

**A Refutation of John  
G. Lenhart's Concept  
of "Modeletics™" and  
His Resulting  
Theology**

# A Brief Summary and Refutation of John G. Lenhart's Concept of "Modeletics™" and His Resulting Theology Outlined in His Book "*Modeling God.*"

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# **A Brief Summary and Refutation of John G. Lenhart's Concept of "Modeletics™" and His Resulting Theology Outlined in His Book "Modeling God."**

By Pastor Tim Snell

*Let God's curse fall on anyone, including myself, who preaches any other message than the one we told you about. Even if an angel comes from heaven and preaches any other message, let him be forever cursed. I will say it again: If anyone preaches any other gospel than the one you welcomed, let God's curse fall upon that person.*

Galatians 1:8-9 NLT

In his book "Modeling God," John G Lenhart attempts to lay out a comprehensive framework (he would use the word "model") of who God is, who we are, and how we are to relate to God. In essence, he strives to present a comprehensive *theology*, or *worldview*, of God, salvation, and life - which he hopes will then guide the reader toward more intentional relationship with God as Lenhart has outlined for them.

From reading this book it is quite obvious Lenhart is extremely intelligent. He uses his background in business and chemistry to derive principles which then serve as the basic mechanisms for building the theological model he presents. His sharp mind and gift of deductive reasoning are quite impressive, and are on full display throughout the book as he "models God" for the reader.

Unfortunately, while Lenhart appears to have quite a sharp mind, it is obvious that his knowledge is limited to a very narrow range of fields. The result of this limited knowledge is a modeling *process* that is fundamentally flawed, and a resulting *theology* that moves so far outside the bounds of the core of recognized orthodox Christian teaching that it can be called nothing less than heretical.

Make no mistake -- "Modeling God" is not just another "Christian" theological paradigm akin to Covenant Theology, Dispensational Theology, Arminianism or Calvinism. In the end, despite any differences or errors in these various theological systems, they all fundamentally tell the story of who God is, who man is, man's sin and God's ultimate redemption of mankind through the work of Christ on the cross.

Lenhart's theological teaching not only doesn't embody some of these key components of orthodox Christian theology, it goes beyond this and fundamentally denies core tenants of the Christian faith. Similar to other "quasi-Christian" theological offerings such as Mormonism or ancient Gnosticism, Lenhart's theology presents a fundamentally different god than the God of the Bible, and offers a completely non-Biblical theological perspective for sin and God's gift of salvation. As such "Modeling God" must be placed outside the bounds of what is considered fundamentally "Christian."

Let me briefly share, then expose and refute, both Lenhart's modeling process and his resulting theology.

## **LENHART'S MODELING PROCESS**

In his book, Lenhart lays out four "model building" principles which he uses to build his theological framework. Since these principles are foundational to the conclusions he reaches, it is

important we not only lay them out here, but also understand why Lenhart sees them as important. Listen to what he says.

“We are going to cover the four principles that make up the foundation for every reasoning, interpretation, and logic tool that exists today.... I have called these principles ‘Modeletics<sup>TM</sup>, because we are applying these modeling tools in order to determine the non-contradictory worldview. These are the same tools, however, used to solve problems and increase understanding in every other field (science, psychology, economics, etc.). The limitations of every other reasoning tool can be corrected by these four principles.”<sup>1</sup>

Later on he adds:

“We all agree on what the Bible says, yet we still disagree. This is because we disagree on what the Bible means. The four principles of Modeletics<sup>TM</sup> will resolve every disagreement.”<sup>2</sup>

Please understand! Lenhart believes the modeling principles he articulates, (and no others) can lead us to a correct theology. This assertion underlies everything within Lenhart’s book and leads to many of his erroneous conclusions. We’ll come back to this a little later.

Lenhart then begins to lay out for us these modeling principles which he believes are the foundation for building a sound and Biblical theological model. Let’s look at each of these briefly in turn.

1. The first principle Lenhart gives us is **The Principle of Non-Contradiction**. This principle states that any accurate theological model or framework must not be self-contradictory. For example, if one part of our theology says that salvation is only by God’s grace, we can’t have another aspect of our theology that says we can earn it through works.

Lenhart illustrates the principle of non-contradiction this way:

“Contradictions don’t exist; conflicts do. For instance, I can be both happy and sad. This is a conflict. However, I cannot be both happy and not happy at all. This is a contradiction.”<sup>3</sup>

He then goes on, explaining how he is going to use this principle in building his model.

“We are going to use the words in the Bible, but we are going to determine the definitions according to their ability to be non-contradictory.”<sup>4</sup>

Basically what Lenhart says here can be summarized in two sentences:

- No theological premise can be inherently contradictory with another theological premise and still be true.
- Lenhart will use the principle of non-contradiction to determine definitions for key theological words which would otherwise be contradictory with other Biblical concepts.

As we’ll note, this principle is ultimately a principle of logic through which one eliminates certain possibilities.

2. Lenhart then gives a second principle which he labels **The Principle of Growth**. This principle states that God creates and intends for us to grow to understand him. This is why He reveals himself. When combined with the principle of non-contradiction, Lenhart says

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<sup>1</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 23-24

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 24-25.

that a person who grows, welcomes any contradictions in his or her “model” because it exposes a flaw, and invites them to grow and learn more.

3. The third principle is **The Principle of Contrastive Thinking**. Contrastive thinking is the principle that *exposes* potential contradictions in a model or theological framework. In other words, instead of just looking for what might agree with me or support the conclusion, I look to see if there is something that *disproves it*.

To illustrate this principle, Lenhart uses the example of trying to convince someone he drives a Corvette when he really drives a Camry. If he only lists the things that are the same between a Corvette and a Camry, you would not readily know he wasn't being truthful. However, the first time he tells you something that is *different* between a Corvette and a Camry, you would immediately know his claim of driving a Corvette doesn't work.

That is how the principle of Contrastive Thinking works. It exposes internal contradictions within the framework of the theological model.

4. Finally, Lenhart gives us **The Principle of Causality**. This principle states that everything must have a cause. In other words, if God acts a certain way, there is a reason God acts this way. In this case, His very nature as God is the *cause* of His specific action. That is how the principle of causality works as it is applied to building a theological model.

In addition to the four principles he outlines for building his “God model,” there are also three additional concepts he utilizes. While these concepts aren't listed as “principles,” they are key to understanding how Lenhart proceeds in building his theological framework. These three concepts are:

1. **The Concept of “The Wall.”** Lenhart uses the concept of “the wall” to address how we gain perspective and see “the big picture.” If I am studying one aspect of the wall up close, I often will fail to see the big picture. But if I back up from the wall, I can begin to see how each piece of the wall fits together.

Lenhart's goal in his book, of course, is to help you see the whole wall. Yes, he gets down to some of the detail (we'll get to some specific points of his theology later), but his larger goal is to help you see the larger framework and outline within which all the other pieces of the theological puzzle fit. He believes (and to a large measure is correct) that if you get the framework wrong, you will not get the relationship of the pieces right. What you will end with is a model full of theological contradictions.

2. **The Concept of “The Ladder of Abstraction.”** Lenhart uses this concept to speak to how we use human language in the development of the theological model. Typically, he says, we will use vague and general terms in speaking about our theological model. This would be the top rung on the ladder of abstraction. The bottom rung would be where we have a very specific definition that is clearly understood.

For example, Lenhart uses the example of Bessie the cow. The most specific term is “Bessie.” That would be the lowest rung on the ladder. On the rung above that would be the word “cow.” I can speak of a cow, and not be referring to Bessie. But when I am talking about my specific Bessie, it definitely includes the notion of “cow.” Continuing up the ladder, we would have the word “livestock,” then “farm animals,” then “farm assets” and so on. Each term becomes more abstract as we go up the ladder.

Lenhart is correct when he points out that when we speak vaguely or abstractly, it creates confusion. This is because the person listening will understand our words to mean something other than what we were intending. In the development of a theological model, when we

seek to remove contradictions, we need to be speaking on the bottom rung of the ladder, as specifically as possible.

3. The final concept is what I call **The Concept of “The Starting Point.”** Now, these are my words. I am not sure Lenhart uses these particular words to describe this concept. But it is a concept that is foundational to his model, and one he uses in its development, so it is worth sharing.

Basically the concept of “the starting point” says that where we start in building the theological model matters. Put slightly differently, how we set up our theological categories tends to significantly impact the theological conclusions we reach.

For example, if I start with the Sovereignty of God (a key starting point for Calvinistic theology) I tend to interpret things such as the possibility of human free will by whether it conflicts with that particular starting point. Conversely, if human free will is my starting point, it will impact how I see the Sovereignty of God.

Lenhart uses this same concept, believing that the correct starting points for understanding God are God’s righteousness and His justice (which he seeks to define very specifically). In the end, he develops his entire model in relation to these two aspects of God’s character, believing every other point of theology is properly derived *only* in relationship to these two starting points. Lenhart states:

“Let me be clear about this; God has a lot of characteristics.... However, all of these characteristics are a result of being righteous and just. None of these characteristics outweigh righteousness and justice.”<sup>5</sup>

## ***Exposing Lenhart’s Modeling Process***

Please bear with me here. It is important, before we explore Lenhart’s theology, to understand the process by which he arrives at his theology. Lenhart’s process *directly leads* to the theology he articulates. Only after examining the flaws in Lenhart’s process can we adequately deal with the flaws in his theology.

The problem with the process Lenhart uses to build his model is not in what he knows, but in what he doesn’t know. In fact, while his names for the principles and concepts above might be unfamiliar, they are concepts and principles incorporated into the development of all theological constructs and worldviews.

In reality, all theological constructs seek to use “contrastive thinking” to become “non-contradictory.” If they didn’t, they would be internally inconsistent in key ways. For example, no theological model that holds to God’s holiness and justice can also hold that God doesn’t have to punish sin. Such a theological construct would be internally inconsistent.

Lenhart correctly understands these things. So what he does is, he brings the principles he has learned in the scientific world for building “models” (within which one can understand the relationships between various truths about chemicals, atoms or molecules) and he then applies them to building a theological model. Lenhart believes that by using these same principles, he can also determine truths related to God. These principles and concepts by and large, in my opinion, are not off the mark.

