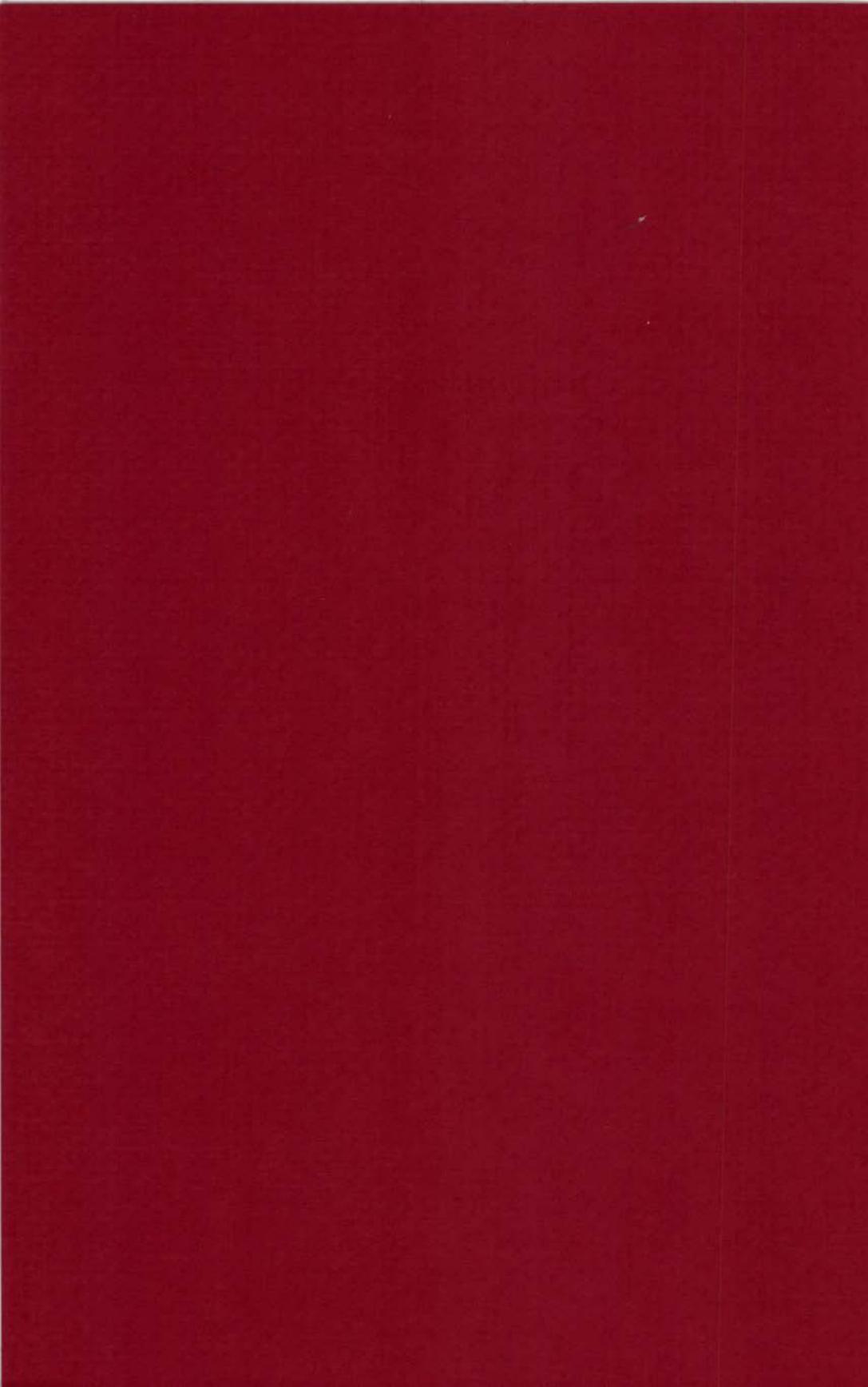


Journal of the
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"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"



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STRIVING FOR THE PRIZE OF ETERNAL SALVATION: A REVIEW OF SCHREINER AND CANEDAY'S *THE RACE SET BEFORE US*

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

Thomas R. Schreiner teaches NT Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He is the author of numerous works on Paul, including a nearly 1,000-page commentary on Romans in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* series.

The co-author of this book is Ardel B. Caneday, professor of Bible at Northwestern College in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The subtitle gives more specificity to the subject of the book: *A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance*. The authors state their aim in this way, "Our objective is to lay out the biblical evidence and offer an interpretation consistent with that evidence that will help readers integrate it into a coherent and consistent whole."¹ They feel the three main views of perseverance and assurance today fail to do this. Thus their aim is to forge a new view of the fifth point of Calvinism that might aid people of all traditions to better understand and apply the Scriptures.

There are three emphases in their book that separate it from existing views:

First, eternal salvation is already-but-not-yet (see esp. Chapter 2). Schreiner and Caneday suggest that there is a tension here which we must recognize and accept (p. 143). They feel that other views wrongly attempt to explain it away.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 11.

Second, the warnings in Scripture are the means by which believers are moved to persevere and gain final salvation (see esp. Chapter 4). They suggest that the other leading views either “superimpose God’s warnings on the promises or the promises on the warnings.”² They advise that the “[warning] passages must be granted their full force without qualifying them with God’s promises.”³ This means they don’t speak of losing eternal life or of proving one was never saved in the first place. They feel there is a biblical tension here that God does not intend for us to eliminate. The promises are one thing; the warnings another.

Third, their view of assurance is a modification of the position found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. On the one hand, they argue for Westminster’s three legs of assurance: “God’s promises, the fruit of the Spirit and the witness of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ On the other hand—unlike Westminster—they say that “every leg is important for Christian assurance, but the promises of God are the most important of all, for God’s promises are the foundation of all Christian assurance.”⁵ Thus their three-legged stool has one big leg and two small legs.

Though this sounds confusing, this book is intriguing and will be fascinating to *JOTGES* readers.

II. A SURVEY OF FIVE VIEWS ON PERSEVERANCE AND ASSURANCE

The first chapter is entitled, “What Is There to Win or Lose?” In it the authors survey four views before laying out their view. Of the views, all but the loss-of-rewards view considers the prize to be eternal salvation. In other words, the authors show that the rewards view is the only one that maintains that we need not strive and work in order to get into the kingdom!

Whereas many authors appear to be a bit reluctant to come out and call eternal salvation a prize to be won by endurance in obedience, Schreiner and Caneday do not share this reservation. I found it refreshing to see someone clearly admit they believe that eternal salvation is a

² *Ibid.*, 142.

³ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.* See also Chapter 7.

prize won by ardent effort. While it grieves me to see someone garble the gospel in that way, I am happy that they at least do so openly.

Here are their titles and brief descriptions of the four views other than their own:

Loss-of-salvation view. They say, “The racetrack represents salvation. Christians may abandon the race and lose salvation. The prize is eternal life.”⁶ This is Arminianism.

Loss-of-rewards view. “The racetrack represents salvation.⁷ Christians may abandon the race and lose rewards. The prize is not salvation but rewards.”⁸ This is the Free Grace position. The authors cite Grace Evangelical Society, Zane Hodges, *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, R. T. Kendall, Charles Stanley, Erwin Lutzer, Michael Eaton, John Hart, and me as advocating this position.⁹

Tests-of-genuineness view. The authors say that this is “one of the most common views in evangelicalism today.”¹⁰ “The racetrack represents salvation. To abandon the race proves one was never saved. Christians run with their back toward the goal¹¹ to assess their progress on the track. The prize is salvation, eternal life.

⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁷ The reason they call the racetrack *salvation* is probably because they see the end as what they call final salvation. However, since in this view the end is not final salvation, but the prize of eternal reward, they should have identified the track differently. A better designation would be that the track represents *the Christian life, progressive sanctification, or discipleship.*

⁸ *The Race*, 29.

⁹ Ibid., 24-29.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29. This struck me as odd, since the first view is obviously that of most denominations and churches, including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and most Protestant denominations. Yet concerning the first view the authors said, “Some insist that these warnings and admonitions indicate that believers can and sometimes do abandon their faith and consequently lose their salvation” (pp. 21-22).

¹¹ This suggestion is well meaning, but confusing. Obviously no one can run toward a finish line by running away from it! The authors seem to mean that the runner runs toward the prize while looking back all the time to see how well he has done so far in the race. This is like the runner who looks back to check out his competitors. However, in the graphic they give with this view, the runners are clearly running away from the finish and toward the starting line!

Warnings and admonitions call for retrospective and introspective self-examination to assess whether one is already saved.¹² This is the traditional Reformed view, also known as Lordship Salvation.

Hypothetical-loss-of-salvation view. The authors do not devote much space to this view “because this interpretive viewpoint emerges principally in discussions of warnings in Hebrews.”¹³ This view is a mix between views one and three. “The racetrack represents salvation. One who is already saved cannot abandon the race. The prize is salvation, eternal life. Warnings and admonitions only caution what would happen if one could fail to endure to the end.”¹⁴

The authors call their view “God’s means-of-salvation view.”¹⁵ They describe their view in this manner:

God’s means-of-salvation view. The racetrack represents salvation. If one abandons the race one will not receive the prize. The prize is salvation, eternal life. Warnings and admonitions call for faith that endures to receive the prize.¹⁶

We will analyze this view carefully. However, for now suffice it to say that it regards eternal salvation as the prize that believers are striving to attain.

The means-of-salvation position sounds like the Arminian view. After all, Arminians also see the warnings as the means God uses to get people to the kingdom. However, since they deny the possibility of loss of salvation, it is not exactly the same as the loss-of-salvation view.

In other ways it is hard to distinguish the means-of-salvation view from the Reformed position. The tests-of-genuineness view also sees the warnings as the means God uses to get people into the kingdom. However, since they say that those who fail to persevere prove they were never saved, and the means-of-salvation position does not, it is not precisely the same as the tests-of-genuineness view either.

¹² *The Race*, 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40. The full title is “God’s means-of-salvation view of warnings and admonitions.” I have abbreviated it since the authors themselves do so as well (see, for example, p. 45).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In a sense, it appears to be a sort of hybrid between the two. Since both those views see perseverance as a condition of eternal salvation, this is not as surprising as it might seem. There is much in common between Arminians and Calvinists—if by Calvinists we mean those who accept the Reformed Lordship Salvation position.

Let us now consider the various components of the authors' view.

III. ALREADY-BUT-NOT-YET: A LINEAR VIEW OF SALVATION?

The authors use the eschatological expression “already-but-not-yet,” extensively in this book. This is becoming increasingly common in soteriological discussions.

They never make it crystal clear—to this reviewer—what it means for salvation to be already present, but not yet realized.

I have taken several steps in order to understand what the authors mean by already-but-not-yet salvation. Both authors were given a prepublication copy of this review, and I have received three detailed email responses from Tom Schreiner and about seven from Ardel Caneday. In addition, at Caneday's suggestion, I have read Chapter 2 five times in an effort to better grasp what they are saying about already-but-not-yet salvation. I think I have it.

Already-but-not-yet salvation is only understood if we avoid trying to resolve the tensions in their view. The tensions must be maintained to keep the scriptural balance.

Salvation that can never be lost is ours already; yet if we do not persevere, we will not be saved on the last day. Keep the tension.

True believers can be assured that they are eternally secure now. Real believers will heed the warnings, persevere, and enter the kingdom. However, certainty that one is a true believer is not possible prior to death. Since only true believers will enter the kingdom, certainty of final salvation is not possible prior to death. Keep the tension.

In their view one who fails to work hard until the end of his life will fail to gain eternal salvation, or *final salvation*, as they prefer to call it. While they believe in eternal security, they also believe in a modified form of perseverance. All who are truly saved persevere. Yet this is not quite automatic.

The means by which God causes regenerate people to persevere is through the many warnings in Scripture. Fear of eternal condemnation

spurs believers to persevere. Thus believers must be very diligent to make it into the kingdom. Yet the faith, works, desire, and diligence are all gifts of God, hence they feel their view is not accurately described as teaching works-salvation.

With that as an overview, let us now examine precisely what the authors say on this key subject.

In Chapter 2 Schreiner and Caneday discuss in detail this already-but-not-yet tension in soteriology. It is vital to realize that in their opinion, passages dealing with *already salvation* are proportionally much less frequent than those dealing with *not-yet salvation*:

Almost all Christians think of salvation exclusively in terms of the past. Believers often say, "I have been saved," or ask someone else, "Have you been saved?" We will argue that most evangelical Christians do not use the word *salvation* as it is usually used in the Bible, where the term denotes our future salvation. Hence, the emphasis of the biblical text often gets lost when we speak about salvation.¹⁷

Why is this so important to them? The reason is because for them salvation (*sōtēria* and *sōzō* in Greek) almost always refers to eternal salvation from hell. Thus if people who are already saved need to be saved in the future, this means to them that one cannot relegate perseverance to the realm of eternal rewards. Nor can one safely rest on his past salvation as though his entrance to the kingdom will occur with or without diligent effort on his part.

Logically the authors seem to believe that eternal salvation does not occur at a point in time. Rather, like Luther, they seem to believe in a linear view of conversion. In this way a person can be on the way to final salvation, fail to obtain it due to a failure to persevere, yet not really lose eternal life.

I say that they *seem to believe* this because Caneday has directly denied this in emails to me. Indeed, he indicated he was not even familiar with *a linear concept of salvation*.

Judge for yourself. The following citations are instructive both for what they say and do not say. Note how each remark is different from what the loss-of-salvation or tests-of-genuineness views would say:

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 48, italics theirs, underlining mine.

The Scriptures call on those who are wandering to repent and to turn again *in order to be saved!* Such an admonition does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that these people were not saved before! The admonition, however, is directed to where a person is now in his or her walk with the Lord.¹⁸

Note first of all the two uses of exclamation marks. Clearly the authors are trying to call attention to something unique about their view. Notice also that they say that this wandering person who needs “to repent and turn again in order to be saved” may already be a saved person. How can this be if the authors believe that eternal salvation can’t be lost? The answer is that this is a biblical tension that must not be swept under the rug. They do not speak of losing eternal salvation or of failing to prove you had it in the first place.

Again, consider this quote:

The exhortation of Romans 8:13 [“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”] is still needed for Christians. Paul warns us that if we succumb to the desires of the body we will die. In order to live, that is, to obtain eternal life, we must slay the deeds of the body by the power of the Spirit.¹⁹

Christians will die spiritually if they “succumb to the desires of the body.” In order for believers “to live, that is, to obtain eternal life” they “must slay the deeds of the body by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Thus here, as in most places, they are emphasizing the not-yet part of salvation. One cannot obtain eternal life before he perseveres in a life characterized by slaying the deeds of the body by the power of the Holy Spirit. Note well that they avoid speaking of either loss of eternal life or proof one never had it in the first place. The key is to keep the tension. As long as we keep our eyes on the prize of eternal salvation and keep on persevering, we will obtain eternal life in the end.

Similarly, note these words:

Paul does not guarantee that believers will inherit the kingdom regardless of how they live. He warns that those who succumb to the flesh will not enter the kingdom.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 310, italics added.

¹⁹ Ibid., 300.

²⁰ Ibid., 294.

If we aren't careful, we will understand the authors to mean that kingdom entrance is not guaranteed for believers. Yet they believe it is. What they actually say here, if you read it with their idea of tension in mind, is that entrance is not guaranteed to believers *regardless of how they live*. In other words, true believers will take the warnings seriously. They will live right and will enter the kingdom. They will not succumb to the flesh since they know the consequences are deadly.

But what of those who do succumb to the flesh? Keep the tension. They will not get into the kingdom.

Righteous living is necessary to obtain entrance into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.²¹

Entrance to the kingdom is not really certain until one perseveres in righteous living. Of course, this is once again looking at the not-yet part of salvation. There is no mention of proving one was never saved in the first place or of losing already salvation.

James also conceives of salvation as future. He exhorts his readers to "humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (Jas 1:21 NIV). *The idea is not that they are saved but that the Word is able to save them. Apparently, the work of salvation is not completed, since the Word planted in them must be given free reign so that they will ultimately experience salvation.*²²

Saying that "the work of salvation is not completed" fits perfectly within a linear view of conversion. If one must give God's Word free reign in one's life in order to ultimately experience eternal salvation, then clearly salvation is not yet an accomplished fact. In light of quotes like these, it appears that for the authors the *not-yet* is so prominent as to make the *already* practically meaningless.

The following quote shows how they include election in their system:

Yet we must not nullify the biblical tension [between faith and works] and omit the need to do good works... We must run the marathon to the end to win the prize. We must gut it out and make it over the finish line. But those who make it over the finish line know that they have made it over the line because God has appointed them to run. He is the one who has given them the grace

²¹ Ibid., 290.

²² Ibid., 52, italics mine.

and energy and strength to run until the end, so he gets all the glory.²³

This is fairly standard Reformed articulation. This is about as close as they come to saying that those who fail to persevere never were saved in the first place. Of course, the authors do believe that the tests-of-genuineness approach is a valid way of explaining those professing believers who fail to persevere and gain kingdom entrance. For example, they write, "It is true that the Bible teaches that the people who failed to persevere by remaining in the church proved by their departure that they never were truly Christians."²⁴ What they object to is viewing the warning passages from that grid.²⁵ Warnings are given to true believers as the means by which God moves them to persevere.

Those who persevere are elect. Those who do not will not win the prize that is eternal life. Striving for eternal salvation is the key to the Christian life.

From their perspective, looking back at our former progress has little if any benefit in helping us to strive for the prize. Our goal is ahead of us, not behind us. No matter how well or poorly we have done in the past, we must do well in the future to make it into the kingdom. Fear of missing eternal salvation is the means by which we can gain it. Therefore, it is absolutely critical that we keep our eyes on the prize of final salvation.

Of course, as we shall discuss in more detail shortly, in their view everything about our eternal salvation is a gift of God. This includes intellectual assent, volitional commitment, an ongoing desire to please God, the strength and motivation to put forth the ardent effort, and the strength and desire to persevere in faith and good works.

All people should be urged to come to Christ and to exert ardent effort to persevere and thereby gain the prize of eternal salvation. Those who find themselves able to do so will get into the kingdom. Those who do not will discover that they are among the unfortunate ones for whom eternal salvation was never a possibility.

²³ Ibid., 331.

²⁴ Ibid., 152.

²⁵ Ibid., 29-35.

IV. ARDENT EFFORT NEEDED TO GAIN FINAL SALVATION

Schreiner and Caneday are much more open than most Reformed theologians in speaking of the need of effort and even “ardent effort” to gain eternal salvation. While others may speak of effort needed, they are quick to give disclaimers that our best efforts are flawed, that we may have times when we are away from the Lord to some degree, and that the efforts are always because of God.

These men give less disclaimers. They feel that the striving is itself a means for us to gain final salvation. Note these remarks:

We must run the race with dogged determination to obtain the prize of eternal life, and it takes remarkable discipline and training to make it to the end.²⁶

[Commenting on Philippians 2:12-13] Note he does not say, “You are saved. Now work for your reward, which is in addition to salvation.” He summons the Philippians to bring to accomplishment their salvation! Effort, toil and energy are all communicated in this phrase [“work out your salvation”]. We are to use all the resources at our disposal in order to be saved on the last day. We must obey, pray, resist the flesh and yield to the Spirit to inherit salvation. No theology is acceptable that diminishes this call to work out our salvation.²⁷

Since the writer [of Hebrews] portrays the Christian life as a race needing gutsy endurance and a training ground in which discipline is meted out, we are correct in saying that obtaining the eschatological prize takes ardent effort. There is no call to passivity here!²⁸

Here we find once again the authors’ biblical tension. It should be noted that at times they do give disclaimers that our ardent effort and all associated with it (commitment, obedience, faith, and works) are gifts of God. We now turn to a consideration of those disclaimers.

²⁶ Ibid., 314.

²⁷ Ibid., 315.

²⁸ Ibid., 313.

V. WORKS-SALVATION IS NOT AN ISSUE

Schreiner and Caneday do not feel their system is one of works-salvation. These men are Reformed theologians. If our efforts and works are all gifts of God then there is no room for merit or boasting or works-salvation.

Here are two examples of this type of disclaimer:

We must consciously and intentionally put these [sinful] desires to death in order to reach our eternal destiny. Such a teaching is not works-righteousness, for Paul informs us that conquering sin in this way is “by the Spirit.” We must summon our wills and make decisions to triumph over the flesh, yet ultimately the subjection of the flesh comes from the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁹

Saying that we must run to the end can scarcely be called works-righteousness, since such persevering faith is ultimately the gift of God!³⁰

Of course, if all this is a gift of God, then why do we need to give “ardent effort”?³¹ If this view were correct, then full effort would automatically bubble up from the elect whether they wanted it to or not.³² No matter how hard an elect person tried to suppress this desire, he would be unable to do so. Just as saving faith is simply implanted in them, so would all the things that are a part of it, including the ardent effort needed to obey.

I would think the authors’ answer is that we need to remember the tension of already-but-not-yet. If we delve into questions of how anyone might lack the desire or might need to will up the effort, we are guilty of trying to answer questions the Bible does not wish us to ask. We must keep the tension.

²⁹ Ibid., 300-301.

³⁰ Ibid., 314.

³¹ In response to a prepublication copy of this review, the authors wrote here, “Do you think ‘gift’ and ‘effort’ are contradictory?” In a sense, no. One may need to strive to enter by the narrow way (Luke 13:24). However, unlike the authors, I would say that any effort needed concerns learning the truth of the gospel. The idea that one must exert ardent effort *to persevere in faith and good works* in order to gain eternal salvation in my estimation directly contradicts the idea of a free gift. Compare Rom 4:4-5.

³² The authors responded to the prepublication copy in this way: “Automatically bubble up? God does not work his grace in us automatically.”

The authors have a second defense to the charge that they are proclaiming justification by works. They turn the charge back against the eternal rewards position. They write:

The first error [in interpreting “Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”] is to think that Jesus speaks of merit...Unfortunately Hodges imputes the notion of merit or “earning power” to Jesus’ call to be a disciple, a call that includes conditions or demands.³³

A footnote is given at this point in which they criticize Zane Hodges and Grace Evangelical Society by name:

Ironically, while Hodges and his associates with the Grace Evangelical Society argue that their view is the only one that avoids a system of works-righteousness, they introduce “merit theology” into the Christian life.³⁴

They back up this charge of “merit theology” by suggesting that the NT teaching on rewards as wages doesn’t really mean something which is earned.

VI. WAGES ARE NOT EARNED

I could find no discussion by Schreiner and Caneday on the word for reward, *misthos*.³⁵ It is the word used for *pay* in everyday Greek. However, once they do refer to the related word, *misthapodotes*, used only in Heb 11:6 (“He is a *rewarder*”). Here is what they say:

Though it is true that the word used in this verse literally means “one who pays wages” (*misthapodotes*), the author of Hebrews does not mean that we achieve the reward by meriting it.³⁶

And why is that? They go on to say that this is merely a figure of speech that is not intended to convey the idea of paying wages:

³³ *The Race*, 155-56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 156, n. 18.

