This book is dedicated to

John Frame

an uncommonly gracious man, who will no doubt conclude that portions of this book are good, other portions are questionable, but the topic warrants further study.
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And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them (Rev. 20:8-9).

As you probably know, Christians disagree about the doctrine of "the last things," called eschatology ["eskaTOLogy"]. I firmly believe that conservative Protestants in the United States are about to get into the biggest theological shouting match of this century over the question of eschatology.

But there is one point that 99.9% of all Bible-believing Christians agree on: these verses in the Book of Revelation refer to the events immediately preceding the final judgment. No denomination or
school of theological interpretation within the orthodox Christian camp argues against this.

This identification of these verses with the final judgment raises a key question of interpretation that non-postmillennialists repeatedly ask postmillennialists (whenever they can locate one). It is a reasonable question:

"How does the postmillennialist explain the final rebellion of Satan at the end of history?"

There may be a few isolated postmillennialists who deny that this prophecy refers to a rebellion at the end of history, but such a view makes little impression on anyone who reads Revelation 20. Those who accept the plain teaching of Revelation 20 must admit that a rebellion occurs at the very end of history. In fact, this rebellion calls down God's fire from heaven which ends history.

Is the whole world, going to be deceived, except for a handful of Christians? The language of Revelation 20:8 is not clear enough to conclude for certain that the devil actually succeeds in deceiving all the nations of the earth, whose inhabitants number as the sands of the sea. He will go out to do so, but he may not be completely successful. But it is possible that Satan will successfully deceive a majority of those who will be living at that time.

It should also be clear that the deception is a deception of people. The battle between God and Satan is for the souls of men. Revelation 20:8-9 is not talking primarily about angels. It is also not
describing a contest over power. There is no question about who has more power in history: God does. What this describes is a battle primarily over ethics. “Choose this day whom you will serve,” Elijah demanded of the people of Israel (I Kings 18). This is the question of life for every man and society in history. The answer that men give has life-and-death consequences, as it had for the 850 false prophets whom Elijah ordered the people to grab, and whom he then killed (18:40), just as they would have killed him had God's fire not burned up the sacrifice on the altar Elijah built. But the fire came down to consume the right sacrifice, and judgment then came to the false prophets. So it will be again at that last day, only next time the fire will consume the false prophets directly, overcoming and ending human judgments in history.

Satan's lure has been the same from the days of the garden of Eden: to get men to covenant with him rather than God, to place themselves under his jurisdiction rather than God's jurisdiction. And let us not forget, “jurisdiction” comes, from two Latin words that mean “law” (juris) and ‘saying” (diction-em). When Satan and God speak their rival laws, whose law will men obey? It is a battle between sovereigns and their respective laws. It is a battle for the hearts, minds, and souls of men. It is also a battle for their strength (Luke 10:27). To that extent, it is a struggle for power, but only because biblical ethics is the source of all long-term power. This, too, is a central theme of this book.

The Battlefield

A war will be fought at that last day—a very brief war. Where will it be fought? What exactly will be the battlefield? What do the words mean, “compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city”? Are there two literal places in view, the camp of the saints and the beloved city? Is this one place, with two descriptions? Or are the words symbolic of Christians in general and the church, in general?

I know of no commentator who accepts literally the idea that the entire population of Christian believers is holed up in one city, even “the beloved city.” There may be such an interpreter, but I have not come across him. Perhaps some dispensationalist interpreter somewhere does cling to such literalism. In response, I would ask him two questions, using basic dispensationalist teaching concerning the millennium: “First, where on earth are the millions upon millions of previously Raptured, transformed, now-immortal believers who returned to earth with Jesus, and who have been living all over the earth for the past one thousand years? Second, are all the Christians on earth—Raptured saints and post-Rapture converts—living in Jerusalem?” I think these questions dispose of the literal city view. The battlefield will be larger than Jerusalem.