What is wrong, in my view, is not what Lenhart brings to the modeling process, but by what he *fails to bring*. There are simply some key things he doesn’t understand or know about, which he fails to bring to building a model of *theology*. Furthermore, Lenhart misapplies his “model

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<sup>5</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 25.

building” principles. Although these principles apply nicely to static and unchanging realities (such as chemicals, elements or atoms) they do not apply so easily to dynamic realities (such as language, concepts, and words) which can change over time, and from one context of communication to the next.

Let me outline the flaws of Lenhart’s modeling process below.

## 1. Can You Say “Dynamic” When It Comes to Language?

When Lenhart brings his modeling process over from business and chemistry and begins to apply it to theology, he makes a fundamental error. Things such as the properties of elements are defined and contained within certain scientific laws. In other words, once we define them, that definition will always fit. Hydrogen today and hydrogen tomorrow will still be the same thing. It would be fair to say that such things are static, at least in terms of their fundamental being. (This may not be true of how they interact with other elements, but that is not germane to this discussion – at least not quite yet.)

Such an assumption is not true of language. Language changes. It changes over time. It has nuances of meaning from situation to situation, from usage to usage, and from person to person. This is especially true when that language is referencing concepts vs. physical realities.

For example, let’s imagine I say “I love my dog,” and then later that day I say, “I love my wife.” Now, while both times I use the word “love” in my sentence, and while there is perhaps some commonality in that I have an affection for both my dog and my wife, that is where the similarity ends. The reality is that in many ways, *even though I am using the same words*, I am saying things about my relationship with my wife which are not true of my relationship with my dog.

Here is another example. Thirty years ago, if I told you “I am gay,” you would have likely *heard* me say that I was happy. However, if I told you that same thing today, you would have likely *heard* me say that I was homosexual in my orientation. Now, I use the same words. But language is dynamic, not static, and as a result it changes over time and from one usage to another.

Here is where the problem comes in. Lenhart apparently doesn’t understand there is an essential difference between the nature of language and the nature of physical realities with which he is accustomed to working, because he tries to do something with his “Ladder of Abstraction” that simply doesn’t work when applied to how language is used. *He tries to come up with a “one size fits all definition”* for key theological words. In other words, he assumes that what is meant by “grace” in one usage of it by Paul, is exactly what is meant when Peter uses the word in a different context...or, what is referenced by Paul when he speaks of “faith” in one context doesn’t have a slightly different nuance of meaning when Paul uses that same word later, but in an entirely different context. This is an assumption one simply can’t make when it comes to the use of language.

The meaning of words is not simply determined by the word itself, but also by the context, tone, mood, voice, and other aspects of language that Lenhart is evidently not familiar with.

The result of this attempt to give “one size fits all” definitions to key theological words is that he does one of two things very consistently throughout his modeling process:

- First, there are times when he attempts to give us a definition of a word encompassing *all* uses of the word *every time*. The problem is, in order to do that he *must* move UP the ladder of abstraction, not down.

Go back to our illustration of the word “love.” In order to have a definition which fits *both* my use of it in relation to my dog and my use of it in relation to my wife, I’ll have to give a *more general* definition, not a more specific one. That is moving UP the ladder of abstraction, not down.

Lenhart is right when he says that in modeling, where one is trying to pare things down very specifically, one must be sure he is using as tight a definition as possible so that communication is clear. We can’t have two people discussing something, using the same word and meaning two different things. The problem is, because he doesn’t understand how linguistics works, he constantly speaks on the top rung of the ladder of abstraction, but *thinks* he is speaking on the bottom rung.

As a result, his entire application of his other modeling principles (i.e. contrastive thinking) for the purpose of logically identifying contradictions becomes far too loose for the modeling process he is attempting to use.

- On the other hand, there are times Lenhart does exactly the *opposite thing* with his definitions. Instead of trying to encompass all usages of the word, he does get down to a lower rung definition and gives a definition that is tight – but it is tight only as it relates to *certain uses* of the word, not all the uses of the word.

The problem now is, while his definition may encompass individual usages of the word, it can NEVER encompass *all* the usages of the word. This is something Lenhart doesn’t seem to comprehend. As a result, he will take a word, give it a very tight definition, and then assume each and every person used it that way in *every instance*, regardless of context, voice, mood, tone, etc.

Let’s go back to our illustration involving the word “love.”

Suppose Lenhart were to attempt to define the love I have for my wife very specifically. He would likely speak of this love in terms of the depth of commitment I would hold, the sacrifice that would be present, and the goodwill and respect that I would give to my wife. Now, suppose he took this “bottom rung definition and applied it to my dog. Do you think it would fit? Of course not! How I *love* my dog is different in key respects to how I *love* my wife.

I am using the same word, but the context gives them different nuances of meaning.

Do you see the problem? To speak on the “bottom rung” when defining a word, one must do it on a usage by usage basis. Taking a bottom rung definition from one specific usage, and then trying to apply it to another specific usage will quickly result in significant flaws in our definitions of these words at key times.

Let’s look at another illustration of the problem by drawing a parallel between language and chemistry.

Suppose Lenhart claimed that hydrogen always *behaved* exactly the same regardless of the presence of other elements, the temperature in the room, or other dynamics. Of course, his scientific colleagues would laugh him out of the room. Such an assertion would not only be ill founded, it would lead to all sorts of erroneous conclusions about other scientific issues.

Yet this is exactly what Lenhart does with language. He makes the assumption that a specific word in one specific context *behaves* and means exactly the same thing regardless of the presence of other words, the situation being addressed, or other contextual issues. Such an assumption is ludicrous!

Individual words, like hydrogen molecules, are always interacting with all the other elements of language being used around them. The result is that different aspects and nuances of meaning come out in various contexts. The specific definition of a word *must be* determined on a *case by case basis* in light of the overall context. One simply can't apply a definition of a word from one place and force it to fit in every other place the word is used.

The truth is that words *behave* differently as they are used in various contexts. They carry nuances of meaning that must be understood in relation to their individual contexts and usages. Words are never static in the essence of what they are or how they are to be understood.

Lenhart's modeling process simply ignores this dynamic nature of language and ends up giving faulty definitions to key words at key times, resulting in a modeling process filled with half-truths or even outright untruths. These are then presented to the reader as truth and successively built upon and harkened back to as "proof" of why other truths must exist, so as to avoid a self-contradictory model. While his effort to have his theological model be non-contradictory is laudable, in the end Lenhart's failure to understand and incorporate the dynamic nature of language and how it is used leads him to build a model that is simply flawed from the get-go.

## 2. Can You Say "Dynamic" When It Comes to Defining and Relating to People?

Theology is ultimately the study of God with the goal of relationship with Him. Like language, people and individual spiritual beings such as God – as well as relationships between them - are also dynamic in nature.

Lenhart runs into problems here as well.

Let's go back to his "Bessie the cow" illustration as it relates to the ladder of abstraction. When speaking about Bessie the cow, Lenhart points out that at the bottom rung of the ladder of abstraction we would speak of the cow by name, "Bessie."

Now here is the rub. Let's say you are there having the conversation with the farmer, who happens to be a good friend. You know Bessie well. When he speaks of "Bessie," into your mind comes a particular cow. That cow has a specific look, personality, disposition, size, etc. All of these things come to your mind.

However, Bessie is *more* than merely the sum of her personality, disposition, look and size. There is something about Bessie, and *all individual living beings* which, when we try to encompass and define them by a simplistic set of words, we inevitably fall short.

This is true especially of God. God is *always* more than what can be contained by words describing his various attributes. Why? Because God is a living being. Even more to the point, God is an *infinite* living being.

Now keep this in mind as you read Lenhart's definition of God:

"God is a set of non-contradictory principles."<sup>6</sup>

Yep. That is what he says. Kind of scary, huh!? God has ceased to be a living being. He is now a set of principles. God not only *isn't* more than the sum of the words used to describe his characteristics - according to Lenhart, God has been depersonalized completely!

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<sup>6</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 23

In fairness, I don't think Lenhart means to go quite THAT far. But nonetheless, in this statement (as well as the whole of the book) he explicitly teaches that finding all the characteristics of God and defining them just right is equivalent to both *who God is* and *knowing Him personally*.

Such a notion would be laughable if it weren't so absolutely troubling ... and blasphemous. God is MORE than the sum of his characteristics. He is MORE than a "set of principles." God is more than righteousness, justice, and love. Yes, he embodies those things – even perfectly. But they are not, in and of themselves, capable of defining God. God is a living spiritual being! There is a dynamic and an essence to his living being that is more than the sum of his characteristics – just as you are, and I am. What Lenhart has done, intentionally or unintentionally, is depersonalize and degrade God into something *far less* than the Biblical God has revealed Himself to be.

We'll come back to this later. However, make no mistake. Throughout the book one finds that Lenhart depersonalizes God fairly consistently. This bleeds through the entire book. This is especially seen as he begins to make application of his model.

Let me give you one example of this depersonalization of God from his chapter entitled "Applications." Here he lists three steps to "progress toward God."

1. Establish where you are today. [He equates this with knowing what you believe about God's attributes.]
2. Actively try to prove your personal beliefs wrong by identifying contradictions.
3. Change your beliefs in order to remove the contraction. [Get a more accurate picture of God's attributes.]

He then makes this statement:

"That is it! That's the process of *growing closer to God!*"<sup>7</sup> (emphasis mine)

Did you notice how Lenhart equated knowing the facts *about* God with having an *intimate relationship with God*? This is something he does throughout the book.

Basically Lenhart has said:

1. Find out what characteristics of God you know about.
2. Find out any way you are misunderstanding God's characteristics.
3. And then refine your understanding about these characteristics.

If you do that, Lenhart claims, that is all it takes to grow closer to God.

Are you kidding me?! Just because I know all the facts about my wife, and have them correct, doesn't mean I love her. Reducing my wife to nothing more than set of facts not only depersonalizes her, it essentially undermines my relationship with her by causing me to relate to her as *less than a person*.

Now, I am not saying that knowing facts about my wife is wrong. Indeed, knowing the facts about my wife may assist me in relating to her (as long as I see her as a person and not merely a conglomeration of facts). However, it is just as possible that even as I grow in *knowledge* of the various characteristics of my wife, I could love her less and less during this same course of time. I venture to say most divorces happen when people have a *more* complete

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<sup>7</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 45-46

and correct knowledge of their spouse, not a lesser knowledge. Why? Because *a knowledge of facts and growing in intimacy are related - but separate things!*

If this same thing is true of one's spouse, how much more is it true of God!?