³⁵ In addition to carefully reading the entire book and looking for references to “wages,” I consulted the subject index. Under “rewards, and wages,” the following pages are cited: 20, 90-92, 104-105. They confirm my contention that they never deal with *misthos* and *misthoō*. Essentially they assume their conclusion without mentioning or discussing the biblical evidence.

³⁶ *The Race*, 90.

While the employer pays wages out of indebtedness to the employee, God gives a reward to the believer purely out of grace, and the author of Hebrews certainly believes this (see, e.g., Heb 4:16; 12:15).³⁷

One might wonder whether the two verses they cite prove their point. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 12:15 says, "looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled." Neither verse says or implies that "God gives a reward to the believer purely out of grace."

The idea that rewards are unmerited gifts of grace is seemingly contradicted by Rom 4:4-5 and the many other uses of *misthos* and *misthoō* in the NT. Schreiner and Caneday do not discuss Rom 4:4-5 or other places in which these words occur.

Those words are used consistently in the sense of merited wages in the entire NT. So clearly there is merit, but not for justification.

Here are a few NT examples. The first two are the verb.

"A landowner...went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard" (Matt 20:1). "No one hired us" (Matt 20:7).

"Call the laborers and give them their wages" (Matt 20:8). "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7; 1 Tim 5:18). "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt" (Rom 4:4). "Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out" (Jas 5:4). "Great is your reward in heaven" (Matt 5:12). "He...shall receive a prophet's reward" (Matt 10:41). "Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name...he shall by no means lose his reward" (Mark 9:41). "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward" (1 Cor 3:14). "My reward is with Me" (Rev 22:12).

It is highly questionable, in light of the evidence, to argue that *misthos* does not refer to wages.

Let's consider the question of desire since it is such an integral part of this system of thought.

³⁷ Ibid., 91.

VII. THE PLACE OF GOD-GIVEN DESIRE IN OBEDIENCE

Schreiner and Caneday say that God gives the desire to obey Him. This is part of saving faith. Thus this desire stays with the elect person from the moment of his new birth until he dies. He cannot be without it, for God guarantees it.

At least that is what they suggest whenever they speak of desire—every time, that is, except for once. They seem to contradict themselves when they ask about the believer who on a given occasion does not have the desire to do right.

Say a believer has a desire to do wrong? Is it acceptable to do the wrong because the desire is missing? Does this mean I am not truly regenerate, for if I were, wouldn't I have the desire?

Here is how the authors respond. After saying, "We receive both the desire and the ability to keep his commands," they give this illustration:

One of us knows of a person who kept having sexual relations outside marriage; his excuse was, "God in his grace has not given me the desire to obey him. It would be legalistic of me to keep his commands without the desire." This is a prime example of going beyond the biblical tension. We are called on to work, to obey and to exert our energy. The biblical writers inform us, however, that the work and desiring that we do on God's behalf finally and ultimately come from him.³⁸

They do not see the problem their illustration raises. If desire is an infallible gift from God, then when it is absent God does not expect one to obey. Indeed, how could a person obey if God removed the desire and ability to obey? The authors indicated both before and after this illustration that the ability and desire are given together as a unit. Thus it would seem impossible for someone to lack the desire and yet have the ability to obey.

Indeed, one wonders how any believer could ever sin if saving faith includes both the desire and ability to obey and saving faith never stops. Would not saving faith have to come and go for believers to sin under this definition of saving faith?

The authors' answer is seemingly simple, yet quite confusing:

To believe is to engage in strict self-discipline, to compete in the good competition of faith, to run, to land blows on oneself, to look

³⁸ Ibid., 316.

to the Son of God for life, to eat of his flesh and to drink of his blood, to hear and follow his voice. All these and more provide contour and texture to our understanding of what faith is. At once these metaphors call us to act in obedient faith to the heavenward call of God in Christ Jesus and provide a standard by which we may know that our faith is authentic, though not perfect.³⁹

If faith by definition results in perseverance, then anyone who does not persevere did not have authentic faith in the first place. This is standard Reformed thought. However, the statement, “to believe is to engage in strict self discipline,” is unusual by Reformed standards.

The authors are convinced that believers must try their hardest in order to persevere and gain final salvation. Yet, if believers sometimes do not have the desire to do so, they should strive wholeheartedly for the prize anyway because this is necessary for them to make it into the kingdom. In other words, if the desire isn’t present, do your best anyway.⁴⁰

VIII. ASSURANCE IS AND IS NOT CERTAINTY

In light of what’s been said thus far, one might think that Schreiner and Caneday teach that absolute certainty of one’s final salvation is not possible prior to death. However, the truth is that they are sensitive to this issue and take a moderating position.

There are some aspects of their view of assurance with which *JOTGES* readers will strongly agree. And there are others with which they will have strong disagreement.

Before we consider a series of references on assurance from the authors, it is vital that we realize what they are seeking assurance of. While in one sense the focus of assurance is entrance into the kingdom of God, the primary focus is really whether one will persevere in faith and good works.⁴¹

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 140-41.

⁴⁰ The authors feel that “This is a less than fair representation of our view.” Yet I fail to see from the illustration given what is less than fair about my representation of what they wrote.

⁴¹ Notice in the quote immediately below (which ends with footnote #43) they equate “confidence and certainty about our status before God in the future” with “confidence that we shall finish the marathon in which we run.”

This is clear because when they discuss the role of God's promises in assurance, they start by saying:

The promises of God are of paramount importance because our confidence and certainty *about our status before God in the future* rests ultimately not on ourselves but on God himself. The fundamental reason we have confidence *that we shall finish the marathon in which we run* is not our strength, our godliness or our endurance. We are confident that we shall obtain our inheritance because God has promised that we shall do so.⁴²

The authors believe that perseverance in faith and good works is necessary to enter the kingdom. Assurance "about our status before God in the future" is parallel to assurance "that we shall finish the marathon." So no one can be sure he will be saved on the last day unless he is also sure he will persevere. How that is possible if even the apostle Paul was not sure of his perseverance (1 Cor 9:24-27) is unclear to say the least.

The following is a survey of their comments on assurance:

- Believers suffer from doubts, temptations, depression and uncertainty on occasion...Assurance is not a static entity, it can wax and wane for believers...Overall there is more certainty about our status with God as we run the race.⁴³
- Those who claim assurance of faith but fail to produce good works contradict their profession by their lives. There is no warrant for thinking that they truly belong to the people of God.⁴⁴
- There is no warrant for assurance if one is doing the works of the flesh and living contrary to the will of God.⁴⁵
- Failure to manifest good works demonstrates that our faith is false and that we are not really believers.⁴⁶
- All believers must preserve the tension between not relying on their good works as a basis for salvation and the necessity of good works to be saved on the final day. Similarly, the biblical tension regarding assurance must be preserved. Assurance is

⁴² *The Race*, 277, italics mine.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

integral to saving faith, yet assurance is also strengthened and confirmed by walking in godliness. Whether such a tension is “inherently unstable” is debatable, for no logical contradiction is involved here. Human beings are prone to upset the balance and emphasize one side of the tension above the other, yet the gospel calls us to live in such a way that we preserve the tension between assurance being integral to faith and the need to confirm our assurance by keeping God’s commands.⁴⁷

- Those who desire assurance but reject the means by which assurance is maintained call into question whether they really want assurance, since they have separated assurance from the means by which it is preserved. The Grace Evangelical Society fails to grasp the distinctions we are introducing, and hence they merge the view proposed by us and Berkouwer with the popular retrospective view and the introspective Puritan view.⁴⁸
- Assurance is not an abstract entity that is ours regardless of what we do. That would contradict a massive amount of biblical teaching. No, our assurance in the faith is strengthened as we continue to run the race, persevering until the end to receive the prize.⁴⁹

Yet contrast those comments with these fascinating comments about the dangers of reading the Puritans:

The Puritans were right in forging a connection between assurance and the fruit of the Spirit (more on this below). Yet if the fruit of the Spirit becomes the fulcrum by which we discern our relationship with God, an unhealthy and destructive introspection is almost sure to follow. Despite the many strengths of the Puritans, those who become immersed in reading them today need to be wary of becoming excessively introspective and self-focused. The reason for this is that the promises of God may no longer be the fulcrum for our assurance in faith. Biblical assurance rests fundamentally on God and his promises.⁵⁰

This seems to contradict most of what they have to say about assurance. The solution is to see this as a disclaimer. While they

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 308-309.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.

repeatedly say that our works are essential to have assurance, nonetheless they see a danger here. In their minds they feel that the Puritans were too introspective and too concerned about whether or not they would persevere. In addition, the Puritans ceased to see the promises of God as the primary means of assurance.

Of course, despite their statement here, one fails to see why any sensible person would not be highly introspective and concerned under their system. And why would someone under their system look to God's promises as the primary basis of assurance, when they repeatedly say our works are essential?

Their view of assurance can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ Assurance has three grounds.⁵¹
- ▶ The most important ground of assurance is the promises.⁵²
- ▶ Good works are objective.⁵³
- ▶ Good works "strengthen and confirm" assurance.⁵⁴
- ▶ Doubts result even when things are going well.⁵⁵
- ▶ We can't know the spiritual condition of living lapsed believers.⁵⁶
- ▶ Believers who have died in a lapsed condition do not get into the kingdom.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Ibid., 276-77.

⁵² Ibid., 17.

⁵³ Ibid., 303.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 296. See also pp. 199, 297, 300. Of course, the GES *Affirmation of Belief* says that good works have a secondary, confirmatory value to our assurance. We might hope that is what Schreiner and Caneday mean. However, they make it crystal clear that good works do not merely confirm what we already know to be true. They *strengthen* and confirm it. Certainty cannot be strengthened. Thus they appear to mean something like this: *the more good works we see in our lives the greater likelihood there is that we will persevere and enter the kingdom*. Unfortunately, as they make clear, no amount of works can give one certainty that he will persevere and enter the kingdom.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 297.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 309.

⁵⁷ Ibid. "We do not believe it is our role to say one way or the other whether a lapsed brother or sister is saved!" At this point a footnote

IX. THE REWARDS VIEW ENCOURAGES PASSIVITY AND LAXITY

Near the end of the book the authors directly attack the rewards view. They begin:

To be faithful to Scripture we must preserve the biblical tension between our responsibility to exercise faith and run the race, and the truth that any faith and work we have is a gift of God. If we exclude our role as human beings [to continue to exercise faith and run the race], we encourage a passivity and a laxity that is contrary to the biblical calls to exertion and effort that we have been investigating.⁵⁸

What view *encourages a passivity and a laxity*? The authors now specify the rewards view as the culprit! Commenting on Phil 2:12-13, they say:

Note that he does not say, “you are saved. Now work for your reward, which is in addition to salvation.” He summons the Philippians to bring to accomplishment their salvation. Effort, toil and energy are all communicated in this phrase. We are to use all the resources at our disposal in order to be saved on the last day.

appears which reads, “Charles C. Ryrie falls into this trap. He agrees that believers are imperfect and then extends the argument from there, asking ‘how much’ believers can sin and still be saved. He implies that we can sin to a considerable extent and still belong to the people of God...But the very attempt to provide assurance to those who are straying is misguided, nor is it our role to pronounce definitively on those who are straying.” On the next page (p. 310) they strongly imply that those who fail to repent of their lapsed state will not enter the kingdom. “The Scriptures call on those who are wandering to repent and to turn again in order to be saved! Such an admonition does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that these people were not saved before!” At the end of that paragraph they conclude, “We do not know what their destiny is as lapsed ones, because we do not know how they will respond to the admonition [to repent and turn again in order to be saved].” The following remarks about assurance and lapsing are quite powerful: “There is no warrant for assurance if sin is dominant in our lives. We maintain our assurance by continuing to run in the race...Assurance is not an abstract entity that is ours regardless of what we do” (p. 311).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 314-15.

We must obey, pray, resist the flesh and yield to the Spirit to inherit salvation. No theology is acceptable that diminishes this call to work out our salvation.⁵⁹

At this point the authors criticize Zane Hodges for suggesting that this and other passages that call for works must be rewards passages.⁶⁰ There can be no doubt that the theology that they find “unacceptable” is the rewards view.

This came as a bit of surprise to me. They do not give such an appraisal of any of the other theological positions. The loss-of-salvation and the tests-of-genuineness views are never called “unacceptable,” nor are they singled out as promoting “a passivity and a laxity.”

X. HOW DOES THIS THEOLOGY IMPACT EVANGELISM?

Since this book is addressing a vital soteriological issue, it is valid to wonder about the evangelistic implications of the view expressed. Unfortunately, the authors do not give much insight here. I found no mention of evangelism anywhere in the book. Only in one place, mentioned below, did the authors give much of an indication of how they might evangelize:

In examining the book of Acts it is clear that conversion, repentance, faith and baptism are alternate and overlapping ways of describing coming to Christ for salvation (e.g., Acts 2:38, 41; 3:19, 26; 4:4; 5:14, 31; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18, 42; 10:43; 11:17-18, 21; 13:12, 39, 48; 14:1, 9, 15, 27; 15:7, 9, 11, 19; 16:31-34; 17:30, 34; 18:8, 27; 20:21; 24:24; 26:18, 20; 28:27). We do not need to detain ourselves long over these terms but will make a brief comment on conversion and repentance. Both of these words denote something humans do in response to hearing the gospel, namely, turn from sins and turn toward God. Both repentance and conversion depict the revolutionary alteration that has transpired in Christians.⁶¹

Several things are remarkable about this statement. First, there are four “alternate and overlapping ways of describing coming to Christ for salvation.” Does this mean, for example, that baptism, one of the four

⁵⁹ Ibid., 315.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 314-15.

⁶¹ Ibid., 64-65.

items they mention by name, is a “way of describing coming to Christ for salvation”? It would seem so.

Indeed, at another time the authors indicate that regeneration occurs at the point of baptism:

Titus 3:5 describes the new birth of Christians in terms of “the washing of rebirth,” *indicating that we should not divide baptism from regeneration.*⁶²

At this point a footnote appears which reads, “We believe this is an argument that points to believer’s baptism.”⁶³ I’ll say. Of course, is it really *believer’s* baptism if regeneration precedes faith (as they argue) and if one must be baptized before he can be reborn?

Since these men are both Baptists who indicate they believe in “believer’s baptism,” maybe they mean something else by their comments on Titus 3:5 and the above quote on the four alternate ways of describing coming to Christ for salvation. However, that is what their words seem to suggest. One would think how one comes to Christ deserves much more explanation.

Second, they are not only “alternate,” but also “overlapping ways of describing coming to Christ for salvation.” Again, more explanation would be helpful. In what sense can four things be alternate ways and also overlapping ways of describing coming to Christ?

Third, if repentance and conversion are “ways of describing coming to Christ for salvation,” then how can they also “depict the revolutionary alteration that has transpired in Christians”?

The authors do say that regeneration precedes faith (“God’s regenerating work precedes faith, love and a righteous life”).⁶⁴ However, that still does not explain how there can be any conditions to regeneration.

While the authors do not give much detail here, they say enough to allow us to draw some conclusions regarding how they would evangelize.

They would call people to come to Christ. How they would do that is not clear.

Their evangelism would surely include telling people the warnings of Scripture. They would warn the possible new convert that only those who endure to the end will be saved. They would be careful to tell them

⁶² Ibid., 76, italics mine.

⁶³ Ibid., n. 22.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 60.

of the already-but-not-yet tension, for only by persevering can anyone enter the kingdom of God. The key, in their minds, is to call people to exert ardent effort to persevere so that they might win the prize of eternal salvation.

XI. CONCLUSION

I really like two things about this book. First, it makes it clear that the theological grid of the Free Grace Movement is quite distinct. We alone see eternal rewards as the prize. Arminians and many Calvinists see the prize as eternal salvation from hell.

Why would I like to be singled out as holding a unique view of soteriology? The reason is that I want people to understand what we are saying. This book represents our view fairly, with the exception of the claim that our view promotes laxity and passivity. I imagine not a few people who read this book will get and read copies of books from our perspective. Some will likely be won over to our position through this book.

Second, I love the subject of this book. It talks about striving to win the prize. That is my aim in life, as it was Paul's (1 Cor 9:24-27). While I do not agree with the thesis of the book—that the prize is eternal salvation and the warnings are the means to get us to win eternal salvation—I do agree with the subject of the book. There is a prize to be won. Calling people's attention to it is a very good thing. Hopefully discerning readers will see it is the rewards position that best harmonizes the teaching of Scripture on this subject.

Finally, I appreciated the tone of this book. Schreiner and Caneday are not vitriolic. There is almost no bombast here.⁶⁵ That is unfortunately not the case in some of the books promoting Lordship Salvation.

I recommend this book, especially for pastors, deacons, elders, Sunday school teachers, and anyone who teaches the Bible.

⁶⁵ There are, however, a few times when the authors' irenic spirit seems to evaporate. For example, note these inaccurate and offensive words concerning Hodges's explanation of the Rich Young Ruler passage, "It is telling that Zane Hodges does not direct his readers to the fact that kingdom of God, eternal life and saved are used as alternate expressions of the same reality. Instead, he introduces the idea of belief from John's gospel *to silence what the text says*" (p. 81, italics added). Compare also p. 330 ("this *gambit fails as well,*" italics added).

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL IMPACT OF AUGUSTINE'S CHANGE FROM PREMILLENNIALISM TO AMILLENNIALISM: PART ONE

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I. INTRODUCTION

In a recent article¹ we introduced the concept of "Spread Sheet Theology" by suggesting that this might be an alternate way to describe Systematic Theology. A good system is unified, comprehensive, consistent, and everything "fits." That means if we make a significant change in one part of the system, it may well affect other parts of the system. We made the claim that Augustine's choice to do away with premillennial eschatology is a case in point. That is, when Augustine became amillennial, this major change in his eschatology affected other parts of his theology, namely his soteriology. The purpose of this study will be to demonstrate how Augustine's change to amillennialism still has ripples in soteriology today. In order to do this, we will develop the study in four parts offered in two installments: the Eschatology of Augustine, the Soteriology of Augustine, the Soteriology of John Calvin, and the Soteriology of Today. Admittedly, each of the subtitles could contain volumes. What we are trying to do in this study is to show how Augustine's change in eschatology affected not only his soteriology, but the soteriology of Western Christianity from the Medieval Period until today.

Though pretribulational, premillennial eschatology is often criticized as a "recent" development in theology, such is simply not the case. That chiliasm was the norm in eschatology up until roughly A.D. 400 is no

¹David R. Anderson, "Regeneration: A Crux Interpretum" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 2000): 43-65.

debate among church historians.² So we can safely say the church fathers were premillennial. But were they pretribulationist?

The primary defense for a pretribulationist approach to the rapture is the early church's view of imminency.³ If one is premillennial and believes in a rapture such as that described in 1 Thessalonians 4, then the only chronological option for this rapture which is consistent with imminency is a rapture before the beginning of the Tribulation.⁴ Thus, a stronger argument can be made for the early Fathers being

² In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, 7 and 8, Justin Martyr (d. 165) explains: "I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem, as was announced by the Prophets Ezechiel, Isaias and the others" (italics mine).

The great apologist Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 200) in his anti-Gnostic work, *Adversus haereses*, gives evidence of his belief in a Tribulation which would precede Christ's millennial reign (V, 28, 3):

For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded. . . . For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years. . . . [When this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who are following him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day.

Interestingly, Irenaeus was known as the "man of Tradition" because of his teaching on the Apostolic Tradition, and he claimed to teach only what he had heard as having been proclaimed from the beginning.

³ A belief in imminency is obvious from the *Didachè*: "Watch over your life; your lamps must not go out, nor your loins be ungirded; on the contrary, be ready. You do not know the hour in which Our Lord is coming." And Clement (*I Clement*, XXIII) exhorts the Corinthians: "Take a vine: first it drops its leaves; then a shoot comes, then a leaf, then a flower, after that the sour fruit, then the fully ripe grapes. You see that in a short time the fruit of the tree reaches maturity. In truth his will shall be fulfilled quickly and suddenly. . . . He shall come quickly and not linger, and the Lord will come suddenly to his temple. . ."

⁴ As the quote from Irenaeus above demonstrates, those who believed in a literal Millennium on earth also believed in a literal Tribulation, which would immediately precede this Millennium, as described by Daniel and Revelation. If the rapture were to occur any time during this Tribulation, then any concept of

pretribulational and premillennial than any other eschatological position with regard to Christ's Parousia. With the notable exception of Origen of Alexandria, this was the prevailing approach to eschatology when Augustine came on the scene.

II. AUGUSTINE'S ESCHATOLOGY

It may shock some to realize that Augustine was not only premillennial⁵ in his early eschatology, but he was also dispensational. Of course, if we understand Spread Sheet Theology and Dispensationalism as a system (spread sheet) of theology, this should not be a surprise. A literal Millennium on earth is of the essence of dispensational theology. Augustine held to a traditional seven-age (dispensational) model which coordinated periods in biblical history with humanity's spiritual progress toward redemption. The initial five stages correlated to OT history and were demarcated by Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, and the Exile.⁶ The two NT dispensations, according to Augustine and practically all dispensationalists, were the Church Age and the Millennial Kingdom, "the Sabbath Rest" of the saints on earth.⁷

But three factors converged in northern Africa which influenced Augustine to take a new approach to the Millennium. The first was his revulsion over the bacchanal celebrations of the Donatists. The Roman Catholics were the intruders in North Africa, the "Bible Belt" of the Mediterranean world. They were the minority right up through the fourth century. But the Donatist Church, which separated from Rome over

imminency associated with Christ's Second Coming would be destroyed, since both Daniel and Revelation tell us how many days are in the Tribulation. If the rapture took place during the Tribulation, one could easily calculate the exact day of His Coming. But this would contradict Christ's statement that no one knows the day or the hour except His Father.

⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 20.7,1; see also G. Folliet, "La typologie du sabbat chez Saint Augustin. Son interpretation millénariste entre 386 et 400," *REAug* 2 (1956): 371-90.

⁶ Though dispensationalists disagree somewhat on the different administrative periods (economies) in the OT, there is general agreement that a dispensation is a distinguishable economy in God's administration of His redemptive plan for mankind.

⁷ Augustine, *Sermon* 259, 2. See also Paula Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991): 163.

the issue of rebaptism of the *traditores* who succumbed to the pressure from Diocletian to burn their holy books, had the upper hand. And they were fervent. The Donatists were the “church of the martyrs,” the faithful who would not compromise no matter how fierce the persecution. They honored their dead by burying them in wet plaster so as to preserve every detail of the body’s outline—all the better to anticipate the resurrection of said body to reign in the physical Millennium to come.

