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“Faith Alone In Christ Alone”

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A RESPONSE TO ROBERT SUNGENIS'S *NOT BY FAITH ALONE*¹

BOB WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

Robert Sungenis grew up in a Roman Catholic home. As a young man, he converted to the Protestant faith and decided to go into the ministry. He then attended Westminster Theological Seminary, one of the leading Reformed seminaries in America, graduating in 1982. For ten years he was a strong proponent of Protestantism and Reformed theology.

In 1992 he reconverted to Roman Catholicism, and is now an active apologist for Catholicism. This book is his magnum opus.

This book is long and academic in nature. Evidently Sungenis was targeting a more scholarly audience. However, in an "Author's Note to Readers," we are told, "This book is designed to be read by both layman and scholar."²

The book opens with a series of endorsements by Roman Catholics. The very first, by "The Most Reverend Fabian W. Bruskewitz, Bishop of Lincoln," gives a flavor for the book. While I normally don't quote endorsements, this one is exceptional. Bruskewitz writes in part:

Faith implies works. We know that the words we long to hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant...come share your Master's joy" (Mt. 25:21), will be spoken to those who have *done well*. Faith alone is not enough. The Protestant Reformation sowed confusion about the biblical theology of faith and good works and many today rely on this confusion to defend or excuse a failure to live holy lives of service and goodness.

¹ Robert A. Sungenis, *Not by Faith Alone: The Biblical Evidence for the Catholic Doctrine of Justification* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997).

² *Ibid.*, vii.

Robert Sungenis has systematically addressed the confusion and demonstrated what we have always known, namely the Sacred Scripture and the Catholic Deposit of Faith are in complete agreement about justification. I applaud this work, and recommend it for all who wish to know how and why the Bible teaches that we are not saved by faith alone.³

The book has just nine chapters covering a little over 600 pages (excluding the appendixes, bibliography, final prayers, and indexes). Thus each chapter is almost an entire book in itself. The nine chapters cover:

- Paul and justification,
- James chapter 2 and justification,
- Jesus' teaching on justification,
- Justification as an ongoing process,
- Justification is infused, not imputed, righteousness,
- Justification is familial restoration, not a mere divine decree,
- Predestination and free will are both aspects of justification,
- Only those who persevere will be finally justified, and,
- The history of faith-alone teaching is confusing and contradictory.

II. FOUR PROOFS THAT PAUL DID NOT TEACH JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Though not always easy to follow, Sungenis attempts to prove in Chapter 1 that Paul did not teach justification by faith alone. I found four lines of proof cited.

First, Sungenis points out that though Paul used the word *alone* more than any other NT writer, he never used it in conjunction with faith.⁴ Thus Paul never used the expression *justification by faith alone*. When Paul said that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law, he did not mean he is justified by faith alone.

Second, by "the works of the law" Paul does not mean to exclude all human works as conditions for justification. Rather, he is excluding

³ Ibid., ix, ellipsis and italics his.

⁴ Ibid., see, for example, pp. 1-3, 114.

works that are done apart from the enabling grace of God.⁵ Here Sungenis borrows a Reformed argument:

The conclusion must be that works are necessary for salvation, and, in fact, are one of the principle determining factors in whether or not one obtains salvation. We say this with the proviso that Paul outrightly [sic] condemns works done with a view toward *obligating* God to pay the worker with salvation. Man can never put God in the position of being in debt to an imperfect and sinful creature. The only way God can accept our works is through his grace. Works done under the auspices of God's grace, that is, works done that do not demand payment from God but are rewarded only due to the kindness and mercy of God, are the works that Paul requires for salvation.⁶

Third, Sungenis uses passages in which Paul speaks of the Judgment Seat of Christ and of the future judgment of Christians by works to prove that he did not teach justification by faith alone. For example, he writes, "Paul holds the necessity of works in such high regard that in Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 he states that all people must eventually face God's judgment throne based on their works."⁷ Since in his mind, the Bema is the same as the Great White Throne, he thinks he has proved that justification is by faith plus works.

Fourth, he takes passages that *JOTGES* readers would understand as dealing with temporal judgment for persistence in sinful deeds and suggests they show that those who persist in willful sin will be eternally condemned. For example, he cites Romans 8:13, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die," as proving that Paul taught justification by faith plus works.⁸

The weakness of all four of these arguments is striking. It reminds me that if one adopts a position based on tradition and accepts inherited views, his arguments not surprisingly will prove convincing only for those within that tradition. How anyone ever came up with these views in the first place is an amazing testimony to man's ability to distort the clear teachings of Scripture.

⁵ Ibid., 18-46.

⁶ Ibid., 46, italics his.

⁷ Ibid., 47. See also pp. 38 n. 47, 41 n. 49, and Ch. 8, "The Final Justification," 479-516.

⁸ Ibid., 87.

III. JAMES 2 TEACHES JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

It should be no surprise that James 2 is the subject of one of the chapters of the book.⁹ It has long been the place where those who oppose justification by faith alone run for support.

Not surprisingly, Sungenis takes the salvation of 2:14 as referring to salvation from eternal condemnation. And, since he believes that eternal salvation can be lost, he sees the persons addressed in the passage as genuine believers. He takes the justification by works of Abraham and Rahab as referring to justification *before God*. In the second chapter of James he finds proof that believers who fail to continue to do good works will lose eternal salvation/justification.

It is unfortunate that though Sungenis cites Hodges, Chafer, Ryrie, and other Free Grace advocates at other places in the book,¹⁰ the Free Grace view of James 2 is noticeably absent here.

IV. JESUS TAUGHT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH PLUS WORKS

In Chapter 3 Sungenis discusses Jesus' teaching on justification. Aside from John 5:24 (which Sungenis does not exegete; he merely raises objections to the faith-alone understanding of it), all the passages discussed here are from the Synoptic Gospels. A justification-by-works understanding of the Rich Young Ruler passage leads the way.

The approach of Sungenis to the Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector turns the passage upside down. Rather than the tax collector being justified by faith, he is justified by faith and works.¹¹ Rather than justification being a one-time event, it is an ongoing process. "Whether the respective tax collectors [he includes Zaccheus here] will continue to be faithful and endure to the end is a matter not addressed by Jesus. All in all, nothing in the passage proves a once-for-all justification by *faith alone*."¹² The point of Luke 18:9-14, according to Sungenis, is that proud faith and works will not justify, but humble faith and works will.¹³

⁹ Ibid., 117-75.

¹⁰ Ibid., see esp. p. 177, n. 2, p. 184, n. 13, and pp. 596-99.

¹¹ Ibid., 195.

¹² Ibid., 198, italics his.

¹³ Ibid., 197.

This chapter demonstrates the tragic result when someone abandons the evangelistic purpose of John's Gospel and looks in the Synoptics for his view of justification. Had Sungenis concentrated on John's Gospel, and studied it without reference to Roman Catholic understandings of it, he would have concluded that Jesus taught justification by faith alone.¹⁴

V. JUSTIFICATION IS AN ONGOING PROCESS

Chapter 4 is entitled, "Is Justification a One-Time Event or an Ongoing Process?" To support his view that it is an ongoing process, Sungenis cites the justification of Abraham, which he believes occurred in Genesis 12 and again in Genesis 15 and again in Genesis 22.¹⁵

Another line of support is two obscure verses in Psalm 106. Verses 30-31 read, "Then Phineas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stopped. And that was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations evermore." Citing the fact that the language in v. 31 is the same as that in Gen 15:6, he suggests that this proves that justification is not by faith alone and is not a one-time event. Phineas was continuing the process of justification by humbly doing good works.