Here is the problem. What Lenhart has done is he has equated *getting one's theology correct* with *knowing God personally*. He essentially elevated knowing the facts about God, and made that sufficient and equivalent to knowing God on a personal level. He has reduced a relationship to an equation and denigrated a dynamic living growing love affair, between Almighty God and his people, to a process of gathering the right facts about an impersonal deity, nothing more.

Let's be clear. I'm not saying that knowing the facts about God aren't wonderfully helpful. They are. But they are insufficient for having an intimate relationship.

Consider this reality. If the gathering of facts through intellectual process is sufficient, then intellectually smart people should consistently have the most intimate and close relationships in life. Conversely, individuals who struggle with conditions involving mental impairment would be condemned to relational failure.

However, we know from experience this is not the case. People with mental handicaps can bond deeply with others on a relational level. Conversely, we often find people of high intellect who cannot draw close to others, even when they might have a superior *intellectual understanding* of the person to whom they are relating.

Knowledge and love, facts and relational intimacy – these are two different things. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up,”<sup>8</sup> God's Word states. The truth is that the Devil probably knows more true facts about God than anyone else. That doesn't mean he has a right relationship with God.

It is further worth noting that the Greek word for knowledge, “γνωσκω” (which is the primary word used for us knowing God) - while encompassing a knowledge of facts, speaks to a state of personal relationship, not simply a cold intellectual acquiring of information and facts *about* an individual.

In the end, Lenhart's entire approach smacks of something akin to a modern day version of Gnosticism, in which the gathering of facts and intellectual knowledge becomes the equivalent to knowing God personally.

Such a notion is certainly troubling to say the least.

In the end, Lenhart's process of building a theological model is not only flawed, it is built with a view toward a goal that is something far less than the goal God had when He revealed Himself to us. That goal was (and continues to be) relationship, not merely a conglomeration of disembodied character qualities.

### **3. Isn't Our Theology Supposed to be Derived from the Scripture?**

One of the incredible feats Lenhart has pulled off is writing a 230 page “Christian” theology book that uses very little scripture to develop his theology at all. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find the equivalent of fifteen pages of scripture referenced in the entire book!

This is yet another fatal flaw in Lenhart's modeling process. He has *not appealed to the primary source* (i.e. the Bible) as the primary source of information for his model. In other

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:1

words, the informational input to this model does not come from God's Word, at least not very much.

Instead, what Lenhart has done is use the Bible as a "starting point" to derive the ideas of God's justice and righteousness (and even of these he does no in-depth Biblical study or show us Biblically why they are the appropriate starting point). He then develops almost his entire model via *human deduction*. Except for an occasional "proof text," Lenhart simply doesn't look much to scripture.

In the end, what one is left with is a lot of Lenhart, not a lot of the Bible.

The problem with such an approach is that one simply cannot build a *Biblical* theological model that way. Biblical theology is *never* simply a matter of deduction. It flows from *revelation*.

What Lenhart has done is equivalent to a scientist writing a paper on the properties of uranium without ever having done (or appealing to) any in-depth research on uranium in any way! Building a model via deduction versus by having input from primary sources of study is simply ignorant. Yet, this is Lenhart's *primary approach* when it comes to building a theological model!!

So how is proper theology built?

At each point in developing Biblical theology, one must *step outside of the model*, and let the Bible speak freshly on the subject at hand.

For example, if I am to build a Biblical theology of God's justice, I would need to carefully study the *whole* of scripture – in depth – for what it had to say on that one subject. Then, once I had a pretty good Biblical picture of God's justice, I would move on.

Let's say I am next going to study God's grace. In developing a *Biblical* theological model, I *cannot* simply take what I have learned Biblically about God's justice, and then *deduce* what *must therefore be true* about God's grace. If I do that, I'll never expose any weaknesses or assumptions or wrong ideas I may have incorporated into my understanding of God's justice which I may have missed in my original study. Furthermore, I'll probably not have a very thorough Biblical understanding of God's grace.

At each step in the building of a theological model, I must go back to scripture. This not only allows scripture to challenge my already arrived at conclusions, exposing flaws, it also provides opportunity for correction to the model as a whole. Lenhart never does this. He isn't interested in comparing his concepts to scripture. He instead only sees if they match up to HIS "definitions," most of which were not derived from an in-depth study of scripture to begin with, but rather come from human deduction.

Biblical theology is developed *only by* going back to scripture freshly, at each stage of the development of the theological model.

Let's go back to our example of developing the concepts of God's justice and God's grace in a theological framework. I'll have to do a separate study – apart from what I may have learned about God's justice – to find out what the Bible says about God's grace. Only by getting outside input from the primary source (the Bible) can I do this. A theological model that relies heavily on human deduction, as Lenhart's does, while it may end up being *internally consistent*, will almost always end up being *inconsistent* with the one source of authority that really matters: God's inspired Word.

In the end, our finite, limited, and not-yet-fully-transformed-by-the-Spirit-of-God minds will show that they simply aren't good enough for building a "God model." As smart as Lenhart

is, the fact that his conclusions (as we will see) simply fly in the face of what the Bible itself states to be true, shows just how flawed his process is.

The result, for Lenhart, is a model that gets increasingly further away from scripture as it is built.

#### 4. Can We Get Some Hermeneutics Into The Process!?

Hermeneutics is the study of *interpreting scripture*. It incorporates everything from the use of linguistics, the use of etymology (a study of how the word developed and was used in ancient times), the study of history, the study of textual transmission and so forth to help the Biblical student understand the Biblical author's *original intended meaning* in its social, historical, and literary context.

The evangelical hermeneutic is generally referred to as a historical/grammatical hermeneutic. In other words, one must study the historical context very specifically and in-depth...and also study the linguistics and specific words in depth...to arrive at a proper understanding of what the author is intending to communicate *in each particular passage*. Anyone seeking to derive meaning from historical documents relies on a similar process. Failing to do so, we simply read our own thoughts into the writing.

Because Lenhart doesn't rely much at all on the Bible as a source, sound hermeneutics are simply not employed in the development of his model. It is another fatal flaw. Even the times he does reference the Bible, it is not done with this type of approach. Most likely, it is because Lenhart simply doesn't have the tools in terms of an understanding of linguistics, etymology, and so forth to see the critical importance of such things in developing a Biblical theological model.

Again, as Lenhart builds his model, seeking to get down to bottom rung definitions, he simply doesn't have the tools to do so effectively. What he has done – to go back to our chemistry example – is tantamount to trying to define an element such as uranium with no understanding of either the scientific process...or such basic things as how protons and electrons work.

Without the tools of hermeneutics, Lenhart falls back to human deduction and simply checks to see if his "definition" of any new words contradicts his already arrived at definitions. In other words, he doesn't go back to *scripture*, and do an in-depth analysis of scripture and allow God's Word to give the definition. In the end, he consistently misdefines, misapplies, and misstates highly important Biblical truths about key concepts. The result isn't Biblical theology at all. It is a self-contained non-contradictory conceptualization of God straight out of Lenhart's mind.

Notice how Lenhart determines the "bottom rung" definition of "righteousness."

"Righteousness means that God is 'right, correct.' Righteousness defines God qualitatively. Every other attempt to qualitatively describe God either limits or contradicts righteousness."<sup>9</sup>

Or what about "mercy?"

"Mercy is the act of allowing an interval of time between the bad act and the punishment..."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 29. NOTE: While his definition of "righteousness" here is not false, it is certainly incomplete from a Biblical perspective, and would not qualify in any sense as a "bottom rung" definition.

Or notice his definition for “death.”

“The definition of death is ‘the inability to repair.’”<sup>11</sup>

At this point, I’m not concerned with whether these definitions are right or wrong. I am concerned with *how he gets these definitions*. Are they drawn from a sound process involving scripture, hermeneutics and etymology ... or were they derived simply by Lenhart *asserting* these definitions are correct ones?

I believe the answer is obvious. There was no in-depth analysis of scripture using proper hermeneutics. There are no in-depth word studies done. Rather the definitions were postulated and then stated to be true *simply* because Lenhart claims them to be true!

This is a repeated pattern in the book. Again and again, key words are defined haphazardly and rely mostly – sometimes solely – upon Lenhart’s assertion that such definitions are true.

In the end, Lenhart’s approach is both ignorant and arrogant given the important responsibility he has assumed in developing a theological model to help people come to know God better.

Let’s go to a more troubling example. Look at how Lenhart uses human deduction instead of the Bible (and hermeneutics) to define God. You’ll not only note that the modeling process isn’t sound, you’ll also see how Lenhart comes to some fundamentally flawed theological conclusions.

“To begin with, we know God the Creator is not a human (physical being). God is a spirit. What this means is that while God is very real, God is not tangible in a physical sense. The only thing we know that is both “real” and “not tangible” is ideas, or more to the point, principles.

“God is a set of non-contradictory principles.”<sup>12</sup>

Did you see what he did? He used a flawed process in arriving at his definition. His definition for God isn’t based on any deep analysis of scripture. Notice the process of *deduction* which Lenhart uses. What is not physical - but is real – “*must be an idea*,” for that is “*all we know as humans*” that is both real and nonphysical. Do you see how this was *deduced* rather than allowing scripture to *reveal* who God is and the fundamental essence of His being.

Don’t miss this! *Lenhart projects his limited human knowledge back on God*. He then moves toward his definition, a definition built on his own *deduction* instead of on *revelation*.

“God is a set of non-contradictory principles.”<sup>13</sup>

This is *not* relying on *revelation from the scripture*. Lenhart has simply postulated something to be true based on human insight and deduction. He has postulated that the very essence and substance of who God is, is nothing more than an idea or a concept, not a living eternal, infinite supreme being.

“...*the only thing we know* that is both ‘real’ and ‘not tangible’ are...principles”  
(emphasis mine)

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<sup>10</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> “J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> “J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 23.

Has Lenhart forgotten what God's Word says?

*"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."*<sup>14</sup> I Corinthians 2:13

Who cares what "we know!" I'm interested in what *God has revealed!* This not only is where truth is found, it is the only way to properly formulate Biblical theology.

He goes on and formulates his deduction:

"God is a set of non-contradictory principles."

Where is the Bible used to reach this conclusion? Where is the appropriate use of hermeneutics?