But it was the drunken feasts celebrated by the “cult of the dead” which offended Augustine. He associated this kind of behavior with the Jewish apocalyptic emphasis on grand feasts of celebration during the kingdom of the saints on earth. His platonic leanings influenced him to view such materialistic gorging with a jaundiced eye. Augustine’s revulsion at his own pre-Christian debauchery left him with an ascetic bent. For example, married men who indulged in sexual pleasure after procreation were guilty of venial sins.⁸ For Augustine this revelry for the dead was *carnalis ingurgitatio*. Through Plato’s eyes he understood the material flesh to be flawed, imperfect, defective—especially when compared to the spiritual world with its perfect forms and ideals. The human spirit is tortured in its carnal prison; it longs to be set free. The pilgrim can hasten its release by fleshly self-denial. Therefore, along with his growing disdain for the carnal *laetitia* (joy) of the saints was an increasing desire to understand the Millennium in a spiritual instead of a material light.

A second factor which frustrated the Bishop of Hippo was the growing excitement of millenarians as they saw A.D. 500 approaching. The seven days of creation from Genesis 1 were used as figures for many concepts, including the “cosmic week.”⁹ The seven days of creation were combined with Ps 90:4 and 2 Pet 3:8 (a day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day) and the thousand years of Revelation 20 to establish the ages of the world. Just as the Lord had created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, so the world would exist for six ages of one thousand years each, but would find rest during the seventh age of a thousand years when Christ returned to rule from Jerusalem. Therefore, one could figure out when Christ would return simply by figuring out the age of mankind.

⁸ Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, 1.3.

⁹ J. Daniélou, “La typologie millenariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitif,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 2 (1948):1-16.

Hippolytus and Julius Africanus (early third century) calculated that Jesus was born in the 5,500th year since creation. Obviously, then, He would return to set up His Kingdom in A.D. 500. This date did not stir up the readers in the days of Julius and Hippolytus, but as A.D. 400 rolled around, anticipation of the coming Millennium added to the ardor and excitement of the Donatists in their celebrations. Augustine's anti-materialism motivated him to deflate this millennial balloon of material emphasis. He could do this if he could use the Scriptures to prove that the Millennium was spiritual instead of physical, and if he could discredit the "cosmic week" chronology so widely accepted in his day. And this leads us to the third factor which combined with the other two to enable Augustine to erase millenarianism from the main stream of Roman Catholic doctrine. It was the hermeneutics of Tyconius.

Origen of Alexandria is often credited with influencing Augustine to use allegory as a tool to do away with a literal, physical Millennium. This is not the case. It is true, of course, that Origen was a scholar of such immense giftedness and influence that his allegorizing of Scripture became a popular approach to interpretation. But his influence was nothing new when Augustine became a Christian. Rather it was the influence of a lay theologian named Tyconius, who first touched Augustine in the 390s. According to Paula Fredriksen,

... it is Tyconius who stands at the source of a radical transformation of African—and thus, ultimately, of Latin—theology, and whose reinterpretation of his culture's separatist and millenarian traditions provided the point of departure for what is most brilliant and idiosyncratic in Augustine's own theology. And it is Tyconius, most precisely, whose own reading of John's Apocalypse determined the Western church's exegesis for the next eight hundred years.¹⁰

The primary tool of Tyconius was not allegory; it was typology. He used typology to avoid the ahistoricism of allegory while insisting that the time of the End could not be known. Through the use of the seven rules of Tyconius¹¹ Augustine was able to turn numbers into symbols, to

¹⁰ Fredriksen, 157.

¹¹ Ibid., 157-58. Rule 1: *mysticae*—compositional principles encoded within the text of Scripture which obscure or hide its meaning; Rule 2: *de Domini corpore bipertito*—the body of the Lord, the church, is divided between both the good and the wicked; Rule 3: *de promissis et lege*—the Bible contains both

bind Satan in the sixth age of a thousand years rather than the seventh, and to have saints rule with Christ spiritually in the sixth age rather than the seventh. The miracles of the saints proved that they were reigning with Christ in the Church Age, the sixth dispensation. He found the Antichrist, Gog and Magog, and the first resurrection—all in the age in which he lived.

Augustine eschewed any sort of *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation History) which was linear. For him it was a tragic waste to try to superimpose a time line on God's redemptive plan, if for no other reason than the fact that Christ Himself did not know when it would end. God's medium of salvation was not history, but rather the individual. Individuals will be raised with corporeal bodies, but these bodies will live in the heavens, not in some kingdom on earth. There will be no food, no procreation, no social relations in God's kingdom. Instead, perfected beings in their thirties will stand around gazing at God. What, then, is the seventh age of a thousand years for Augustine? Although the first six ages were indeed historical, the seventh age is the saints themselves: "After this present age God will rest, as it were, on the seventh day; and he will cause us, who are the seventh day, to find our rest in him."¹²

The success of Tyconius and Augustine can be measured by the Roman Catholic commentary tradition, which followed their lead step

law and promise, the former arousing faith in the latter among the saints; Rule 4: *de specie et genere*—simple reference to particular persons and events can convey general truths; Rule 5: *de temporibus*—numbers in Scripture defy calculation because they are elastic with an infinite number of interpretations; Rule 6: *de recapitulatione*—what appears to be sequence may actually be recapitulation; Rule 7: *de diabolo et eius corpore*—references to the devil in Scripture might actually be referring to his unrighteous followers. With these rules Tyconius could assign historical value but obscure the eschatological significance of the millenarian/apocalyptic passages in the Bible. It is easy to see the influence of these rules in Augustine and subsequent eschatology throughout the centuries of church history: 1) "Future figures" like Gog and the Son of Man appear in present time rather than the future; 2) Millenarian references can be recapitulatory rather than sequential (Revelation 20); 3) Persecution does not identify the righteous of the Great Tribulation since the good and wicked coexist in the present church age; 4) Apocalyptic numbers of former significance (1,000; 144,000; 1260 days; 42 months) are stretched any number of ways with vertiginous ease; 5) Realized eschatology.

¹² Augustine, *City of God*, 22.0.5.

by step. By the time the Reformers appear on the stage of history, eschatology was a dead issue. No scholar had avowed millenarianism for centuries. But the influence of Augustine reached far beyond the eschatological. His most profound influence may have been soteriological. But before we can assess his influence in the soteriology of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Reformers and beyond, we must first understand how his eschatological change affected his own soteriology.

III. AUGUSTINE'S SOTERIOLOGY

Two salient features of Augustine's soteriology are standard fair in any text book discussion on this most influential of Church Fathers. His approach to the depravity of man emasculated man's ability to pull himself up by his own bootstraps to the portals of heaven. Without God's grace it would be impossible for anyone to be eternally saved. Total depravity and human ability stood as antipodes in the soteriological debates, but grace stood out as the corollary of depravity. Depravity underscored the exigency of grace. God's grace was man's only hope for eternal salvation. For these Siamese truths both Roman Catholics and Protestants are indebted to Augustine.

In centuries to come the differences would arise from disagreements over grace. How was God's grace to be obtained? Could one deposit of grace open the doors of heaven to a fallen sinner, or were daily deposits throughout one's life required? Could salvific grace be earned, or was it completely unmeritorious? Could venerable saints like the Virgin Mary also dispense God's grace, or was saving grace the proprietary property of Almighty God alone? And so it goes.

Among these discussions on obtaining God's grace it is often pointed out that Augustine's scant knowledge of Greek caused him to misunderstand *dikaioō*, translating it in its present infinitive form, "to make righteous,"¹³ as opposed to the defining truth of the Reformers that this word meant "to declare righteous." The distinction was enough to cause schism in Western Christianity. Whereas the former meaning signified a change of *character*, the latter meaning referred to a change of *standing*. "To make righteous" looked to one's experience in life, but "to declare righteous" looked to the court room of heaven. The

¹³ Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 45.

temporal significance of the distinction in meanings was monumental. Augustine saw justification (the making of righteous character) as a life-long effort, where as Luther understood that one could be “declared righteous” in God’s court at a moment in time.

Initially, the forensic view of justification (“to declare righteous”) was not illumination given to Martin Luther. His issue when he tacked his ninety-five theses to the door at Wittenburg was the sale of indulgences. It was his fellow colleague and language teacher, Philip Melancthon, who persuaded Luther of the truth and implications of forensic righteousness some ten years after the Reformation officially began (1517). But when Luther did understand the significance of “court room” justification, he penned a truth perhaps no one since Paul himself clearly understood: *simul iustus et peccator* (just and a sinner at the same time). This apparent contradiction—that one could be declared righteous (justified) in his position or standing before God, but still be sinful in his character and condition in his temporal body—was a truth never comprehended by Augustine. He was convinced that the character of Christ needed to be infused into the character of the sinner from regeneration at water baptism (usually of infants) until death in order for the person to be “made righteous” (justified) enough to enter God’s heaven. Even the vast majority of God’s elect would not pass muster, so they would be consigned to Purgatory until the final vestiges of sin could be eliminated from their character. Only then could they march confidently through heaven’s gates. So, for Augustine justification was a life-long process. In fact, Purgatory was a provision of God for those in whom the process had not been completed. These elements of Augustine’s soteriology have been sifted through by more scholars than we can number.

However, the connection between Augustine’s understanding of justification and his understanding of eschatology has not, to my knowledge, been previously explored. As we have already seen, Augustine’s exposure to the hermeneutics of Tyconius occurred in the early 390s. By A.D. 400 Augustine had already become a variation of what we would call today amillennial (no literal, physical thousand year reign of Christ on earth). He had also set his sights to destroy millenarianism in Western Christianity. Yet the vast majority of his writings occurred post A.D. 400. Almost all of his writings pertaining to soteriology were written after this point. And in the soteriological writings of Augustine, one verse has center stage. This verse is practically the

point of departure for Augustine's understanding of soteriology. It occurs in his writings more times than John 3:16 or Eph 2:8-9 or any verse or passage from Romans 3-8. What verse is this? It is none other than Matt 24:13—"But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

Now in his early writings Augustine understood the meaning of "saved" in the Olivet Discourse to refer to physical salvation. In one of his early sermons he says:

"And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." . . . If, saith He, the war of the Romans against the city had prevailed further, all the Jews had perished (for by "no flesh" here, He meaneth no Jewish flesh), . . . But whom doth He here mean by the elect? The believers that were shut up in the midst of them. For that Jews may not say that because of the gospel, and the worship of Christ, these ills took place, He showeth, that so far from the believers being the cause, if it had not been for them, all had perished utterly. For if God had permitted the war to be protracted, not so much as a remnant of the Jews had remained, but lest those of them who had become believers should perish together with the unbelieving Jews, He quickly put down the fighting, and gave an end to the war. Therefore He saith, "But for the elect's sake they shall be shortened."¹⁴

Here he equates "saved" with not perishing physically. But in all his writings after the early stage he equates "saved" with eternal, spiritual salvation. There are over 250 such references to persevering unto the end (of one's physical life) in order to be saved (eternally). Here are a couple of references to clarify his thought: "Who could be ordained to eternal life save by the gift of perseverance? And when we read, 'He that shall persevere unto the end shall be saved;' with what salvation but eternal?"¹⁵ In another treatise he reiterates the same thought: "Who could be ordained to eternal life save by the gift of perseverance? And when we read, 'He that shall persevere unto the end shall be saved;' with what salvation but eternal?"¹⁶ No longer does Augustine understand "saved" in this context to refer to physical salvation. Now it is spiritual salvation.

¹⁴ Augustine, *Homily 75*.

¹⁵ Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, 5.10.

¹⁶ Augustine, *On Perseverance*, 4.10.

For Augustine Matt 24:13 becomes the *sine qua non* of eternal salvation. One can genuinely believe, but not be elect: "It is, indeed, to be wondered at, and greatly to be wondered at, that to some of His own children—whom He has regenerated in Christ—to whom He has given faith, hope, and love, God does not give perseverance also . . ." ¹⁷ One can be regenerated, but not be elect: "Some are regenerated, but not elect, since they do not persevere; . . ." ¹⁸ The only way to validate one's election was to persevere until the end of his physical life on earth. This was the ultimate sign of the elect:

We, then, call men elected, and Christ's disciples, and God's children, because they are to be so called whom, being regenerated, we see to live piously; but they are then truly what they are called if they shall abide in that on account of which they are so called. But if they have not perseverance,—that is, if they continue not in that which they have begun to be,—they are not truly called what they are called and are not; for they are not this in the sight of Him to whom it is known what they are going to be,—that is to say, from good men, bad men. ¹⁹

Of course, with this approach to soteriology Augustine did not think anyone could know that he was elect until he died. No matter how righteous and pious a life the believer might be living today, he could always fall away from the faith before he died (1 Cor 10:12). Such a falling away would prove that this former believer was never elect to begin with, and it would also prove that any assurance derived from the righteousness of his former life was false assurance indeed. No one can be certain until death:

Therefore it is uncertain whether any one has received this gift so long as he is still alive. For if he fall before he dies, he is, of course, said not to have persevered; and most truly is it said. How, then, should he be said to have received or to have had perseverance who has not persevered? ²⁰

Can the connection between Augustine's change in eschatology and his soteriology be made? It should be obvious. As a pretribulational,

¹⁷ Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, 5.18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.22.

²⁰ Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, 5.1.

premillennial dispensationalist Augustine would understand the salvation of Matt 24:13 in a physical sense, especially when two previous uses of "the end" (24:3, 6) and an immediately subsequent use (24:14) both refer to "the end of the age," not the end of one's life. But when Augustine changed his eschatology, that is, when he negated any literal, physical Millennium on earth, which would be preceded by a time of Tribulation such as the world has never seen nor shall ever see again (Matt 24:21), then his options for understanding Matt 24:13 were narrowed considerably. No longer could "saved" have a physical meaning, and no longer could "the end" mean the end of the age. The only interpretive option open to him was a spiritual one, so he understood the verse to mean only those believers who persevere in their Christian lives until the end of their physical lives will be able to go to heaven (saved).

With this understanding of Matt 24:13 as the driving force behind his soteriology, Augustine also had reason to believe that justification must be a life-long process. No one could know if he were justified until his physical death, since no one could know if he would persevere in the Christian faith and practice until his physical death. Thus, until today members of the RCC have no assurance that they will go to heaven when they die. There is never any knowledge if their life of perseverance is actually good enough to be accepted by God.

One consequence of this approach to soteriology is a life of self-denial and asceticism so as to help ensure that the believer has not been seduced from the straight and narrow by the sirens of this world. Such self-denial then becomes a requirement for eternal salvation. As Augustine said, "Self-denial of all sorts, if one perseveres to the end of his life, will bring salvation."²¹ If one loves his wife, parents, or children more than Christ, he is not elect.²² To the unbiased observer this kind of "self-denial salvation" is none other than a works approach to eternal life. But no, Augustine solves the apparent contradiction between self-denial and grace by falling back on verses like Phil 2:12-13 to prove that the power to persist comes from God, not man.²³ Hence, perseverance to the end is a product of God's grace, since He is the one who graciously

²¹ Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*, 5.9.

²² Augustine, *City of God*, 21.26.

²³ Augustine, *Homily 8; On the Gift of Perseverance*, 33.

gives a baptized, regenerate believer the power and the desire to do His good pleasure.

Of course, Augustine is still left with a conundrum. Why is it that God graciously gives some baptized, regenerate believers the gift of perseverance to the end but does not give it to others? Now there is only one fall back position left in this labyrinth of soteriological sophistry: it is a mystery. When the theologian can transform obvious contradictions into mysteries, one can easily explain the inexplicable, solve the insoluble, and unscrew the inscrutable! No wonder Philip Schaff concludes that the soteriology of Augustine is both gloomy and full of contradictions.²⁴

The point here is that a change in eschatology has effected a change in soteriology. Changing from premillennial to amillennial caused Augustine to reinterpret Matt 24:13. Completely ignoring the three near references to “the end” which undeniably refer to the end of the age (vv. 3, 6, 14), he chose to interpret “the end” as the end of one’s physical life and “saved” as eternal salvation. With this understanding only those baptized, regenerate believers who remained faithful to Christ until the end of their lives were elect. Faulty biblical theology can lead to faulty systematic theology.

But one might say, “So what? Augustine wrote sixteen hundred years ago. He may have influenced the RCC, but the Reformers broke away from the RCC. My legacy is Reformed, not Roman Catholic.” To which we should reply, “Ah, my friend, you do not understand the influence of Augustine upon the Reformed tradition.” In our second installment of this study we will examine how the change in Augustine’s “Spread Sheet” affected the soteriology of John Calvin and the soteriology of modern Christianity.

²⁴ Philip Schaff, *St. Augustin: Confession, Letters, Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 1, *Early Church Fathers*, CD-Rom (Dallas: Galaxie Software, 1999), Prolegomena.

**DOES ANYONE REALLY KNOW
IF THEY ARE SAVED?
A SURVEY OF THE CURRENT VIEWS ON
ASSURANCE WITH A MODEST
PROPOSAL**

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Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
— Fanny Crosby

I. INTRODUCTION

At a symposium honoring Dale Moody, I. Howard Marshall recited the old saw that Arminians know they are saved but are afraid they cannot keep it, while Calvinists know they cannot lose their salvation but are afraid they do not have it.² Aside from being witty, this highlights the two components of the question about assurance. First, is it possible to know absolutely or even confidently that one is saved, and second, is it possible for those who currently believe they are saved to have assurance that they will remain in a state of grace until the day of redemption? It is more than just a little ironic that though they travel different routes, many Arminians and Calvinists arrive basically at the same answer—assurance is based on the evidence of sanctification.³ Michael Eaton points to the 19th century preacher, Asahel Nettleton, as

¹ This paper was presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Southwest Regional Meeting on March 2, 2002 at Criswell College in Dallas.

² I. Howard Marshall, "The Problem of Apostasy in New Testament Theology," *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, 3rd ed. (London: Paternoster, 1995), 267.

³ Both Marshall and D. A. Carson make this observation. See D. A. Carson, "Reflections on Christian Assurance," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 21. Carson states, "Thus at their worst, the two approaches meet in strange and sad ways."

a good example of this odd state of affairs when he quotes Nettleton who stated, "The most that I have ventured to say respecting myself is, that I think it possible I may get to heaven."⁴ Words perhaps expected from an Arminian, but Nettleton was a Calvinist.

Recently, Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday presented an updated version of the provocative position set forth earlier by Louis Berkhof and G. C. Berkouwer. They attempt to reconcile the biblical passages that promise unconditional assurance with passages that warn of divine judgment (particularly the five warning passages in the Book of Hebrews) by positing "that adhering to the warnings is the means by which salvation is obtained on the final day."⁵ The believer's salvation is not merely manifested by perseverance, but rather, eschatologically speaking, a believer actually is saved by perseverance. However, Schreiner and Caneday deny that the elect will apostatize, claiming that the warning passages are the means by which God has chosen to preserve the elect. The means-of-salvation position, as they call it, seems to be, as a practical matter, a melding of Arminian and Calvinist soteriology.⁶ Critics respond that if they are correct then perhaps we should be honest enough to admit to our Roman Catholic counterparts that the Council of Trent was right after all.

This paper will first address the two main questions about assurance with a brief survey of the proposed answers. Second, additional attention will be given to the means-of-salvation position of Schreiner and Caneday,

⁴ Cited by Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 3.

⁵ Thomas Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and a Proposal," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (Spring 1998), 53. See Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 1958), 88-124; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 1996), 548. John Piper takes a similar position in *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 231-59.

⁶ Hicks uses this point to argue that the respective positions of the Arminian and the Calvinist on the economy of redemption are essentially the same and that a truce, or at least the calling of a draw, between the two sides is in order. See John Mark Hicks, "Election and Security: An Impossible Impasse?" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, CO, Nov 14-16, 2001), 12-17.

which is sure to be the topic of much discussion in evangelical circles. Third, it will be contended that, though Schreiner and Caneday have made a positive contribution to the discussion about assurance, a variation of the tests-of-genuineness position best explains the tension between the biblical texts that assure and those that admonish.

II. HOW DOES ONE KNOW THAT HE IS GENUINELY SAVED?

Three schools of thought have provided three different answers to the question of how an individual believer knows if he or she is genuinely saved. The first view, held by the Roman Catholic Church, regards the claim of assurance of salvation to be a demonstration of spiritual arrogance. Roman Catholic soteriology does not separate sanctification from justification and therefore does not present assurance as something currently available. The second view is that of the Reformers. Flying the banner of *sola fide*, they trumpeted a certainty to salvation that made saving faith and assurance virtual synonyms. The post-Reformation Calvinists and Puritans held to a third view which saw assurance as a grace given subsequent to conversion and discerned by careful self-examination. The second and third answers are still predominant in Evangelicalism today.

A. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW: ASSURANCE IS NOT POSSIBLE

If salvation is a lifetime process that may or may not be successfully completed, then assurance of salvation is not possible. Following Augustine, official Roman Catholic doctrine views justification as a process that occurs within the individual Christian over the course of his lifetime and perhaps even continues after death. No one can know for sure how far along he is on the journey of faith or if he will continue the difficult task of walking in the Way. Seen from this light, the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone seems to present a truncated soteriology. The Council of Trent condemned all who claim to have assurance of salvation, declaring, "If any one saith, that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; let him be anathema."⁷ The Tridentine Council reasoned that since only the elect will persevere, and since only God knows who is and who is not elect, then special revelation would

⁷"Canons Concerning Justification," canon 15 (DS 1565) *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, ed. Karl Rahner (Cork, Ireland: Mercer, 1966), 400.

be required for someone to have assurance of salvation.⁸ Calvin responded by declaring that for the elect to have assurance, the Word of God was all the special revelation needed.⁹

B. THE REFORMERS: ASSURANCE IS OF THE ESSENCE OF FAITH

So how does one know if she is saved? The answer of the Reformation was that this knowledge is a part of salvation itself. Calvin defined faith as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ The very nature of conversion and regeneration insures that the believer will know when she has believed. Anyone can know whether or not she has believed in Jesus Christ, and all who believe in Him are saved. Therefore, assurance is of the essence of saving faith.¹¹

Having certain knowledge at the time of conversion does not exclude the possibility that a believer may have doubts after her salvation, nor does it mean that only those with absolute certainty are saved. Luther stated,

Even if I am feeble in faith, I still have the same treasure and the same Christ that others have. There is no difference; through faith in him (not works) we are all perfect. It is just as if two people have a hundred gulden—one may carry his in a paper bag, the other store and bar his in an iron chest; but they both have the treasure whole and complete. So with Christ. It is the self-same Christ we possess whether you or I believe in him with a strong or weak

⁸ Ibid., canon 16 (DS 1566). For a Roman Catholic perspective on the Council’s view on assurance see Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 48-50.

⁹ John Calvin, “Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote,” *Selected Works of John Calvin*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 155. Calvin asks, “What else, good Sirs, is a certain knowledge of our predestination than that testimony of adoption which Scriptures makes common to all the godly?”

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.2.7 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 551.

¹¹ Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (NIV). Both Zane Hodges and Thomas Schreiner hold that assurance is the essence of saving faith. At least on this point they are agreed.

faith. And in him we have all, whether we hold it with a strong or weak faith.¹²

Both Luther and Calvin realized that many genuine believers have subsequent doubts. Nevertheless, this view does contend that when a person is saved, she knows it, and this core conviction, though buffeted, will never die.