Sungenis fails to note that these verses are not cited or alluded to anywhere in the NT, unlike Gen 15:6 (which is quoted three times in the NT). If these verses deal with forensic justification, it would seem reasonable for the NT to tell us so.

Sungenis also fails to note how some OT commentators (e.g., Gunkel) understand these verses. Some believe that *righteousness* here is experiential and that it alludes to the reward that Phineas received of the priesthood perpetually being in his line. Numbers 25:13 says, "And it shall be to him [Phineas] and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel" (see also vv. 7-12).

In any case, it is surely improper exegetical technique to take an obscure verse that is not explained in context or elsewhere in the Bible and make your understanding of it one of the key proofs of your position. Whatever Ps 106:30-31 means, it cannot contradict Rom 4:1-8 or Gal 3:6-14 or any other text in the Old or New Testaments.

¹⁴ See, for example, John 4:10; 6:28-29; 11:25-27.

¹⁵ Sungenis, *Not by Faith Alone*, 231-34.

In this chapter the author naturally must argue against eternal security. One way he does so is by giving 18 pages of Scripture without a word of explanation in the text, with lots of ellipses, and with only limited discussion in the footnotes.¹⁶ For example, out of 83 passages he cites, only 28 have footnotes, leaving 55 without comment. This is hardly exegetical proof.

Sungenis does deal with Rom 5:1, a passage that contradicts the idea of justification as a process. There Paul uses a perfect passive verb to describe our completed justification: “Therefore, *having been justified* by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Sungenis has several explanations of this text. First, he suggests that Paul is merely saying that the readers were in a state of justification at that time, but “whether these people will remain in that state he does not address.”¹⁷ Second, and this point seems to contradict his first point, the readers “are in the state of justification for the time being *only*.”¹⁸ He feels that Rom 8:1 supports that understanding. In addition, he argues that the grammar shows this as well. “In fact, the Greek verb in the phrase, ‘having been justified’ is a *perfect passive* Greek verb which denotes a *completed* past event.”¹⁹ Then he has a footnote at this point that seems to contradict what he just said: “The perfect tense, passive voice in Greek denotes an action in the past that is complete, *anticipating future results*.”²⁰ We learn nothing in the text itself about anticipated future results. We are just told that it “denotes a completed past event.”

Possibly the reason Sungenis does this is because the perfect passive in Greek denotes a past event which has an abiding result. If that abiding

¹⁶ Ibid., see pp. 276-93. Passages printed included Matt 7:21-23; 10:22, 28, 33; 24:12-13; Mark 9:43; 10:21-23; 13:22; Luke 8:13; 12:43-46; John 12:47-48; 15:6; Acts 14:43, 46; 20:29-30; Rom 2:6; 8:12-13; 11:20-22; 1 Cor 3:17; 4:5; 6:8-9; 9:27-10:6; 10:11-12; 15:1-2; 2 Cor 5:20-6:2; 11:3; 12:21-13:5; Gal 5:19-21; 6:7-9; Eph 5:5-6; Phil 3:10-16; Col 1:21-23; 1 Thess 4:1-8; 2 Thess 2:13-15; 3:6, 14; 1 Tim 4:1; 5:15; 6:10-19, 20-21; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:12, 17; 4:10, 16; Titus 1:16; 3:10; Heb 2:1; 3:1, 6, 12-14; 4:1, 11-13, 14; 6:4-6, 11-12; 10:26-27, 35-38; 12:1, 3, 14-17, 25, 29; Jas 1:14-16, 21-22; 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:9; 1 Pet 4:17-18; 5:8; 2 Pet 1:9; 2:20-22; 3:14-17; 1 John 2:24-26, 28; 2 John 8; 3 John 9-11; Jude 5; Rev 2:5, 10, 16, 23, 26; 3:3, 11, 16, 21; 16:15; 22:12, 19.

¹⁷ Ibid., 258.

¹⁸ Ibid., italics added.

¹⁹ Ibid., 259, italics his.

²⁰ Ibid., n. 40, italics added.

result contradicts his position, it makes sense for him to fail to mention it in the text. And it also makes sense for him to soften the idea in the footnote by speaking of “*anticipated* future results.” Which grammarian speaks of “*anticipated* future results” for a perfect tense in Greek is not stated. No biblical examples are given of other perfect tenses where the continuation of the verbal action is contingent on other factors.

VI. JUSTIFICATION IS INFUSED, NOT IMPARTED, RIGHTEOUSNESS

In Chapter 5 Sungenis argues that justification is not imputed righteousness, but infused righteousness. He then draws the seemingly contradictory conclusion that God justifies a person as long as he is righteous in his behavior.

If God infuses righteousness into people, then they would be righteous. How could a person God made righteous become unrighteous? Essentially Sungenis holds the view that Christians now are like glorified saints, righteous not only in their position, but also in their experience. But glorified saints will never sin (1 John 3:2). Sungenis fails to explain how an experientially righteous person sins at all.

Now someone could respond that there is a type of experiential righteousness in the NT that is less than perfection. That is true. However, that experiential righteousness is not *infused* by God. If it were, it would result in sinlessness.

The author makes a fascinating observation about Zane Hodges, suggesting that he is rare in that he is “at least being true to the implications of a *faith-alone* theology.” He writes:

Dispensationalist Zane Hodges, the major spokesman for an opposing tangent of Evangelical thought, has declared that the faith which appropriates the righteousness of Christ cannot be qualified [by works] in any manner without falling into a salvation by works. Hodges is at least being true to the implications of a *faith alone* theology, in that if one makes faith to be the sole instrument of justification then it must truly be alone, without works to qualify it.²¹

²¹ *Ibid.*, 356. See also p. 569 where he criticizes those who speak of the need to have a certain quality of faith. He rightly indicates this confuses people.

He recognizes that the Free Grace position is unique and uniquely consistent! From his Westminster Seminary background, he sees in the Reformed position a faith-alone position that isn't truly faith alone.

Sungenis, like Reformed theologians, is quick to point out that works could never occur apart from the grace of God.²² *Unlike* Reformed theologians, he feels free to speak of the fact that the one doing the good works indeed cooperates synergistically with God in his justification.²³

VII. JUSTIFICATION IS FAMILIAL RESTORATION, NOT A MERE DIVINE DECREE

In Chapter 6 Sungenis rejects the idea that justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness. Instead, justification becomes a fellowship concept. He speaks of "initial justification,"²⁴ a concept not found explicitly anywhere in the Bible. Of course, if justification can cease, then there must be initial justification, and then there is potential ongoing and final justification for those who endure to the end.

Sungenis uses Luke 15 and the Parable of the Prodigal Son as partial support for this idea.²⁵ Of course, if that parable concerns fellowship and not justification, then the point is lost. Sungenis fails to recognize or point out that the term *justification* is not used in the chapter. While it is true that the term *just* or *righteous* appears earlier in the chapter in v. 7, it is most natural to understand this as experiential righteousness, that is, those who are still walking in fellowship with God.

In this way of thinking "inheritance" is equal to justification.²⁶ Thus one who loses his inheritance loses his justification. Of course, if inheritance is a rewards concept, then his argument evaporates.

