efforts, while putting a hurting on their enemy, is unable to stop the overwhelming power that they face. The Union is up t it old devious ways but even their plan is falling apart so they decide to send an emissary to the Hegemony to see if they might fight side by side with them against the Hegemony…but they do not understand the Hegemony mission of assimilation. From the book: *“I look forward to a bright future as we absorb this vast new population, and as we continue to advance our knowledge, our technology, back to and beyond the levels of the old and lost empire… to a new dawn of humanity, and an endless march into a bright and hopeful tomorrow.” She didn’t believe much of what she was saying, but she had to secure a united Hegemony for the struggles that lay ahead. She understood the need for the Hegemony’s manifest destiny, and she supported that goal in every way. Yet she saw the decay setting in all around, and she imagined it had been thus even in the days of the empire. Did the Great Death begin like this? With arrogance and growing hubris? Are we on our stated path, or merely following the road that led before to such suffering and death?”* While this is going on the Senate is a mess ...a civil war is on the horizon for the Confederation unless Tyler Barron can convince everyone of the seriousness of this threat so that they might fight united. All the regular characters are here with a few new ones being added to keep up your interest in all of these folks. In fact, that seems to be the draw for me, I am so invested in these “lives” that I can’t stop…and beside the Union has not been subjugated yet…and I can’t wait for that. It may be coming quicker than II think…I hope the next book.
22. **COMPANY COMMANDER: THE CLASSIC INFANTRY MEMOIR OF WWII,**  by Charles B. MacDonald (Kindle edition 2015). Captain Charles MacDonald, “Mac” to the other officers began his war with the Battle of the Bulge. He cut his teeth with this engagement and grew to a more than able leader from there. At different times he commanded different Platoons of the 23rd Infantry part of the 2nd Infantry battalion. This account of the Battle of the Bulge certainly out shines the rest that I have read since he was right there in the middle of one of the biggest battles ever fought by American soldiers on foreign soil. None of the other books tell so much about the foot soldier/rifle company and their “sprint across Belgium and Germany chasing the remnants of the war ending in Czechoslovakia for V-E Day. He says, *“Don’t scouts have fun? There’s nothing between them and the whole German nation but the muzzles of their rifles. They get first choice of the liquor and the loot and the fraternizin’. Everybody wants to be a lead scout. Like hell they do, brother! Like hell!”* and again, *“One man from the 2d Platoon lay in a crumpled heap and did not rise. His face was buried impassively in the snow. I looked at him as I passed. He was a new man, a replacement received the week before. He was the first man from the company whom I had seen killed, and a mixed feeling of horror and pity swept over me, but there was no time to stop and think. I did not even know the man’s name. How strange is war. Some of us can go for days, and weeks, and months in war and never he killed or wounded, but another man is killed in his first taste of war.”* He tells us what he is thinking and what he is struggling with as a fresh new Captain and then even as a veteran at the end of the war. He says as the war was coming to its end, *“The unleashed joy of these oppressed people knew no bounds, and it was too much for us. Suddenly, I began to realize what no one had thus far been able in the war to put into words—what we were fighting for. And I found a lump in my throat which I could not swallow.”* His honesty and candidness makes this so readable and so hard to put down. *“The food had been prepared for our supper the night before, and it seemed strange to be eating cold mashed potatoes and cold English peas at six o’clock in the morning, but any food was welcome. We had not eaten since seven o’clock the preceding morning. As an officer in the United States Army seventy-five cents per day is being subtracted from your pay under the assumption that you get three squares per. Do you want I should take a letter to your Congressman?”* How this green commander gains the trust and loyalty in the snows of Belgium is worth the price of the book…but then again when he has to do it all over again after being wounded and being reassigned to another platoon as the chased down the war. This book is an absolute must for any who want a firsthand look at the last year of the war and the Battle of the bulge. He says it all, *“The characters in my story are not fictional, and any similarity between them and persons living or dead is intentional, and some of them are dead. This is a personal story, an authentic story. And to make a story of a war authentic you must see a war—not a hasty taste of war but the dread, gnawing daily diet of war, the horrors and the fears that are at first blunt testimony that you are a novice and then later become so much a part of you that only another veteran, through some sixth sense, may know that those same horrors and fears are yet there…the GIs’ lot was harder than mine I shall try to tell you that, because I am not the hero of my story. The heroes are the men from Companies I and G—the lead scouts, the riflemen, the machine-gunners, the messengers, the mortar men. Companies I and G are called rifle companies in the Army, and when you call a company a rifle company, you are speaking of the men who actually fight wars.”*
