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Is God a Threat to My Happiness?

What led you to write this book?

My main motivation for writing *God, Freedom and Human Dignity* was my growing sense, after over twenty-four years of teaching an undergraduate course “Christianity and Culture,” that the coming generation no longer views the existence of God as an unambiguous good. The book began as an effort to discover why my students felt hesitant to affirm God as the only sure basis for hope and joy in life and, addressing those concerns, to help them find their joy, identity and hope securely grounded in the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

What is unique about your approach?

My book is distinctive in the way it combines analysis of modern self-understanding (or the modern “self”) with a biblically faithful, Christocentric theology of God and humanity. Many books attempt to bring to light the distinctive features of the modern self and many books theologize about God and humanity; but *God, Freedom and Human Dignity* brings these two together in a way that illuminates and deepens both sides of the dialogue. A theology that does not listen to the modern self and take it seriously appears to our contemporaries as unrelated to human existence. But apart from its ground in God, human existence possesses no depth, purpose or greatness. This book listens carefully to contemporary human longings and shows they can be understood rightly and fulfilled completely in the Christian understanding of the God-human relationship.

How might readers benefit from this book?

Many people today lack a sense of identity, meaning and direction rooted in something real and important. They feel no sense of being part of something great and worthy of their life’s effort. I believe that the renewed vision of God and humanity I am presenting in this book can help some people discover a God-centered identity and recapture a sense of greatness and calling in their lives.

Why is it important for Christians to rightly understand human freedom and human dignity?

For a long time I have felt that in church circles and in the culture in general people misunderstand or possess only a superficial understanding of human freedom and dignity. We tend to understand freedom as the *power and opportunity* to do as we please and dignity as the inherent *right* to do as we please; and we index the level of happiness we can attain to the degree of freedom we can exercise. Viewing freedom and dignity in this way creates a tension between our desire for freedom and dignity (and consequently happiness) and certain aspects of the Christian message about our relationship to God, especially the call to

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submit our wills to the divine will, to obey the divine law and to “take up the cross” and follow Jesus.

If we view God as a threat to our freedom and dignity, how might we respond?

Given the tendency to see freedom and dignity as we do, the New Testament appears to be calling us to give up our freedom and dignity and consequently our happiness. This contradiction is unbearable and may push us toward one of three alternatives: defiance, subservience or indifference toward God.

How can we embrace God instead?

To avoid these unhappy alternatives we need to rethink the nature of freedom and dignity so that loving God and affirming God’s will also enable us to love and affirm ourselves in the right way, a way that leads to true freedom and dignity. We can break through to this renewed way of thinking by learning to view every divine attribute and every aspect of our relationship to God through the prism of Jesus Christ in whose person both God and humanity are perfectly reconciled and affirmed.