What Lenhart has done is simply invite us into his head, made an assertion of what must be true without appealing to a primary source for input (The Bible), and then made a deduction: a deduction that ends up being foundational to his entire book. This may allow one to build an internally consistent model, however, it simply won't be Biblical in the end. It certainly isn't "bottom rung" in any sense of Lenhart's ladder of abstraction concept.

In the end, I can easily see how people can become "sucked in" to what Lenhart is saying. Once you agree to his initial definitions (and his assertion that they are "bottom rung"), it becomes very hard to "think outside the box" Lenhart has given, for you are relying almost entirely on human deduction versus Biblical input. At that point, indeed, the model would seem very consistent and non-contradictory.

Unfortunately, because neither the Scripture nor hermeneutics are utilized much, the end result is nothing but vain imaginations.

Indeed I would urge all who have been sucked in by Lenhart to be reminded of the passage in Colossians 2:8

*"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."* (NIV)

In the end, Lenhart has built his theological model almost entirely off human deduction rather than on God's revelation as seen most fully in Christ Jesus.

## 5. Does Lenhart Know that Theological Modeling Has a Direction?

One of the flaws that people often make in developing theological models is that they project themselves, and their understanding, *back* upon God.

Let me give you an example. All of us have a concept of justice in our minds. It may be somewhat Biblically informed. It may not be. In either case, we can be sure of one thing: Since God is infinite and our minds are finite, our conceptualization of justice will never fully embody God's infinite justice, no matter how accurate our conceptualization may be. Our minds are simply incapable of capturing infinite reality perfectly.

Now, let's say that I take *my* conceptualization of justice, and I reflect it *back* upon God. THAT is what I call "backwards theology." Instead of allowing our conceptualization of justice to be informed and molded and defined by God's infinite justice as revealed in scripture, I have instead taken my limited sense of justice and quantified it in the limits of human words, and *projected it back* upon God. I have insisted that all of God's infinite

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<sup>14</sup> *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (1 Co 2:13). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

justice is hereby contained by *my conceptualization*. In other words, I have reduced God down to *my* conceptual box. Furthermore, I have insisted that I – not God – correctly define the concept...and that God, not I, must conform to it.

This is the process of making God into our image. And Lenhart does it repeatedly.

Let's go back to Lenhart's definition of God's infinite righteousness.

“Righteousness means God is ‘right, correct.’... Every other attempt to qualitatively describe God either limits or contradicts righteousness.”<sup>15</sup>

Now, certainly we can say God is “right” and God is “correct.” But Lenhart insists this is a “bottom rung” definition – one that entirely captures the essence of God's righteousness. Again, he doesn't go back to scripture and do any detailed study. He doesn't allow scripture to flesh out the breadth or depth of what is *revealed by God* about his righteousness. Lenhart just glibly defines it and insists that his definition captures *all of who God is* when we speak of His righteousness. He takes *his* conceptualization and *reflects it back* upon God, rather than allowing God's revelation to mold and shape...and eventually define for him what God's righteousness is. It would be laughable if it weren't so troubling.

This “backward theology” is seen most easily in Lenhart's reliance on deduction. In other words, if God (and how He relates to mankind) is contained in Lenhart's definition, then all Lenhart has to do is *deduce* how God *must act* based on his definition. He doesn't have to go back to scripture. He can just insist that everything fit his nice tight non-contradictory definition – even though it will inevitably be flawed because it isn't drawn from scripture – but projected back upon God out of Lenhart's mind.

Hence we find statements like these throughout the book:

- “Another issue is that *justice says* we are still going to have to pay for this value we got from God.”<sup>16</sup> (emphasis mine)

(Did you notice how deduction is used rather than the Bible...and then reflected BACK on what MUST be true...rather than allowing the Bible to give it?)

- “Remember, *justice says* everyone will have to pay for the wrong they've done, even people who are saved!”<sup>17</sup> (emphasis mine)
- “However, ‘golden key’ grace [the idea that there is a moment where you receive Jesus and become “saved.”] *doesn't agree* with justice.”<sup>18</sup> (emphasis mine)
- “If sovereignty is a cause, then God could unilaterally make His will happen. He could initiate events that overcome the will of the individual. Some people believe God does this. However, this quickly results in several contradictions. First, isn't this unjust of God?”<sup>19</sup>

Do you see how Lenhart works backwards? Instead of saying, “What does the Bible say?” and then allowing that to reveal contradictions and inadequacies in his model, he simply works backwards from his definitions. He says, “This must be true of God or how he relates to us *because* of a definition of justice I have already arrived at.”

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<sup>15</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 66

<sup>17</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 105.

<sup>18</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 104

<sup>19</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 44.

By not going back to the scripture, Lenhart is left insisting that God must fit his finite definitions, even though God's embodiment of attributes such as justice, righteousness, etc, are things we can grasp at and speak to in a limited fashion, but not contain – for God is infinite. In the end, we must allow God's infinite and perfect embodiment of his nature to mold and shape our view of each of those principles, not the other way around. When we get it wrong, our theological development process flows backwards. We project our thoughts and experiences back on God rather than allowing God's perfect revelation of these dynamics to enlighten our limited understanding.

All sound Biblical theological constructs *must flow from* God's revelation to us. We cannot simply project back *our thoughts* and try to fit God into our understanding. Lenhart's theology is flowing in the wrong direction.

## 6. Is Non-Contradiction Adequate to Determine Truth?

One of Lenhart's key modeling principles is non-contradiction. It is a valid principle. Any theological system that is self-contradictory has either misunderstood various truths, or they have an incomplete understanding of these truths.

However, the question one must ask is whether having a non-contradictory model means that such a model is always true?

The simple answer is "No." One can have a model that is *internally* non-contradictory, and yet the model itself can still be false if the *input* into that model is flawed.

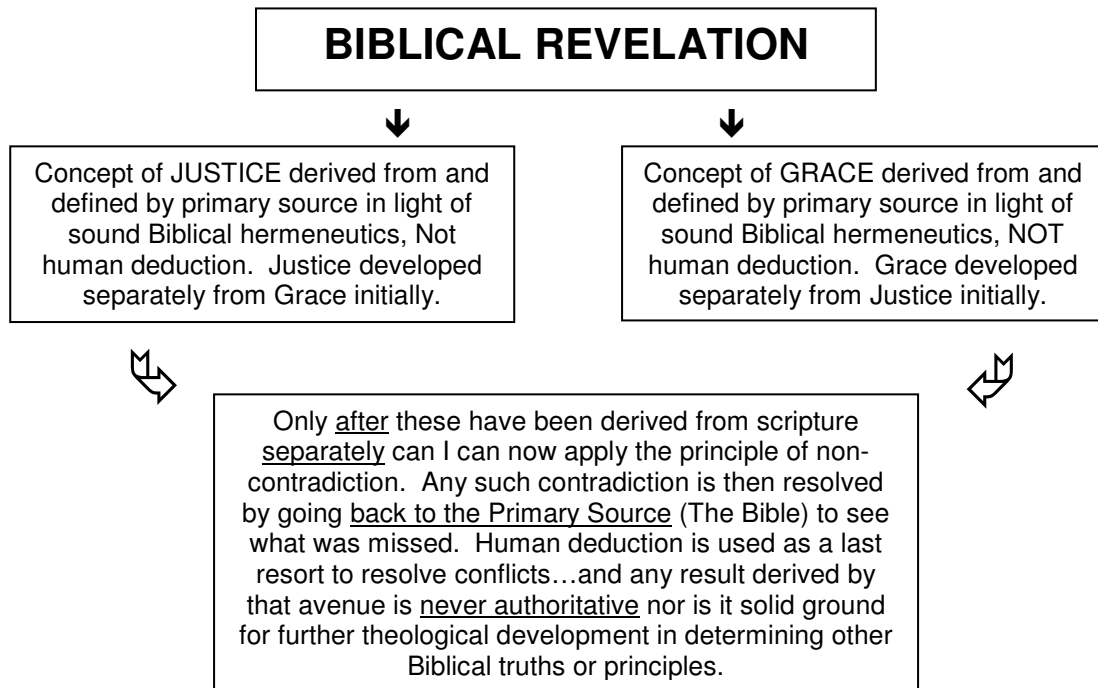
As such, Lenhart's reliance upon non-contradiction *alone* as a basis to determine truth is simply flawed both logically and Biblically.

As we have already seen, one can insist on definitions that don't come from the Bible. If I then begin to explain truth in light of those definitions I can end up with a non-contradictory theological model. The problem is, it won't be Biblical. Various beliefs can be internally consistent with one another...and yet ultimately be built on a false foundation.

To some extent, all worldviews and theological models attempt to be non-contradictory. They would not make sense otherwise. However, note – they cannot all be true. Naturalism – the belief that all of reality is contained by nature, is a worldview that contains immense amounts of detailed beliefs that tie together pretty flawlessly. However, it is a false world view. In the end, its ability to be internally consistent is not the ultimate measure of truth.

In theological modeling, the issue of non-contradiction is asked only *after* one has made sure to do an in-depth analysis of scripture on the given topic. The first point of contradiction one looks for is with scripture – not other principles or beliefs within the model. It is then – and only then – that one seeks to be sure there aren't contradictions with other beliefs in the model. It is a second level check for truth...not a first level as Lenhart believes.

Building a proper theological framework requires the process seen below:



Throughout his modeling process, Lenhart fails to follow this basic construct. The result is that he relies on non-contradiction *itself* to be sufficient for determining truth, rather than realizing that there is an entire process as it relates to developing theology that must transpire first.

### ***A Summary of Why Lenhart's Modeling Process Is Inadequate***

The very principles and process Lenhart uses to develop his theological model are fundamentally inadequate. They are inadequate, not because the principles he uses are false, but because there are some principles in theological modeling process of which Lenhart is simply not aware.

As a result, he seeks to apply principles that are true as they relate to static objects (which would have been true in his chemistry background) but which are *not true* as they relate to the dynamic realities of language which will change in its nuance from use to use.

Even more fundamental, Lenhart fails to go back to the scripture as a primary source, instead relying heavily on human deduction through each and every stage of his model building. When he does go to scripture, he doesn't seem to comprehend the depth of work that must be done with hermeneutics to properly and intelligently speak to Biblically revealed truths. Lacking this, he simply cannot arrive at "bottom rung" theological definitions.