Conventional premillennial interpreters might argue that the second reference could be to Jerusalem, but that not every believer on earth is there. It is simply a representative city. The same satanic attack will be going on elsewhere. The “camp of the
"saints" is the whole earth. This would make more sense.

Those who are not premillennialist usually argue that "the camp of the saints" and "the beloved city" both refer symbolically to the church, and probably the invisible church, meaning the totality of individual Christians. An attack by Satan's human followers comes on those who are true Christians.

One question for all interpreters arises: How will the satanists know who is who? Christians cannot be sure about the true spiritual status of members of our own congregations at any point in time. This is why God requires excommunications to deal with church members who commit major sins. How will Satan's human army identify clearly just who the true Christians are? Or will the attack be somewhat indiscriminate? This problem besets all interpreters.

However large the army of Satan may be, Revelation 20 indicates that there will be a sufficient number of reprobates to surround the Christians, meaning sufficient to threaten them with death. This will be a confrontation primarily between rival armies of mortals, not between armies of angels or, between anyone and Raptured immortals (in the premillennial scheme) who obviously cannot be threatened with death. (The premillennialist really does have a problem in explaining where all those Raptured immortals will be when the war breaks out, and what they will be doing to defend their mortal Christian brothers.) This is clearly a description of a huge, well-organized army of evil people.

The attack is unsuccessful. Immediately, God intervenes, burns them up, and begins the last...
ment. The resurrection of the dead takes place. End of history. Curtain call. Boos and cheers from the heavenly host.

The Postmillennialist’s Problem

The postmillennialist argues that the kingdom of God is to be progressively manifested on earth before the day of judgment, and therefore before the Rapture, which he identifies with the last judgment. Then how can these events take place? Where will all those sinners come from? The army of Satan will be filled with people who have been recruited from the nations of the earth, not angels.

We need to consider several possible assumptions that may be coloring the exegesis of either postmillennialists or the questioners.

1. Does a theology of the extension of God’s kingdom on earth require that almost everyone on earth in the era close to that final day be a born-again believer in Christ?

2. Can born-again believers fall from grace and then rebel? In short, can Satan gain recruits from the born-again invisible church?

3. Can unbelievers seem to be saints in the camp of the saints, almost as spies who successfully invade an enemy military camp?

4. How can unbelievers possess so much power after generations of Christian dominion?

The answer to the first two questions is “no.” Postmillennialism does not require that all or even
most people be converts to Christ at that last day. (Prior to the last day, postmillennialism holds, there will be large numbers of converts, and the civilization of the world will generally reflect God's biblically revealed law-order.) People at that last day need only be externally obedient to the terms of the covenant, meaning biblical law. This book attempts to explain how this externally faithful living might operate.

The question of whether saints can fall from grace is not a specifically eschatological issue, but I know of no postmillennial commentator who believes that men can fall from special (soul-saving) grace. Obviously, if regenerate men can lose their salvation, then there is no big problem for the postmillennialist in explaining the final rebellion at the last day. This book is dealing with a harder problem.

The answer to the third question is "yes." The camp of the saints can and will be filled with people who have the outward signs of faith but not the inward marks. In fact, this is the only way out of the exegetical dilemma for the postmillennialist.

If the answer to question number one is "no, not everyone needs to be a saint," then this raises a fifth question:

"How can a world full of reprobates be considered a manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth?"

The answers to the fourth and fifth questions are closely related to each other. Answering these two
questions is what this book is all about. The correct answers come when we gain a correct understanding of the much-neglected doctrine of common grace.