23. **NIGHTFALL (BLOOD ON THE STARS BOOK 10)***,* by Jay Allan (2019). All the old characters are engaged save one. The Union fleet has defected to the Confederation after their attempt to join the Hegemony in their conquest of the Confederation after realizing that the Hegemony wants to assimilate the whole Rim into their genetic data base. Tyler Barron is more than skeptical about this given his history with the Union and Andi’s recent near death experience at the hand of one of the Unions most formidable assassin, Richard Lille. Book 10 takes us clear across the Confederation with the Hegemony following and fighting suing up so much of the Confederation reserves just to hold their own. With each battle they find themselves on the losing end and retreating. The Confeds...stop at their capital world of Megara. An epic battle ensues... one in which the navy loses... but they still have time to fall back …one more time, running to Crayton in the Iron Belt so that they might have time to repair their ships and get new ones with new weapons…but the Hegemony come and the fight is even bigger. Both sides are taking terrible losses in these battles. The Hegemony have brought their whole fleet along with their supply lines to the battle (this little piece of information was brought back by Jake in the last book) …everything from mining operations to ship building and Adm. Barron devises a plan to hurt them in this place. Almost at the end of this epic battle at Crayton, reinforcements show up in the nick of time and they actually push the Hegemony back to the capital system to lick their wounds undeterred in their hope for universal assimilation just a bit slower than they assumed. The hegemony have never encountered a group of humans so head strong and unrelenting even when grossly out numbered. It is night, and everywhere seems to be getting darker, but the Confederation is not finished yet especially with the Grand Alliance that has just been forged.
24. **SHOW ME YOUR GLORY: UNDERSTANDING THE MAJESTIC SPLENDOR OF GOD,** by Steven J. Lawson (2020). You want to understand the attributes of our God? Pick up this book. This book rates right up there with A.W. Pink’s work on the same subject with the added advantage that it is easier read and flows better. This book also compares with Thomas Watson’s, **A Body of Divinity** that I haven’t read in a while and except for the older language they read very similarly as far as easily understood and how they flow for the reader. In this work there is some amazing quotes from giants of the faith that almost makes this book worth buying all by themselves. He fashion his work around the passages in Exodus 33 where Moses exclaims “Show me your glory!” and the ensuing discussion and actions of God that reveal many of His attributes just in that one section of Scripture. H covers all the normal attributes but then he tackle one that is not often talked about in this day and age in the chapter on God’s Wrath. He says many things but this short discussion summarizes it all very well, *“‘Vengeance’ (Hebrew naqam ) indicates God’s intense anger against His enemies that inflicts punishment for the offense inflicted against Him. God says He will repay sinners for their wickedness:* ***‘Vengeance [ naqam ] is Mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near’ (Deut. 32:35).*** *As the Lawgiver, God must execute the due penalty when His law is broken. Otherwise, He would be an unfit Judge. Disobedience to the divine moral code always demands full retribution by God, which is death* ***(Gen. 2:17; 2 Kings 14:6; Jer. 31:30; Ezek. 18:4, 20).*** *In the New Testament, “vengeance” (Greek ekdikēsis ) means the punishing retribution administered in carrying out justice. It conveys God’s avenging of what is wrong. It is a compound word, combining “ek” , meaning “out of,” with dikēsis , meaning “righteousness of justice.” The word refers to the execution of God’s righteous judgment that proceeds out from Himself. It is the inflicting of a just punishment on the person who commits an offense against God. Vengeance is the necessary response of holy God against sinners. It is when God rightly avenges the wrong suffered against Him.”* He doesn’t assume that his reader knows anything substantial about the person or attributes of God so at times for the trained reader some of it may get a bit tedious…but stay with it… it is well worth wading through materials that you think you know already.