If all this weren't bad enough, Lenhart then uses backwards theology, insisting God must fit his limited conceptualization, building his model by projecting his own ideas back upon God rather than allowing God to appropriately define and reveal his infinite and perfect nature through scripture..

The result is that Lenhart has set up a modeling process that is destined to fail when applied to developing Biblical theology.

- He can't truly get to the "bottom rung" in terms of adequate definitions.
- He doesn't understand the nature of linguistics...and misapplies his principles as it relates to language and words.
- He isn't getting the appropriate Biblical "input" he needs to make his model Biblical.
- And he inappropriately relies on non-contradiction to be the final arbiter of truth.

Such a process, because of the serious errors in it, is going to be inevitably flawed in terms of the belief system it outputs.

Let's note this as we look at Lenhart's theology.

## A SUMMARY AND REFUTATION OF LENHART'S THEOLOGY

The ultimate goal of this critique is not to simply tear apart Lenhart's process for developing his theology. I did that so we could see how Lenhart arrives at the "truths" he then feeds to his readers. Lenhart's teachings are the natural result of his flawed process built on human deduction.

For the sake of brevity, I will only be focusing on those things which most believers view as being at the heart of the gospel. While Lenhart's heresy (and let there be no doubt that he crosses that line in a *big way*) goes far beyond what we will cover, I simply don't have the time or space to deal with the breadth of each and every falsehood in his book here.

Let's look at some of Lenhart's core teachings. We'll point out the flaws, inadequacies, or outright falsehood as may be appropriate in each one as we go.

### ***Lenhart's Teaching on Who God Is***

At the heart of orthodox Christian theology is an understanding of who God is. Any significant deviation from this always leads to serious error.

Listen to some of Lenhart's statements about God which either diminish or deny central aspects of God's being as revealed in scripture:

- "God is a set of non-contradictory principles."<sup>20</sup>
- "We see proof throughout the Bible that God can't unilaterally initiate His will."<sup>21</sup>
- "It looks as if God's sovereignty is an effect, not a cause."<sup>22</sup>
- "God doesn't know how much each of us needs until we've made choices.... God doesn't know which people are going to need the value until after they have expressed their will to focus on the spiritual over the physical. Therefore, God could not justly identify that exact amount ahead of time."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 87-88.

Do you see what Lenhart has done here? Very subtly, through his flawed process of developing theology, he has used deduction to:

- Depersonalize God.
- Reject God's absolute sovereignty.
- Reject God's omniscience (the idea that God can know everything – even the future).

In the end, such a god is significantly *less than* and *other than* the Biblical God. Yes, he still calls him “God,” but he is not the God of scripture. Notice some of these passages which contradict Lenhart's human deductions:

- (Sovereignty) *“In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will.”* Ephesians 1:11 (NIV)
- (Sovereignty) *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* Romans 8:28 (NIV)
- (Sovereignty) *“As it is written, “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.” <sup>14</sup> What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” <sup>16</sup> So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the scripture says to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” <sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses. <sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, “Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” <sup>20</sup> But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, “Why have you made me like this?” <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? <sup>22</sup> What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; <sup>23</sup> and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— <sup>24</sup> including us whom he has called...”* Romans 9:13-24 (NIV)
- (Sovereignty) *...even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.”* 2 Peter 2:1 (NIV)
- (Omniscience) *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”* Hebrews 4:13 (NIV)
- (Omniscience) *“O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. <sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. <sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.”* Psalms 139:1-4 (NIV)
- (Omniscience) *“See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”* Isaiah 42:9 (NIV)
- (Omniscience) *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, “* 1 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV)

- (Omniscience) “*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.*” Ephesians 1:4 (NIV)
- (God’s Personal Nature) “*Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.*” James 4:8 (NIV)

In the end, Lenhart’s god is simply not the great I AM of scripture. He is something less, far less. He is a god who is more of a set of characteristics than someone who has the dynamic essence of being which we understand is possessed by living spiritual beings. He is not sovereign. He is not all-knowing. Such a god is simply not the God of the Bible. Yet this is the god Lenhart would lead us towards.

Why does Lenhart do this? Lenhart can easily develop a theology of God that is unbiblical because, in the end, it isn’t drawn from the Bible. As we pointed out earlier, Lenhart is primarily using human deduction to reach his conclusions. The result is that he develops a model that is nice and tight. It is internally consistent and non-contradictory. But in the end, it is also non-Biblical. When all is said and done, Lenhart’s conclusions about God don’t necessarily disagree with other elements of his model. But they do disagree with the one source where there simply cannot be disagreement in Biblical theology: God’s inspired Word.

## ***Lenhart’s Teaching on Jesus’ Nature***

Lenhart’s teaching on Jesus’ Divine nature is not much better. Listen to his quote:

“The only way for God to bridge this gap between His nature and our nature was for there to exist a being that had free will and chose to be righteous and just in everything he did. This would make this person fully God because he is always completely righteous and always completely just....

This is *how* Jesus is able to be fully man and fully God. (Notice, Jesus’ father being God and his mother being a human *would only make him half man and half God.*)”<sup>24</sup>  
(Emphasis mine.)

What Lenhart has done here is deny that Jesus is fully God *by nature*. Rather, he says, Jesus is only fully God because of *how he chose to act* while being man.

This has all kinds of theological implications that touch on all the core issues of the Christian faith: The Incarnation, the sufficiency of Jesus’ work on the cross, and even the very nature of salvation itself. In reality, this issue of Jesus’ nature is so core, it is vital to understand the implications. To accept what Lenhart says here is to fundamentally undermine the entire core of the Christian faith and the message of salvation through the cross of Christ.

Because the nature of Jesus is so core to the Christian faith, it is vital we see what scripture says about this. (After all, any good theological modeling process *must be derived* from scripture...not merely human deduction.)

“*The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being...*”  
Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)

Biblical scholar Dr. George Guthrie comments on this passage:

“So as the ‘radiance of his glory’ the Son is *the manifestation of the person and presence of God.*”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 26-27.

He goes on to comment on the second part of the verse which says Jesus is “the exact representation of his [God’s] being.”

“This word rendered ‘representation’ (character), also used only here in the New Testament, originally denoted an instrument used for engraving, and later the impression made on coins... What the Son represents is the ‘being’ of the Father, that is, *his essential nature*.”<sup>26</sup> (Emphasis mine)

Biblical scholar Dr. F.F. Bruce agrees:

“The Greek word character, occurring here only in the New Testament, expresses this truth even more emphatically than *eikon*, which is used elsewhere to denote Christ as the ‘image’ of God. Just as the glory is really in the effulgence, so the *substance* (Gk. Hypostasis) *of God is really in Christ*, who is its impress, its exact representation and embodiment. *What God essentially is, is made manifest in Christ.*”<sup>27</sup> (emphasis mine)

You see, to follow Lenhart’s thinking, if Jesus is God – even in part – because of his *choosing* to embody certain principles (not because He is God by nature) then when Jesus left heaven to come to earth he *lost* part of his divinity. Yep! That is what Lenhart’s assertion means. He was fully God before...but not anymore.

Notice his quote again:

“The only way for God to bridge this gap between His nature and our nature was for there to exist a being that had free will and *chose to be righteous and just in everything he did*. This would *make this person fully God* because he is always completely righteous and always completely just....

This is *how* Jesus is able to be fully man and fully God. (Notice, Jesus’ father being God and his mother being a human *would only make him half man and half God.*)”<sup>28</sup> (Emphasis mine.)

However, losing His divinity through the incarnation is only the beginning of the problem. Think this through with me. By saying Jesus *attains* his status as fully God by perfectly embodying God’s righteousness and justice *by choice* as a human, what Lenhart does is create a threshold where Jesus has to express his will and *attain perfection in a full and complete way*. So where does he cross the line and *become fully God*? At His birth? During His ministry? At His death?

At birth, Jesus has expressed no will *as a human being*. Therefore, by Lenhart’s construct, Jesus would still not be fully God at His birth.

Let’s go to the cross. Could Jesus still make choices? Yes. Even on the cross, as time was playing out, Jesus could still have chosen to be unrighteous or unjust. So that means (according to Lenhart) Jesus could not have been fully God on the cross. (There were still things Jesus could “do,” and in the doing, he could still choose not to be perfectly righteous. This means he hasn’t perfectly attained his obedience yet.)

Could he still make choices after the resurrection? Yes he could! That means (again according to Lenhart’s assertion) Jesus wouldn’t be fully God even after the resurrection. “After all,” Lenhart would say, “Jesus is only *half God* by nature. The other half he gets by how he *chooses to act* as a human being. He has to perfectly embody righteousness and justice *by choice* in order to be

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<sup>25</sup> George Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, Zondervan, 1998 p. 48

<sup>26</sup> George Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, Zondervan, 1998 p. 48

<sup>27</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 26-27.

fully divine. If he fails, he never gets that other half of his divinity. So, since he still has the ability to choose wrongly, he still wouldn't have *attained* the other half of His divinity."

Let's take this a step further. Even now, Jesus still is embodied. (Acts 1:1-11, Rev 1:13) Since he could theoretically still *choose* to not follow God, his ability to fully *be God would still* not be at the point of completion.

Ultimately, because (by Lenhart's assertion) Jesus has to perfectly embody righteousness and justice *by choice as a human* to attain Godhood, as long as Jesus would have opportunity to *not* choose those, his obedience would not have reached a point of perfection and completion.

Again ... when does Jesus cross Lenhart's threshold of fully "*choosing to be righteous and just in everything he does*" so that it "*makes him fully God*"...and reach divinity?

If we are to carefully think through Lenhart's assertion, *Jesus actually can never reach such a threshold*, for Jesus can still choose to sin. Even to take Lenhart's assertion on its face, without thinking it through, one is left with Jesus still – at best - being only half God in His very nature. This is extremely troubling.

Let's note some other passages which also speak to Jesus' very nature, some before the incarnation and some both before and after. Consider the following passages:

- "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...*<sup>14</sup> *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*" John 1:1, 14. (NIV)
- "<sup>17</sup> *Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."* <sup>18</sup> *For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*" John 5:17-18 (NIV)
- "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?* <sup>10</sup> *Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"* John 14:9-10 (NIV)
- "<sup>5</sup> *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:* <sup>6</sup> *Who, being in very nature God...*" Philippians 2:5-6. (NIV)
- "*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...*" Colossians 2:9 (NIV)

These passages speak unequivocally to Jesus' nature itself being divine. If Lenhart is right, then what happened at the incarnation (when Jesus left heaven and took on flesh) is that Jesus (who prior to the incarnation would have been divine) somehow *lost* his essential divine nature. This is inherently a Gnostic concept.