The reader should understand in advance that this book is not intended to present the exegetical case for postmillennialism. I no more try to build the case for postmillennialism here than Van Til tries to build the case for amillennialism in *Common Grace and the Gospel*. I simply assume it, and then get on with the business at hand. This is an exercise in apologetics, not systematic. David Chilton's *Paradise Restored* and *Days of Vengeance* have presented the case for postmillennialism better than I could or any other theologian ever has. Any critic who thinks that he will score cosmic Brownie points by saying, “But North doesn't prove his eschatology” should get on with his business at hand, namely, writing a definitive critique of Chilton's eschatology books. That project will keep him busy for a few years. (Furthermore, unless he is very, very bright, and very, very gifted stylistically, it will also end his career as a critic when he finally gets it into print, if he can get it into print.)
INTRODUCTION

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matt. 13:24-30).

This passage deals with the kingdom of God. It raises one of the most important issues in human
thought the issue of “continuity vs. discontinuity? The discontinuity in this passage is the final judgment. Will the owner of the field (God) allow the servants (angels) to tear out the tares (evil men) before he harvest date (the end of time)? The answer is no. The owner insists that the tares be left alone until both wheat and tares have fully matured, and the harvest day has come.

God’s plan for history involves both continuity and discontinuity. His continuity is His grace. “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that sin by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation (Ex. 34:5-7).”

The Lord suffers long; in this case, three or four generations. This is exactly what God had told...
'Abraham concerning the conquest of the Promised Land: “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). In the fourth generation after, they became subservient to Egypt, the Israelites would return. Moses' generation was the fourth after Jacob came down to Egypt (Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses: Ex. 6:16, 18, 20). They came to the edge of the land, but drew back in fear; Joshua's generation conquered it.

Why the delay in judging the Amorites? Their iniquity was not yet full. God gave them time to fill it up. He gave them continuity. Then, in Joshua's day, he gave them discontinuity. Judgment came at last.

So it is with the history of man. God extends time to all men; then, at the final day (or at the death of each person), judgment comes. Judgment day confirms eternal life to the regenerate, and the second death (Rev. 20:14) to the unregenerate. Continuity is broken by discontinuity.

Common Grace

If you want a four-word summary of this book, here it is: common grace is continuity. It is also a prelude to judgment.

The concept of common grace is seldom discussed outside of Calvinistic circles, although all Christian theologies must eventually come to grips with the issues underlying the debate over common grace. The phrase was employed by colonial American Puritans. I came across it on several occasions when I was doing research on the colonial Puritans' eco-
nomic doctrines and economic experiments. The concept goes back at least to John Calvin's writings.

Before venturing into the forest of theological debate, let me state what I believe is the meaning of the word "grace." The Bible uses the idea in several ways, but the central meaning of grace is this: a gift given to God's creatures on the basis, first, of His favor to His Son, Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, and second, on the basis of Christ's atoning work on the cross. Grace is not strictly unmerited, for Christ merits every gift, but in terms of the merit of the creation—merit deserved by a creature because of its mere creaturehood—there is none. In short, when we speak of any aspect of the creation, other than the incarnate Jesus Christ, grace is defined as an unmerited gift. The essence of grace is conveyed in James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Special grace is the phrase used by theologians to describe the gift of eternal salvation. Paul writes: "For grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). He also writes: "But God commendeth his love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). God selects those on whom He will have mercy (Rom. 9:18). He has chosen these people to be

L. John Calvin, Institutes Of the Christian Religion (1559), Book II, Chapter II, sections 13-17; II:III:3; III:XIV:2
recipients of His gift of eternal salvation, and He chose them before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-6).

But there is another kind of grace, and it is misunderstood. Common grace is equally a gift of God to His creatures, but it is distinguished from special grace in a number of crucial ways. The key verse that describes two kinds of grace is 1 Timothy 4:10: “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.” This verse unquestionably states that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men, meaning all people. Yet the Bible does not teach “universalism,” meaning the ethical redemption of all men. There are saved and lost throughout eternity (Rev. 20:14). So what does this verse mean? It means simply that Christ died for all men, giving unmerited gifts to all men in time and on earth. Some people go to eternal destruction, and others are resurrected to live with Christ eternally. But all men have at least the unmerited gift of life, at least for a time. There are therefore two kinds of salvation: special (eternal) and temporal (earthly).