25. **THE GRAND ALLIANCE (BLOOD ON THE STARS BOOK 11)***,* by Jay Allen (2019). We left off last time with the Hegemony controlling Megara the capital planet of the Confederation and Tyler Barron planning an offensive since he is convinced that the Grand Alliance of the Rim nations would be in peril if they simply waited for the Hegemony to come to them. In the meantime both sides are re-building their battered strength from the battle that was won at Crayton including some enhancements by the Confeds that are unknown to the Hegemony. They don’t send out reconnaissance because of their superior arrogance so they are unaware of what the Confeds and the rest of the Rim nations have planned. The Rim nation’s greatest weapon however is their defiance…a defiance centered around their freedom…even the Union forces that are with them see the same freedoms slipping away if the Hegemony take over the Rim. The Hegemony believes they have a greater cause for the good of the humans of the universe. Their Number 1…the most genetically superior of their people has said, *“’For the good of all humanity,’ she repeated. It was the mantra of the Hegemony, the very reason the great power existed. Too many of its people, she knew, Masters included, forgot that sacred duty.”* Meanwhile, back on the home world for the Union there are others namely the 1st Citizen who sees things differently which might cause some extra struggle sooner rather than later. The nations led by Tyler Barron will not surrender at any cost, so they must take the fight to the Hegemony before it is too late to be able to do so and they do. But what will be the results of the greatest battle in the history of the Rim nations? Will the Hegemony prevail or the Rim nations? Stay tuned for **The Colossus**, book 12.
26. **PRACTICAL RELIGION: A HELP FOR THE COMMON DAYS,** by J.R. Miller(first published in1888, digitalized and re-worked by Monergism Books2020). James Russell Miller was a popular Christian writer and Presbyterian pastor born 1840- died 1912. This is a book (200-300 pages depending upon how it iis formatted) of biblical wisdom for the ages. Biblical wisdom/practical religion for the day to day Christian seeking to glorify our Father in heaven. He tackles 27 different issues that affect our Christian walk. Dealing with issues like prayer, quietness before the Lord, beholding God’s truth, being a Christian on the weekday, the cost of being a blessing, marriage, friendship, being a means of grace in the world, not worrying, controlling our temper, always striving to move forward with God not backwards, thinking about failing, living victorious and how to end well are just some of the subjects he tackles hoping to help the believer to walk more smoothly in life. In the chapter, *Transformed by Beholding*, he says*, “Beholding, we are changed. The verb is passive. We do not produce the change. The marble can never carve itself into the lovely figure that floats in the artist's mind; the transformation must be wrought with patience by the sculptor's own hands. We cannot change ourselves into the image of Christ's glory; we are changed. The work is wrought in us by the divine Spirit. We simply look upon the image of the Christ, and its blessed light streams in upon us and prints its own radiant glory upon our hearts.”* He seeks to show why it is unthinkable NOT to live uprightly as a Christian. He concedes that life is hard…but we are called to live the life God has given us no matter how hard it may be so he wishes to make thigs better for us by pointing us to what is real in our walk in the Lord. Each of these are either a short treatise or sermon that he was passionate about because as a pastor he saw the kinds of things that tripped up the people of God in their day to day. I would highly recommend the reading of this book. I can’t find it on Monergism’s site yet but hopefully it will be there soon. It is for sale from Kindle for $ .99 and is an absolute gem. Many of Rev. Miller’s sermons and books can still be found online.