However, certain doctrines advocated by the Reformers for the purpose of establishing assurance often produced the opposite effect. The doctrines of the absolute decree of election and reprobation made within the hidden will of God, limited atonement, and temporary faith created a tension in later Calvinist theology and made assurance of salvation very difficult to obtain. This difficulty manifests itself particularly in the theology and practice of the Puritans.

C. THE PURITANS: ASSURANCE IS LOGICALLY DEDUCED

It is intensely debated whether the struggles later Calvinists and Puritans had over assurance of salvation were the result of their departure from the teachings of Calvin or if they simply took Calvin's theology to its logical conclusion. R. T. Kendall and Charles Bell argue that Calvin held to a doctrine of unlimited atonement and to a Christocentric doctrine of assurance. Their thesis is that later Calvinism, beginning with Beza, departed from Calvin by adhering to a doctrine of limited atonement and to a doctrine of assurance that begins with the absolute decree of the hidden God as its starting point.¹³ Others have responded that the confusion begins with Calvin himself, and that his followers' works simply highlighted his confusion.¹⁴ Either way, it is a historical fact that much of the Puritan's life was defined by his search

¹² Martin Luther, WA 33, 37, 22. Cited by Richard Olmsted, "Staking All on Faith's Object: The Art of Christian Assurance According to Martin Luther and Karl Barth," in *Pro Ecclesia* 10:2 (2001), 138.

¹³ R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Zachman and Thomas argue that the trouble begins with the inconsistencies of Calvin's formulation of the doctrine of assurance and that the later Calvinists are closer to Calvin than Kendall or Bell want to admit. Thorson concludes that "Calvin is not just complex, but inconsistent." See Randall Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); G. Michael

for assurance. This concern about assurance would mystify the average Evangelical of today.

Post-Reformation Calvinists stressed the doctrines of double predestination and limited atonement to emphasize that the believer's salvation is completely by grace and is as secure as the nature and character of God Himself. But the doctrine of limited atonement implies that the anxious inquirer cannot presume that Christ died for him; Christ died for an individual only if that person is one of the elect. How does one know if he is one of the elect? The electing decree is part of the hidden will of God, so the only way a person knows that he is elect is if he truly believes in Jesus Christ for salvation. But how does one know if his faith is genuine or if he is deceived? A genuine faith manifests itself by persevering in doing good works. In the final analysis, the basis of assurance in Reformed theology is sanctification, not justification.

The doctrine of temporary faith, a notion first formulated by Calvin but later developed by Beza and Perkins, further intensified the problem of assurance in Calvinist and Puritan theology. God gives to the reprobate, whom He never intended to save in the first place, a "taste" of His grace. Based on passages such as Matt 7:21-23, Heb 6:4-6, and the Parable of the Sower, Beza and Perkins attribute this false, temporary faith to an ineffectual work of the Holy Spirit. Perkins propounds a system in which the reprobate might experience five degrees of ineffectual calling that to him is indistinguishable from a genuine conversion experience. Those who profess to be believers are encouraged to examine themselves lest they are found to possess only this temporary faith.¹⁵ Beza declared that the reason God gives temporary

Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536-1675)* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997); and Stephen Thorson, "Tensions in Calvin's View of Faith: Unexamined Assumptions in R. T. Kendall's *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 1994): 423. Beeke and Hawkes defend the Puritan's approach to assurance, calling it a thoroughly Trinitarian model and "especially elegant." See Joel Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999); and R. M. Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 260.

¹⁵ Richard Muller, "Perkin's *A Golden Chaine*: Predestinarian System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis*?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 60:1 (1978): 75. Perkins

faith to the reprobate is so that “their fall might be more grievous.”¹⁶ In Olmsted’s opinion, Beza’s teaching “comes perilously close to ascribing the matter to divine sadism.”¹⁷

History shows that these doctrines produced a crippling anxiety in the later Calvinists and Puritans that drove them to an introspection which an objective observer might describe as pathological. John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* has blessed multitudes of Christians, but his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, is disturbing. He recounts how, in his seemingly endless search for assurance of salvation, he was haunted by the question, “How can I tell if I am elected?”¹⁸

Kendall and Bell document the pastorally damaging results of the Puritan approach to assurance. Even those who disagree with Kendall’s thesis concede that his “devastating critique” of the miserable travails produced by Puritan theology and practice is more or less “on the mark.”¹⁹ Kendall recounts the life and work of William Perkins (1558-1602), who is often called the Father of Puritanism. Perkins wrote extensively and almost exclusively on the subject of assurance, having devoted 2500 pages to the topic. Unfortunately, the preaching and teaching of Perkins on assurance often had the opposite affect, creating more doubts than were resolved. Ironically, Perkins, like so many other Puritans of his day, died without a clear assurance of his own salvation.

In a similar fashion, Bell chronicles the struggle for assurance among the Scottish Calvinists. He says,

devised an elaborate chart that expounds a supralapsarian view of salvation. Under the heading of “A Calling Not Effectual,” Perkins lists five evidences of the ineffectual work of the Holy Spirit: 1) an enlightening of the mind, 2) a penitence accompanied by a desire to be saved, 3) a temporary faith, 4) a taste of justification and sanctification that is accompanied by the heart-felt sweetness of God’s mercy, and 5) a zeal for the things of religion. See also Kendall, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 67-76. Kendall quotes Perkins as saying that the quest for assurance ultimately requires a “descending into our own hearts” (75), which is a type of introspection that Calvin warned against.

¹⁶ Cited in Kendall, 36.

¹⁷ Olmsted, “Staking All on Faith’s Object,” 140-41.

¹⁸ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 26.

¹⁹ George Harper, “Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649 a Review Article,” *Calvin Theological Journal* (November 1985): 257.

It is well known, for example, that for generations many in the Scottish Highlands have refused to receive the communion elements because of the want of personal assurance of their salvation. Although believing that Jesus Christ is the Savior and the Son of God, self-examination fails to yield sufficient evidence of their election to salvation. Fearing that apart from such assurance they may eat and drink in an unworthy manner, and thereby incur the judgment of God, they abstain from receiving the Lord's Supper.²⁰

The later Calvinists and Puritans employed two syllogisms, the practical syllogism and the mystical syllogism, in their attempt to ascertain assurance by way of logical deduction. They used the practical syllogism (*sylogismus practicus*) to determine whether or not they had believed and the mystical syllogism (*sylogismus mysticus*) to search for evidence of true faith.²¹ The practical syllogism is as follows:

- *Major premise:* If effectual grace is manifested in me by good works, then I am elect.
- *Minor premise (practical):* I manifest good works.
- *Conclusion:* Therefore, I am one of the elect.

But how does one know the minor premise of the practical syllogism is true for him? The Puritans attempted to answer this question by an introspective self-examination using the mystical syllogism. The mystical syllogism is as follows:

- *Major premise:* If I experience the inward confirmation of the Spirit, then I am elect.
- *Minor premise (mystical):* I experience the confirmation of the Spirit.
- *Conclusion:* Therefore, I am one of the elect.

Beza concludes, "Therefore, that I am elect, is first perceived from sanctification begun in me, that is, by my hating of sin and my loving of

²⁰ M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985), 7.

²¹ Joel Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 132-39.

righteousness.”²² The post-Reformation Calvinist and the Puritan believed that sanctification is the basis of assurance.

Of the three answers given to the question, “How does one know that he is genuinely saved?” only the second option, “Assurance is of the essence of saving faith,” provides certainty of salvation. Assurance of salvation must be based on Jesus Christ and His work for us—nothing more and nothing less.

III. HOW SECURE IS ONE’S SALVATION?

Even if a believer knows he is saved, the question of perseverance is still unanswered. This brings us to the second aspect of assurance—how secure is one’s salvation? Arminians have traditionally answered that apostasy is possible for the believer while Calvinists have affirmed the perseverance of the saints. Some scholars have offered mediating positions that argue that while the Scriptures warn against the danger of apostasy, the possibility of apostasy does not exist. Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday’s means-of-salvation position is one such midway proposal, and this paper will give additional attention to it.

Apostasy Is Possible	Apostasy Is Not Possible	Apostasy Is Threatened, But Not Possible
Non-elect believers fall (Luther) Non-persevering believers fall (Moody)	Implicit Universalism (Barth) Once-Saved-Always-Saved (GES)	Tests-of-Genuineness (Demarest) Irreconcilable Tension (Carson) Means-of-Salvation (Schreiner and Caneday) Middle Knowledge (Craig)

A. LUTHERAN AND ARMINIAN VIEWS: APOSTASY IS POSSIBLE

Two positions accept the possibility that a believer may lose his salvation. Many Lutherans argue that non-elect believers may fall from grace while traditional Arminians argue that all believers are at risk of apostasy.

²² Theodore Beza, *A Little Book of Christian Questions and Responses*, Q209 (Allison Park, PA: Picwick Publications, 1986), 96-97.

1. *Non-Elect Believers Fall.* According to many Lutherans, only elect believers persevere and only God knows which believers are the elect.²³ God has not elected every believer whom He regenerates. A believer can lose his salvation and be placed back under the wrath of God by committing mortal sins. As examples, Luther makes a contrast of David and Peter from Saul and Judas. He holds up the first pair as examples of saints who lost their salvation but regained it by their repentance, but he views the second pair as formerly regenerate saints who experience eventual damnation.²⁴ God grants repentance and perseverance to His elect. Since election is part of the hidden will of God, all believers must strive to endure until the end. On a practical level, the Lutheran perspective operates much like the Arminian one.

2. *Non-Persevering Believers Fall.* Arminians interpret the assurance passages in light of the warning passages and understand salvation to be a present condition that a believer enjoys but could lose. Two recent proponents of this position, Dale Moody and I. Howard Marshall, argue that the Scriptures are filled with explicit warnings to believers that they must persevere if they are to be saved.²⁵ Moody claims that because of preconceived theological positions, the full impact of these verses has been muted. He laments, "Yet cheap preaching and compromise with sin have made such texts forbidden for serious study."²⁶ He argues, "Eternal life is the life of those who continue to follow Jesus. No one can retain eternal life who turns away from Jesus."²⁷

Schreiner points out that Moody solves the tension between the assurance passages and the warning passages by denying there is a tension.²⁸ Moody asserts that Calvinists have put so much emphasis on

²³ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 437-38. This paragraph depends on Demarest.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Works*, vol. 26 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 94.

²⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*; and Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 1981).

²⁶ Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 350.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 356. Moody defends his position by claiming that it is also the position of A. T. Robertson, the famed New Testament scholar at Southern Seminary.

²⁸ Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance," 33.

the assurance passages that they have bleached out the full force of the warning passages' meaning. However, he appears to have committed the same error in reverse when he ignores the unconditional nature of the promises of preservation and makes them subordinate to the warning passages.

B. CALVINIST AND DISPENSATIONAL VIEWS: APOSTASY IS NOT POSSIBLE

Three positions argue apostasy is not possible and the believer's eventual salvation is guaranteed. The first position is the implicit universalism of Karl Barth based upon his view of election, while the Grace Evangelical Society advocates the second view—the once saved, always saved position—as a major plank of their doctrinal platform. Bruce Demarest argues for a third view, the tests-of-genuineness position, which argues that saving faith manifests itself by perseverance.

1. Implicit Universalism. In a famous discussion in his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth demonstrated that the Reformers' formulation for assurance stands on an unstable platform. Beginning the search for certainty with the electing decree that is hidden in the secret will of God dooms the enterprise from the start. He argued that the Reformers erred when they attempted to develop a doctrine of assurance with a Christological beginning and an anthropological ending.²⁹

Barth resolved the question of assurance by utilizing his idiosyncratic view of election. According to Barth, Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected Man. God relates to the elect only through Christ, but Christ is also the rejected Man of the reprobate. Therefore, God relates to all, both elect and rejected, through Christ with the end result that God rejects the rejectedness of the reprobate. Barth solves concerns about assurance by placing all mankind in Christ.³⁰

Barth never conceded that his position implied universalism. J. I. Packer observes that this was "a conclusion that Barth himself seems to have avoided only by will power."³¹ However, his approach seems

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2000), 333-40.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 344-54. Randall Zachmann and G. Michael Thomas currently advocate Barth's position. See Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith*, viii, 244-48; and Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 252-53.

³¹ J. I. Packer, "Good Pagans and God's Kingdom," *Christianity Today* (January 1986), 22-25.

to conclude that a reprobate is someone who is elect but does not yet know it.

2. *Once-Saved-Always-Saved.* The once-saved-always-saved position rejects the traditional Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in favor of the doctrine of eternal security. Proponents of the view include Zane Hodges, Charles Stanley, and Charles Ryrie.³² Advocates of the once-saved-always-saved position, while not accepting Barth's view on election, agree with him that any attempt to arrive at assurance of salvation that involves looking at the believer's life for evidence or support will not succeed.

Assurance of salvation comes only by trusting the promises of the Word of God. The believer should manifest the fruits of salvation, but there is no guarantee that he will. At best, works provide a secondary, confirmatory function.³³

Critics argue that this position has three weaknesses. First, it either ignores or explains away the real meaning of the warning passages directed to the saints. Second, it encourages laxity in Christian commitment, and third, it gives false comfort to those who walk in disobedience to the commands of Scripture and who in fact really may not be saved.³⁴

The advocates of the once-saved-always-saved position argue that the Bible provides plenty of motivation for Christian service without threatening the believer with eternal damnation.³⁵ First, the believer is moved to service by a sense of gratitude for his salvation. Second, the believer who fails to follow the Lord faithfully experiences the chastening hand of God, even to the point of death, if necessary. Third, in addition to divine chastening in this life, the disobedient believer experiences the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The carnal believer enjoys the preservation of God even if he does not persevere in the faith.³⁶

³² See Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989); Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989); and Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990).

³³ See the section entitled "About" under "Motivation" on the Grace Evangelical Society website at: <http://www.faithalone.org/>.

³⁴ Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 361-65.

³⁵ See the "Motivation" section on the GES website.

³⁶ Stanley, *Eternal Security*, 92-100.

3. *Tests-of-Genuineness.* The tests-of-genuineness position, traditionally understood as the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, agrees with the once-saved-always-saved view that the believer's salvation is eternally secure. They also agree that good works are not necessary to procure salvation. However, unlike those who advocate the doctrine of eternal security, the advocates of the tests-of-genuineness position contend that the fruits of salvation will always and eventually manifest themselves in the life of a believer.³⁷

The tests-of-genuineness proponents base their doctrine of perseverance on God's promises in Scripture that He will complete His work of salvation in the individual believer.³⁸ Even though a believer may fail miserably and sin terribly, he cannot remain in that condition. A Christian may fall totally, but his fall will not be final. The true believer will persevere.

The warning passages serve as litmus tests, according to the tests-of-genuineness position.³⁹ Those who are not genuinely converted will eventually show their true colors. Therefore, the judgments threatened in those passages are not directed toward believers but are intended for false disciples, who for one reason or another are deliberately masquerading as real Christians.

Schreiner and Caneday agree with the advocates of the tests-of-genuineness position that true believers will persevere, but they believe that the tests-of-genuineness advocates have misinterpreted the warning passages in the NT. Schreiner and Caneday argue the warning passages are orientated toward the future, while the tests-of-genuineness position turns the warnings into tests of past behavior.⁴⁰

C. MEDIATING VIEW: APOSTASY IS THREATENED, BUT IS NOT POSSIBLE

Some scholars understand the warning passages to be admonishing believers about the danger of eternal judgment while at the same time they hold that the Scriptures teach that a believer cannot apostatize.

³⁷ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 439-44.

³⁸ Philippians 1:6 "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (NKJV).

³⁹ See Wayne Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from the Warning Passages in Hebrews," *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 133-82.

⁴⁰ Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 29-35.

Three positions attempt to reconcile these two seemingly contrary concepts. The first view, the Irreconcilable Tension position, argues that the two types of passages are irresolvable and that a "compatibilistic" approach must be taken. Second, the means-of-salvation position argues that the warnings are the means by which the believer is preserved and third, William Lane Craig argues that the means-of-salvation view is a middle knowledge approach.

1. *Irreconcilable Tension.* Certain scholars have given up any attempt to reconcile the assurance passages with the warning passages and have ascribed the whole matter to mystery. In his book, *Assurance and Warning*, Gerald Borchert concludes that the two types of passages are in irreconcilable tension and must be held in a "delicate balance."⁴¹

D. A. Carson takes a similar tack when he argues for taking a compatibilistic approach to the issue at hand. He defines compatibilism as,

the view that the following two statements are, despite superficial evidence to the contrary, mutually compatible: (1) God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty does not in any way mitigate human responsibility; (2) human beings are responsible creatures (i.e., they choose, decide, obey, disobey, believe, rebel, and so forth), but their responsibility never serves to make God absolutely contingent.⁴²

Since we do not know how God operates in time, how God operates through secondary agents, or how God is both sovereign and personal at the same time, then we are not going to know how the two types of passages interface. In the end, we are left with a theological antinomy. Carson concludes, "So we will, I think, always have some mystery."⁴³

Neither Schreiner nor Hodges are impressed with Carson's appeal to compatibilistic mystery. Schreiner cautions against appealing to mystery too quickly, otherwise he contends we may be simply avoiding the hard labor and hard choices of doing theological work. He suspects that Borchert and Carson are using "tension" and "mystery" as code

⁴¹ Gerald Borchert, *Assurance and Warning* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 194.

⁴² Carson, "Reflections on Christian Assurance," 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

words for “contradiction.”⁴⁴ Likewise Hodges argues that an assurance based on a mystery is not much of an assurance at all. He says,

If “assurance” were indeed a mystery, then it would be a deeply disquieting mystery to those who need assurance the most. Does Dr. Carson know beyond question that he himself is regenerate? If so, let him tell us *how* he knows. The compatibilist cannot have a mystery and a confident answer, too!⁴⁵

2. *Means-of-Salvation.* In their book *The Race Set Before Us*, Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday present a provocative position they label the means-of-salvation view. They agree with the advocates of the tests-of-genuineness position that a believer cannot apostatize. However, they argue that the warning passages, such as those found in the Book of Hebrews, threaten believers with eternal damnation in hell if they fail to persevere. They reject the way proponents of the once-saved-always-saved position interpret 1 Cor 9:27 to mean that Paul was concerned about losing his fitfulness for the ministry when he spoke of keeping his body in subjection so that he would not be castaway. Rather, they agree with Dale Moody that Paul, in spite of all his service to Christ, was genuinely concerned he still might not go to heaven.⁴⁶

They argue that obtaining eternal life requires great effort. Only by diligent perseverance can the believer obtain eventual justification on the final day. They state,

We have insisted throughout this book that the New Testament directs its admonitions and warnings to believers. We have also argued that these warnings do not merely threaten believers with losing rewards but that eternal life itself is at stake. Biblical writers frequently warn believers that if they turn away from Jesus Christ they will experience eternal judgment. If believers apostatize their destiny is the lake of fire, the second death, hell. These warnings cannot be waved aside and relegated to those who are not genuine Christians. They are directed to believers and must be heeded for us to be saved on the last day. We will win the prize of eternal life

⁴⁴ Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance,” 52.

⁴⁵ Zane Hodges, see “The New Puritanism Part 1: Carson on Christian Assurance,” at <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1993i/Hodges.htm>.

⁴⁶ Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 178-83.

only if we run the race to the end. If we quit during the middle of the race, we will not receive eternal life.⁴⁷

Curiously, Schreiner and Caneday argue that though the threats of damnation to the saints are real, the possibility of apostasy is not. This is because God uses the warnings as the means by which the believer is caused to endure. They explain,

[C]onditional warnings in themselves do not function to indicate anything about possible failure or fulfillment. Instead, the conditional warnings appeal to our minds to conceive or imagine the invariable consequences that come to all who pursue a course of apostasy from Christ.⁴⁸

In assessing the warnings, they make a distinction between that which is conceivable and that which is possible. They liken the warnings to road signs, and conclude, "Road signs caution against conceivable consequences, not probable consequences."⁴⁹

The way Schreiner and Caneday see it, rather than causing consternation in the elect, the threats of damnation produce encouragement and confidence.

The admonitions and warnings of the Scriptures threaten believers with eternal judgment for apostasy, but these warnings do not violate assurance and confidence regarding final salvation....The warnings do not rob us of assurance. They are signposts along the marathon runner's pathway that help us maintain our confidence.⁵⁰

Schreiner and Caneday argue that the advocates of the other positions have overlooked a primary interpretative principle to the NT, which is the already-but-not-yet tension of an inaugurated eschatology.⁵¹ With the resurrection of Christ, the end of the age has begun, so all the blessings of the Kingdom of God and its salvation are an accomplished fact. However, our Lord has not returned, so the full enjoyment of our salvation is not yet accomplished. This sets up a tension in the world, the church, and in the hearts of individual believers that is expressed in the biblical record. Schreiner and Caneday argue that the once-saved-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 267.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 208.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 269.

⁵¹ Ibid., 46-86.

always-saved position is particularly guilty of an over-realized eschatology. They contend that those like Hodges and Stanley have emphasized the conversion event to the point of making salvation a past event. The means-of-salvation view teaches that saving faith is not a one-time event but rather is a lifetime journey. All the components and aspects of salvation have an already-but-not-yet orientation—even justification. They agree that justification is primarily forensic, but they also argue that final justification is obtained by perseverance.⁵²

The means-of-salvation position contends that the NT is always referring to the gift of salvation when it speaks of the believer's reward.⁵³ Passages that exhort the elect to pursue crowns of life, glory, and righteousness are making reference to salvation itself, not to any subsequent reward that the believer may earn in addition to salvation.

As a way to understand the basis of assurance, Schreiner and Caneday present a three-legged stool.⁵⁴ They argue that the first leg is the promises of God, the second leg is the evidence of a changed life, and the third leg is the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. They admit that the analogy is an imperfect one, since the promises of God are primary for assurance, but they deny that there can be a discontinuity between the first leg and the other two.

Schreiner and Caneday present an intriguing proposal in the means-of-salvation view. They make a compelling argument that the NT utilizes the "now—not yet" motif in its discussion of soteriology. It seems that the biblical witness, in fact, often does use the terminology of reward to describe the gift of eternal life (for example, Matt 25:31-46).

However, serious questions remain. First, when they state that the warnings are the means by which the elect are enabled to persevere, just what do they mean? Just how real is the possibility of apostasy for the believer? In 1 Cor 9:27, when Paul spoke of his fear of being castaway, was he genuinely expressing concerns and doubts about his eternal destiny? If so, what kind of confidence is that? Their position seems to be unclear at this point. Dale Moody scoffs at the means-of-salvation view as Arminianism that has lost its nerve. In his opinion it ultimately "reduces the warnings to bluffing."⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 77-79.

⁵³ Ibid., 89-95.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 276-305.

⁵⁵ Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 361.