A debate has gone on for close to a century within Calvinistic circles concerning the nature and reality of common grace. I hope that this little book will contribute some acceptable answers to the people of God, though I have little hope of convincing those who have been involved in this debate for 60 years.

Because of the confusion associated with the term “common grace,” let me offer James Jordan’s description of it. Common grace is the equivalent of
the crumbs that fall from the master's table that the dogs eat. This is how the Canaanite woman described her request of healing by Jesus, and Jesus healed her daughter because of her understanding and faith (Matt. 15:23-28). The prime loaf, however, is reserved for those who respond in faith to the gospel, and who then persevere in this faith to the end of their earthly lives (Matt. 13:8, 23).

Background of the Debate

In 1924, the Christian Reformed Church debated the subject of common grace, and the decision of the Synod led to a major division within the ranks of the denomination which has yet to be healed. The debate was of considerable interest to Dutch Calvinists on both sides of the Atlantic, although American Calvinists were hardly aware of the issue, and Arminian churches were (and are still) completely unaware of it. Herman Hoeksema, perhaps the most brilliant systematic theologian in America in this century, left the Christian Reformed Church to form the Protestant Reformed Church. He and his followers were convinced that, contrary to the decision of the CRC, there is no such thing as common grace.

The doctrine of common grace, as formulated in...
the disputed "three points" of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, asserts the following:

1. Concerning the favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general and not only toward the elect, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession it is certain that, besides the saving grace of God bestowed only upon those chosen to eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God manifested to His creatures in general.

2. Concerning the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and of society, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession there is such a restraint of sin.

3. Concerning the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession the unregenerate, although incapable of any saving good (Canons of Dort, Ill., IV:3), can perform such civic good.

These principles can serve as a starting point for a discussion of common grace.

3. R. B. Kuiper, To Be or Not to Be Reformed: Whither the Christian Reformed Church? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1959), p. 105. Van Til's version was taken from The Banner (June 1, 1939), and differs slightly in the wording. I have decided to use Kuiper's summary. Van Til, Common Grace, in Common Grace and the Gospel (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), pp. 19-20.

4. Idem.

5. Ibid., pp. 105-6.
The serious Christian eventually will be faced with the problem of explaining the good once he faces the biblical doctrine of evil. James 1:17 informs us that all good gifts are from God. The same point is made in Deuteronomy 8:18. It is clear that the unregenerate are the beneficiaries of God's gifts. None of the participants to the debate denies the existence of the gifts. What is denied by the Protestant Reformed critics is that these gifts imply the favor of God as far as the unregenerate are concerned. They categorically deny the first point of the original three points.

For the moment, let us refrain from using the word grace. Instead, let us limit ourselves to the word gift. The existence of gifts from God raises a whole series of questions:

Does a gift from God imply His favor?

Does an unregenerate man possess the power to do good?

Does the existence of good behavior on the part of the unbeliever deny the doctrine of total depravity?

Does history reveal a progressive separation between saved and lost?

Would such a separation necessarily lead to the triumph of the unregenerate?

Is there a common ground intellectually between Christians and non-Christians?

Can Christians and non-Christians cooperate successfully in certain areas?
Do God's gifts increase or decrease overtime?

Will the cultural mandate (dominion covenant) of Genesis 1:28 be fulfilled?

This little book is my attempt to provide preliminary answers to these questions.

**Challenging Van Til**

This book is basically 'a refutation of Prof. Cornelius Van Til's book, Common Grace and the Gospel, a compilation of his essays on common grace. It is without question the worst book he ever wrote. It is also one of the most confusing books he ever wrote, given the relative simplicity of the topic. It was not as though he was trying to analyze and refute the arcane mental meanderings of some dead German theologian. It is possible to write a clear book on common grace.