27. **THE COLOSSUS (The Blood on the Stars Series Book 12**, by Jay Allan (2019). I have not read many but this military sci-fi thriller is one of the best I have read so far. So good, as you can see from my perspective and literary expertise that I am still reading this series when I said way back that there was “no way” that I would read the whole series…and now there is an 18th book coming out this year or next. Ant way, The Grand Alliance has just gained another major victory and won back the capitol planet of the Confederation, Megara. The Hegemony is caught unaware and Admiral Barron’s strategy works…at least for the moment. He and his 2nd in command, Adm. Clint Winters, know that the Hegemony are not beaten… they have just pulled back to an out world of the Confederation that they conquered in a previous battle…the planet Dannith which has played a large role in espionage through the years in the Confeds struggle with the Union forces. The admirals are right and the Hegemony are back this time with a super ship, a holdover from the old Imperial days, Colossus …a behemoth of a ship much like the planet killer in a previous book. This great ship is tremendously powerful. There is nothing like it in the known universe and within it is a secret known only as “Red Storm”…a secret that could turn the tide toward the Rim submitting to the Hegemony in the end. While this is going on number #1of the Hegemony, Akella, is on the hot seat back in her home world as politicians…even genetically enhanced politicians… do the run around for power and she has to remind many of them why they are expending so much energy and resources in this war with the Rimdwellers, *“The action on the Rim is not elective in nature, Number Two. We live by laws and first among those is our sacred duty to shepherd and protect humanity. There are hundreds of billions of people on the Rim, a vast concentration of population that defies any previous knowledge or expectations. I will acknowledge that the conflict has proven more difficult to conclude than we had hoped at first, but I maintain that any other choice but to pursue assimilation would have been unthinkable, and a sacrilegious violation of our primary purpose.”* So back at the Rim, the battle is upon them. The battle of the ages...yeah, I know… I said that in the last book…but this one really is…maybe! Any way while this battle on the Rim heats up there is a danger looming at the edge of Hegemony space …a danger even more powerful than the hegemony and if They return it could change the way that even this battle for the Rim turns out…and that is what we will find out in book 13 entitled **THE OTHERS.**
28. **GRACE DEFINED AND DEFENDED: WHAT A 400 YEAR OLD CONFESSION TEACHES US ABOUT SIN, SALVATION AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF God,** by Kevin DeYoung (2019). Of all the confessions to ignore if you are Presbyterian maybe this is not the one to ignore. This book is written not just as a commentary on the Canons of Dort but also to reintroduce us, who are not from the Dutch Reformed tradition, to a true gem. For those of us who tout the 5 Points of Calvinism this Canon does so much more than give us the definitive documentation and definition of these points in contrast to the 5 point of the Arminians. Kevin states, “*The canons do not pretend to explain everything about Reformed theology, let alone about the entire Bible. Dort simply sought to declare what was “in agreement with the Word of God and accepted till now in the Reformed churches” concerning ‘Divine Predestination.’ And in this they are worthy to be commemorated and (more importantly) deserving of careful study and consideration.”* Also, here in the Canons of Dort—considered one of the high points of Calvinist confessional orthodoxy—we have a bold statement on the unequivocal mandate to preach the gospel to all nations*. “This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people (Article 5).”* As Christians who believe the Bible we are always looking for information that can support our faith…so much so that we often forget 400 year old documents that are the clearest documents to help God’s church shine. Kevin states again, *“We live in an age where passion is often considered an adequate substitute for precision. Charles Spurgeon once advised young ministers that when drawn into controversy, they should ‘use very hard arguments and very soft words.’ It’s a good thing Spurgeon never used social media! Too many tweets and posts specialize in overly hard words and especially soft arguments. Many of us, even Christians, have little patience for rigorous thinking and little interest in careful definition. We emote better than we reason, and we describe our feelings better than we define our words, which is one reason we need to study old confessions written by dead people. Whatever errors of harshness or exaggerated rhetoric may have existed in earlier centuries of theological discourse, this much is wonderfully and refreshingly true: they were relentlessly passionate about doctrinal truth. They cared about biblical fidelity. They cared about definitions. And they cared about precision. Praise God, they cared enough to be careful. And in no Reformation-era confession or catechism do we see this so clearly as in the Canons of Dort.”* The Canons of Dort ought to be read by all truly serious Christians. I am also reading an older book that he did on the Heidelberg Catechism, **THE GOOD NEWS WE ALMOST FORGOT: REDISCOVERING THE GOSPEL IN A 16TH CENTURY CATECHISM (2010).**  They are interesting to read together and I would recommend that discipline as well. Great stuff and a great resource!