Sungenis argues that faith plays no role in law: "Faith is not at all involved in the courtroom."²⁷ However, he seems to arrive at this conclusion by means of circular reasoning. First he admits that faith is required for justification. While he rejects justification by faith alone, he argues for justification by faith plus works. Second he says that justification is a

²² Ibid., 302.

²³ Ibid., 302-307.

²⁴ Ibid., 384.

²⁵ Ibid., 385.

²⁶ Ibid., 413.

²⁷ Ibid., 399.

family issue, not a legal one. Finally, since he has removed any legal element from biblical justification, he is able to suggest that faith “is not at all involved in the courtroom.”

I wonder if eternal condemnation in his view is not a legal concept? If it is, then faith is involved in the courtroom at least in terms of condemnation. While I didn't find an instance where Sungenis uses the word *legal* in Chapter 8 as he discusses the final judgment, it is clear that in his view lack of faith will result in a negative legal verdict at the Great White Throne.²⁸ He repeatedly calls this *judgment*. He speaks of *the Judge* at this *judgment*. How could it not be legal? Yet if condemnation is legal and is directly related to lack of faith, then faith is indeed a courtroom issue for lack of faith results in failing to obtain what he calls “final justification.”

VIII. PREDESTINATION AND FREE WILL ARE BOTH ASPECTS OF JUSTIFICATION

In Chapter 7 Sungenis wades into the whole issue of God's sovereignty and man's free will. Most *JOTGES* readers will agree with this statement by Sungenis:

Using Augustine's argumentation, Aquinas agrees that unless man has a free will, all commands, exhortations and prohibitions would be in vain. If man acts of necessity, then all basis for reward and punishment and all principles of moral philosophy are overthrown.²⁹

Sungenis concludes this chapter by saying, “If we are faithful to Scripture, however, we must conclude that it teaches both predestination and free will. Sometimes Scripture speaks as though man does everything and at other times as if God does everything.”³⁰ Of all his chapters, this is the one where the most agreement is likely to be found.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 481-82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 446.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 473.

IX. ONLY THOSE WHO PERSEVERE WILL BE FINALLY JUSTIFIED

With Chapter 8 we come upon an Arminian version of the perseverance of the saints. In this case, some saints persevere and obtain final justification. Others do not, lose their justification and eternal life, and end up in the lake of fire.

Interestingly, Sungenis argues that the purpose of this final judgment is two-fold: “In *all* the passages that specify a judgment for deeds, the primary purpose of the judgment is to determine the eternal destiny of the individual and only secondarily to determine the degree of reward or punishment.”³¹

If you can overlook the fact that Sungenis believes in possible loss of justification, what you find in this chapter is just what a five-point Calvinist would say. They too speak of final justification. They too believe in one final judgment, not two. They agree that all who fail to persevere in both faith and good works end up in the lake of fire. And some, though not all, Reformed people suggest that a secondary purpose of this final judgment is to determine degrees of reward or punishment.

Of course, throughout this chapter Sungenis suggests that the Bema and the Great White Throne are one in the same. And he sees all people, just and unjust, evaluated at the same time in this one and only judgment.

At the end of this chapter, his fourth “summary point” about justification and judgment concerns assurance. I have heard precisely this same sentiment from five-point Calvinists as well. He writes:

If he is living a good Christian life, loving God and his neighbor as he should, the Christian can have confidence that God will justify him. *He cannot, however, have absolute assurance that he will be saved* precisely because he may fall into sin, depart from the faith, and remain unrepentant until death.³²

His final summary point concerns the role of Purgatory in justification. After suggesting God must prepare us for kingdom citizenship via

³¹ Ibid., 486, italics his. See also, pp. 496-97, 515.

³² Ibid., 516, italics added. In an earlier chapter (p. 214) he wrote, “The teaching is clear. Salvation is not based merely on an act of faith at the beginning of one’s life but on continual faith and obedience throughout one’s life.”

trials and sufferings in this life, he says: "God will also purge any remaining corruption from us in post-mortem purgatorial fires."³³

X. THE HISTORY OF FAITH-ALONE TEACHING IS CONFUSING AND CONTRADICTORY

The author naturally feels that history is on his side. The title of Chapter 9 is "Will 'Faith Alone' Be All Alone?" Of course, history does not determine truth; exegesis does. However, like many five-point Calvinists, Sungenis considers it important to show that the history of the church supports his view, not the faith-alone view.

Sungenis supports his contention about history in a unique way. Rather than simply quoting church fathers and Roman Catholic theologians through the years, and showing that the Catholic (and Eastern Orthodox) writings far outweigh Reformed writings, he shows that faith-alone proponents are confusing and contradictory. While the former might have swayed more people, this latter approach has the advantage of casting doubt on anything that is so diverse and confusing.

Sungenis writes:

To close this study we will now analyze *faith alone* theology from a historical perspective... This chapter is designed to reveal the extremely diverse and often very confusing notions of justification prevalent in historic Protestant theology, including current Evangelical and Fundamentalist thought.³⁴

He spends 38 pages discussing Luther, 19 pages addressing Calvin, and then a few pages each on Osiander, Arminius, Anabaptists, Pietists, Methodists, Jonathan Edwards, Herman Bavinck, John Gerstner, and Norman Shepherd. He also discusses the Lutheran and Catholic Dialogue on justification, Anglicans and Catholics, the Lordship Salvation Controversy,³⁵ ECT, *Five Views on Sanctification*, and the new perspective on Paul (which he calls, "Another View of Justification").³⁶

³³ Ibid. See also Appendix 8, "Patristic Evidence for Purgatory and Prayers for the Dead."

³⁴ Ibid., 517, italics his.

³⁵ Ibid., 595-99.

³⁶ Ibid., 602-604.

Concerning Lordship Salvation, Sungenis discusses Zane Hodges, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles C. Ryrie, and John F. MacArthur.³⁷

His comments about MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* are fascinating. He wrote:

MacArthur spent almost all of his 300-page work exegeting passages from the Gospels, systematically going through many of the teachings of Jesus which specified that works indeed play a large part in our standing and relationship with God. This is not surprising. Catholic theology has always maintained that the Gospels deny *faith alone* theology most emphatically.³⁸

A bit later he added this remark:

Like most Reformed theologians, MacArthur has found himself trying to walk the razor-thin edge between the gospel of Hodges and the gospel of Rome. For them [Reformed theologians] it is easier to live in the dichotomous world of "faith alone but not a faith that is alone," yet we find many of them are accused by their Reformed brethren of falling off the edge.³⁹

Frankly, Sungenis is correct that there is a debate going on among the faith-alone people. If we are honest, we are a minority even among the faith-alone folks.

The fact that there are diverse views within the faith-alone camp should in no way dissuade people from embracing it. While it is true that the Catholic position has less variance within it, that is not such a good thing. The reason for the agreement is that people within the Church of Rome accept tradition as being on par with Scripture. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). We are to search the Scriptures, not tradition and Scripture, to see if something is true (Acts 17:11).

Each of us should be so committed to Scripture that even if we were the only person on earth who believed it taught justification by faith alone, we would stand firm in that belief. It should not matter to us what percentage of people in Christendom hold the faith-alone view. The only thing that matters is what God says.

³⁷ Ibid., 597-98.