Second, Schreiner and Caneday nuance the point that the warning passages caution against conceivable or imaginable consequences rather than possible or probable consequences, but are the consequences even conceivable? They affirm that the believer experiences forensic justification, full adoption, and Divine regeneration as present realities. How then is it conceivable that a believer so positioned in Christ is in any danger of damnation? This objection does not arise merely from an over-realized eschatology, as they contend. There is a “now” component to the already-but-not-yet tension.

Third, what happens to those who do not persevere? Many who at one time professed faith in Christ later renounce their faith (consider Ted Turner or Larry Flynt). If their failure to persevere indicates an absence of salvation, then the warnings were not given to the elect after all, and the means-of-salvation position collapses into the standard tests-of-genuineness view held by most Calvinist Evangelicals.⁵⁶ If the failure to persevere results in a loss of salvation for the non-elect, then the means-of-salvation hypothesis is really Arminian after all, whether they admit it or not.

Fourth, as the first section of this paper demonstrated, the Puritans employed an approach very similar to the means-of-salvation position and found it to be pastorally disastrous. Schreiner and Caneday acknowledge the experience of the Puritans but give little reason to believe the same problems would not recur if the means-of-salvation view were to become widespread again.⁵⁷ The subtitle to their book is *A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*, but the work seems to be long on perseverance and short on assurance.

Fifth, at times it appears that the means-of-salvation proposal comes dangerously close to a works-salvation position. Graciously enabled works are still works. Most Evangelicals agree that true saving faith works, but it is still faith that is the means of salvation. But, this is not Schreiner and Caneday’s position. They state, “Perseverance is a necessary means that God has appointed for attaining final salvation.”⁵⁸ However, Calvin addressed this approach in his response to the Council of Trent. He stated,

⁵⁶ This is, in fact, the position that Schreiner and Caneday take about those who lapse. See *The Race Set Before Us*, 243.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 277-78.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

Here there is no dispute between us as to the necessity of exhorting believers to good works, and even stimulating them by holding forth a reward. What then? First, I differ from them in this, that they make eternal life the reward; for if God rewards works with eternal life, they will immediately make out that faith itself is a reward which is paid, whereas Scripture uniformly proclaims that it is the inheritance which falls to us by no other right than that of free adoption.⁵⁹

Even though they are careful to insist that the works done by the believer are actually accomplished by the grace of God, their position is difficult to reconcile with the Reformation principle of *sola fide*.⁶⁰

3. *Middle Knowledge*. Does the means-of-salvation view inadvertently abandon the traditional Reformed understanding of Divine sovereignty? William Lane Craig believes that it does. He argues that the means-of-salvation position implicitly employs middle knowledge.⁶¹ Craig asks that if the believer's will is so overwhelmed by God's grace, then why does God give the warnings at all? And, if the warnings themselves bring about perseverance, does this mean that the believer is capable of apostasy, even if he does not apostatize? Hypothetically, at least, the elect can fall away, but God, using middle-knowledge, has

⁵⁹ John Calvin, "Antidote," 144-45.

⁶⁰ In addition to the problem of the role of works in their position, Schreiner and Caneday make some statements that seem to imply that water baptism plays a role in regeneration. For example, they state, "Forgiveness is portrayed, therefore, in John 13:10 as a bath in which we are cleansed from that which stains us. Such cleansing is closely associated with baptism, for in baptism our sins are washed away. The forgiveness of sins in baptism is probably described in Ephesians 5:26, where Paul says that the church was cleansed 'by the washing with water through the word.' Similarly, Titus 3:5 describes the new birth of Christians in terms of 'the washing of rebirth,' indicating that we should not divide baptism from regeneration" (76). Also, they claim "it is clear that conversion, repentance, faith and baptism are alternate and overlapping ways of describing coming to Christ for salvation..." (64). Perhaps Schreiner and Caneday have misstated their position or, even more likely, this writer simply misunderstands what they are saying. Either way, it would be helpful if they clarified their views on this matter.

⁶¹ The middle knowledge position (also called Molinism), attempts to affirm a deterministic view of Divine sovereignty while at the same time hold to a libertarian view of human free will. By way of middle knowledge, i.e. knowledge

chosen to actualize a world in which scriptural warnings will operate as the means to keep His children from apostasy. This is a novel understanding of perseverance, but it appears to be the view argued by those who hold to the means-of-salvation position.⁶² Craig states,

The classical defender of perseverance must, it seems, if he is to distinguish his view from Molinism, hold to the intrinsic efficacy of God's grace and, hence, the causal impossibility of the believer's apostasy. But in that case, the warnings of Scripture against the danger of apostasy seem to become otiose and unreal.⁶³

Craig concludes that the means-of-salvation view is, in fact, a Molinistic perspective and represents an abandonment of the classic Reformed doctrine of perseverance.

Schreiner and Caneday's response to Craig's article seems to indicate they miss the point to his argument. In an appendix to their book, *The Race Set Before Us*, they contend that Craig misunderstands the difference between his view of how God's grace works in the human will and the view of Reformed theology.⁶⁴ Since Craig assumes a "false disjunction" between God's grace that overwhelms the believer's will and the warnings themselves, he thinks the efficacy of the warnings reside merely in themselves. Schreiner and Caneday claim Craig wrongly attributes his own view to the proponents of the means-of-salvation position, and "thus his whole argument against the Reformed view takes a trajectory that will miss its mark."⁶⁵

However, Craig does fully realize the difference between the Reformed view and the Molinist view of God's use of means. That is exactly his point, which seems to be lost on Schreiner and Caneday. If God is using the warnings as the means to insure perseverance, then either the saints would fall without the warnings (which is contrary to

of what free creatures would do in a certain situation, God ordains scenarios that will cause free persons to do His will. Molinism differs from Calvinism in that it sees God accomplishing His will externally on humans rather than internally in humans.

⁶² William Lane Craig, "Lest Anyone Should Fall": A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings," *Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991), 65-74.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁴ Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 332-37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

how Reformed theology understands how God's grace works in the believer) or the saints would persevere even without the warnings (which would make the warnings superfluous). Either way, the means-of-salvation position is a departure from Reformed soteriology.

IV. A MODEST PROPOSAL: A VARIATION OF THE TESTS-OF-GENUINENESS POSITION

The position offered over the next few pages is very close to the once-saved-always-saved view. However, it differs in that it simultaneously affirms both God's preservation of the redeemed and their persistent, persevering faith, so it is more accurately described as a variant of the tests-of-genuineness view. This position has four points. First, the only basis for assurance is the objective work of Christ. Second, assurance is of the essence of saving faith. Saving faith perseveres is the third point, and the fourth point is that there are rewards offered by God to the believer subsequent to salvation.

First, the only basis for assurance is the objective work of Christ. Any doctrine of assurance that includes introspection as a component will produce anxiety in the hearts of the very people it is intended to encourage. Barth is right when he points out that no system that has a Christological beginning and an anthropological ending can provide genuine and sustained assurance.

This is why Schreiner and Caneday's analogy of a three-legged stool for assurance fails. They admit the analogy is imperfect, because they view the leg of God's promises as pre-eminent over the other legs of sanctification and the inward testimony of the Spirit. Nevertheless, a stool that has one leg that is longer, stronger, and more sturdy than the others is an inherently unstable platform. To change metaphors, when it comes to providing assurance, the provision of Christ is the soloist and evidences are just members of the back up choir.

A close corollary to the premise that Christ is the only basis for assurance is the necessity to reaffirm the doctrine of *sola fide*. Perseverance cannot be understood in terms of good works and great effort without having the result of dismantling the Reformation. The doctrine

of perseverance must be formulated so that it does not create the impression that the Scriptures contradicts itself about grace and works.⁶⁶

Second, assurance is of the essence of saving faith. The very nature of conversion and regeneration guarantees that certain knowledge of salvation is simultaneous with being saved. Subsequent doubts and fears may come, but a core conviction about one's relationship with God will remain.

Good works and the evidences of God's grace do not provide assurance. They provide warrant to assurance, but not assurance itself. Perhaps a good analogy is how a Christian knows the love of God. He experiences the love of God every day in a myriad of ways. However, all those countless blessings merely affirm what the Christian already knows—God loves him. Even during those times when the good favor of God seems to be circumstantially absent and that Christian's confidence is tested, he still knows that God loves him the same way he has always known this—by the promises of God. So it is with the assurance of salvation. Good works play the mere supporting role of confirmation.

Third, saving faith perseveres or remains until the day when it gives way to sight. Perseverance should be understood as a faith that cannot be annihilated and therefore persists. This persistent faith inevitably and eventually exhibits itself in the believer's life in such a way as to bring glory to God. The point of Hebrews 11 is that saving faith manifests itself by the journey of discipleship. One may stumble and falter but never leave the trail. Perseverance should be viewed more as a promise than a requirement.⁶⁷

This writer cannot agree with Schreiner and Caneday when they contend that the tests-of-genuineness position makes the mistake of turning the forward-looking warning passages into retrospective tests. Rather, the warning passages that look forward (such as those found in the Book of Hebrews) are pointing out the obvious: genuine belief will

⁶⁶ Romans 11:6 "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (NKJ).

⁶⁷ Editor's note: While many *JOTGES* readers will likely disagree with this suggestion that apostasy is impossible, note well what the author is and is not saying. He is saying that faith in Christ necessarily persists. He is not saying that good works certainly persist. He holds the view that believers may backslide and even die in that state.

not turn back. Warnings about future behavior can be tests of genuineness without being retrospective.

Some passages teach that past behavior can be an indicator of genuineness. The genuinely saved person hungers and thirsts for righteousness, even when he is struggling with temptation or even if he stumbles into sin. In fact, this writer is not overly concerned with the destiny of those who struggle nearly as much as he is about those who do not care enough to struggle. Indifference is more of a red flag than weakness.

The absence of a desire for the things of God clearly indicates a serious spiritual problem, and a continued indifference can possibly mean that the person professing faith has never been genuinely converted. God is infinitely more dedicated to our salvation than we are, and He will not fail to finish that which He has begun. If a believer engages in willful disobedience or deliberate indifference, our heavenly Father promises him decisive and appropriate action. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit insures that no peaceful backslider exists.

Fourth, there are rewards that are subsequent to salvation for the believer to win or lose. One of the great weaknesses of the Schreiner and Caneday proposal is the necessity to deny that there are any subsequent rewards available for the believer and that all promises of reward must be references to salvation itself. Their position is difficult to reconcile with many biblical passages. For example, 1 Cor 3:12-15 speaks of one Christian's work remaining while another Christian's work burns. The believer whose work remains receives a reward while the other believer suffers loss. Schreiner and Caneday admit the passage teaches "some will be saved that have done shoddy work."⁶⁸ This admission undermines the major plank of their position—that persevering in good works is the necessary means by which our salvation is completed. A better understanding of the role of works in believers' lives is to hold that we will be judged and rewarded according to our service.

In the end, assurance comes from depending on Christ alone. This writer agrees with Calvin's retort to the Roman Catholic controversialist Albert Pighius, "If Pighius asks how I know I am elect, I answer that Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 51.

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 321.

JUSTIFICATION AND JUDGMENT¹

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Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

—Matthew 7:21-23

This passage of Scripture is widely misunderstood. The Baptist John MacArthur, the Christian Reformed Norman Shepherd, and Pope John Paul II all misunderstand the passage, and they misunderstand it in essentially the same way. They all—Baptist, Reformed, and Romanist—appeal to verse 21 for the same reason: It seems to teach salvation by doing, rather than by merely believing. After all, Jesus does say that it is only those who *do the will of His Father* who will enter the kingdom of heaven.

In his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, John MacArthur cites this passage and asserts: "Real faith is as concerned with doing the will of God as it is with affirming the facts of true doctrine" (189). Real faith, saving faith, according to MacArthur, is as much about doing as it is about believing, for Jesus brought a "message of works" (79).

In his book, *The Call of Grace*, Norman Shepherd tells us that "The consequence of disobedience is exclusion from the kingdom of heaven" (49). So a believer may be excluded from the kingdom for his disobedience, because belief alone is not enough. To faith one must add "covenant faithfulness." And the most eloquent statement of the three, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1821, cites Matt 7:21 as scriptural support for its statement that "In every circumstance each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere 'to the end' and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ."

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Notice that the *Catholic Catechism* mentions grace twice in this single sentence. Many non-Catholics labor under the mistaken impression that the Roman Church-State teaches salvation by works apart from the grace of God and Christ. But it does not, and this paragraph reflects its teaching that the good works Christians do are done by the grace of God and Christ. This common misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Romanist doctrine has contributed to (or is caused by) a misunderstanding of biblical doctrine. Our works, our doing, the Bible teaches, contribute nothing whatsoever to our salvation. They are neither an instrument for our justification nor a condition of our salvation. The difference between the Bible and Rome is not that Rome teaches salvation by faith and works-without-grace, while the Bible teaches salvation by faith and works-with-grace. The difference between the Bible and Rome is that the Bible teaches that our salvation does not depend on our works at all (whether allegedly done by the grace of God or not), while Rome asserts that our salvation depends in part on our works. The Bible affirms *sola fide*; Rome denies it.

But let us return to the text.

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven (Matt 7:21).

At first glance, verse 21 seems to be saying that the decisive difference between those who are excluded and those who are admitted into the kingdom of heaven is the difference between empty professors and actual doers of the Word. It is not those who *say*, "Lord, Lord," but those who actually *do the will of the Father*, who are admitted into heaven. In verse 21, Jesus seems to be making the same distinction that James makes in 2:14: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone *says* he has faith but *does not* have works? Can faith save him?" The contrast in James is between a person who *says* something with his lips, but does not give evidence of his faith by his works. But, unlike James, Jesus does not explicitly mention belief in verse 21; He mentions doing and saying, asserting that doing the will of the Father in heaven is required to get into the kingdom of heaven, but saying "Lord, Lord" is not enough.

Again, at first glance, verse 21 seems to contradict verses such as Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..." and Rom 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law;" and Eph 2:8-9: "For by grace you

have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast;" and scores of other verses that deny salvation comes by doing.

This apparent contradiction in the NT raises a further difficulty: Does the Bible contradict itself? Many scholars say, Yes, it does. Or if they are coy rather than candid, they say the Scriptures contain "tensions," "paradoxes," and "antinomies." The scholars apparently never consider the possibility that they have misunderstood the Scriptures. They are quick to attribute logical difficulties to the revealed propositions (and they always add that it is pious and humble to do so), but they do not even contemplate the possibility that they might not understand the text. Therefore, the text itself must be paradoxical.

But as Christians we ought to be humble and say, *Of course the Scriptures contain no contradictions, no paradoxes, no antinomies, and no tensions.* When we come to what seems to be a contradiction in our theology, we must check our premises, return to the propositions of Scripture, and conform our thoughts to what the noncontradictory Scriptures say.

The "first glance" reading of verse 21 raises still another problem: Does Jesus teach legalism? Here I am using the word *legalism* in its proper sense: the notion that one can obtain, in whole or in part, salvation by doing, rather than by mere belief. The Pope, Shepherd, and MacArthur all appeal to this verse because they all believe that Jesus does in fact teach salvation by doing here—that He here denies the sufficiency of belief alone for salvation. The central problem in verse 21 is the meaning of Jesus' phrase: "he who does the will of My Father in heaven." The Pope, MacArthur, and Shepherd all appeal to this verse because they believe that the phrase means "works." But that interpretation, of course, implies that the Bible contradicts itself. And that interpretation of the phrase cannot be correct, because of what verse 22 says.

Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" (Matt 7:22).

Now if we understand verse 21 as the Pope, MacArthur, and Shepherd understand it, what Jesus says in verse 22 is both unexpected and inexplicable.

If Jesus' point in verse 21 were that faith is not enough, that good works, or "covenant faithfulness," or obedience is also necessary in

order to be saved, then Jesus should have said something like this in verse 22: “Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, we trusted in You alone, we had faith in You alone, we believed the Bible and Your words.’” But of course Jesus says nothing of the sort. Instead, He reports that many people will appear before Him at the Judgment and will talk about their *works, not their faith*. These people—the ones who present works—will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Let us examine this verse carefully.

First, Jesus says “Many.” At first glance, verse 21 suggests that there will be only a few among those who will say, “Lord, Lord” who will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had said, “Not everyone,” and, sinners that we are, we jumped to the conclusion that He meant “almost everyone.” But here in verse 22 He says “many.” Many will come before Christ Jesus and speak to Him, saying, “Lord, Lord,” and they will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Second, many will speak to Jesus “in that day:” the Day of Judgment, when every person will give an account of every thought, word, and deed done in the body. We will each give an account of our lives to God.² There is no escaping this judgment, no parole, no continuance, no diversion. The author of Hebrews writes: “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (9:27). Those are two appointments each one of us will keep: death and judgment. We will be on trial for our lives. We will not be appearing in this court as witnesses, victims, or jurors, but as defendants.

Third, each of us will speak directly to Jesus; there will be no attorneys, no priests, no pastors, no bishops, no archbishops, no popes, no confessors, no counselors, no elders, no deacons, no church, no parents, and no friends to represent us and to speak for us. We will be held individually accountable by God.

This is the basis of the idea of individual responsibility, not merely in theology, but in law as well. Individual responsibility is one of the pillars of Christian jurisprudence, and those who rant against the individual and individualism are merely displaying their ignorance of, or their rejection of, what the Bible teaches about the role and the significance

²Editor’s note: The author does not distinguish here between the Judgment Seat of Christ (for believers) and the Great White Throne Judgment (for unbelievers). In light of John 5:24 (“will not come into judgment”), it is important to realize this distinction.

of the individual person. We will each be summoned to this divine court to face the Creator of the universe. What will we say in that day?

Jesus in His mercy tells us what many will say to Him in that Day: First, they will acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ, addressing Him as "Lord." Not only will they say it once, they will repeat it: "Lord, Lord." Recognizing the gravity of the situation, they will plead for their lives. This repetition of "Lord" may also suggest that they think they are on familiar terms with Jesus.

Next, they will ask Jesus a series of questions, calling the Christ Himself as a witness in their defense. Notice that they will not directly assert that they have done good works. They will speak in interrogative, not declarative, sentences. Because of this, their defense will actually be much stronger than their own mere declarations would have been: They will call Christ Jesus Himself as their defense witness. They will ask Him to testify to the facts of their lives: their prophesying, exorcising, and wonder working.

Some commentators have tried to dismiss the claims of these defendants by suggesting that they will lie or exaggerate, that they really will not have done what they will claim to have done. There is nothing in the text that supports such an accusation. That misinterpretation is a desperate device to evade what Jesus is telling us in this passage. The defendants will make no direct assertions. They will ask questions. They will address those questions to Jesus, whom they will acknowledge as Lord. They will ask Him to testify to the truth of their claims. They actually will have done these things on earth: prophesying, casting out demons, and performing wonders.

Now the fact that many people will have done these things on earth implies several things.

First, it implies that these people are not mere professors, without works and without practice, as we may have concluded from our superficial reading of verse 21. They are not pew warmers; they are not spiritual spectators; they are not churchgoers who show up only on Easter and Christmas; they are not those who have no works. These people have many works, and they will call on Jesus Himself to testify to their works on earth. Theirs is not mere lip service; nor empty profession. They will have been *very* active in church and in other religious endeavors.

Second, not only are these people active in the churches, they are church leaders. They prophesy, they preach, they proselytize, they teach;

they cast out demons, they exorcise; they perform many wonders—not just a few, but *many* wonders. These are things publicly done, not things done in a corner or in the privacy of one's own home.

Third, they will do all these works in the name of Jesus Christ. Notice that the defendants will use the phrase “in Your name” repeatedly: They will prophesy “in Jesus’ name;” they will cast out demons “in Jesus’ name;” they will perform many wonders “in Jesus’ name.” They will be leaders in professedly Christian churches. They are not Buddhists, performing these things in the name of Buddha. Nor are they Hindus, performing these works in the name of Shiva or some other Hindu god. Nor are they Muslims, doing these things in the names of Allah or Mohammed. Nor are they Jews, doing these things in the name of Abraham. These are not pagans ignorant of the name of Jesus; they are professing Christians who will do all these works in the name of Jesus Christ.

Because they were doing these things in the name of Jesus while on earth, they must have known something about Jesus, perhaps even that He is God. Some demons know no less, such as the one whose conversation with Jesus is reported in Mark 1:24: “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”

Did these defendants know as much as that demon? They were as lost as that demon. This implies, among other things, that simply acknowledging Jesus as Lord, as the Holy One of God, is not sufficient for salvation. Do not the Scriptures say that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord? And do not the Scriptures say that some people will not be saved? It therefore follows that confessing Jesus as Lord is insufficient for salvation; one must also confess Him as Savior.³

Now, consider the irony of the exegetical situation. Proponents of “Lordship Salvation” such as Shepherd and MacArthur appeal to this passage in Matthew 7 to support their view that belief alone in the Lord Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation, that we must also practice the Lordship of Christ by faithfully performing works in order to be saved. Yet this passage clearly teaches that some of those who confess Jesus

³Editor's note: It would be clearer to say what the author himself says later in the article, “The phrase Jesus used in Matt 7:21, ‘he who does the will of My Father in Heaven,’ is equivalent to *believe the gospel*” (p. 74).

as Lord and perform amazing works will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, one may acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, perform many wonderful works, and still go to hell. Jesus Himself here warns us that “many” who confess His Lordship and perform many works will go to hell. Obviously the passage does not mean what the Pope, MacArthur, and Shepherd think it means. It is not a contrast between mere believers (who are lost) and workers (who are saved), for Jesus Himself says that the workers are lost.

Fourth, because these men were visible church leaders on earth, we know that the visible church is not the kingdom of heaven, for these men are excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Let us turn our attention briefly to the sorts of works these church leaders will have done. They will have prophesied in the name of Jesus; they will have cast out demons in the name of Jesus; they will have performed wonders in the name of Jesus. Now, these are not only works; they are extraordinary and supernatural works. In fact, they are the greatest works done by men and among men, to use John Gill’s phrase. Perhaps a few of us, but certainly not this writer, have done anything remotely as great or as impressive as these works. Our works are ordinary: attending church, being good neighbors, giving money to the church and to the poor, taking care of our families, and so on.

Now here is the question: If none of us has done or will do anything like the works these men will have done, and if these men are lost, then what hope is there for us? If Jesus Himself turns these men out of the kingdom of heaven—these many men who have performed such great works in the name of Jesus—what hope have we? If these very active, professing Christians, these church leaders, will be sent to hell, what hope have we of gaining heaven?

The answer is, we have no hope, if, like these men, we rely on our works. If we believe that our works help obtain our salvation, we have no hope of heaven, no matter how great our works, no matter how faithful our obedience, regardless of whether we act in the name of Jesus, or whether we confess Jesus as Lord. If we rely on our obedience or our covenant faithfulness or our good works, we are lost.

This is the crux of the passage, and of salvation. When these church leaders give their defense at the judgment, they will offer their works as Exhibits A, B, and C. Their plea to Jesus will be their works—works done in the name of Jesus, to be sure, but works nonetheless. And far

from lessening their guilt, doing their works in the name of Jesus increases their guilt before God.