It is not that Van Til's book is not filled with many important insights into many philosophical and theological problems. The trouble is, these insights are found in any of a dozen other of his books. The vast bulk of these insights really did not belong in Common Grace and the Gospel. If he had removed them, he would have spared us all a lot of time and trouble, not to mention a lot of extra paper-and it possibly would have spared us several of his mistakes. But probably not. Van Til has referred to himself as a stubborn Dutchman.6 He clings to his

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favorite mistakes with the same fervency that he clings to his favorite truths. The raises a much-neglected point. Van Til is an enigma to those of us who studied under him or who have struggled through his books. His books are always filled with brilliant insights, but it is very difficult to remember where any single insight appeared. They are scattered like loose diamonds throughout his writings, but they never seem to fit in any particular slot. Any given insight might just as well be in any of his books — or all of them. (In fact, it may be in all of them.) They are not systematically placed brilliant insights. They are just brilliant. He makes good use from them, too; he repeats the same ones in many of his books. “No use throwing this away after only one time; it’s almost like new. I’ll use it again!” The man is clearly Dutch.

His most effective critical arguments sound the same in every book. Randomly pick up a coverless Van Til book, and start reading; you may not be sure from the development of the arguments just what the book is about, or who it is intended to refute. His books all wind up talking about the same three dozen themes. (Or is it four dozen?) Just keep reading. You will probably find his favorite Greeks: Plato, who struggled unsuccessfully to reconcile Parmenides and Heraclitus. But only rarely will you find a footnote to one of their primary source documents.

7. The remarkable thing is that Van Til knows his primary source material better than most philosophers. As a graduate student at Princeton University, he studied under the famous and rigorous classical scholar-philosopher, A. A. Bowman. He
Kant’s name will be there, too, but only in a four-page string of quotations from a book written in 1916 or 1932 by a scholar you have never heard of. (No direct citations from Kant? Hardly ever. Phenomenal!) He will refer to a Bible verse occasionally, but the rarest diamond of all is a page of detailed Bible exposition. You will learn about univocal and equivocal reasoning. Continuity will be challenging discontinuity. Rationalism will be doing endless battle with irrationalism. The one will be smothering the many, whenever the many aren’t overwhelming the one. (These last four conflicts are, if I understand him correctly, all variations of essentially the same intellectual problem.)

Watch for his analogies. Rationalism and irrationalism will be taking in each other’s washing for a living. There will be a chain of being lying around somewhere, probably right next to the infinitely long cord that the beads with no holes are supposed to decorate. Some child will be trying to slap her father’s face while sitting on his lap, and someone out in the garage will be sharpening a buzz saw that is set at the wrong angle. Warning if you don’t watch your step, you could trip over the full-bucket problem. And so it goes, book after book.

and his two fellow students (including another of my teachers, Philip Wheelwright) would be assigned a passage in Plato or Aristotle in the original Greek. They would then go into the seminar to discuss what they had read.

8. An exception is the first half of The God of Hope (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1978). These chapters are sermons. But there is not much exegesis even here.
What memorable analogies! But where did I read the one about the ladder of water rising out of the water to the water above? Which bad argument of which philosopher did that one wash away?

What we need is a 5-inch laser disk hooked to a Sony... scratch that... a Philips (Dutch) laser disk player with a microchip, with all of his works on the disk, plus a computer program that will search every phrase and pull the one we want onto the screen in three seconds. The technology exists; the market for his works doesn't. Sad.