³⁸ Ibid., 597.

³⁹ Ibid., 597-98.

XI. APPENDIXES

There are 21 appendixes included in the book. While most of them are only mildly interesting, two are especially helpful.

Appendix 20 gives the 33 anathemas from the Council of Trent concerning justification. Canon 9 reads,

If anyone shall say that by faith alone the sinner is justified, so as to understand that nothing else is required to cooperate in the attainment of the grace of justification, and that it is in no way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will: let him be anathema.⁴⁰

Canon 20 reads,

If anyone shall say that a man who is justified and ever so perfect is not bound to observe the commandments of God and the Church, but only to believe, *as if indeed the Gospel were a mere absolute promise of eternal life, without the condition of observation of the commandments*: let him be anathema.⁴¹

Appendix 17 has Latin in the title which bears an important message: “The Official Interpretation of ‘Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus.’” The Latin means, “Outside the Church *There Is No Salvation*.” The Catholic position is similar to that of many Protestants today. Vatican Council II says,

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their action to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.⁴²

The difference is that they say, “no one will be saved who, knowing the Church to have been divinely established by Christ, nevertheless refuses to submit to the Church or withholds obedience from the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth.”⁴³

After the Bibliography, but before the Indexes, comes a section with six “Final Prayers.”⁴⁴ The last one is to the Lord Jesus. *The other five are*

⁴⁰ Ibid., 690.

⁴¹ Ibid., 691-92, italics added.

⁴² Ibid., 682.

⁴³ Ibid., 681.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 737-38.

to *St. Gregory the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis de Sales, St. Michael the Archangel, and "Mary, Mother of God."* I found these prayers quite alarming. Clearly the book must be addressed almost exclusively to Catholics, since including prayers to deceased people and even to an archangel is quite offensive to Protestants.

Here is the prayer to Mary:

Mary, Mother of God, we pray that you will beseech your Son, who alone provides grace and wisdom, to help us in our efforts to further the cause of the Church. *May your holiness and faithfulness be brought to God on our behalf*, so that he may have mercy and patience with us as we endeavor to honor his name.⁴⁵

XII. CONCLUSION

This book is overly long. However, it is a resource worth having since it is by a Catholic who is well trained in Reformed thought.

I would think that pastors, elders, deacons, Bible study leaders, Sunday school teachers, and all who share God's Word with others would find in this book plenty of fascinating illustrations of how even highly educated and quite intelligent people can be badly confused.

I recommend this book, especially for anyone who ministers in heavily Roman Catholic areas.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 737, italics added.

TULIP: A FREE GRACE PERSPECTIVE PART 2: UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

TULIP is the Calvinistic means of categorizing the broad doctrine of human salvation and stands for: 1) Total Depravity; 2) Unconditional Election; 3) Limited Atonement; 4) Irresistible Grace; and 5) the Perseverance of the Saints. It is here that we seek the truth about these five points regardless of whether the conclusion fits the systems of Calvinism, Arminianism, or neither.

This article considers the doctrine of divine election.

The two major views of election are the Calvinist and the Arminian views. Lightner says there is a “great division [that] exists in evangelicalism over the doctrine of election. Unconditional election is the belief that God sovereignly, on the basis of grace, chose before time individuals on whom he would bestow his saving grace. Those who hold this view are Calvinists. Those who reject the teaching are Arminians.”¹

There is a third view—called the Corporate view of election—which became popular with the writings of Karl Barth. Ryrie summarizes Barth’s teaching and its evangelical offshoot:

[Barth] taught that election is primarily election of Christ, then the election of the community, and finally the election of individuals. Actually all are elect in Christ, though unbelievers do not know that. This is why Barth’s doctrine of election caused him to be accused of universalism.²

An evangelical form of this same concept (perhaps in some cases influenced by Barth and in some cases not) views election as the choosing

¹ Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 208.

² Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 358.

of the group, the church, in Christ, but not individuals until after they become members of the group by faith. In the evangelical form there is no suggestion of universalism, though the idea of corporate election is common to both. We cannot speak of individuals being elected before the foundation of the world but only of the church being so elected in Christ (Eph 1:4). When an individual believes in Christ, he is placed in that elect group, and then he can be said to be elect. "What did God choose before the foundation of the world? The church. Not individuals, but the body of Christ."³

The Corporate view, while held by some, negates the biblical teaching of God's choice of individual election and seems to contradict the Scripture in regard to the use of personal pronouns in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1 which emphasize the individual nature of election. Klooster says,

Election (as well as reprobation) is individual, personal, specific, particular. Ephesians refers repeatedly to "us" and "we" in connection with election (1:4-5, 12). In Romans, Paul refers to "those" whom God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified (8:29-30). Rom. 9 indicates that personal election unto salvation was operative within the election of Israel.⁴

Corporate election *of individuals* in the evangelical sense would be God's selection or election *after* one believes. This goes beyond the Arminian understanding of foresight, making even foreknowledge unnecessary.⁵ God just "calls it as it is," when one believes. In the Barthian sense the doctrine of individual election would be destroyed. Since our

³ Ibid., 359. Ryrie quotes Dan Esterline, "The Doctrine of Predestination," *Moody Monthly* (February 1979): 86. For the same or similar views Ryrie suggests: Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1975) and Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Springfield, MO: Westcott, 1970), 48-49.

⁴ F. H. Klooster, "Elect, Election" in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 349.

⁵ Such a view is compatible with the newer trend towards "Open Theology," the more recent speculation that God created us with a sort of freedom which He cannot override or control and that He does not possess knowledge of all things. His knowledge is limited and no pre-creation election is possible for a being that is limited in knowledge. This arises from those steeped in Arminianism, perhaps, but it goes beyond that position. For more information, see Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

current discussion involves individual election, not corporate election, we will now consider the two major views. In doing so, we will attempt to understand and simplify things and then to think outside the “box” and arrive at a biblical understanding of the matter.

II. A COMPARISON OF THE CALVINISTIC AND ARMINIAN VIEWS REGARDING THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

As a basis for the discussion, it seems proper to list the main passages from which the doctrine comes.

Eph 1:4-5 – ...just as He chose (*exelexato*) us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined (*proopisas*) us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...

Eph 1:11 – In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined (*proopisthentes*) according to Him who works all things according to the council of His will.

Deut 26:18-19 – [referring to Israel’s selection in time] Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God...

1 Pet 1:1-2 – To the pilgrims of the Dispersion...elect (*eklektois*) according to the foreknowledge (*prognōsin*) of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

1 Thess 1:4 – ...knowing, beloved brethren, your election (*eklogēn*) by God.

Rom 11:5-6 – Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election (*eklogēn*) of grace. 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.

John 15:16 – You did not choose (*exelexasthe*) Me, but I chose (*exelexamēn*) you and appointed you that you should go and

bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give to you.