29. **THE GOOD NEWS WE ALMOST FORGOT: REDISCOVERING THE GOSPEL IN A 16TH CENTURY CATECHISM,** by Kevin DeYoung (2010). This has to be the best commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism in print today. The most comprehensive and analytical commentary is still **THE COMMENTARY OF DR. ZACHARIUS URSINUS ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**. But this commentary (DeYoung’s) is thoroughly devotional as written by a man who is and has the heart of a pastor. I only hope that he will do the same for the Westminster Confession of Faith and Shorter Catechism before I am too old to read it. His pastoral insights and historical perspective as well as his personal experience…having grown up with this catechism being read and taught for each Lord’s Day… is especially invaluable to those of us who did not grow up the same way. He says, *“If there is* ***‘nothing new under the sun’****, perhaps the main task now facing the Western Church is not to reinvent or be relevant, but to remember.”* He bids us remember that the Heidelberg is largely the best commentary on The Apostle’s Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer with pastoral advice for believers to live according to what God says. I really like this point when talking about where the Law is placed in the Heidelberg Catechism, *“It’s worth noting, as many have, that the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism included their exposition of the law in the gratitude section and not the guilt section. This choice reflects the widespread Reformation belief in the so-called third use of the law. The law is given (1) to restrain wickedness and (2) to show us our guilt and lead us to Christ. But, according to Calvin, the “third and principal use” of the law is as an instrument to learn God’s will. The law doesn’t just show us our sin so we might be drawn to Christ; it shows us how to live as those who belong to Christ.”* He writes again, *“The gospel summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is glorious, its Christ gracious, its comforts rich, its Spirit strong, its God sovereign, and its truth timeless…* *But the Catechism has in mind a different kind of comfort, one that is deeper, higher, richer, and sweeter. We find this comfort by admitting our sin, instead of excusing it; by trusting in Another instead of ourselves; and by living to give thanks instead of being thanked…* *The first thing we need in order to experience the comfort of the gospel is to be made uncomfortable with our sin. The comfort of the gospel doesn’t skirt around the issue of sin, or ignore it like positive thinking preachers and self-help gurus. It looks at sin square in the eye, acknowledges it, and deals with it. While many people will tell us to stop focusing on sin and to lighten up because we aren’t “bad” people, the Catechism tells us just the opposite. In order to have comfort, we must first see our sin-induced misery.”* It points out an obvious longing in all believers to know God better and its author sought to help with that so personally. He ends with this thought, *“This has been a book about theology, about knowing theology and loving theology But if we’ve really paid attention to the Heidelberg Catechism, this should also be a book about warmhearted experiential faith. In fact, knowing and loving theological truth is what produces the warmhearted experiential faith.”* There is also an appendix asking the question; Does the Heidelberg Catechism forbid homosexual behavior?...which is almost worth the price of the book by itself.
30. **THE FORLORD SON,** by Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), (published digitally by Monergism 2020, originally published in 1885 by Andrew Bonar). Rev. Rutherford was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor, theologian and author; as well as a Scottish Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly in 1645. This particular addition is a construct of 7 sermons that he gave on Luke 15:11-32- The Prodigal Son as we know it. He called them the parable of the forlorn son. They are primarily dealing with the youngest son as a reprobate who seeks only what is his at the expense of his father’s reputation and wealth. He wishes to get out from under his father’s covenant headship. As he says by way of describing the younger son, “it is only in this life that the natural man seeks.” So did the youngest son. But he is none to easy on the older brother either who cannot understand even the easiest concepts of joy when the sinner repents seen in how the father treats the forlorn son. In the end the youngest son is won to the faith by the grace of God and the oldest son lost for he was not a believer after all. Couple of things here: (1) Most preachers now understand that the youngest son is a child of the covenant and possibly already a believer who steps away for a time from a misunderstood faith succumbing to temptation for a time but after a while the Lord who iis always watching over His own brings Him to his senses and he truly repents and comes back home…just the way all of us who sin have access to the Father. (2) It is unfortunate that Monergism or Andrew Bonar as well didn’t see fit to “clear” up the word choices and phrases so that a more modern audience wouldn’t have to work so hard on just simply reading the text. It is not just archaic wording…Old and Middle English but also Scottish uses of words to the degree that there are few definition on line for the words so you kind of have to guess at some of their meaning. I have enjoyed in the past several of Rutherford’s sermons and letter but the language in them was brought up to at least early 20th century.