**Puzzling**

F. A. Hayek says that great scholarly minds come in two types. There are system-builders whose minds encompass huge amounts of seemingly disparate information and then pull them into a coherent whole. There are also those who Hayek calls puzzlers. These men take the great systems, break them into scattered sections, and start pointing out the problems with every single part, often from a perspective that few people have thought of and fewer yet can follow.9

Van Til is a classic puzzler. In (non-brute) fact, he built his epistemology quite frankly in terms of his view that all man's attempts to build totally comprehensive systems are doomed to failure, that all human thought is the exercise of puzzling. God is in-

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finite; man is finite. Man’s mind will never comprehend (surround, encircle) God. Man’s mind will therefore never encompass any aspect of the creation, for every atom is related to God, and this brings God back into the picture. The atom, too, is incomprehensible by man’s finite mind. But God comprehends Himself and His creation, so we must go to God’s Word to begin locating the proper ways to puzzle through any problem. As the person who keeps turning a blade of grass over and over, getting more knowledge of it each time, but never seeing both sides at once, so is man’s ability to observe and think.

Van Til takes any system you hand him, and he breaks it down into its component parts, turning the pieces over and over in his mind, finding out what it is and how it works. The problem is, “he never puts the pieces back together. He just leaves them scattered around on the floor. “Next!”

On the floor, in pieces, they all look pretty much alike. Go ahead. Pick up that scrap of Barthianism. The one over there. No, no—the other one. (Wholly ‘other’) Doesn’t it resemble a fragment from Kant? Or is it more like Heraclitus? Or could it really be a direct descendent of Plato?

One thing you will recognize for sure: it’s humanism.

The Wrong Questions

Van Til has only a finite number of questions to ask about each system, and some are his special

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favorites. These are the ones he usually asks. Of course, he has lots more in reserve. The trouble is, he sometimes asks less appropriate questions, just because he likes his favorites so much. *Common Grace and the Gospel* suffers from this flaw. Other questions should have been asked, but he is determined to ask the questions he wants to ask, and others just will not do. Even better ones.

In this book, I try to ask better questions. Why attack Van Til? Because he is the best. If some theological nonentity had written *Common Grace and the Gospel*, it would not matter if anyone replied to him. But it matters with Van Til. He is the man who has reconstructed Christian philosophy in our time, by far the most important Christian philosopher of all time. His dissecting and puzzling have cut apart all the alternative systems. He has knocked all the Humpty Dumpties off their respective walls. But when he goes in to try to put a case of biblical eggs in their place, he sometimes slips in the goo.

He simply slipped up (or fell down) with *Common Grace and the Gospel*.

So, what is wrong with his book on common grace? First, it is cluttered up with extraneous material. The book is filled with questions concerning Platonic reasoning, Roman Catholic apologetics, and other specialized philosophical topics. But these topics are not the heart of the debate over common grace. As with everything else Van Til writes about, he can use them to illustrate philosophical topics, but in this case, this overemphasis on philosophy misleads the reader. It steers him away from the key
issue. This is my second (and major) criticism.

What the common grace debate is about, above all, is history. The issue of common grace asks: What is the history of the saved and the lost in God's scheme of things? Where are men headed, and why? We find the answer right where Van Til always says we must search for every philosophical answer: in ethics.

In short, common grace is about eschatology. And it is here that Van Til's stubborn Dutchmanship is rock-hard. He will not budge. He is an amillennialist. Worse: he is an undeclared amillennialist. He builds his whole theory of common grace in terms of his hidden eschatology, probably never realizing the extent to which his seemingly philosophical exposition is in fact structured by his assumptions concerning eschatology.

So forget about Plato. Forget about St. Thomas Aquinas. Forget about univocal vs. equivocal reasoning. Keep your eye on his prophetic chart. If it is wrong, then the whole book is wrong.

And just to get my position straight right from the beginning, let me say this: his prophecy chart is wrong.
Dominion and Common Grace provides the biblical answers. These answers are intended to reshape your life. When enough Christians learn the truth, they will begin to use biblical principles to reshape the world. In fact, there has been an implicit alliance between the humanists and these pessimistic, defeat-preaching Christians. So, when dominion-minded Christians begin to put the Bible into practice in every area of life, a lot of humanists will be outraged, and a lot of Christians will be surprised to find that the Bible really works.