John 17:6 – I manifested Your name to the men whom You have given me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

Rom 8:29-30 – For whom He foreknew (*proegnō*), He also predestined (*proōrise*) to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined (*proōrise*), these He also called (*ekalese*); whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

A. THE CALVINISTIC VIEW: ELECTION IS *UNCONDITIONAL*

In a previous article we considered the doctrine of total depravity. This discussion proceeds assuming the reader is familiar with the Calvinist understanding of total depravity. Buswell says, “The doctrine of unconditional election follows necessarily from the doctrine of total inability.”⁶ Logically following the assertion of the doctrine of man’s total inability to believe and/or merit salvation, Calvinists insist that election is not conditioned on man’s response to the gospel but that man’s response to the gospel is conditioned on God’s pre-creation election. The Calvinist position is succinctly stated by Steele and Thomas:

God’s choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God’s choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance

⁶ J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of The Christian Religion*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 139. However, bear in mind that Calvinists and Arminians define and understand the doctrine of total depravity in a decidedly different way, as seen in our former article.

of Christ. Thus God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.⁷

Steele and Thomas insist that foreknowledge does not mean God simply foresaw an event or a believing response to the gospel as a basis for election. Commenting on Romans 8:29 ("For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son")⁸ they say,

Calvinists contend that the passage teaches that God set his heart upon (i.e., foreknew) certain individuals; these He predestined or marked out to be saved. Notice that the text does *not* say that God *knew* SOMETHING ABOUT *particular individuals* (that they would do this or that), but it states that God *knew the individuals* THEMSELVES—those whom He *knew* He predestined to be made like Christ. The word "foreknew" as used here is thus understood to be equivalent to "foreloved"—those who were the objects of God's love, He marked out for salvation.⁹

Boettner also argues against the idea that God based His selection of certain ones on foreseen faith.

Foreseen faith and good works, then, are never to be looked upon as the cause of the Divine election. They are rather its fruits and proof. They show that the person has been chosen and regenerated. To make them the basis of election involves us again in a covenant of works, and places God's purposes in time rather than eternity. This would not be pre-destination but post-destination, an inversion of the Scripture account which

⁷ Steele and Thomas, *Romans: An Interpretive Outline* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterians and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963), 144-45.

⁸ Buswell also argues against those who "speak as though God had looked down through the ages and observed those who would be good enough to believe in His son, and had then elected to save them on the basis of their faith" (Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, 2:140).

⁹ Steele and Thomas, 131, italics and all capitals in original. The discussion is amplified on pp. 131-37. Geisler argues against the idea that "foreknow" equals "foreloved" or "chosen." See fn. 42 in this article for a summary of Geisler's reasoning.

makes faith and holiness to be the consequents, and not the antecedents, of election (Eph. 1:4; John 15:16; Titus 3:5).¹⁰

He goes on to say,

The Almighty and all-sovereign Ruler of the universe does not govern Himself on the basis of a foreknowledge of things which might haply come to pass. Through the Scriptures the divine foreknowledge is ever thought of as dependent on the divine purpose, and God foreknows only because He has pre-determined. His foreknowledge is a transcript of His will as to what shall come to pass in the future, and the course which the world takes under His providential control is by the execution of His all-embracing plan.¹¹

By saying that “foreknowledge is a transcript of His will as to what shall come to pass,” Boettner equates foreknowledge with God’s eternal decree.¹²

A simple explanation of the Calvinistic position on unconditional election might be, “Because man is dead in sin, he is unable to initiate a response to God; therefore, in eternity past God elected certain people to salvation. Election and predestination are unconditional; they are not based on man’s response.”¹³ Enns expands upon the Calvinistic view:

There are six main features involved in election. (1) Election is a sovereign, eternal decree of God (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4, 5, 11). (2) Election is necessary because of man’s fall and total depravity. It therefore reflects the grace of God, not human effort (Rom. 9:11). (3) Election is “in Christ.” From eternity past God chose believers to be united to Christ (Rom. 8:29; Eph.

¹⁰ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977), 98. Boettner wrestles with the time-related concepts of “pre” and “post.” The time element is a major cause for misunderstanding in the doctrine of election, as we shall see.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 99. Actually, the term post-destination would probably better fit the evangelical view of corporate election discussed above.

¹² And it does seem difficult to arrive at any other conclusion, but here he departs from the idea that foreknowledge means “to fore-love” an individual. Is foreknowledge a transcript of God’s will or is it the fore-loving of an individual by God? Or, we might ask, is the fore-loving of an individual included in the transcript of God’s will?

¹³ Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 480.

1:4, 5, 11). In election God effects salvation through sending the Savior and effectually calling certain ones to salvation. (4) Election involves the salvation of the elect and the provision for their salvation. God determined to predestine, call, justify, and glorify certain ones (Rom. 8:29-30). This was planned and effected in eternity past. (5) Election and reprobation are individual, personal, specific, and particular. The pronouns in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1 emphasize the individual nature of election. (6) The goal of election is the glory and praise of God (Eph. 1:6, 12). Everything is to ascribe glory and praise to God.¹⁴

We may then summarize the Calvinistic view as follows:

- 1) God selected certain individuals *apart from any meritorious reason* which they could supply.
- 2) The election of certain individuals for salvation and not others was *based on God's sovereign will and His ultimate and hidden purpose*, not on anything God foresaw man do (neither foreseen faith nor deed).
- 3) Faith as well as repentance are *gifts* of God in grace and are the *result* of His election and regeneration, not the *cause* of His selective choice of certain men.¹⁵
- 4) The gracious power of God's regenerating Spirit creates a willing acceptance of Christ only in the elect individual with whom the Spirit chooses to work regeneration effectively.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 482-83 (summarizing F. H. Klooster's article "Elect, Election" in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 348-49). Arminians would strongly disagree with the second point in this quote, arguing that it is God's grace, not works, that makes salvation possible, but that the practical possibility of individual election is the *result* of God's provision of Christ and the gospel promise that whoever believes will receive eternal life. To the Arminian, election would be the result of God's foresight of man's faith, but election would not necessitate such belief. If it did, man would not be able to believe or reject God's offer. Thus, human responsibility would be nullified.

¹⁵ Dabney argues, for instance, that faith is the fruit of regeneration, not the cause of it. See Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 607.

¹⁶ The application of His grace will be considered in a future article on "Irresistible Grace."

- 5) The ultimate cause of salvation is God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of God. This is so because man is dead in sin and no man can, of himself, appropriately respond to the gospel or believe it.
- 6) God's election took place before creation and therefore before the actual existence of anyone, elect or not.

B. THE ARMINIAN VIEW: ELECTION IS *CONDITIONAL* BASED UPON GOD'S FORESIGHT OF MAN'S RESPONSE IN FAITH TO THE GOSPEL

The Arminian view of election is contrary to the Calvinistic position. Steele and Thomas accurately state the Arminian position on conditional election:

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based his choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus, the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.¹⁷

The Second of the Five Arminian articles says,

That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys forgiveness of sins except the believer according to the word of the Gospel of John iii.16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And in the First Epistle of John

¹⁷ Steele and Thomas, 144-45.

ii.2: “And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”¹⁸

Thiessen, of the Arminian camp, astutely asks,

Is election the sovereign act of God whereby he chose some to salvation solely on the basis of sovereign grace apart from merits or acts of the individual, or is it the sovereign act of God whereby he chose those whom he foreknew would respond to his gracious invitation? What is a working definition?¹⁹

Thiessen includes himself in the Arminian camp. Enns summarizes: “God elected those whom He knew would believe of their own free will. Election is conditional, based on man’s response in faith.”²⁰ Thiessen affirms the doctrine of election as a “sovereign act of God in grace whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation all those whom He foreknew would accept Him.”²¹ He goes on to explain:

Although we are nowhere told what it is in the foreknowledge of God that determines His choice, the repeated teaching of Scripture that man is responsible for accepting or rejecting salvation necessitates our postulating that it is man’s reaction to the revelation God has made of Himself that is the basis of His election...In His foreknowledge He perceives what each one will do with this restored ability, and elects men to salvation in harmony with His knowledge of their choice of Him.²²

Thiessen asserts his first proof on his view that election is based on foreknowledge of man’s individual reaction to the gospel saying it is “in accord with Scripture (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Pet. 1:1, 2). To say that God

¹⁸ Article 2 in “*ARTICULI ARMINIANI SIVE REMONSTRANTIA*. The Five Arminian Articles. A.D. 1610.” From Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), 546.