31. **THE OTHERS (The Blood on the Stars Series Book 13)**, by Jay Allan (2019). The Others are in Hegemony space and they are coming with a vengeance and a force so large that maybe even the “great Hegemony” won’t be able to stop them. Lats time we were in the battle to end all battles with the Hegemony on the Rim when the Hegemony brought up their most lethal weapon The Colossus, a massive ship from the Imperial days that cannot be stopped by any conventional weapons. But then that is the problem with the enemies of the Confederation they always underestimate Tyler Baron and his people to the point that they made such a dilemma for the Hegemony with the Others in their space that they had to make a hard decision concerning their most powerful weapon before they all headed back home making a truce with the Confederation rather than assimilating them. These wars were taking a toll on Barron*… “He wondered just how much more he could endure—the pain, the death, the suffering. He was only a man, and he knew he had a limit. Even his grandfather’s wars, as brutal as they had been, ended. But Barron seemed stuck in an endless series of conflicts, of disasters and blood-soaked battles, one coming right after another. Was that where they were? Not truly at the dawn of peace, but only in a brief respite before more killing, more struggle? He didn’t have an answer, but he knew he would push forward, fight for all he held dear, and for the duty that drove him… but he knew he couldn’t face the fire forever. No one could.”* Now there is the Others, as the Hegemony call them, to consider…the Highborn as they call themselves, because the Hegemony is calling on the Confederation to come along side to fight with them against such a hostile enemy. While the Hegemony wish to assimilate the people of the Rim into their society…the Highborn wish to enslave for their evil desire to conquer the whole universe. The Highborn used humans to man their ships…to work their mines…to do their bidding like cattle if necessary but they weren’t against annihilating whole planets if they could cause fear and that is just what they are doing as they pass through Hegemony space at this time. Over a billion Hegemony citizens have been wiped off the face of their planets so far and there may be more to come. Barron and his force will come to the aid of their most recent enemy simply because of the enormity of the threat even to the Rim and they will all meet in a grand battle to end all battles…maybe…on to book 14 of 18…**THE LAST STAND.**
32. **LUKE: PART 1: A STUDY OF LUKE 1-8 (BOOK 5 of the AT HIS FEET STUDIES)**, by Hope A. Blanton, Christine B. Gordon (2019). This is a one of a kind Bible study in my opinion because these 2 women combine real scholarship with probing questions that lead to challenge and change and on top of that each lesson can be done in less than 30 minutes preparation. With each lesson the reader is given the “big idea” as well as the contextual insight needed to not only understand the Word of God but also to incorporate it into your life. Of course, this is written for women. I say that, not in any condescending way but because it is so efficient and rewarding all at the same time. Where does this study take the reader? Listen in their own words. *“We have traced the life of Jesus from his birth in a dirty cave. Born to a powerless, teenage mother, foretold by a miracle child born to two elderly people, and raised in a poor family, Jesus lived a difficult life in our broken world. From the very beginning, he had chosen to deal with the suffering of humanity by entering into it. He endured the testing of Satan in the wilderness and the rejection of the religious leaders. He called a band of unlikely disciples and began a preaching tour complete with demonstrations of God’s power. He withdrew to pray when he could have rallied for insurrection. He taught love for enemies when he alone had the right to condemn. He saw and had compassion on those who were hurting, released people from the tortures of Satan, and called an unclean woman ‘daughter.’ Who was this man? Who is this man? He is the Son of the Most High God, the anointed one who was to come, the Messiah, the king of the upside-down kingdom. And to those who put their trust in him, he still says, “Your faith has made you well. Go in peace.””* I wish there were more of these…of wait… there are this is book 5 in the series after all!
33. **THE PRAYER OF THE BROKEN HEART: Expository Discourses on Psalm 51,** by Robert Candlish (Monergism eBook 2020). Robert Candlish (1806-1873) was a beloved and gifted Scottish preacher who sought to pastor his flock well which meant that is most cases he pastored them through his writings. C.H. Spurgeon said of him, *"A man hardly needs anything beyond Candlish. He is devout, candid, prudent and forcible."* He is in fact extremely pastoral in his approach of the exposition of Psalm 51. As you read this work you sense his own on-going angst over his own sin and then you can’t help but feel the angnst surrounding your own sin. This is one of the most convicting, challenging and restorative books that I have read in a while. His style is such that you could sense him sitting down with you in the midst of dealing with your sin before God. He walks through the psalm not holding back the severity of the sin up to the jubilation of God’s restoration because of the work of Christ in our life. He states near the beginning of this little booklet (100 or so pages depending upon formatting), “*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." There is no enlargement here; no detail. It is a bare cry generally for mercy; the grasping, as it were, of the helping hand; the simple acceptance of a pardoning voice. It is a casting of himself, just as he is, with no analysis of his case, "on the loving-kindness of God." But it is a thorough and unreserved casting of himself upon that. For he desires to be "throughly washed and cleansed." It is not any slight or superficial healing of the hurt of his soul that he seeks; but a probing of it to the bottom, with a view to a radical cure. And this desire distinguishes his frame of mind from that of one feeling merely "the sorrow of this world which worketh death," and turns it into the "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.