Far from teaching a “message of works,” Jesus warns us that anyone who comes before Him at the Judgment and offers his works, his covenant faithfulness, or his life as his defense will be sent to hell. Far from teaching that our works are necessary for our salvation, Jesus here teaches that all our works contribute not one whit to our salvation.

Why will many men not be admitted into the kingdom of heaven? What is wrong with their defense? Jesus tells us plainly: They will plead their own lives and Christian works.

Their defense should be the imputed righteousness of Christ, not their works. Many will be sent to hell because they will not mention that they are sinners saved only by the righteousness of the Man Christ Jesus.

They will not mention the perfect life, sinless death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They will not mention the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to those who believe in Him. They will not mention the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ for His people. They will not mention that Jesus Christ earned their salvation for them. They will not mention that Jesus Christ suffered the penalty of hell due to them, that Jesus satisfied the justice of the Father on their behalf.

In short, they will not confess Jesus as Savior, even while they confess Him as Lord.

Jesus in His mercy has told us one thing that will happen on the Day of Judgment. This is not a parable; this is not a metaphor. This is prophecy. It is exactly what many scholars deny prophecy is: future history. When Jesus here uses the verb “will,” when He speaks in the future tense, He speaks literally, and these events must happen. We ought to heed His warning and realize that if we rely on anything we do—faithful church attendance, tithing, serving as a church officer, writing, speaking, teaching, holding crusades attended by millions, raising money, giving alms to the poor, building hospitals, Christian schools, churches, baptism, participation in the Lord’s Supper—we are lost. All our righteousnesses—Isaiah does not say *unrighteousnesses*—are as filthy rags.

Jesus tells us that many people at the judgment will argue that they deserve heaven, that they have a right to heaven because they have done many wonderful works in the name of Jesus. They will not acknowledge their depravity, for they think they are good men. They will not acknowledge the satisfaction and atonement of Jesus, because

they do not believe it. Their prayer will not be, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” but, “Jesus, I did many wonderful works in Your name, and now You ought to reward me with heaven.” Whatever these churchgoers and church leaders may believe about themselves and about Jesus, they do not believe in their own depravity, nor in the imputed righteousness of Christ. They do not believe that the only way to heaven is through Jesus Christ. In short, they do not believe the gospel, and that is why they are damned.

The vivid warning that Jesus gives us in this passage is not merely about the futility of working for salvation. It is also a warning about believing some things about God and Jesus, but not believing the gospel. James tells us that demons believe in one God—and they are lost. That means that monotheism *per se* will not save anyone. Mark tells us that one demon recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God, and that demon was lost. That means that acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah *per se* will not save anyone. (And if anyone suggests that it is obedience that makes faith saving, it seems that no one obeys Jesus Christ more quickly in the NT than the demons to whom He speaks.)

Paul picks up on this point in Galatians, where he damns everyone, man or angel, who brings a message other than justification by faith alone. Presumably the false teachers in Galatia who were urging the Christians there to supplement their faith with works not only believed in God and in Jesus as the Son of God, but in the infallibility of the Scriptures (OT) and in Jesus’ miracles as well. Perhaps they even believed in His resurrection. But a belief in Jesus’ resurrection *per se* will save no one. That is why unbelieving, apostate churches can recite the early creeds of the church: While they contain some truth (and some error), the creeds do not contain the Gospel. Consider, for example, the Apostles’ Creed. The received form reads:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into Hell; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

What is missing from the Apostles' Creed? Read it again: There is no mention of God's law, no mention of Adam's sin, no statement that Jesus suffered and died for the sins of His people, no mention of His representative obedience and vicarious death, no mention of redemption, no mention of His perfect righteousness imputed to sinners, no mention of justification through belief alone. Jesus' descent into hell, an event that did not occur, is mentioned, and the mention of forgiveness of sins is vague enough to leave open the possibility that the Holy Catholic Church forgives sins. The Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) omits any mention of sin, mentions the word "salvation," but can hardly be said to present an explanation of it. The A.D. 381 enlargement adds some explanation, but also adds the error that water baptism remits sin.

What we need to believe was stated by Paul in Rom 3:20-28:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt 7:23).

Notice the "and then." Jesus pronounces judgment only after hearing the pleas and defenses of the men on trial. If any judge ever had the right to condemn a defendant without hearing his defense, this Judge has. But He is so scrupulous about God's law—and His law became the model for due process in civilizations influenced by Christianity—that Jesus does not pronounce judgment until after the defendants have presented their defenses.

Jesus' declaration, "I never knew you," eliminates another common perversion of this passage. Some commentators have suggested that the men Jesus will send to hell were once believers, and they performed their good works while they were believers; but they did not persevere; they were not faithful to the covenant, so they lost their "final justification." But that is not what Jesus will say to them: He will say, "I *never* knew you." He will not say, "I formerly knew you, but you were unfaithful to the covenant." Nor will He say, "I knew you once, but you disobeyed My commandments." Jesus will say, "I *never* knew you." These people, these church leaders, were *never* Christians. They were *never* foreknown, elected, called, regenerated, justified, adopted, reconciled, or sanctified. They may have been baptized, confirmed, ordained, chrismated, and canonized, but they were never born again. They were active churchgoers and church leaders; they did many extraordinary and wonderful works, all in the name of Jesus; but they were never Christians. *Christ Jesus never knew them.*

This declaration eliminates Romanist and Arminian doctrine, with its "saved on Sunday, lost on Monday" soteriology, as well as the Neolegalism of men like Norman Shepherd and Steven Schlissel. The final salvation of Christians—their admittance into the kingdom of heaven—just like their election, calling, regeneration, adoption, justification, reconciliation, and sanctification, depends not one whit on their good works, but on the perfect righteousness of Christ alone imputed, not infused, through belief alone. Believers have salvation—we possess eternal life—at the first moment of belief, and the gift of salvation is irrevocable.

Notice that Christ Jesus is the only *door* to heaven; He admits and excludes. Christ Jesus will send these professing Christians to hell. Notice that Christ Jesus is the only *way* to heaven. It is His life, work, and death alone that entitles sinners to heaven. Notice that Christ Jesus is the only *life*. When He says, "Depart from Me," He is condemning these men to everlasting death. That is what hell is: separation from Christ.

Jesus will describe these people as "you who practice lawlessness." Now if we had seen these people on earth—and perhaps we have seen some of them—we may not have reached that conclusion. After all, we would have seen these church leaders prophesying, casting out demons, and performing supernatural wonders, all in the name of Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church-State would have declared them saints.

The ersatz Evangelicals would have made them best-selling authors and celebrities. But Jesus calls them “you who practice lawlessness.” Why?

He has already told us why. All of these extraordinary and wonderful works done in the name of Jesus are lawlessness, because they are done for the purpose of obtaining salvation. These works are lawlessness because they involve an illegal use of the law. The law, Paul tells us, is given for the knowledge of sin. It is not given that we sinners might use it to gain entrance into heaven. Conviction of sin, not salvation, is the purpose of the law. Legalism, because it is an illegal use of the law, is lawlessness. “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully,” Paul told Timothy. But using the law in an effort to obtain heaven is not lawful; it is an illegal use of the law; it is lawlessness.

But if we see some of these men on earth, we are able to recognize them as false teachers, not because of what they do, but because of what they say: They teach salvation by faith and works, by faith and obedience, by faith and covenant faithfulness. They teach on earth what they will tell the Lord Jesus Christ at the judgment. That is what they believe.

The simple and obvious notion that false teaching is the indicator by which we recognize false teachers clarifies and explains the meaning of this whole passage. In the verses immediately prior to verse 21, Jesus had been warning of false prophets. He said,

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them (Matt 7:15-20).

The trees that are cut down and thrown into the fire in verse 19 are the men Jesus commands to depart from Him in verse 23. They are the men who have done spectacular works in the name of Jesus on earth. This implies, please note, that the fruit by which we are to know them is not primarily their works, perhaps not their works at all, but their doctrine, their teaching. We have become so accustomed to thinking of “fruit” as behavior that we have missed Jesus’ point in His warning against false prophets: They are recognized by their doctrine. What

they teach is their “fruit.” That is why John gives us a doctrinal test in 2 John 7, 9-11:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.... Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your home or greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

The notion that *fruit* is doctrine or teaching, rather than works or behavior, is so clearly taught in Scripture that the dominance of the incorrect view must be attributed to our inability to read. For example, Jesus in Matt 12:32-37 says,

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Fruit is a metaphor for words, doctrine, speaking, teaching. *Evil fruit* is false teaching; *good fruit* is true teaching; and we are to judge men by their fruit, that is, their teaching. This is entirely consistent with the tests prescribed in the OT (Deuteronomy 13 and 18) for false prophets: The tests were doctrinal. The Israelites were to disbelieve false prophets even if they performed miracles and foretold the future.

Jesus prescribes a doctrinal test for false prophets because a behavioral test is unreliable. We all have known unbelievers whose behavior is better than that of some Christians. And if *fruit* means behavior, and we must judge them by their fruit, then we must conclude that they are Christians, despite what they say.

There is, however, one final question with which we have to deal. In verse 21, Jesus used the phrase: “he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” What does this phrase mean, if it does not mean works?

The answer may be found in John 6:40, where Jesus says, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and

believes in Him have everlasting life,” and in John 6:28-29: “Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”

The phrase Jesus used in Matt 7:21, “he who does the will of My Father in Heaven,” is equivalent to *believe the gospel*. Far from teaching that our works save us, the passage teaches that even extraordinary, spectacular, and wonderful works are of no value in obtaining salvation, and that the only instrument of salvation is simple belief of the gospel. Faith alone unites us to Christ. Faith alone is the instrument of salvation. By faith alone we are justified and sanctified. By faith alone we receive the imputed righteousness of Christ. By faith alone we are admitted into the kingdom of heaven.

What will be your defense in the day of judgment? Your good works? Your obedience? Your covenant faithfulness? Or will your defense be the righteousness of Christ alone? Anyone who relies on his own works (whether allegedly done by the grace of God or not), or some combination of his works and Christ’s works, will not enter heaven. Anyone who thinks he deserves heaven because of his Christian works will not enter heaven. Miracles, prophecies, and casting out demons will not help: Judas Iscariot did all three.

A thousand years ago Anselm wrote a tract for dying men, telling them what they ought to say at the day of judgment. Here is an excerpt from the tract:

Come, then, while life remains in you. In His death alone place your whole trust; in nothing else place any trust; . . . with this alone cover yourself wholly; and if the Lord your God wills to judge you, say: “Lord, between your judgment and me I present the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; in no other way can I contend with You.” And if He shall say that you are a sinner, say: “Lord, I interpose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my sins and You.” If He should say that you deserve condemnation, say: “Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my evil deserts and You, and His merits I offer for those which I ought to have and have not.” If He says that He is angry with you, say: “Lord, I oppose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between Your wrath and me.” And when You have completed this, say again: “Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and You.”

Our only hope in life and death is our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing less, no one else, will save. That is the message of Matt 7:21-23.

FROM PERTH TO PENNSYLVANIA: THE LEGACY OF ROBERT SANDEMAN

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Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

— Jude 3

I. INTRODUCTION

For most, the Lordship controversy began in the late 1970's to early 1980's. However, in an article entitled "History Repeats Itself," J. I. Packer correctly noted, "The view that saving faith is no more than 'belief of the truth about Christ's atoning death' is not new. It was put forward in the mid-eighteenth century by the Scot Robert Sandeman."¹ If the average Free Grace proponent was told that their view of saving faith was nothing more than a revival of Robert Sandeman's theology, they would most likely ask, "Who's Robert Sandeman?"

After discussing the ministry of Sandeman and the ill effects of his view of faith, Packer concludes by stating, "The narrow intellectualism of Sandeman's view of faith dampened life-changing evangelism. This was one reason why the Glasite-Sandemanian denomination did not survive."² Nevertheless, Sandeman's motto "contending earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"³ clearly demonstrates that he was not vying for denominational superiority. Rather, he was merely "contending earnestly for the faith." Therefore, while Packer's observation was correct concerning the demise of this group as an

¹ J. I. Packer, "History Repeats Itself," *Christianity Today* (September 1989): 22.

² Ibid.

³ Thomas J. South, "The Response of Andrew Fuller to the Sandemanian View of Saving Faith," (Th. D. dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993), 60.

organized fellowship, the impact that the theology of Robert Sandeman has had upon the church for the last 250 years cannot be ignored.

II. THE BIRTH OF SANDEMANIANISM

While there were certainly many who influenced Sandeman, John Glas, his father-in-law, had one of the greatest affects upon his life. Glas (or Glass) was born in Auchtermuchty, Scotland in 1695 but spent much of his formative years in Perthshire,⁴ where his father, Alexander Glas, served as a Scottish minister. In 1719, following in his father's footsteps, John was ordained a minister in the Church of Scotland within the parish of Tealing.

Because of his convictions that the local church should be autonomous, he was asked to leave the church of Tealing in 1730.⁵ Murray states, "He and his followers formed [Scottish Baptist] churches, first in Dundee and Arbroath..."⁶ and then in fourteen other towns including London and Edinburgh.

After leaving the Church of Scotland, those who agreed with Glas's doctrines formed a new sect, which would later be referred to as the Glasites. This neoteric sect firmly believed in the "autonomy of the local congregation and the authority of Scripture."⁷ These convictions were most likely a reaction to the present climate of the church and state in Scotland.⁸

⁴ D. B. Murray, "John Glas," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 364.

⁵ South, 47.

⁶ D. B. Murray, "The Scotch Baptist Tradition in Great Britain," *The Baptist Quarterly* (October 1989): 187.

⁷ South, 52.

⁸ Black writes, "After the first rebellion [1715] there was passed a law which forbade any clergyman who had not taken an oath of loyalty to the reigning house to conduct a service attended by more than eight persons, including his own family... many and sometimes quaint expedients were resorted to by non-jurors to circumvent the law. In Inverness it was the custom for the Episcopal minister and his authorized congregation to meet in a room with a hole in the ceiling, through which his voice ascended to a larger gathering in the loft above. The law was thus being obeyed according to the letter, since the people in the loft were not actually present at the service. In some places the worshippers assembled in a barn, while the minister, hidden from view but

Glas's motto was "Let the people take the whole of scripture for their law and guide."⁹ Glas's literal approach to Scripture affected his view on the observance of communion. Black writes, "In an effort to follow closely as possible the first Holy Communion, their sacrament took the form of an actual meal."¹⁰ His motto affected other matters of Ecclesiology as well. The leadership of the Glasites was comprised solely of lay elders. Glas believed that the current hierarchy of the Church of Scotland was biblically unfounded and thus believed, like the soon to arise Plymouth Brethren, that elder leadership was the model advocated by the New Testament.

The advent of this new movement led some to refer to Glas as "the Father of Scottish Congregationalism."¹¹ This was the beginning of the Glasite movement, which would later be popularized by Glas's son-in-law, Robert Sandeman.

III. THE RISE OF SANDEMANIANISM

Robert Sandeman was born in Perth, Scotland on April 29, 1718. His father, David, an indifferent Glasite by membership, introduced his son to Glas's ideas at an early age.¹² However, it was not until 1734 while a student at the University of Edinburgh that Sandeman became a member of a Glasite church.¹³ During his time in Edinburgh, Sandeman had the opportunity to personally meet Glas and some of his associates.

within earshot, stood in the kiln. In others, the service, with its tiny congregation, was conducted near an open window, through which it could be heard by the men and women standing outside, often in rain and snow." C. Stewart Black, *The Scottish Church* (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1952), 201. Because of the restrictive nature of this oath, which the "loyal" were forced to espouse, some Glasite congregations met in the "open air" in order to circumvent the law. These churches were referred to as Kail Kirk because of the cabbage soup that was so frequently served after each one of the services. (cf. http://www.auchtermuchty.freeserve.co.uk/general_information.html).

⁹ D. B. Murray, "Robert Sandeman," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 744.

¹⁰ Black, 216.

¹¹ Harry Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Glasgow: Congregational Union of Scotland, 1960), 17.

¹² South, 57.

¹³ D. B. Murray, "Robert Sandeman," *Dictionary of Scottish Church*, 744.

McMillon writes, "Within a few weeks Robert was converted to Glas's persuasion. He also took part in the church where Glas was an elder."¹⁴ Sandeman returned to Perth after college, and in 1737 married John Glas's daughter, Catherine. Four years later he left his weaving business to devote all of his time to the church.¹⁵ This occupational switch was most likely incited by the inception of the Glasite movement.

In 1744, at the age of 26, Sandeman was appointed an elder of Glas's congregation and became their primary literary publisher. The most controversial and widely read of all his works was *Letters on Theron and Aspasio* (1757).¹⁶ This work was a dialogue between Sandeman and James Hervey, a well-known Calvinist minister from Northamptonshire, concerning Hervey's work *Dialogues between Theron and Aspasio* (1755). In this book, Hervey concentrated on the doctrine of justification by faith. South comments, "Hervey had been influenced by John Wesley at Oxford, but later asserted that he had altered his view of how salvation is obtained, through correspondence with George Whitefield."¹⁷ This dialogue brought Sandeman's theology into the spotlight.

In *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, Sandeman wrote,

But one thing in the general may be freely said, that where the faith necessary to justification is described, every epithet, word, name, or phrase, prefixed or subjoined to Faith, not meant as description of the truth believed, but of some good motion, disposition, or exercise of the human soul about it, is intended, and really serves, instead of clearing our way, to blindfold and decoy us; to impose upon us, and make us take brass for gold, and chaff for wheat; to lead us to establish our own, in opposition to the divine righteousness; even while our mouths and our ears are filled with high sounding words about the latter.¹⁸

Two hundred years later, Earl Radmacher echoed Sandeman's sentiment with these words: "We need to beware of the tendency to

¹⁴ Lynn A. McMillon, *Restoration Roots* (Dallas: Gospel Teachers Publications, 1983), 39.

¹⁵ South, 58.

¹⁶ Murray, "Robert Sandeman," *Dictionary of Scottish Church*, 744.

¹⁷ South, 59.

¹⁸ Robert Sandeman, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Sands, Donaldson, Murray, and Conchran, 1759), 329-30.

overpsychologize the word ‘faith’ and add to it more semantic baggage than it was ever intended to carry by distinguishing faith and saving faith or some other kind of faith.”¹⁹ Apparently, just as the word “faith” has been overpsychologized in the twenty-first century, so it was in Sandeman’s day.

Sandeman continues by saying,

In vain shall we consult catechisms, confessions, and other publicly authorized standards of doctrine for direction here. These are framed by the wisdom of the scribes, and disputers of this world. We can receive no true light about this matter, but from the fountainhead of true knowledge, the sacred oracles of divine revelation.²⁰

Sandeman’s rebuke proves prophetic when one reads S. Lewis Johnson’s pronouncement of the Westminster Confession of Faith as the “standard of reference that evangelicals as a whole will accept in the main.”²¹ Chapter XVIII Section I of the Westminster Confession of Faith reads,

Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions: of being in the favor of God and estate of salvation; which hope of theirs shall perish: yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God: which hope shall never make them ashamed.²²

Hence, according to the Westminster Confession of Faith, only those who persevere in love and good deeds may have assurance of salvation. Apparently, Sandeman’s rebuke of those who consulted catechisms and confessions as standards of reference is just as true today as it was in his day.

¹⁹ Earl Radmacher, “First Response to John F. MacArthur, Jr.,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 1990): 38.

²⁰ Sandeman, 329-30.

²¹ S. Lewis Johnson, “How Faith Works,” *Christianity Today* (September 1989): 21.

²² This 1646 version of the Westminster Confession of Faith can be viewed online at http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html.

Sandeman continues,

Thence it will appear, that justification comes from *bare faith*. As a Christian, What's his faith, the spring of all his hope? And he answers you in a word, The blood of Christ.²³

Hodges seemingly recapitulates Sandeman's words, when he states, "What faith really is in biblical language, is receiving the testimony of God. It is the *inward conviction* that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith."²⁴ Hodges is in agreement with Sandeman that saving faith is faith, which is alone.

Sandeman then turns to the topic of the grace of God. He writes,

Ask a proficient in the popular doctrine the same question, and he immediately begins to tell you a long-winded story, how grace enabled him to become a better man than he was, and this he calls *conversion*. Thus we see what a wide difference there is between the false and the true grace of God.²⁵

In his book *Grace Unknown*, R. C. Sproul illustrates Sandeman's point by stating,

The perseverance of the saints could more accurately be called the preservation of the saints...The believer does not persevere through the power of his unaided will. God's preserving grace makes our perseverance both possible and actual.²⁶

The view that the grace of God will bring about perseverance is exactly the theology that Sandeman was arguing against.

Less than one year after the first printing of *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, controversy ignited in London. In 1759 an anonymous female dissenter wrote,

I dislike too many things in Mr. Sandeman's Letters to notice, without being to you extremely tedious. And shall therefore give you my Thoughts only of some, as briefly as I can, with respect to,

²³ Sandeman, 329-30.

²⁴ Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 31.

²⁵ Sandeman, 329-30.

²⁶ R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 210.

1. His Omission of the great Work of Regeneration, as previous to any Act of Faith in us, for Salvation.²⁷

The reformed theologian R. C. Sproul seems to agree with the dissenter when he writes, "We cannot exercise saving faith until we have been regenerated, so we say faith is dependent on regeneration, not regeneration on faith."²⁸ The view that regeneration precedes faith is obviously not new.

Sandeman's female dissenter concludes,

But, Sir, The Scripture Doctrine, concerning justifying and Saving Faith, is much more than a *bare* Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel's Report, That Christ died for Sinners.²⁹

This view of *bare faith*, for which Sandeman became well known, would later influence the likes of Alexander Campbell and the Plymouth Brethren.

In 1760, word reached Sandeman in London that his work *Letters on Theron and Aspasio* had caused quite a stir in the American colonies. Encouraged by their response to his views on *bare faith*, Sandeman left England for America with John Glas's blessing.³⁰

While preaching in various towns along the east coast, Sandeman attracted great crowds. However, he was not always warmly welcomed. On December 14, 1764 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a mob broke out and smashed the windows of the meeting room where he was preaching. Sandeman was subsequently given four days to leave town.³¹ Nevertheless, soon after this incident, on May 4, 1765, a church was established in that very city. Several other congregations also sprang up in the surrounding areas.

After this event Sandeman became an elder of a congregation in Danbury, Connecticut. Due to his religious and political beliefs, Sandeman

²⁷ *Mr. Sandeman Refuted by An Old Woman: or Thoughts on his Letters to the Author of Theron and Aspasio: In a Letter from a Friend in the Country to a Friend in Town* (London: J. Hart in Popping's Court, 1759), 3.

²⁸ Sproul, 195.

²⁹ *Mr. Sandeman Refuted by An Old Woman*, 9.

³⁰ South, 60-61.