¹⁹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. Vernon D. Dorksen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 257. We note that Thiessen, an Arminian, is zealous in preserving God’s sovereignty like the Calvinist, but in a different way.

²⁰ Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 481.

²¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), 344.

²² *Ibid.*, 344-45.

foreknew all things because He had arbitrarily determined all things, is to ignore the distinction between God's efficient and His permissive decrees."²³ He says, "This would mean that in election God has decided to save those who accept His Son and the proffered salvation, and in foreordination He has determined effectively to accomplish that purpose."²⁴

We may note the following tenets of Arminianism:

- 1) God selected those for salvation *based on* His foresight/foreknowledge of the individual's response to the gospel.
- 2) The response of individual persons is one of *freedom*, not coercion. Thus the responsibility of man is affirmed (as opposed to the Calvinistic teaching of the bondage of the will and the inability of fallen man to believe).
- 3) The response of man in faith is the *logical cause*, not the result, of regeneration and is the *basis* for the prior election unto salvation.
- 4) The only condition for pre-time election of an individual is the personal response of faith which the omniscient God foresaw. Since He knows all things, He can accurately (and without chance of error) pre-select, from before the foundation of the world, those who would believe and be saved. Thus, He can elect on that basis and do so without possibility of error or uncertainty.

C. THE DILEMMA OF THE CALVINIST AND ARMINIAN POSITIONS

Both the Calvinistic and Arminian views attempt to make sense of the scriptural doctrine of divine election. Calvinists place the sovereignty of God as preeminent over man's responsibility and freedom to believe. They assert that man is unable to believe because of his spiritually dead condition so that man, left to himself, without faith and repentance being given or imposed upon him by God, would never attain eternal life. A conjectured covenant in eternity past between the Persons of the Godhead, with the Father pre-selecting certain ones from the mass of depraved humanity, serves as a basis for the Calvinistic system. Under this supposed covenant of grace, the Son would then, in the course of history, die specifically and solely for the ones the Father had so sovereignly

²³ Ibid., 345-46.

²⁴ Ibid., 345.

selected and given to the Son, and the Spirit would, in the course of the ages, effectively apply to those selected and redeemed by Christ the benefits of Christ's atoning work. In other words, the Father chose only those for whom the Son would specifically die and gave them to the Son. The Son died just for those chosen. The Holy Spirit regenerates and gives faith to the chosen and redeemed elect, thus assuring that God's sovereign plan is completed exactly as He had designed.

Arminianism, on the other hand, sees no such covenant of grace and, when confronted with the biblical teaching of the doctrine of the divine election of individuals to eternal life, sets forth the idea that God, in His omniscience, looked down through the corridors of the future, saw those who would freely and without coercion respond in faith to the gospel message, and chose them on the basis of how they would respond to the gospel. Thus Arminians hold to the sovereignty²⁵ of God, but they deny God's arbitrariness in the selection process and also defend the doctrine of human responsibility by asserting that a person's foreseen faith is the basis for such individual selection by the Father. Human responsibility would mean nothing if humans were unable to respond. Thus, Arminians see unconditional election as a misunderstanding of God's sovereignty, an elimination of human responsibility, and a disregard for God's omniscience (including His certain ability to foreknow or foresee man's response in the "history" of the future, so to speak).

So the dilemma is one of the relationship of the sovereignty of God to the free will of man. Calvinists attempt to protect God's sovereignty as a basis for the doctrine of His unconditional electing grace and Arminians attempt to preserve man's responsibility to believe by asserting the preeminence of divinely established free will as a basis for election. They do not rule out God's sovereignty, but by including human responsibility in God's sovereign plan, they diminish the seeming arbitrariness of election.

It is here that a proposal is suggested, which seems both true to Scripture and sound in its logical argumentation. It also accords with the

²⁵ Geisler, not an Arminian, defines God's sovereignty this way: "A God who is before all things, upholds all things, knows all things, and can do all things is also in control of all things. This complete control is called the sovereignty of God" (*Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2001], 116).

essential qualities of God in the search for understanding this timeless truth.

III. GOD'S ATTRIBUTES ARE HARMONIOUS, CONSISTENT WITH HIS NATURE, AND NON-CONTRADICTORY

How are we to understand the mechanics of God's election? Is election conditional or unconditional? Does God's sovereignty rule out human freedom and impose a sort of gracious coercion upon some, but not others, or does human freedom denigrate God's sovereignty to the point that God has to elect man based upon what He pre-views man's response to be?

The answer to these questions is to be found in a consistent understanding of the very nature and attributes of God. We would likely agree that God's attributes exist and operate in a continual relationship with no disharmony whatsoever. We might not understand exactly how mercy and justice interrelate within His perfect nature, but we can be assured that they do. Based on this assumption, we perceive no contradiction by saying that God is infinite (unlimited, boundless), eternal (not bound by time), immense (not limited by either macro-space or micro-space), immutable (unchangeable), omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and sovereign (in complete control). These attributes certainly work together in harmony and in accord with His perfection.

As an example of His harmonious outworking, consider God's work in the creation itself. He created the universe by the effective activation of His sovereign purpose, complete knowledge, and supreme power. He did so while retaining His separation from the confines of time and space, and without changing who He is. Nor did He diminish His power, knowledge, or perfection in any way. When He, according to His sovereign, eternal plan powerfully spoke the physical elements into existence from nothing, He must have both designed and *known exhaustively* all things, such as the atomic structure of those elements, and the relationship and interaction of one element to another. To not know all things exhaustively would leave open the possibility of mistake, which God could never make. In His omniscience, He created the various elements and designed into each atom a certain number of electrons which were then related to one another in such a way that the variation between different atoms would, among other things, alter their ability to conduct electricity (like copper, wood, glass) or take the form of liquid, solid, or

gas. The point is that the harmonious combination of God's sovereignty, purpose, power, and knowledge are clearly seen. In considering the creation this harmony certainly does not cause logical consternation in our minds. Rather, it exalts our appreciation of His perfection and clarifies His worthiness for receiving worship.

On a physical level, we can see that God's attributes are coordinated and are not contradictory. Jesus said, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). So, if God, in the performance of His purposeful design of the physical universe, used His coordinated and harmonious attributes without contradiction and without one attribute getting in the way of another, why could He not also so design the "spiritual" universe with the same consistency and ease? We will now observe and understand the harmonious relationship of some of God's attributes and then see how such cognition works to answer the question of divine election.

IV. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD WHICH RELATE TO DIVINE ELECTION

A correct understanding of God's attributes which relate to the doctrine of divine election, as they work harmoniously and in accord with one another, provides the answer to the problems raised by the Calvinist and Arminian views.