* *When my sin finds me out, all this confidence or conceit is gone. For it is a vain dream in which men trust when they affect to question or defy the righteous judgment of the Most High. Their own consciences, even partially awakened, more than half attest its hollow vanity. Nor will their unbelief make void the unchanging truth, and justice, and faithfulness, of God. Nay rather, as the Apostle quotes this text (Rom. 3:4),—"Let God be true, and every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." Even when men presume to try the sayings of that God who reproves them, and to sit in judgment on his right to accuse them and his procedure in condemning them,—they are compelled to justify him and blame themselves "* He seems to fully understand this… himself a sinner….as he speaks of owning our sin and then repenting/confessing it freely to the only one who can or will do anything about it. We have the promise of His blessing even up to and including forever after we repent and work in God’s ways. One last quote*, “I speak because I believe. I believe and therefore speak. It is a principle having all the sobriety, simplicity, and chastened earnestness, of the most child-like submission, the most entire and absolute self-renunciation; for it flows continually through the channel of a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, ever realising its own emptiness and dependence. It is a principle, finally, having all the enlargement and elevation of the divine love itself; for it grasps the mighty plan of God in all its comprehensive fulness of grace and glory. Springing up in your own bosom, out of your own personal experience, it rises to the bosom of God, and becomes associated, united, identified with his eternal purpose! Your aim and his are now the same. Your desire and his are now the same. Your hope and his are now the same. You and he alike, you and he together, find satisfaction in the prospect of the Blessed Day, when ‘incense and a pure offering shall be offered unto His name, for the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same.”*
34. **THE LAST STAND (The Blood on the Stars Series Book 14)**, by Jay Allan (2019). So many changes occurring in this book makes it a really fast read even at 400 plus or minus pages. I have for the most part enjoyed this series immensely and will continue to the end even though it has become a bit predictable. But his believable science and the character development keeps me coming back. You have watched all the main cast develop over a 20 year period and their growth and wisdom is reflected very well…as if these were real people. The revelation concerning what actually happened with the old empire was a great twist in this series of many twists. *“The empire declined because of its prosperity, because it had united all of humanity. Because it had no enemies on its borders, and no real dissension within. People became apathetic, and less and less productive. They wasted their time in pointless disputes over meaningless issues. For the first time since humanity clawed its way from the deep jungle to build the first civilization, there was no pressure on most people. No war, no famine, no uncontrolled disease. It seems like paradise, but instead it was a road to hell. We lost our spark, our drive… and that condemned us to decline, and perhaps to total destruction.”* The old empire has been a common thread to all the different cultures that the author introduces us to, even the Highborn or The Others as the Hegemony knew them at first. As we have seen throughout there are multiple “last stands” in this series that don’t end as you would expect them to end…or do they by now. This book gets a bit personal in new arrivals and the apparent deaths of some people key to the story. The Highborn are almost comical since they seem to be the extreme of evil compared to Hegemony and even the Union…Oh, have I said that the Hegemony and the Confederation are fast friends/allies or is it frenemies now in their all-out war with the Highborn? I wish he had had someone do a better job of editing these last 2 books…because it can often be somewhat disrupting to your reading . But now on to **Empire’s Ashes, book #15.**
35. **THE CHRISTMAS WE DIDN’T EXPECT,** by David Mathis (2020). I was hoping to get this book read in time to recommend it to the church…but alas, I am only now finishing it up. These are wonderful devotionals that are at the same time filled with sound doctrine. Each day moves forward with the God-man, Jesus to the Christmas Eve. He says, *“Throughout church history, the best of Christian theology has recognized and affirmed the truth of Jesus’ continuing incarnation—the idea that Jesus didn’t simply play human for three decades in the created world, but rather forever joined our humanity to his divine person and will always be fully God and fully man.”* The author is making sure, through it all, that his readers come away with knowing the real Jesus, the Christ. This book is NOT full of surprises if you have been a student of your Lord and Savior through the years but what it does is surprise you perhaps by what you have forgotten ...or with what you may have thought was insignificant…and, by the way, nothing is insignificant concerning Jesus. I loved many things about this book but this quote stood out to me, *“This Christmas Will Change You. God’s good and powerful gift of habit teaches us an important truth for the Advent Season and especially as Christmas Day now draws near: holidays and feasts not only fill our mouths with laughter, and our bellies with food, but shape our souls, for good or ill. December is the single most distinctive month in our society, and Christmas the most distinctive day. It has its own special décor and music. It has the most distinguishing feel. This Christmas will change you. You will not be the same afterwards. You will be the better for it, or the worse. Will you be closer to Christ because of this Christmas, or further away? Will your heart be softer to him or more callous? Will more fog lie between your eyes and his face, or will you see him with greater clarity and savor him with greater fervor? Will you know and enjoy Jesus more? Now Christmas lies only a week away, and we cannot miss it. Christmas confronts us and affects us. It makes us either more like Scrooge (from Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol) or more like the shepherds who glorified and praised God (Luke 2: 20). Come December 26, we will be different, to some degree, whether more like Herod or more like the magi who “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (Matthew 2: 10).”* Merry Christmas …now I need to remember to recommend this for reading next year!