In the end, Lenhart has succeeded – through his flawed modeling process – to give us a non-omniscient, non-sovereign, impersonal deity...and a Jesus who is not fully God in the essence of his being. He only *becomes* that by choice through his life and actions – which in reality creates a point of *becoming God* which Jesus could really never cross. Such is the beginning point for almost all heresy, for the enemy seeks to always undermine and sabotage the essential nature and quality of who God is and who Jesus is. The next thing to go after this is Jesus' work on the cross. We'll get there shortly.

## ***Lenhart's Teaching on Sin***

Let's move on to Lenhart's teaching on sin.

Through his book, “Modeling God,” Lenhart is seeking to build a theological framework that sees the “big picture” and paints the basic outlines of who God is, what sin is, and what salvation is in order to help the reader understand God better and thereby make progress toward God.

Given that sin is essential to understanding the Biblical idea of salvation, it is very interesting to notice how Lenhart defines sin, and then teaches about it. What one finds is that for Lenhart, sin is never the violation of objective standard which God gives to us, but is entirely dependent upon the individual and their understanding.

“Therefore, sin is anything we do that does not look Long Term. Sin is an action, attitude, or thought that is wrong *because it is done apart from understanding and experience*. That is, *anything done apart from what the individual knows is right due to their understanding or experience*.”<sup>29</sup> (emphasis mine)

Oh really? So if someone grows up in a culture where murder is not considered wrong – and there are such cultures<sup>30</sup> – then murder is not a sin? Lenhart goes on...

“This [sin] is *not a list of objective actions*, like the law. *It is dependent on the individual. If it is wrong for the individual, then it is sin for the individual alone*.”<sup>31</sup> (emphasis mine)

Lenhart then goes and insists that because sin is individual, and not the breaking of a set standard, that we should never point out sin. In doing so, he further ignores scripture about the hardness of people’s heart by stating that guilt will always be felt if sin is truly present.

“It is not our responsibility to point out what is sin in other people... Sin causes guilt. If it is sin for the individual, the individual will feel guilt.”<sup>32</sup>

So what does scripture say about this? While we don’t have space to go into an entire doctrine of sin here – and while we assert there are types of sin that are individual – we can also be clear that on the whole, sin *is* the violation of God’s known and revealed standard. Notice God’s Word.

“<sup>4</sup> *Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.*” 1 John 3:4 (NIV)

In other words, sin is where I choose to live apart from, and without, God’s law.

In the Old Testament, the entire system of sin offerings was in reference to the breaking of God’s law. And it is important to note, it was an objective standard *whether one was aware of it or not!*

“*If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, he is guilty.* <sup>28</sup> When he is made aware of the sin he committed...” Lev 4:27-28 (NIV)

This then is carried into the New Testament. The sin offering the Israelites practiced was brought into full reality by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Why did he die? For sins which violated – not only God’s law – but the essential holiness of His being!

Note the Greek words used for sin. Despite Lenhart’s claim that it can’t mean “to miss the mark,”<sup>33</sup> indeed, this is what the term itself means. Please note how the two main usages of the word “sin” are listed in Strong’s Greek Lexicon. You will see that inherent in the usage of the

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<sup>29</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 89.

<sup>30</sup> For a great example of this, read the book *Spirit of the Rainforest* by Mark Ritchie, Island Lake Press, Chicago, 1996, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 89.

word “sin” itself is the idea of the violation of a known standard, hence the translation is often “trespass.”

“ἁμαρτάνω [*hamartano* /ham-ar-tan-ol/ ... 43 occurrences; AV translates as “sin” 38 times, “trespass” three times, “offend” once, and “for your faults” once. **1** to be without a share in. **2** to miss the mark. **3** to err, be mistaken. **4** to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honour, to do or go wrong. **5** to wander from the law of God, violate God’s law, sin.”<sup>34</sup> (emphasis mine)

“ἁμαρτία [*hamartia* /ham-ar-tee-ah/] ... **1** equivalent to 264. 1a to be without a share in. 1b to miss the mark. 1c to err, be mistaken. 1d to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honour, to do or go wrong. 1e to wander from the law of God, violate God’s law, sin. **2** that which is done wrong, sin, an offence, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act. **3** collectively, the complex or aggregate of sins committed either by a single person or by many.”<sup>35</sup> (emphasis mine)

What Lenhart has done is undercut the entire Biblical model of salvation involving the cross. By making sin something other than a violation of God’s very being and of His holy standard, he has reduced sin to something personal, and ultimately – relative.

Please be aware, by Lenhart’s standard, no one should ever say to Adolf Hitler, “Killing the Jews is wrong.” This would violate the very construct that Lenhart has developed. For one, Lenhart would say that such a thing *might not be wrong* for Hitler. Secondly, he would say it is not our responsibility to point out other’s sin.

As shocking as that is, *this is exactly what Lenhart is teaching!* He ignores the scriptural reality of the depth of our sin, the consequence of our fallenness, the reality and extent of the Enemy’s work, and the resulting hardening and twisting of our heart and mind.

*“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup> Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron...” 1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NIV)*

How does Lenhart get to his unbiblical teaching of sin? He gets here because his modeling process is flawed. Ultimately, it is flawed because its foundation is Lenhart’s deductive mind, not by the careful study of the inspired Word of God, relying on the Holy Spirit for illumination, and utilizing the disciplines involved in sound hermeneutics. He simply doesn’t go back to the Word of God and allow it to inform his theology; instead he demands that God’s Word be molded to his flawed construct.

## ***Lenhart’s Teaching on Grace***

Lenhart begins his teaching on grace as he does with many of his other teachings, seeking to get to a “bottom rung” definition that can then be utilized in each and every situation. As I have already pointed out, language doesn’t work this way, and so his attempts almost universally end up some place *other than* the place given when one looks at the whole of God’s Word.

Early in his discussion of grace Lenhart says:

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AV Authorized Version

<sup>34</sup>Strong, J. (1996). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* (G264). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

<sup>35</sup>Strong, J. (1996). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* (G266). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

“When you ask most people their definition of grace, their answer is ‘unmerited favor.’”<sup>36</sup>  
He then goes on to debunk this notion, mocking it as a “golden key” definition which must be rejected.

“When a person does wrong, they have to pay... This ‘golden key’ definition says the person pays (and continues to pay) with the unmerited value they received from God. Now that their debt is paid and they are righteous, they can go to heaven. This actually raises a lot of questions....

“...Obviously, this ‘golden key’ definition of grace makes no sense...”<sup>37</sup>

“Unmerited favor is not a cause of righteousness and therefore has no power to save us.”<sup>38</sup>

And why is grace not “unmerited favor?” Listen to Lenhart’s deduction from his previously deduced conceptualization of God’s justice.

“Justice says we are still going to have to pay for this value we get from God. God may give us value to pay for sins here, but *we still need to reimburse God.*”<sup>39</sup> (emphasis mine)

In other words, Lenhart has turned grace on its head! By Lenhart’s definition of justice, he *precludes* God from giving us something *for which we don’t have to pay!*

Lenhart then goes on and constructs a model in which grace is *limited to* God’s “divine influence upon the heart,”<sup>40</sup> an influence *we must pay for* so as to not violate God’s justice. This influence, Lenhart says, leads to proper actions which are “righteous” and therefore must be rewarded by God on the basis of the principle of justice.

As we will see in a moment, this undercuts the entire Biblical message of salvation through faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross!

So where does Lenhart go wrong in his teaching on grace? Two ways:

1. First he goes wrong by trying to get a one-size-fits-all definition of grace which can then be applied in every use of the word in scripture.

As we have pointed out, such an attempt will ALWAYS result in either moving UP the ladder of abstraction, or it will result in a definition that only fits in a few certain places.

One can see Lenhart’s flawed process in his appeal to Luke 2:40 which says:

“*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.*”

Lenhart basically says, “See, grace can’t essentially be unmerited favor *anywhere* in scripture because Jesus didn’t need unmerited favor here in Luke 2:40.”

His problem? He is not using etymology and other hermeutical tools to understand *each individual usage of the word within its given context*. Instead, he simply attempts to slap some upper rung definition on the word and force it to fit. Of course Jesus didn’t need unmerited favor. That isn’t how the word is used in Luke 2:40.

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<sup>36</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 65-66.

<sup>38</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 67.

*There are many times in scripture the word “grace” is used in a way that speaks to other things besides unmerited favor. Lenhart points many of these out. The question is, does it always? Especially when the scripture is speaking of our salvation, is the word “grace” utilized in scripture in a way that it can be considered as an undeserved gift...unmerited favor?*

Ultimately Lenhart’s contention is that grace is something we control, not God – and therefore it can NEVER mean “unmerited favor.” Listen to what he says:

“The ‘golden key’ definition of grace puts the responsibility on God. The New Testament definition of grace *puts the responsibility on the individual.*”<sup>41</sup> (emphasis mine)

“We have control over grace and removing guilt.”<sup>42</sup>

Yikes!

2. Secondly, Lenhart goes wrong because once again he is not relying on scripture to be his primary source, inputting God’s revelation into the model...especially as it relates to salvation. Instead, Lenhart is trying to rely almost entirely on deduction. His appeal to scripture is essentially an effort to “proof-text” his position, rather than allowing a thorough and exhaustive study of scripture to inform and give him his position.

Let’s consider just a few of the Biblical uses of the word grace. Notice how, in these instances (each of which speaks of grace as it relates to our salvation and Christ’s work on the cross), grace is contrasted with *what we do that could pay for our sins*.

*“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—<sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”*  
Romans 3:21-26 (NIV)

*“<sup>5</sup> So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup> And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.”* Romans 11:5-6 (NIV)

*“<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s workmanship...”* Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)

Scripture is very clear on this issue: Jesus paid for our salvation. His death was the manifestation of God’s grace. Christ’s death was not merely so we could have divine influence upon the heart – as needed and true as that is. *His death went beyond this and paid our debt of sin and purchased our salvation.* A study of the words used in the above passages makes this abundantly clear.

Listen to Lenhart again.