³¹ Jean F. Hankins, "A Different Kind of Loyalist: The Sandemanians of New England during the Revolutionary War," *The New England Quarterly* (June 1987): 225-26.

was fined and asked to leave town in the spring of 1770. However, Sandeman never left Danbury. He died there on April 2, 1771. After a short controversy over whether his body could be buried in the city limits, the town relented and he was buried in the Old Wooster Street graveyard.³² To this day, his gravestone reads:³³

Here lies
 Until the Resurrection
 The body of
 ROBERT SANDEMAN;
 A native of Perth, North Britain;
 Who, in the face of continual opposition
 From all sorts of men,
 Long and boldly contended
 For the ancient faith;
 That the bare work of Jesus Christ,
 Without a deed,
 or thought on the part of man,
 is sufficient to present
 THE CHIEF [OF] SINNERS
 Spotless before God.
 To preach this blessed truth,
 He left his country—he left his friends;
 And, after much patient suffering,
 Finished his labours,
 At Danbury,
 Second April, 1771, Aged 52

IV. THE INFLUENCE

While he was alive, Robert Sandeman contended earnestly for the faith, forsaking cohort, comfort, and even country. On April 2, 1771, Robert Sandeman went to be with the Lord, however, his influence

³² *Ibid.*, 233.

³³ South, 61. There seems to be two variant readings. For an optional reading visit <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~bronwyn/ssbionotices.htm#johng>.

would live on through the likes of Greville Ewing, Thomas Walker, and Alexander Campbell.

A. GREVILLE EWING

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Greville Ewing was ordained in 1793 as the associate minister at Lady Glenorchy's Chapel. He became well known for his expository preaching and love for missions, establishing Scotland's first mission's periodical, the *Missionary Magazine*.³⁴ Richardson notes,

The object of the *Missionary Magazine* was to awaken the churches to the importance of missions to the heathen world; and it was conducted with marked ability by Mr. Ewing, and caused no little stir throughout Scotland.³⁵

In an alliance with the Haldane brothers, whom some claim were growth catalysts for Congregationalism in Scotland,³⁶ Ewing began tutoring students of theology. This alliance would soon unravel as Richardson notes,

In his religious sentiments generally he [Ewing] was much more favorable to the views of Glas and Sandeman than were the Haldanes. Indeed, the introduction of the works of Sandeman into the seminary at Glasgow gave umbrage to the Haldanes, who protested against it, and it was one of the reasons for the transfer of the seminary to Edinburgh.³⁷

Furthermore, Richardson comments,

As it respects the doctrines of the Haldanes, he found that they did not fully approve of the views of Glas, Sandeman, and of Walker... the Haldanes regarded the writings of Glas and Sandeman

³⁴ K. J. Steward, "Greville Ewing," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 309.

³⁵ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell: A View of the Origin, Progress, and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 151-52.

³⁶ See John Butler's article at <http://www.congregational.org.uk/main3/history/scotland2.htm>. It is interesting to note that the Haldanes, who sold their estates in order to fund evangelistic efforts, in July 1798 began establishing Circus Churches where the poor could hear the gospel free of charge.

³⁷ Richardson, 177-78.

as exhibiting, here and there, noble views of the freeness of the gospel and the simplicity of faith; but to their system, as a whole, and especially to the intolerant spirit manifested by them and their followers, both the brothers were always strongly opposed. With regard to faith, they regarded Sandeman's view, that it was the mere assent of the understanding to testimony, and that faith in Christ did not differ from faith in any other historical personage, as frigid and defective.³⁸

Ewing went on to influence many with Sandemanian doctrines, including Alexander Campbell, the founder of the Campbellites, the Disciples of Christ, and the Church of Christ, which will be discussed later.

B. JOHN WALKER

Not much is known about John Walker's formative years except that he was born in Exeter, England between late 1773 to early 1774.³⁹ While teaching at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, he ministered at Bethesda Chapel. After becoming disenchanted with the church as a whole, Walker resigned from the fellowship in 1804. Walker, a doctor by trade, was a peculiar sort who was not particularly concerned with the cares of this world. Richardson notes, "This singular man sold his carriage and traveled on foot through Ireland..."⁴⁰ According to Whitsitt, Walker was "a learned and unfortunate gentleman whose literalism had rendered him one of the most fantastic of all Sandemanians."⁴¹ In other words, Walker was a fanatic.

³⁸ Ibid., 177.

³⁹ G. B. Tatham, *Dr. John Walker and the Sufferings of the Clergy*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1911), 1. Because there is so little known about Rev. John Walker, his exact birth date is unavailable.

⁴⁰ Richardson, 61-62.

⁴¹ William H. Whitsitt, *Sidney Rigdon: The Real Founder of Mormonism*, Book 2 (unpublished), 105. (This work can be found at <http://sidneyrigdon.com/wht/1891WhtB.htm>). Richardson also implicitly ties Walker to Sandeman by saying, "As it respects the doctrines taught by the Haldanes, he found that they did not fully approve of the views of Glas, Sandeman, and of Walker..." (p. 176). Furthermore, in 1815 Alexander Campbell wrote, "I am now an Independent in church government; of that faith and view of the gospel exhibited in John Walker's *Seven Letters to Alexander Knox*, and a Baptist so

The influence of Walker's preaching in Ireland and England has some controversy behind it. Richardson states that Walker traveled "through England and gained here and there a few proselytes to his views, especially Plymouth, from whence they have become known as the Plymouth Brethren."⁴² Many have tried to link John Walker, and thus Sandeman, to the founding of the Plymouth Brethren. However, there is not unanimity among historians. Contrary to Richardson's opinion, William B. Neatby states,

Bretherenism cannot in any proper sense be affiliated with either of these movements [Walkerites and Kellyites], indeed, there is not a word in the narratives of any of the early Brethren to indicate that they consciously received any influence from them. But, that such movements existed is proof of the wide diffusion of ideas that went to form Brethrenism, and to which Brethrenism in its turn was destined to give a far more durable embodiment, and a far more extensive influence.⁴³

Whether or not Walker had a direct hand in the founding of the Plymouth Brethren cannot be proven, however, even those like Neatby who deny Walker's direct influence, acknowledge his influence on the movement.

F. F. Bruce notes,

Founders of the Brethren movement were a group of young men, mostly associated with Trinity College, Dublin, who tried to find a

far as regards baptism" (<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/egates/tdoc/TDOC02.HTM>).

⁴² Richardson, 61-62. In the first footnote, Richardson notes, "These 'Brethren,' however, it is believed, do not accord with all the views held by Walker. They practice immersion, but do not make it a term of communion; have no officers in the church, and conceive that 'the unity of the Spirit' is shown by each member rising, as he may be moved to perform public functions. They have small churches in England at various points, as at Leeds, Liverpool, etc., and the philanthropist Müller, author of the 'Life of Faith,' was immersed by them."

⁴³ William B. Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902), 27.

way in which they could come together for worship and communion simply as fellow-Christians, disregarding denominational barriers.⁴⁴

If this statement is true, because of his connection with Trinity College, John Walker must have had some influence on the founders of the Plymouth Brethren movement. Krapohl notes, "It is difficult to believe that Darby did not become familiar with the views of... Walker during Darby's days at Trinity College."⁴⁵ Callahan also notes,

It is interesting to note that early Brethren were aware of the Walkerites and turned acquaintance into insult when it served a purpose. One may note a tendency among Brethren historians to align the Walkerites and the early Brethren. For example, George Stokes argued that there was a direct relationship between the Walkerite meetings and the formation of Darby's early ecclesial convictions; Robert Krapohl saw so many similarities between Darby and the Walkerites that a direct connection seemed probable...⁴⁶

Although there is disagreement among historians, the evidence seems to indicate that Walker's influence on the Plymouth Brethren Movement was profound. Callahan notes a study by Harold H. Rowdon in which Rowdon acknowledges that there are "numerous similarities between the Brethren and historically coordinate movements, especially the Recordites and the Walkerites."⁴⁷ Furthermore, Richardson comments that "[Walker] taught that there should be no stated minister,

⁴⁴ Bruce's article "Who are the Brethren?" can be found at <http://web.singnet.com.sg/~syec/literature/brethren.html>.

⁴⁵ Robert H. Krapohl, "A Search for Purity: The Controversial Life of John Nelson Darby," (Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1988), 36.

⁴⁶ James P. Callahan, *Primitivist Piety: The Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996), 70. In n. 21 Callahan quotes Anthony Groves as accusing an ecclesial position similar to the Walkerites and Glassites: "practically [your ecclesial practices] will prove that you witness against all but yourselves, as certainly as the Walkerites or Glassites..." Cf. *Memoirs of the Late Anthony Norris Groves, Containing Extracts from His Letters and Journals, Compiled by His Widow*, ed. Mrs. [Harriett] Anthony N. Groves, 2nd ed. (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1857), 539.

⁴⁷ Callahan, 21. See Harold H. Rowdon, "Secession from the Established Church in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Vox Evangelica* 3 (1964): 76-68.

but that all members should exercise their gifts indiscriminately.”⁴⁸ This same view of Ecclesiology was earlier purported by Glas and Sandeman. The common practice in Plymouth Brethren congregations to observe weekly communion and autonomy in church government, characterized earlier Sandemanian congregations as well. Murray notes, “Practice developed with a fresh study of Scripture, and weekly Communion, and a lay leadership were instituted.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Walker’s Sandemanian⁵⁰ influence did not stop with the Brethren movement.

In an address to the members of the Methodist Society of Ireland, Walker plainly aligned himself with Sandeman’s view of justification by faith alone writing that:

The doctrine of a sinner’s justification, as the *free gift of God* in Christ Jesus, to every one that believeth, is the essential difference of the Gospel, that distinguishes it from all human systems: and all other ways of justification, which men propose to themselves, are alike dishonorable to God—alike opposed to the truth of his word,—and alike ruinous to those who walk in them. The doctrines, as Luther justly observed, is the turning-point of a standing or falling church; and it may as truly be said to be the turning-point of *true or false religion*.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Richardson, 61.

⁴⁹ Murray, “John Glas,” *Dictionary of Scottish Church*, 364.

⁵⁰ Walker signed a document called the “Portsmouth Compact,” which contained names such as: (1) William Hutchinson, Jr., who was the husband of Anne Hutchinson who was banished along with Roger Williams from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for antinomian beliefs—believing that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone; (2) William Coddington who was the first Governor of Rhode Island and who supported Anne’s beliefs (see A. C. Addison, *The Romantic Story Of The Mayflower Pilgrims And Its Place In The Life Of Today* [Boston: L.C. Page & Company, 1909, 184], which is available online at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/users/deetz/Plymouth/addison.txt.html>); and (3) John Clarke who founded Rhode Island with Anne Hutchinson and William Coddington and aided Anne in the antinomian controversy. See “William Coddington” *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), <http://www.bartleby.com/65/>. Also see <http://www.rootsweb.com/~rinewpor/compact.html>. The first three names were banished for their antinomian beliefs. This seems to further substantiate Walker’s soteriological convictions.

⁵¹ John B. D. Walker, *An Expostulatory Address to the Members of the Methodist Society in Ireland* (Dublin: R. Dapper, 1804), 33-34. This was printed

For Walker, the “fantastic Sandemanian,” the doctrine of *sola fide* was not something to be debated, but the “turning-point of *true* or *false religion*.”

C. ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

Alexander Campbell was born in County Antrim, Ireland in 1788 to a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian minister named Thomas Campbell. After studying at the University of Glasgow, Alexander moved to the United States in 1809. Ordained in 1812, he assumed a leadership role in his father’s ministry, The Christian Association of Washington (Pennsylvania). This gave Alexander the opportunity to travel throughout Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, and Tennessee as an itinerant preacher. His converts soon began calling themselves “Disciples of Christ.” Hope states, “Campbell claimed to derive his theology and churchmanship from the Bible, especially the NT, in which the basic pattern of Christian faith and practice was displayed.”⁵²

There is no question that Campbell sought to base his theology solely on the Scriptures, but as a theologian, he could not help being influenced by others. There is no doubt that the Sandemanians influenced the Campbellites—even a “meetinghouse in Edinburgh is marked with a small sign that reads: *Church of Christ (Commonly Called Glasites or Sandemanians)*...”⁵³

Undoubtedly, Sandeman’s move to America led to his influence upon the Campbellites. Garrett writes, “The Glasite churches, perhaps as many as thirty in Great Britain, eventually had practices that made their way to America and into the Stone-Campbell Movement.”⁵⁴ However, this influence most likely began prior to Campbell’s move to America. John Walker was certainly “another individual who visited and preached at Rich-Hill... whose abilities and learning made quite a strong impression on the mind of young Alexander.”⁵⁵

while John Walker was a fellow at Trinity College, where he most likely knew Darby.

⁵² N. V. Hope, “Alexander Campbell,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 189-90.

⁵³ Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1981), 50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁵ Richardson, 60.

Certainly, the theology of Alexander Campbell was forever changed through his encounters with Sandeman, Glas, Walker, and also Greville Ewing. Richardson writes,

This change [Campbell's disengagement from the Seceder denomination and all forms of Presbyterianism] seems to have been occasioned chiefly through his intimacy with Greville Ewing... Alexander was frequently at Mr. Ewing's to dinner or to tea, where he formed agreeable intimacies with the guests at his hospitable board, and acquired, during this intercourse, an intimate knowledge of Mr. Ewing's previous religious history.⁵⁶

Garrett states,

Besides an emphasis on weekly communion, it can be concluded that Ewing's influence on Campbell would include these elements of reform, all of which were indeed rare for their time... the view that faith is not supernaturally or subjectively induced, but is based upon the belief of scriptural testimony, the appeal being to man's intellect as well as his heart.⁵⁷

Concerning Campbell's view of faith, Ray writes, "This Campbellite faith does not concern the heart; it is the mere *persuasion that the Gospel is true!*"⁵⁸ While Greville Ewing had a profound affect on Campbell, Sandeman's affect cannot be underestimated. Whitsitt writes,

Returning to the subject of faith, Alexander describes as follows the method in which he pursued his investigation: "I assembled all the leading writers (that day on) these subjects. I laid before me Robert Sandeman, Hervey, Marshall, Bellamy, Glas, Cudworth, and others of minor fame in this controversy. I not only read, but studied, and wrote off in miniature, their respective views. I had Paul and Peter, James and John, on the same table. I took nothing upon trust. I did not care for the authority, reputation, or standing of one of the systems, a grain of sand. I never weighed the consequences of embracing any one of the systems as affecting my standing or reputation in the world. Truth (not who says so) was my sole object. I found much entertainment in the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 148-49.

⁵⁷ Garrett, 169.

⁵⁸ D. B. Ray, *Text-Book on Campbellism* (St Louis: St. Louis Baptist Publishing Co., 1881), 166.

investigation; and I will not blush, nor do I fear to say, that, in this controversy, Sandeman was like a giant among dwarfs. He was like Samson with the posts of Gaza on his shoulders."⁵⁹

There is not doubt that Sandeman heavily influenced Alexander Campbell at least in regard to his definition of faith. Garrett writes,

"Sandeman's theological contribution to the [Campbellite] Movement... was his view of the nature of faith... Sandeman contended that faith in Christ is not all that different from any other faith that man has, for all faith is based upon testimony and comes through man's assent to facts."⁶⁰

Furthermore, Garrett writes, "He also taught that faith begins with intellectual assent..."⁶¹

The Campbellites, as they were known early on, are commonly known today as the Disciples of Christ or the Church of Christ, which presently number around four million members.⁶² Whitsitt opines,

The Disciples of Christ are direct descendants of the Sandemanians; it is possible to point out in the literature of Sandemanianism the source whence Mr. Campbell derived almost every one of his religious opinions. If he ever had an original idea he took pains to avoid giving expression to it in such of his writings as have been submitted to the inspection of the public.⁶³

The Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ rely heavily on Acts 2:38 for their view that justification is not solely through faith but also through repentance (viewed as a turning from sins) and water baptism. Concerning Campbell's view of justification, Humble writes,

While Campbell argued that simple historical belief of testimony constitutes saving faith, he nevertheless contended that this belief must be operative to constitute saving faith and that to become

⁵⁹ Whitsitt, 111.

⁶⁰ Garrett, 53-54.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶² This number was taken from the Disciples of Christ Historical Society website <http://users.aol.com/dishistsoc/>.

⁶³ Whitsitt, 124-25.

operative it must lead the sinner to obey the Lord in baptism. Baptism is the test of faith; for without it, faith will not save.⁶⁴

In taking both elements in Acts 2:38, repentance and baptism, as pertaining to justification it is not surprising that the Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ correctly make the distinction between faith and repentance (as viewed as a turning from sins). Ray writes,

The Campbellites often ask, in fancied triumph, "How can one repent before he believes?" "Can a man repent before he is heard of Christ, or the plan of salvation?"⁶⁵

Although they correctly delineate between faith and repentance, they unfortunately see both of them as necessary for salvation. This is further qualified by the need for water baptism in order to transform faith into saving faith.

V. CONCLUSION

Although Robert Sandeman's definition of faith seems to have cleared up a point of contention, for many, Sandeman's theological derivation might be somewhat embarrassing. Most would be excited about Sandeman's influence upon the Plymouth Brethren, however, the discovery of his influence upon the Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ might not lead to hearty rejoicing. Sandeman's view of *bare faith* when coupled with repentance and baptism as necessary elements of saving faith hardly exemplifies Sandeman's view of justification. South noted,

In his endeavor to remove any concept of merit from saving faith he carried the issue to the extreme. He described faith as the mere mental persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, the "intellectual apprehension of objective revelation."⁶⁶

For Sandeman, saving faith was nothing more than "mental persuasion of the truth of the Gospel."

⁶⁴ Bill J. Humble, *Campbell & Controversy: The Debates of Alexander Campbell* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1986), 286.

⁶⁵ Ray, 162.

⁶⁶ South, 61.

Just as the gospel survived from its first controversy in Galatia until Sandeman's day, the burden is on those in the Free Grace camp to carry the torch until Christ returns. May Sandeman's motto "contending earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,"⁶⁷ forever characterize those in the Free Grace movement. Just as 2 John 8 admonishes believers to "watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward," we must remain watchful and alert, not only striving for clarity in our definition of faith but also striving for clarity when answering the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

⁶⁷ Ibid., 60.

BOOK REVIEWS

Harmony with God: A Fresh Look at Repentance. By Zane C. Hodges. Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 2001. 133 pp. (Paper), \$9.95.

In the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, John Nash scolded a brilliant fellow graduate student for publishing material that had not a new or innovative idea anywhere within it. One cannot make that charge concerning *Harmony with God*. This book contains groundbreaking ideas that deserve a best-selling type of hearing.

Theologians have been notoriously sloppy when it comes to the doctrines of repentance and forgiveness. Not one to my knowledge has taken the time to meditate on the precise relationship between the two. What role does repentance play in the life of a Christian? When does a Christian need to repent? How can a forgiven person, a believer, still need forgiveness?

John Nash received a Nobel Prize for his novel work in the field of economics that grew out of his meditations. Hodges should receive a spiritual Nobel Prize for this book which has grown out of equally amazing meditations.

GES is happy that this book had its genesis at our conference on repentance in 1998. Hodges was a key speaker. But he was stricken with a heart attack and couldn't attend. As a result, he wrote 6 newsletter articles for *Grace in Focus* that form half of this book. The other half of the book is new material.

Nearly every NT verse on repentance is discussed here. Since there is a Scripture Index, this book is a handy guide to all verses on repentance.

Here are the insights brought forth in *Harmony with God*. First, repentance is not a condition of eternal life. Second, repentance is a fellowship issue, not a justification issue. Third, both believers and unbelievers should repent in order to get right with God. Fourth, forgiveness is not to be equated with eternal life. Born-again people need ongoing forgiveness (e.g., 1 John 1:9). Forgiveness is primarily a fellowship issue. Fifth, on the cross Jesus did not merely potentially take away the sins of the world. He did so actually. No one will be sent

to hell because of their sins. They will be sent there because they lack eternal life (Rev 20:15). Of course the reason anyone lacks eternal life is because they never believed in Jesus for it. Sixth, Hodges points out something else that is rarely discussed by others: God uses different methods to prepare people to come to faith in Jesus. He suggests three different avenues: deep soul thirst, gratitude for some blessing from God, and repentance from one's sins (pp. 54-55). He points out that "God has many ways to bring men to Himself" and that "None of these 'routes' to faith should be mistaken for a 'condition' for eternal life" (p. 54).

This is actually a very short book that can be easily read in a few hours. However, you will want to read it over and over again for it is chock full of marvelous insights. And you will want it handy on your shelf as a reference work.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Free at Last: Experiencing True Freedom Through Your Identity in Christ. By Tony Evans. Chicago: Moody Press, 2001. 209 pp. (Cloth), \$19.99.

Dr. Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and president of The Urban Alternative, has distinguished himself as an excellent communicator. On top of that, he is a strong advocate of the doctrines of grace. His ability to communicate clearly and his commitment to grace come together in this book.

The fourteen chapters deal with topics like our Christian identity, our new position in Christ, our struggle with sin, legalism, grace, walking by the Spirit, living by faith, and intimacy with God. There is both a Subject Index and a Scripture Index.

Evans begins with the proposition that most Christians who struggle with sin and the Christian life need to understand their new identity in

Jesus Christ. His goal is to explain that new identity and the implications for living consistent with it which brings freedom from Satan, sin, and guilt. I believe he accomplishes that goal and as a result I think this book will help many Christians who struggle in their walk with God. It seems getting justified by grace through faith is only half the battle these days. Many Christians need to learn to be sanctified by that same grace and faith. Confusion, inconsistency, and legalism abound in our churches. This book has the potential to reach many people with a convincing presentation of what it means to live by grace through faith.

Evans's style is very sermonic, which makes the book very appealing on the popular level. One gets the impression that in-depth exegesis is used, but carefully hidden (as it should be in this type of work). Important Scriptures are explained, but not with a formal expositional style. The chapters are arranged by and follow more of a topical style. This all makes for easy reading.

As in his preaching, Evans distinguishes himself as a master of illustrations. If illustrations are "windows to the truth," then there is plenty of light here to help us see. I'm sure many a grace preacher or teacher will find this a rich source from which to "borrow" an effective illustration. But Evans speaks clearly even without the use of illustrations. He is also a master of making hard texts simpler.

It is encouraging to see a man of Evans's profile unashamedly teach the implications of living by grace. Everyone who appreciates grace living should own a copy and buy a second to generously share with others.

Charles C. Bing

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Burleson, TX

Sermon on the Mount Expounded. By Robert Govett. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 2001. 386 pp. (Cloth), \$22.95.

Robert Govett lived from 1813 until 1901; however, this book was originally published three decades after his death, in 1934. We are

indebted to Schoettle Publishing Company for specializing in reprinting Free Grace works that have long been out of print.

While the English of this book is a bit stiff for our modern tastes, the vitality of the author comes through. Thus this book is an easy read. And it is a challenging one. Govett uses force of argument and illustrations to drive home the application of the text.