36. **EMPIRE’S ASHES (Blood on the Stars Book 15)** by Jay Allan (2019). The Highborn literally born out a conspiracy to “save” the old empire have turned on their human creators and have for over 400 years been enslaving and killing them treating them as evil gods would putting the human race in their part of the galaxy…part of the old empire…in a living hell in more ways than one. They were grown to believe they were of greater intellect and more worth than anything else ever created…(didn’t these people read Frankenstein…once a monster always a monster.) Any way, of course, Tyler Barron is once again engaged in the battle to end all battles when they “win” everyone, the Confederation, the Alliance, the Hegemony and other smaller nations, go off to their respective corners to re-coup and re-organize. They build bigger ships and stronger fortresses and the Highborn, at least, come up with a strategy to once and for all subjugate these Rim dwellers. So off goes the Pact to discover their strengths and weaknesses, if there are any of their enemy…all along knowing they are walking…well…cruising… into a trap. *“Just the kind of thing an enemy would do to split up our forces, fight us in piecemeal bits… Barron knew it could be a trap. He knew that because it was precisely the kind of thing he might try in the enemy’s place. He could get up there in a day, with maybe a third of his combat power, but the rest would trickle in over the following thirty-six hours. And if the enemy comes through the flank transit point again while the fleet is stretched out like that… The tactical decision seemed a simple one. Keep the fleet in formation, and advance at the speed of the slowest ships. Except that such a course almost guaranteed the destruction of Jeffries’s entire force.”* Will they survive to fight another day? Will we see people we didn’t expect to see in places we didn’t expect to see them? What is going on in the Union all this time? (I personally have been rooting for the downfall of Gaston for some time now.) What is Andi doing and why is she and her crew on the capital of the old empire? Will there be another epic battle…I can answer that one…of course…but the outcome? Well…that is one of the things I have always like about this series…the space battles. A good shoot ‘em up is always entertaining and these are good ones to be sure.
37. **THE SWORD OF SUMMER: MAGNUS CHASE OF THE GODS OF ASGARD SERIES BOOK 1,** by Rick Riordan (2015). This was fun. This one is about the Norse gods mythology and it is fun. Told from a first person point of view, Magnus Chase dies at the very beginning of the book. He turns out to be a demi-god son of Frey but he has been homeless and living on the streets of Boston since his mother died two years ago. He is a mis-fit so he will resonate with many of Rick’s readers…nothing worse than being a pre-teen or teen that really doesn’t fit anywhere…I remember. He is witty and ungraceful especially in his living but in his “afterlife” much more confident and graceful in how he approaches battle and people. His character is very much like a Percy Jackson or a Jason Grace but that is okay from one who has been picky about which series to read and have been waiting to read this one. Boston, interestingly enough is the convergent point for the Nine Realms so everything happens in and out of Boston. Being the son of a God, of course, he must take on a quest to save the world from Ragnarok. There is a lot of choices to be made in this novel of teenage demi-gods just like with the **Heroes of Olympia** about Greek demi-gods. (Oh, one of them show up in here as well as a cousin.) But it really highlights the “right’ decisions which is a good message for kids and adults these days. The story captures you from the beginning and the reader cannot put it down…even if the reader, like me, is an adult as these are written for teens. And then there is Thor…the TV binging, overweight avenger of the Nine Realms…he is really funny…especially the references and comparisons to the movies. Almost 500 pages of non-stop fun and frolicking… Viking style.