“Justice says we are still going to have to pay for this value we get from God. God may give us value to pay for sins here, but *we still need to reimburse God.*”<sup>43</sup> (emphasis mine)

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<sup>41</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 74.

<sup>42</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 123.

Make no mistake my friend. What Lenhart has done is constructed a model that says you *earn* your salvation. Grace depends on you...not God. Grace depends on you, not Jesus and His work on the cross. Grace, in the context of how the scripture uses it in relationship to salvation, has been turned on its head. The message of the cross has been set aside. And the entire message of the gospel is compromised because of it.

## ***Lenhart's Teaching on Salvation***

Lenhart's teaching on grace leads directly to his teaching on salvation. Because he has skewed things so severely up to this point, it is no surprise that his conceptualization of salvation is also foreign to Biblical truth.

In his discussion about salvation, Lenhart again uses the "golden key" concept of salvation (as he terms it) as the concept he says is wrong. (It is important to note that his use of this concept is, in some way, meant to represent some aspects of Calvinistic theology which he believes to be wrong. For example, he will use it to speak to his disagreement with the concept of "once saved, always saved."<sup>44</sup>)

Whatever one's stance as it relates to the Calvinistic/Arminian debate, the irony is that Lenhart frames his "golden key" concept in such a way that – while he thinks it argues only against Calvinistic theology – he ends up trying to debunk the entire Evangelical understanding of salvation – regardless of theological persuasion within that framework.

Among the concepts that Lenhart articulates:

- That there is NOT a salvation event where one receives Christ and is made a new creation.<sup>45</sup>
- That salvation is NOT by grace...as in the typical evangelical understanding of grace as God's undeserved favor extended to us through Christ's death.<sup>46</sup>
- That God's righteousness is NOT imputed to us and is not sufficient to save us.<sup>47</sup>
- That one's faith DOES NOT NEED to be placed in the person and work of Jesus to be saved.<sup>48</sup>
- That salvation entirely depends upon whether a person's ACTIONS are moving toward God or away from God *at the moment of death*, not their reception of Christ as Lord and Savior.<sup>49</sup>

Such assertions should be of concern to anyone who is a believer, for they undercut the entire Biblical message of salvation.

Let's consider some of what Lenhart writes about salvation as it pertains to some of the above points.

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<sup>43</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. P. 66.

<sup>44</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 87

<sup>45</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 89

<sup>46</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 65, 88.

<sup>47</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 89

<sup>48</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 99

<sup>49</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 95-96.

## Is there a Moment at Which We Are Saved?

Let's begin with whether or not there is a moment where one receives Christ and is "saved." Here is what Lenhart says on the subject.

"The 'golden key' definitions looked at salvation as a one-time event... However, we know you aren't saved yet."<sup>50</sup>

"Essentially salvation is a process that depends on progress, not a quantitative threshold."<sup>51</sup>

"If I were working for the enemy, I would tell people I was a Christian and all they had to do was say they believed in Jesus... I'd tell them the 'golden key' concept – they were saved by unmerited favor no matter what they felt or how illogical it appeared.... First of all, this would cause the 'convert' not to receive salvation."<sup>52</sup>

"Salvation is not a one time event."<sup>53</sup>

Lenhart is very clear. He denies what all evangelicals believe: that there is a moment where one passes from death to life and is saved – where saved is a completed action.

The question is, what does the scripture say on this?

Consider a passage that Lenhart references repeatedly, Ephesians 2:8-9.

<sup>8</sup> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—* <sup>9</sup> *not by works, so that no one can boast.* (NIV)

Lenhart says of this passage:

"'Saved' refers to the result *at the end of the process* of salvation. If 'saved' referred to a current result, then it would contradict your will."<sup>54</sup> (emphasis mine)

Isn't it interesting how Lenhart merely asserts his proposition to be true, and then relies on human deduction to support it? There is no exegetical work. There are no word studies done of the scripture so that scripture can inform his theology. No, Lenhart merely deduces it based on his "pre-arrived at" definitions and constructs.

So let's do what Lenhart failed to do. Let's let the Bible become the source of our theology. Let's look at this word "saved" as it is used here in Ephesians 2:8.

The word "saved" here is the word "σέσωσμενοι." Its usage here in the Greek is as a perfect passive participle.

So what does all that mean for the reader?

Here is what Biblical scholar Dr. Ron Minton says of this Greek word as it is used in this passage:

"Often perfect passive participles... can be translated by a simple 'is' or 'are.' In Eph. 2:8 the force is the current state. You could translate 'you are now in a saved state which has resulted from being saved in the past.' Or, you could translate 'You are saved.'"<sup>55</sup>

Why is this? It is because, in the Greek language, the perfect tense references *action completed at a specific point of time in the past with results continuing into the present.*<sup>56</sup> In other words,

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<sup>50</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 87.

<sup>51</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 95.

<sup>52</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 101.

<sup>53</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 103.

<sup>54</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> <http://lists.ibiblio.org/pipermail/b-greek/2005-May/034271.html>

Ephesians 2:8 is saying that at one point in the *past* you *entered* a saved state and you are now currently *in that saved state* because of that past action which was done to you by God on the basis of faith.

Let's look at some other passages.

*"<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."* Titus 3:4-5 (NIV)

Here the word "saved" is in the Greek aorist tense. This tense in the Greek is used to indicate *a one time past event whose action is complete.*<sup>57</sup> In other words, you were saved at a point in the past when God gave you the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

How about 2 Timothy 1:9?

*"<sup>9</sup> who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus..."* 2 Timothy 1:9 (NIV)

Again, the word "saved" is in the aorist tense, *indicating past action that is in a completed state.*

Let's go on.

*"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* Acts 2:47 (NIV)

Here the word "saved" is used as a present passive participle in the Greek. This indicates *the Lord's ongoing action resulting in a **completed effect** for the person.* In other words, this passage describes a reality in which, by the Lord's action, there were ongoing numbers of people entering the *state* of being saved...with their salvation being a completed act.

These are just a few of the many passages which speak to the reality of salvation happening at a given point and time where one receives Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Here is the bottom line: Lenhart's assertion that there is no point in time (other than death) in which one is saved simply doesn't square with the scriptures. Lenhart has simply engaged in intellectual deduction and built his theology on his own flawed human wisdom. Ultimately the reason he has done this, as we will see shortly – is because Lenhart doesn't believe you need to have faith in the person of Jesus. He thinks there are multiple paths to heaven...all of which rely on human effort.

### **Are We Saved by God's Righteousness or Ours?**

Lenhart further paints his picture of salvation in unbiblical terms by making it a matter of our righteousness being needed rather than God's righteousness being imputed to us on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection.

Listen to what he says:

*"God gives us value because we are going against our nature and *trying to become more like God* – righteous. Recall, righteousness is the requirement for salvation. Confession and repentance are righteous and remove unrighteousness."<sup>58</sup> (emphasis mine)*

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<sup>56</sup> Dr. James Hewett, *New Testament Greek: A Beginning and Intermediate Grammar*, Hendrickson publishers, 1986, p. 76

<sup>57</sup> Eugene Van Ness Goetchius, "The Language of the New Testament," Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, NY, 1965, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 89.

Lenhart's argument here is subtle, but important in its error. Note that he speaks to our actions *producing* righteousness, and that it is *our effort at righteousness* that then somehow requires God to give us "value" on the basis of Lenhart's definition of God's justice. Beloved of God, this is salvation by works!

Contrast Lenhart's teaching with scripture again. Notice his blatant denial of what God clearly teaches in His Word on this important subject.

<sup>6</sup> *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...* Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one..."* Romans 3:10 (NIV)

<sup>21</sup> *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.* <sup>22</sup> *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,* <sup>23</sup> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* <sup>24</sup> *and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Romans 3:21-24 (NIV)*

*"...that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." Phil. 3:8-9 (NIV)*

The scripture is very clear. The righteousness that saves us is not some righteousness we attain – even through confession and repentance. Confession and repentance don't force God to do anything. The righteousness He gives to us is HIS righteousness that is applied to us on the basis of Jesus' finished work on the cross. And it is given, not because God is forced to by virtue of His justice, but because He graciously gives it though it is undeserved.

Let's be clear. This is NOT a small matter. What Lenhart has done is deny the very CORE of our entire hope and faith as believers: that IN CHRIST there is salvation based on HIM – not us.

### **Do We Need to Trust In Jesus to Save Us?**

Unfortunately, Lenhart's false teaching grows far worse as he proceeds to talk about Jesus and salvation. Listen to what he says:

"If we were to put a name to the process [of salvation], it would be Jesus, because He made it possible for us to receive the value. There is 'none other name' that can be correctly placed in this process. However, *a person doesn't have to know the name of Jesus in order to receive the value [of salvation]*. The quoted verse that opens this chapter does not say it is the only method. It says it is a sure way of making it to heaven."<sup>59</sup> (emphasis mine)

He goes on in the next paragraph.

"Everyone can benefit from these causes *regardless of religious affiliation*. It would be unholy for someone to intentionally make progress and be barred [at death] from continuing on the journey because they didn't recognize the brand name [Jesus] on the process. In fact, the 'golden key' belief in the name only leads to the biggest problem in the salvation process."<sup>60</sup> (emphasis mine)

Lenhart's assertions here are so troubling on so many different levels, that it is hard to know where to even begin.

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<sup>59</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 99

<sup>60</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 99.

First of all, salvation is *not* primarily about some process as Lenhart claims. Scripture is abundantly clear that salvation IS all about a *person*, the person of Jesus Christ. By minimizing Jesus and elevating the process, Lenhart has dethroned God and enthroned his own version of human dynamics which *produce* the result of salvation by having us correctly plug into his salvation formula.

However, the bigger problem is Lenhart again explicitly espouses a teaching that is not only unbiblical, *it is anti-Biblical*. He claims there are *multiple paths to God – apart from Jesus!!*

However, a person doesn't have to know the name of Jesus in order to receive the value [of salvation]. The quoted verse that opens this chapter *does not say it is the **only** method. It says it is a sure way of making it to heaven.*"<sup>61</sup> (emphasis mine)

Let's again allow scripture to be our source for our theology. Let's go back and see what God says about this in His Word. Can we be saved apart from a personal faith in the PERSON of Jesus?