He covers the Sermon verse by verse and so there is a fair amount of helpful material here. A pastor or Bible teacher will find much here to benefit preaching and teaching.

It is refreshing to read a book in which the author is not challenging the readers to see if they are “true believers.” In doing so, Govett makes it clear that perseverance is not a condition of eternal life.

I found his application of Matt 6:19-21 a bit too restrictive. He indicates that it is wrong for a husband to take out life insurance for his wife and children (p. 199). It is hard to see how this text forbids that when it is a well-established principle from the wisdom literature that a wise man leaves an inheritance for his children and his children’s children. Of course, that inheritance could be left by saving sufficient money for them and not by purchasing insurance. However, that doesn’t seem to be what Govett means. He seems to be saying that all storing up of money for later in this life is improper.

He also says that no Christian should be a lawyer or judge (e.g., pp. 15, 238). This too is hard to sustain from the texts he cites.

Still, these are minor concerns. My only major reservation is that Govett explains many texts dealing with the kingdom by suggesting that unfaithful believers will miss the Millennium (e.g., see pp. vii-ix, 7, 11, 16). For example, I was bothered to read that “Faith in Jesus as Lord, and confession of Him as such, are enough for salvation; as we have seen Rom. X...*That which is enough to introduce eternal life, is not enough for the kingdom.* The entrance into that is ‘according to works.’ Here therefore works are required” (pp. 339-40). In the first place confessing Christ is not a condition of eternal life.

In the second place, all of the texts Govett cites are more readily explained in other ways (see, for example, the explanations by Dillow in *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, Hodges in *The Gospel Under Siege, Grace in Eclipse, and Absolutely Free!*, and my book, *Confident in Christ*). Govett seems to have missed the point of 1 Thess 5:10, “Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together

with Him." Even believers who are morally asleep will be raptured and will be with the Lord in the Millennium.

I recommend this book for the well-grounded believer. However, I must caution that the repeated emphasis on missing the Millennium is likely to disturb some believers.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

The Baptismal Regeneration/Believer's Baptism Debate: A Theological and Historical Overview of the Most Contested Subject of the Church Age. By J. O. Hosler. Haverford, PA: Infinity Publishing Co., 1999. 522 pp. (Paper), \$22.95.

The title of this book is a bit daunting and slightly misleading. While much of the book deals with the issue of whether baptism is a condition of eternal salvation, a significant portion does not. My favorite sections of the book are Chapter 3, in which Hosler deals with salvation in the OT, and Chapter 10, in which he deals with the Lordship Salvation debate.

Though the title of Chapter 1 is somewhat unappealing ("The Ritual-Equals-Reality Controversy in the Apostolic Church"), this is actually a very readable section. In it Hosler shows that no one was ever saved by any ritual, whether circumcision, washings, baptism, or anything else. He shows how false teachers were trying to undermine the ministry of the apostles themselves by introducing rituals as necessary for eternal salvation.

A nice distinction is made between those who proclaim a false gospel who are unsaved versus those who are saved (that is, those who came to faith and then were later misled). See especially pages 23-25.

JOTGES readers will likely join me in their enjoyment of Chapter 3, "One Plan of Salvation for All Ages." In it the author shows that even in the OT people believed in the coming Messiah for everlasting life. They were not saved by obedience, animal sacrifices, or a general faith in God. They specifically believed in the Messiah who was to come.

Chapter 9 examines scriptural arguments in favor of baptismal regeneration. Passages like Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Gal 3:27, Eph 5:26, and Titus 3:5 are discussed. While I don't agree with all of the interpretations (e.g., Hosler adopts the causal use of *eis* in Acts 2:38), there is much excellent material here. Especially helpful is his repeated reference to "the principle of coherence." By this he means that Scripture cannot contradict itself.

In Chapter 10 Hosler primarily uses John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus and Faith Works* as the source for the charges which he refutes. He delineates and answers 31 Lordship Salvation charges. This section (pp. 439-81) is the portion I found most profitable. It directly impinges on many gospel-related issues. This chapter is reasonably well documented. However, there were a few places where I would have liked more proof to demonstrate that this is what MacArthur is in fact arguing. See, for example, Argument 13, f.n. 16, p. 452. Hosler fails to show evidence that MacArthur is arguing for *absolute* obedience. See also Argument 21, f.n. 18, p. 462 and Argument 23, pp. 464-65 (this is the only point in which no documentation at all is given).

Additionally, it would help if differences within the Lordship Salvation ranks were pointed out. Not all in the movement, for example, agree with all that MacArthur says on the subject.

In the concluding chapter (Chapter 11), Hosler considers the question of whether this wrangling about baptism and salvation needlessly divides the Body of Christ. It is a nice section, ending with an invitation to the one who is not sure he has eternal life to believe in Jesus (p. 504).

Other chapters in the book cover the place of the law in Christianity (Chapter 2), whether the gospel and baptism of John the Baptist was Christian (Chapter 4), whether baptism replaces circumcision (Chapter 5), infant baptism and believer's baptism (Chapter 6), an historical overview of the baptismal regeneration debate (Chapter 7), and subjective and extra-biblical arguments for baptismal regeneration (Chapter 8).

There is a Scripture Index. The reader should beware, however, of two problems. First, some of the passages are not in sequential order. So, for example, under Acts, we find three passages from Acts 10, then Acts 16:14, 19:4, 2:38, 22:14-16, 8:15, 16.

Second, the vast majority of passages mentioned in the book are not included in the brief one-page index. For example, on page 131

alone there are 11 passages mentioned and of those 11 not one is indexed. I found similar results on many other pages (e.g., pp. 69, 161, 204, 340, 442).

I recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Shock and Surprise Beyond the Rapture! The Mystery of the Ages Revealed. By Gary T. Whipple. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992. (Cloth), \$10.95.

Those who are interested in the mission of GES will find *Beyond the Rapture* by Pastor Gary Whipple a mixed blessing. The burden of the author is to clarify in a systematic way the doctrine of rewards as a subset of the larger issue of eschatology. The message of the book is completely compatible with the grace message of the gospel. The author clearly states that justification is by faith and that eternal life is received by faith alone in Christ alone. These are encouraging words in a day of theological confusion.

The theological model and matrix of the book's message is embedded in classic dispensationalism with its eschatology maintaining premillennialism with a pretribulational rapture scheme. As such, the book builds off of this theological platform to offer a lively exposition of the reward and warning passages of the NT.

The style of the book is expositional as opposed to exegetical, although some Greek is utilized. Many of the fine points of exegesis are left out, but the exposition of the NT texts covered is clear with an occasional chart for clarification. Much, if not most, of what is said is in line with the many fine books coming from the grace camp such as *Grace in Eclipse* and *The Gospel Under Siege* both by Zane Hodges. Also many similar themes are seen in Joseph Dillow's excellent work, *Reign of the Servant Kings* and in Robert Wilkin's, *Confident in Christ*. Pastor Whipple's exposition of the Bema Seat of Christ, the parable of

the soils, the conditional nature of the warning passages in the Book of Hebrews, “the abundant entrance,” the “out-resurrection” of Philippians, the “outer darkness,” and other standard reward passages are dealt with in a way that maintain distance from the Reformed theological persuasion and do not compromise the freeness of the gospel.

However, *Beyond the Rapture* departs from this stream of rewards teaching into a different current that was started by Robert Govett in his *Kingdom Studies*, and *Entrance into the Kingdom*, both of which were written at the end of the 19th century. These views were carried on through the writing ministry of G. H. Lang during the 1940’s and 50’s in his *Commentary on Hebrews* and in his insightful work *First Born Sons, Rights and Risks*.

Beyond the Rapture articulates the partial rapture model in which only those Christians who have invested their life for Christ will be raptured. Only those who “overcome” are “found faithful,” “endure to the end,” will receive “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,” which is the “first resurrection” that leads to the “the wedding feast,” and have the right to enter the millennial kingdom and reign with Christ. The author would have benefited from a reading of “The Rapture in I Thessalonians 5:9-10” by Zane Hodges in *Walvoord: A Tribute* which seeks to clarify not only the fact of the rapture but also that the rapture is pretribulation and not partial for all believers whether they be “awake or asleep.” Pastor Whipple contends that those Christians who are not faithful will spend the millennial kingdom in the Gehenna fire (p. 174). This is distinct from the lake of fire reserved for the lost and the devil. The Gehenna fire is for those believers who did not live out the life of faith and obedience to Christ during their time upon the earth. This is identical to the teaching of G. H. Pember and others concerning the future of unfaithful Christians (pp. 156-94).

One of the interesting concepts presented in *Beyond the Rapture* is the idea that there needs to be a salvation of the three constitutional parts of a person: the soul, spirit, and body. The concept is built from the tripartite view of human constitution interpreted from 1 Thess 5:23 (pp. 17-63). This is accomplished by the justification of the spirit, which results in eternal life. The believer then awaits the resurrection of the body. However, the salvation of the soul is through progressive sanctification and results in participation in the millennial kingdom if one is deemed worthy. This is based upon the saying of Jesus in the synoptic gospels that in order to “save your life/soul you must lose it. If you lose

it you will save it.” The same theme is seen in 1 Pet 1:9 in which a future salvation awaits those who have a strong faith and hence “obtain salvation of the soul.” This view has its antecedent form in Govett and Lang. It is also the teaching of Watchmen Nee in his work, *The Salvation of the Soul* written in 1930. A modern rendition of this view is found in A. Edwin Wilson and Arlen Chitwood in works of the same title.

There is much in Pastor Whipple’s book concerning the doctrine of rewards that is commendable, especially as he shows how this teaching can be applied to motivate Christians in their spiritual life. However, the degree of nuance concerning the levels of existence and the housing of the saints during and after the Millennium seems to drift from clear exegesis.

The book contains a good Scripture and Subject Index. It is easy to find the topics and texts desired to investigate certain aspects of the study. However, it contains a slim bibliography. Only a few of the “partial rapture” sources are mentioned and almost none of the modern works on the topic of rewards are cited.

For those who are interested in a modern exposition of the historic partial rapture theology of Robert Govett, G. H. Lang, and G. H. Pember, this is a very good work. However, although there is much to be gained from the theme of biblical rewards, for those who embrace the reward theology of GES this book must be read with caution due to its theological commitment to a partial rapture theology.

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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

“We Plead on Christ’s Behalf: ‘Be Reconciled to God,’” Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Bible Translator* (July 1997): 328-31.

Every major English translation of 2 Cor 5:20 includes the word *you*. For example, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf...” (NKJV, NIV); “We beg you on behalf of Christ” (NASB); “We entreat you on behalf of Christ” (NRSV).

In this short article the author makes a simple point: don’t supply the word *you*. He gives several reasons for this. First, the readers, the believers in Corinth, were already reconciled to God. Second, the verb *deomai* (I beg, beseech) is used 5 other times by Paul, 3 of which occur without an object (Rom 1:10; 2 Cor 10:2; 1 Thess 3:10).

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

“The Meaning of Porneia in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9,” David Janzen, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (December 2000): 66-80.

Janzen argues that we can find a plausible explanation for the divorce exception clauses that Matthew uses by investigating common practices of divorce in Israel and its cultural neighbors. He suggests that Matthew’s use of the term *porneia* (Matt 5:32; 19:9) is best understood as a reference to the notion of divorce without just cause; an idea presented throughout the ancient Near East and first-century Judaism. Just cause includes actions on the part of the woman that constitute the man’s right to divorce without repayment of the dowry. Matthew excludes the possibility of divorce without just cause, and limits just cause to *porneia*, sexual intercourse during betrothal or marriage with one other than the wife’s husband. Jesus did indeed authorize divorce,

but only divorce with just cause. Just cause is strictly limited to adultery (*moicheia*) or intercourse during the betrothal period (*porneia*).

Much of the debate surrounding these passages centers on Matthew's usage of the word *porneia* instead of the technical term for adultery: *moicheia*. The thrust of this article is to demonstrate that Matthew uses *porneia* instead of *moicheia* to demonstrate that it is not simply sex during marriage that constitutes a permissible reason for a man to divorce, but also sex during betrothal. Janzen believes that Matthew is aiming at a narrow interpretation of 'erwat dabar ("some indecency," Deut 24:1), one that encompasses only intercourse on the part of the woman with a man other than her fiancée or husband.

Janzen makes a case for his position by consulting Jewish and Ancient Near East history. However, this writer does not find extensive arguments based on extra biblical history especially convincing. But for those who are intrigued with the exception clauses in Matthew, this is worthwhile reading.

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"Jesus' Last Passover: The Synoptics and John," David Instone-Brewer, *The Expository Times* (January 2001): 122-23.

The Synoptic writers say that the Lord celebrated the Passover with His disciples. Yet John says that the Jews would not come into the Praetorium when they were calling for Jesus to be crucified so that they could eat the Passover that night. How could both nights be the Passover night? How do we explain this seeming discrepancy?

Instone-Brewer discusses the two major interpretations. One view assumes that sacrifices could be eaten on either the 14th or 15th of the month, even though all knew the 15th was Passover, because this gave sacrifices on Thursday afternoon (the 13th), to be eaten Thursday night (the 14th, actually the start of Friday in Jewish reckoning). Others brought their sacrifices on Friday afternoon (the 14th), to be eaten Friday night

(the 15th, which is actually the start of the Sabbath, since under Jewish reckoning the new day begins at sundown, not midnight).

Another view is that there was a legitimate difference of opinion in Israel on the dating. According to the writings of some first century rabbis, some sacrificed their lambs on what was actually the 13th, and others on the 14th. The best explanation for this is because those who sacrificed on the 13th thought that it was the 14th. The rabbis said that as long as one thought he was celebrating the Passover at the right time, the celebration was acceptable to God.

The reason the days of that month were off is because there was a difference of opinion on the date of the new moon. The Pharisee celebrated Passover on one day and Sadducees on the next.

Whichever view is right—Instone-Brewer adopts the second view—this shows how the Synoptics were correct when they say that Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover together on the night before He was killed, and John is correct when he says the Jews would not enter Pilate's Praetorium because they wanted to eat the Passover that night. The Passover was celebrated on two consecutive days, the night Jesus was betrayed, and the night immediately after He was placed in the tomb.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
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“Mark 15:39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion,” Earl S. Johnson, Jr., *Biblia* 81 (3, 2000): 406-13.

For years scholars have debated how to properly understand the confession of the Roman Centurion in Mark 15:39 (cf. Matt 27:54; Luke 23:47). Much of the discussion centers on the phrase “Son of God” (*huios theou*). In the Greek there is no article before “Son;” so it could be translated “a son of God,” that is “a godly man.”

Presbyterian Pastor, Earl S. Johnson, Jr., insists that continuing examination of the grammatical, literary, and historical evidence indicates

that the centurion's remarks about Jesus in Mark 15:39 cannot be understood as a full Christian confession on Jesus' divine Sonship. He suggests that Jesus' identity in the Gospel is not revealed by the centurion, the demons, the disciples, or in the introduction to the Gospel. (Note: Johnson believes text-critical evidence indicates that *huios theou* in 1:1 is not a part of the original text.) It is made clear by God's declaration that He truly is the Son. This occurred at His baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7).

Johnson argues this case by stating that in Mark's Gospel, the absence of the definite article casts serious doubt on whether *huios* should be taken definitely (i.e. determinate). He substantiates this view by demonstrating that in Mark 1:11 and 9:7 the definite article is used clearly expressing the point that Jesus is the Son of God. He also builds a case from textual criticism that sheds doubt on whether Mark 1:1 should be understood in the traditional sense. Both of these weaken the case for Mark 15:39 being understood as definite.

Another discussion that Johnson develops and critiques is whether the centurion's confession was a challenge to the Roman imperial cult (i.e. applying especially to Augustus, very likely the ruling emperor at the time Mark's Gospel was written). Fortunately, Johnson dismantles this convoluted view, although he takes a large portion of his article to do so.

Johnson concludes by stating "the only difference between the centurion's statement about Jesus and that of the High Priest is that Jesus can no longer respond. So it is up to the reader to discern who Jesus really is. If we continue to insist that the centurion's 'confession' is the correct one, then we will have failed to learn one of the most salient lessons of the whole story, which is that those in power indeed 'know who Jesus is,' and are out to destroy whereas those who follow him are often unsure who he is, but struggle to trust him nonetheless."

Although this article is fairly technical, it is helpful reading for those who have thoughtfully considered this passage or will be teaching Mark in the near future. This writer, however, is not comfortable with Johnson's decision to rely upon disputable textual criticism and extra biblical arguments to support his final conclusion. In spite of Johnson's weighty arguments, it would seem that we should adopt the traditional

understanding, which includes *huios theou* in the introduction (1:1) and sees the centurion's confession as legitimate.

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“Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament,”

Robert H. Stein, *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (Spring 1998): 6-17.

Robert Stein is the Mildred Hogan Professor of New Testament Interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. His aim in this article is to investigate what the NT teaches on the matter of the relationship of baptism to conversion. Stein, in a modest remark, claims that his thesis cannot be “proven,” yet he feels that it best accounts for all the NT data.

Stein's thesis is outlined clearly in the article. He claims: “. . . conversion involves five integrally related components or aspects, all of which took place at the same time, usually on the same day. These five components are repentance, faith, and confession by the individual, regeneration or the giving of the Holy Spirit by God, and baptism by representatives of the Christian community” (p. 6). Next Stein proceeds to show the combinations he sees in the NT. He believes faith and baptism are found together in texts such as Acts 8:12, Gal 3:26-27, and Col 2:11-12 for example. He also believes baptism and regeneration are found together in texts such as Titus 3:4. After showing various NT combinations, Stein attempts to marshal evidence that “salvation” comes *through* each of the components listed in his thesis statement. He also shows that “justification” comes *through* each of the five components. Finally, he uses a hypothetical interview of a supposed convert from the early church to show that each of the five components from his thesis statement were experienced by the individual when he became a Christian.

In his concluding comments, Stein draws out implications for today. First, baptism is “. . . more an initiation into the Christian community

than an act of witness to the world” (p. 14). Stein here stresses the corporate nature of the Church and one’s entrance into the visible community of faith. Second, he addresses the obvious question that springs to mind: Is baptism necessary for salvation? Stein separates the question into two foci: for the early Church and for the Church of today. He claims that a rejection of baptism in the early Church was a rejection of the way of salvation and therefore a rejection of Christ. Today, however, people reject baptism for other reasons than those of the early Church era. The former rejection is “damnable,” says Stein, while the latter is not necessarily so.

There are many insights with which this reviewer is in agreement. Stein, rightly in my estimate, shows that “. . . there is an intimate relation between baptism and regeneration. . .” (p. 9). He notes that the relationship was not causal. Baptism did not bring about regeneration. The focus of the NT is seen in that the regenerated—those who believed—did get baptized. Throughout the NT, believers are those who are baptized. In a sense, the NT Church does not contain unbaptized believers. This is shown to be the case in Mark 16:16. Yet one must notice that condemnation is to follow where there is a lack of faith, not a lack of baptism. This text maintains the close connection between the believer and baptism, which is biblical, but clearly distinguishes between faith and baptism, with regard to the means of salvation. Faith alone saves. The one who believes should get baptized, but *not* in order to be saved.

This is a very interesting article. What will shock *JOTGES* readers is the claim that salvation is dependent on *five* elements not *one*. Stein does not try to argue for a theological articulation of *sola fide* as part of his thesis statement. However, he does on one occasion state, “If one has faith but no baptism, one has Christ!” (p. 15). Certainly here Stein has caught the essence of the gospel—salvation by faith alone. His article as a whole, nevertheless, leaves one wondering how that can be true in his model when he says that five elements are necessary as the means *through* which salvation comes.

Some of the major concerns stem from a confusion of categories. Stein assumes that Rom 6:4-6; Col 2:11-12; and Gal 3:26-27 all refer to water baptism. Much can be eliminated from his discussion if these texts teach Spirit baptism, which I believe they do. The close connection between faith and water baptism is still a prominent NT theme, but there is no strong indication that the NT teaches that water baptism is a

condition for salvation. According to Paul in 1 Cor 1:17, his mission was not to baptize but to preach the gospel. Paul is crystal clear that the gospel of God's salvation (cf. Rom 1:16) has nothing to do with water baptism. This text seriously undermines Stein's thesis. The many references to the one and only means of salvation in the NT further show that despite Stein's attempt to synthesize much NT data, he betrays with his thesis—the evangelical insistence on *faith alone*. This is most unfortunate.

This reviewer agrees with much in the article and recommends its perusal, but the overall thesis is not harmonious with a *sola fide* position.

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“Recognizing the Gods (Acts 14:8-10),” Rick Strelan, *New Testament Studies* (October 2000): 488-503.

Little attention is given to the stare and the loud voice of Paul in the healing of the cripple in Acts 14:8-10. Strelan examines these two actions and argues that they explain how the Lystrans recognized that “the gods have come down” in Paul and Barnabas.

Strelan's thesis is that there was something “off” in Paul that helped the locals to identify and acclaim him as a god. He draws out four dominant clues: (1) *Paul was a stranger*. In Greek antiquity, strangers were often associated with unusual occurrences in the community. (2) *Paul stared at the lame man*. Strelan believes that Paul stares because he is possessed or infused with the living God (Acts 14:15). In this stare, Paul experiences and demonstrates paranormal vision and this is what attracts the attention of the locals. The Lystrans assume that this indicates he is possessed with the passions of the gods. (3) *Paul spoke in a loud voice*. Strelan spends most of his time on this point. He insists that in Greek and Latin literature, the loud voice can be a sign that the speaker is either possessed by the gods or seeking to be in touch with the divine through prayer and invocation. He also argues from Jewish literature that there can be an explicit link between the loud voice and the Spirit of God or the spirit of those involved. He also

observes that there are instances where the loud cry is closely related to an intense Spirit-filled experience or vision. Finally, Strelan argues from early Christian literature that Paul's loud voice is a telltale sign to the Lystrans that he is possessed by a god or is a god in human form. It also highlights Luke's desire to portray Paul as being a chosen vessel of God. (4) *Paul commanded the lame man to stand to his feet.* Strelan states that it would seem without exception the command is given in the context of holy figures and holy actions. It is ultimately the command of God and there can be only the response of obedience.

In many ways, Acts 14:8-10 is a unique episode in the NT. It is the only occasion on which an apostle heals without any apparent calling on the name of Jesus. Apart from the healing of Lazarus, it is also the only recorded instance in which a healer uses a loud voice and combines staring with a loud voice. This should warrant a close treatment of this account.

This article should be a welcomed read for a more academic audience. Several times, Strelan makes the point that most commentators, with the exception of German scholars, ignore the clues that he has analyzed. This should be a reminder to every Bible student that the biblical text must be read carefully paying attention to each and every detail. This article challenged and convicted me to think through God's Word as deeply and frequently as possible. It also persuaded me that Strelan is correct in the significance he places upon the above details. While I would not have previously alluded to his insights in my preaching, time permitting, I will likely do so in the future.

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