A. THE ATTRIBUTE OF GOD'S INFINITY SETS THE STAGE

Whereas the doctrine of total depravity arises from misunderstanding the nature of man in regard to his ability to respond in belief when the gospel message is clearly presented, so also the doctrine of divine election is problematic simply because we fail to comprehend the nature of God. One reason for this is that man's perspective is time-bound. We naturally define events as past, present, and future. It is extremely difficult for us to think in terms of eternity. Yet when we think about God, His actions, attributes, purpose, and His eternal election, we are compelled to consider things from God's eternal point of view.

God is an infinite Being. "Infinity means that God has no bounds or limits. He is in no way limited by the universe or by time-space boundaries."²⁶ As the perfect Being, He lacks nothing that is essential to His

²⁶ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 43. See 1 Kings 8:27; Acts 24:28.

nature.²⁷ His attributes might be defined as “qualities without which He could not be God.” For instance, lacking infinity would disqualify Him as God, because He would then be necessarily finite. But God cannot be finite. As the only infinite Being, He exists independently and is not limited, confined, or constrained by anything. Indeed any “thing” falls into the category of His “creation” and He has complete control over the “thing’s” existence. So, nothing (no thing) can possibly limit Him. The infinity of God opens our perspective of Him and sets the stage for further understanding.

B. GOD’S ETERNITY PROVIDES THE REAL PERSPECTIVE

God’s infinity, when juxtaposed with the concept of time, leads to the understanding that He is eternal. He exists in a dimension apart from time. “His existence extends endlessly backward and forward (from our viewpoint of time) without any interruption or limitation caused by succession of events.”²⁸ Another definition of God’s eternity is, “*that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present.*”²⁹ Clearly the definition separates God from time, but what is time? One dictionary says time is “a continuous measurable quantity in which events occur in apparently irreversible order,” or “an interval bounded by 2 points of this quantity; duration.”³⁰ One might define time as the measurable duration between the occurrence of two separate events. But for events to be possible things must exist, because without things, there could be no basis for an event. Something can’t be called an event without some “thing” being involved.³¹ There can be no events without existing things. And without a standard of measure based

²⁷ For instance, Jesus, as the second Person of the Trinity, can add to Himself flesh (become a man), but man-ness is not an essential quality of deity.

²⁸ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 41.

²⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 60, italics in original.

³⁰ “Time” in *Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary* (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), 716.

³¹ A car accident, for instance, must involve cars and a lot of other things. The time (measurable duration) between an accident and the arrival of a police officer at the scene also involves “things.” Apart from all these “things” nothing could happen. No event is possible without things. And no duration (time) is possible without a combination of things.

on the duration between other events, there can be no determination of what the measurable duration really is.³² Now let's press it further. In order for there to be things to serve as a basis for events, things must exist in the first place. But things don't exist by and of themselves. Before God created things (matter) from nothing, there were no things. With no things, no events. With no events, no time! There was no time because there were no events between which to measure duration. We can thus conclude that God is timeless, eternal, and is "before" creation (to use a time word for a timeless existence). He simply exists outside that realm, not within it's confines. As Creator, He made the *ingredients* (things) necessary for *events* to exist, and in doing so He created the *arena* in which time might exist. But God is greater than and beyond His creation of things (and, therefore of time).³³

Now it is easy to speak of "eternity past." The apostle Paul wrote that God elected before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), but this is only a language accommodation because of the time-bound perspective in which we exist. From our perspective it was something that happened prior to creation, but from God's perspective, it was always so. In speaking of "eternity past," we forget that God is also eternally present and eternally future because time is separate from Him. This is so simply because the Creator of things isn't bound, limited, or confined by His creation, i.e., by any thing, event, or duration between events.³⁴

The fact that God is eternal provides a perspective that is time-less.

³² One cannot say that a bus went from one city to another in an hour without using a higher, unchanging, independent standard of measure such as the duration of the earth's complete rotation on its axis. An "hour" is then calculated as 1/24 of that duration, but there needs to be an earth as well as a sun (i.e., things within creation) in order to calculate that duration.

³³ God is pure Spirit and is therefore "simple." His Spirit is singular (cf. Deut 6:4; John 4:24). He is not a combination or composition of matter and spirit. As a simple, spiritual Being without created matter as an essential attribute, He must be eternal, always existing outside the realm of time, the eternal Presence.

³⁴ John records such descriptions of the eternal, unbounded-by-time, Lord who identifies Himself saying, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev 1:8).

C. GOD'S IMMUTABILITY PROVIDES STABILIZATION

Divine election is also related to the quality of God's immutability. "Immutability means that God is unchangeable and unchanging. This does not mean that He is immobile or inactive, but it does mean that He is never inconsistent or growing or developing."³⁵ The concept of change was made popular, and perhaps originally defined, by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who said, "Upon those who step into the same river different and again different waters flow. The waters scatter and gather, come together and flow away, approach and depart."³⁶ A river constantly changes. It's never the same. Heraclitus was speaking of that which is material, of course. Crane and Wiggins explain that, "The river is in constant flux. The waters are constantly renewed. We may even suppose that, consequently, upon this changing of constituents, the river changes in any and every property range, in depth, strength, speed, temperature, colour, noise-level, etc."³⁷ The material universe does indeed seem to be in constant flux. But change or flux in God is an impossibility.

Change is impossible in God because change can take place in either of two realms, either in the realm of *what one is* or in the realm of *what one has*. The river of Heraclitus doesn't change in what it is. It's still a river, but it does change in its elements—extensions, speed, and temperature. If I were to change from a human into a monkey, I would have changed in *what I am*. If I were to lose all my hair I would be different, but I would still be human. Now, God being immutable, cannot change either in who He is or in what He has. This is so because what God has (attributes) are simply what He is in His perfection. One could say that He *is* His attributes.

If God were to change in His being there would be only two possibilities. He would have to change either: 1) for the better, or 2) for the worse. But God is absolutely perfect (another of His attributes) and if He were to change for the worse, He would no longer be God (because anything less than perfection is imperfect). Similarly, if He were to change for the better, this would demonstrate that He had not been absolutely perfect in the first place and, thus, wouldn't have been God prior to the

³⁵ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 43.

³⁶ Tim Crane and David Wiggins, "Metaphysics" in *Philosophy 1: A Guide through the Subject*, ed. A. C. Grayling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 235, quoting Heraclitus's fragments 12 and 91.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

change for the better. So, for God to change in any of His attributes would require Him to change who He is. And so, change within God's being or nature is logically impossible. He is immutable. And if He doesn't change, then neither can His eternal viewpoint, i.e., what He knows (and therefore decrees) can't change.

That God cannot change in His nature provides stability for going further into the consideration of His omniscience.

D. GOD'S OMNISCIENCE IS THE ARENA FOR ELECTION

So, God is infinite, eternal, and immutable. He exists, therefore, in a timeless, unchanging manner, completely independent of the confines of any created thing, be it time, space, angel, or mankind. Now, consider this harmonious alignment of His eternity and His immutability with another divine attribute, His omniscience. In His eternal, unchanging existence, He knows all things exhaustively, "all things both actual and possible."³⁸ He is infinite in knowledge. A. W. Tozer reflects on God's perfect knowledge, "God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything, He is never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything..."³⁹ We have touched upon this idea above, but now we will expand it further.