<sup>12</sup> *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we **must** be saved.*" Acts 4:12 (NIV)

*"...how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."* 2 Timothy 3:15 (NIV)

*"...that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." Phil. 3:8-9 (NIV)*

<sup>26</sup> *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...*" Galatians 3:26 (NIV)

Please note the *core message* laid out in each of these passages. Salvation comes through a personal reliance on the *person of Jesus*. No one else qualifies. There is *one* name through which we *must* be saved. That name is Jesus. Salvation is not just *through Christ*, it is through *faith in Christ*.

In denying the centrality of Jesus in salvation, Lenhart has fundamentally denied the core of the gospel message. He has begun to lay forth a false gospel.

Make no mistake. Lenhart's teaching on this is so far off the mark, we can safely say:

- this denial of the person and work of Jesus...
- this denial of the fundamentals of salvation by grace through faith IN Christ...

...is born – not of God - but was hatched in the pit of hell itself in order to keep lost people from knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is heresy my friend.

### **So How Are We Saved According to Lenhart?**

Lenhart, in his debunking of Biblical truth, lays forth his alternative perspective on salvation. He says it this way:

"We know that progress is a result that depends on the individual's decision to pursue growth in grace and faith. *This decision* is an expression of the will of the individual and *causes the individual to be saved* when he dies.

Going back to our party analogy, when a person dies, it is up to God whether he gets to continue the journey or not. If people want to get to the party, they are going to choose to

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<sup>61</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 99

make progress towards the party instead of looking for short-term thrills by driving on roads that take them away from the party.

*If the person should die while they are trying to make progress towards the party, the individual is saved...* It would be unholy for God to do something against the will of the individual.

*If people die while they are intentionally driving away from the party, then they are not saved,* even if they said they wanted to go to the party while they were driving away from it. Even if they spend their entire life driving toward the party, if they are choosing to drive away when they die, God will not allow them to continue the journey....

As long as you are moving forward when you die, no matter how slowly, it would be unholy for God to bar you from continuation of the journey.”<sup>62</sup> (emphasis mine)

So let's put this all together. According to Lenhart, one does not need to have faith in the person of Jesus for salvation. Rather, one's salvation depends on their own personal righteousness rather than God's righteousness. It is something they earn by "gaining value" from God so that God's justice is all "equaled out" according to Lenhart's equation.

Please note the implications of Lenhart's salvation theology.

According to Lenhart, someone who has faith in Christ and who has entered into a covenant relationship with Him - but at the moment of their death falls into some personal sin (they take a step in the wrong direction, moving away from God) - that person is lost.

However, imagine if there is someone who is a child sacrificing, axe murdering, idol worshipper. Let's say at the moments immediately prior to death says, "You know, I don't think God would want me to be an ax murderer," even as he sacrifices his child to the idol. According to Lenhart, that person is saved. Why? Because he made a decision to make "progress" toward God at the point of death. He expressed a desire to be more "God-like" in some small way. He "drove toward the party."

This is what salvation looks like in Lenhart's model.

Faith IN Christ and his work on the cross has been set aside, and a gospel absolutely foreign to the scripture has taken its place. A decision to "make progress" toward God...even if it is apart from Christ, is now the mechanism of salvation.

Beloved of God, this is heresy of the worst form.

Doesn't Jesus say:

*"<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 (NIV)*

According to Lenhart, Jesus has been replaced by a process. Grace has been replaced by works. The cross has been replaced by "progress." This is not the gospel of the scriptures. It is the gospel of John G. Lenhart.

*"Let God's curse fall on anyone, including myself, who preaches any other message than the one we told you about. Even if an angel comes from heaven and preaches any other message, let him be forever cursed. I will say it again: If anyone preaches any other gospel than the one you welcomed, let God's curse fall upon that person." Galatians 1:8-9 NLT*

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<sup>62</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 95-96.

## Where Is the Cross?

Have you noticed what is missing here? The cross of Jesus! Yes, in a 230 page book written to lay out a theology of salvation, there is only the most fleeting of references to the cross (I saw just two paragraphs).

All through the Bible the cross is the centerpiece.

*“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* 1 Cor 2:2 (NIV)

This was the heart and center of the Apostle Paul’s message. *This* was what was vitally important to maintain at all costs. And yet Lenhart has simply given it away for a perspective of salvation that somehow depends on my “progress.”

## Where is the Holy Spirit?

If Lenhart sidelined the cross in his salvation theology, he was even more remiss when it came to the role of the Holy Spirit.

It may have been in there, but *I didn’t find one reference* to the work of the Holy Spirit in either Lenhart’s theology of salvation, or in his perspective on how a believer victoriously lives out the Christian life. Not one!

Doesn’t that strike you as odd? In the New Testament, apart from Jesus’ work on the cross, nothing was more significant than the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Paul put it this way in Romans 8:2-4

*“...through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”*(NIV)

## A Summary of Lenhart’s Basic Theology

Here is what we are left with in the end of Lenhart’s deeply flawed theological modeling process:

- We are left with a non-omniscient, non-sovereign deity.
- We are left with a Jesus who is not fully God in his fundamental essence and nature.
- We are left with an unbiblical concept of sin which makes sin relative to the individual, not the violation of God’s essential being and His holy and revealed standard.
- Salvation by grace has been turned on its head. It is now something that must be earned rather than given by God’s undeserved favor towards us manifested in Christ’s death on the cross.
- We are left with a theology of salvation which denies there is a point at which one receives Christ and is saved.
- We are left with a theology of salvation that denies the necessity of a personal faith in a real and living Jesus. He believes there are multiple ways of being saved, all of which depend on human behavior and intent.

- We are left with a theology of salvation which significantly sidelines the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the core of our salvation.
- We are left with a formula and a process which must be worked, rather than a living Savior in whom we can place our trust.

What Lenhart has articulated is a theology based on deduction, not the revealed Word of God. It is a theology built from a flawed modeling process. In the end, it is a gospel which is substantially *different from* the gospel presented in the scripture. Lenhart's gospel:

- Has a different god than the Biblical God,
- Has a different Jesus than the Biblical Jesus,
- Has a different message of salvation than the one presented in the pages of scripture.

Because of the significant error in Lenhart's teaching, it is vital that we heed these words of warning from scripture:

*“<sup>3</sup> Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. <sup>4</sup> For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” Jude 1:3-5 (NIV)*

*“<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” Colossians 2:8 (NIV)*

*“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” 1 Timothy 4:1 (NIV)*

We would also do well to remind ourselves that the gospel has never rested on human deduction or wisdom, as Lenhart has attempted to do. Rather, it rests upon the revelation given by God's Spirit in the scriptures and the Spirit's ongoing work in the world to illuminate the hearts of mankind.

*“<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.<sup>19</sup> For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?<sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.<sup>22</sup> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,<sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.<sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.” 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 (NIV)*

*“<sup>13</sup> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.<sup>14</sup> The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 (NIV)*

## ***Lenhart's Other Teachings***

Let me just briefly summarize some of Lenhart's other teachings which flow out of his core theology.

- First, he believes that a key to spiritual vitality is finding your “spiritual ARE.”<sup>63</sup> (Ask yourself where that is in the Bible.)

Listen to what he says:

“Your ultimate goal is to find and operate in your ARE. This is your calling.”<sup>64</sup>

“Even today, the ultimate profitability attained by each person occurs through his or her ARE.”<sup>65</sup>

“The ARE is the unique purpose for which you were created.”<sup>66</sup>

- He believes that prayer is about a formula where one can spend the “value” we get from God, and that prayer will not work if we don't have enough “value” built up in our spiritual bank account.<sup>67</sup>

“If you don't have value, God would have to first take a value away from you before giving it back in answer to prayer.”<sup>68</sup>

“Prayer initiates an exchange of value with God.”<sup>69</sup>

“We are told to pray. Yet, prayer doesn't really work unless you have value.”<sup>70</sup>

- Lenhart believes one engages in witchcraft when they pray for someone to get saved or healed.<sup>71</sup>

“It is witchcraft to pray that someone believes something or does something when he or she is against it. This includes praying for people to get ‘saved’ or healed.”<sup>72</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

When I finished reading Lenhart's book, I laid it down and thought, “I have just read a gospel that is entirely different from the gospel of scripture.”

Lenhart's gospel has a non-sovereign impersonal god, a non-divine Jesus, and an unbiblical view of both sin and God's grace. It significantly marginalizes the cross to mean virtually nothing and almost completely excludes the work of the Holy Spirit. Salvation does not require faith in Christ and must be paid for by gaining “value” from God. Elements of the Christian life, such as prayer

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<sup>63</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 193-202.

<sup>64</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 194.

<sup>65</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 196.

<sup>66</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 197.

<sup>67</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 170-172.

<sup>68</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 171.

<sup>69</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 171

<sup>70</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 172.

<sup>71</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 165, 173.

<sup>72</sup> J.G. Lenhart, *Modeling God*, Deep River Books, 2007 p. 165.

is also about exchanging “value” and living victoriously as a believer is found by living in your spiritual “ARE.”

I must ask, “Where are these things in the Bible?” In the end, this is something entirely *different* from the gospel laid out in the pages of scripture.

In contrast to Lenhart’s gospel, the gospel of Scripture is focused on Christ and His work on the cross. It reveals a sovereign God who pays the full price for people’s sin through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The victorious Christian life isn’t found through gaining “value” or living in your spiritual “ARE.” Instead it is through abiding with (and walking in step with) the Holy Spirit of God as He applies Christ’s finished work on the cross to our personal lives. (Galatians 5)

As I finish this refutation of Lenhart’s process and theology, I am more convinced more than ever that my initial reaction to his work is valid. What Lenhart teaches is *not* another orthodox Christian theological framework. I’ll say it again: In the end, despite any differences or errors in various orthodox Christian theological systems, they all fundamentally tell the story of who God is, who man is, man’s sin and God’s ultimate redemption of mankind through the work of Christ on the cross – in accordance with the scriptures. Lenhart arrives at something far outside of this place.

In the end, Lenhart’s teaching must be labeled for what it is. It is a heretical teaching that is a violation of the central core tenants of the Christian faith. As such, it must be rejected by all who profess Jesus as Lord.

*“If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,<sup>4</sup> he is conceited and understands nothing.”* 1 Timothy 6:3 (NIV)

*“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.”* 2 Peter 2:1 (NIV)

*“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* 1 John 4:1 (NIV)

May God continue to guide you and bless you as continue to discern and seek His will.