The fact that God knows all things, both possible and actual, is to understand the attribute involving infinity in regard to time. Since He is outside the realm of time, what He knows is irrespective of time. He knows all things from one eternal, all-comprehending perspective. Certainly God can enter the realm of time, but time does not bind or limit Him. As an eternal Being all time is present before His eyes. Berkhof effectively writes, "The knowledge of God may be defined as *that perfection of God whereby He, in an entirely unique manner, knows Himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal moment.*"⁴⁰

Now, if we align His immutability with the concept of eternal, unchanging omniscience, we are inclined to ask the question: When did God come to know all things, or any one thing in particular? Did He *before* the foundation of the world *acquire* His omnipotence or *arrive at* His complete, exhaustive knowledge of all things? Did He at one

³⁸ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 47.

³⁹ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 62.

⁴⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 66, italics in original.

moment, sometime prior to the creation of the universe see and observe what would happen and conclude that this was to be reality and, therefore, knows all things on that basis? Such would conform to the Arminian view. But in such a scenario God would have had to learn something. He would have had to gain more knowledge than He had possessed before. (You will notice that the words in italics in this paragraph are “time words” which are illegitimate in the realm of eternal existence). There would have had to be a changed state in God’s very being: a state of not knowing all things to a state of knowing all things.

The problem with the idea that God acquired an understanding of anything contradicts His immutable nature. He would have had to learn something He didn’t know before, and coming to a knowledge of this or that would have been a change in His knowledge. This would have meant that He didn’t know all things before He came to learn it. This would disqualify Him as God because He wouldn’t have been omniscient in the first place. With no omniscience there is no deity!

But how, then, can He be omniscient or know all things, both possible and actual, in an absolute, exhaustive, and certain manner? This is how He does it. In His unchanging nature as an all-knowing Being, God views the entirety of reality *at once* (to use a time word to describe an eternal concept again) from His eternal, ever-present perspective. He not only views all reality (which we would refer to as past, present, and future) at one time, but He knows all things at once. He always did and He always will. Neither His eternal perspective of reality nor His exhaustive knowledge of that reality (as it is resolved in the passing of time) preceded the other since that which God eternally and unchangeably knows cannot be wrong. What God perceives about reality is precisely what He knows as part of His exhaustive knowledge. Thus, God knows all things, including the outcome of the present world condition and beyond. He retains His sovereignty in time because He does not neglect the created order, but rather, directs it in its progression toward its destined end. He is now in the process of creating the best of all possible worlds as the completion of His eternal purpose.

It is not difficult to see how God can both know all things and continue working out His purpose in the realm of time. On a human level we have the ability to know something and to practice it over a period of time. For instance, many of us have memorized John 3:16 or Psalm 23 as children. We “know it by heart.” Yet, when it comes to saying it, we can’t say all of it at once, we must recite the passage one word at a time.

We know every word, but it takes time to completely recite it. As we recite the passage it is mandatory to concentrate on each word as we progress. In like manner, the eternal God knows every person, every circumstance, and every event. He acts sequentially within time to carry things toward the destined end which He has purposed.

God's omniscience is the arena for understanding the doctrine of election because whatever decree of God's exists, it is to be found in His "mind," that complete comprehension of all things, both actual and possible.

V. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE VARIOUS VIEWS OF ELECTION

A. PROBLEMS WITH THE CALVINIST AND ARMINIAN VIEWS

In considering the views of both Calvinism and Arminianism above, we have, perhaps in a cursory way, observed that views are arguably based on Scripture, but both are positions adverse to each other. Either one is correct, the other is correct, or neither are correct. Both cannot be correct.⁴¹ The suggestion here is that neither are correct.

Problems with the Calvinistic view are: 1) the assertion of (and need for) an unspecified eternal covenant of grace as a basis for the system, 2) the assertion that faith is a gift which logically follows the regeneration of the elect, rather than a human response which is the condition for regeneration as is taught in the Bible, 3) the denial or, at least, denigration of the doctrine of human freedom and the inherent ability to believe the gospel, 4) the seeming arbitrariness of God in choosing some to be saved and, as He does so, condemning the others to hell (by either actively doing so or by passing over them with the same result), 5) the dismissal, for all practical purposes within the discussion, of the interaction of God's foreknowledge as it relates to the doctrine of election, and 6) the questionable assertion that foreknowledge equals foreloving or choosing, not the knowledge of all things from God's eternal perspective.⁴²

⁴¹ Since they are adverse and assert different truth claims, the logical law of non-contradiction rules out the possibility of both views being correct.

⁴² Geisler adequately argues against the exclusive use of God's foreknowledge by saying, "If God does know infallibly, then He would still foreknow what people freely believe, and He would still have to decide whether He would have to force them to believe in Him or else elect those He knew could be

Essentially, the Calvinist sees individual election as an exercise in the sovereign (arbitrary) mind of God which doesn't take into account His offer of salvation and the free acceptance of all who will believe in the Son.

The problems with the Arminian view might be as follows: 1) By insisting that God chose the elect based on what He foresaw from His pre-creation position, Arminians make the doctrine of election moot. What would be the point of actively electing some and not others if God simply knew how man would react? Why wouldn't God just wait and let the chips fall where they may, so to speak? It would seem that there would be no reason to even bring up or believe in the doctrine of election. Why not just say that God knew who would freely believe? In that case, there would be no divine election. The idea that election is conditioned upon what God foresees is simply no election at all. 2) In the Arminian perspective, man, in freely choosing God, does the real electing. God has no eternal or sovereign function in this matter other than to concur with what He pre-observes man's free response to be. Certainly, God *could* choose a man to be saved on that basis (as the Arminian argues), but why bother? And why bother to tell us about it? This is seen to be a denigration of God's sovereignty because, left to his free will, man could not be expected to make decisions that would lead to the completion of God's eternal purpose. God would simply take His hands off the controls. The Calvinist would argue that such destroys the doctrine of God's sovereignty and assert that some coercion by God is therefore needed. 3) The Calvinist would argue against the Arminian that since Christ died only for the elect, God knows who the elect are. To do so, He had to have chosen/designated them and given them to the Son.

persuaded to freely accept His grace" (*Chosen But Free*, 71). He continues, "there is strong evidence to show that 'foreknow' does not mean 'chose' or 'elect' in the Bible" (*ibid.*). He then refers to the use of the root *ginōskō* in Matt 25:24, John 2:24; 5:42 and continues saying, "In addition, 'foreknow' (Greek *proginōskō*) is used in the New Testament in reference to advanced knowledge of events. 'Therefore, dear friends, since you *already know* this [in advance], be on your guard...' (2 Peter 3:17; cf. Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:18-20). Thus the extreme Calvinist's equating of foreknowing and foreloving does not follow" (*ibid.*, 72, italics in original). Finally, he argues that "the word 'chosen' by God is used of persons who are the elect. Regarding John 6:70 he says, "Judas, for example, was 'chosen' by Christ but not one of the elect" (*ibid.*).

Another problematic area of theology is the categorization of views which view the decrees of God as having occurred in a sort of logical order. Historically theologians have tried to understand the doctrine of election, an eternal phenomenon, from a time related, or at least a logic-related perspective. Because of this, we have spent a lot of time trying to resolve whether election is based upon foreknowledge (conditioned on what man was foreseen to do) or whether regeneration is based upon a pre-creation choice by God without respect to foreseen faith. This is sometimes couched in terms of the *lapsarian* designations as to what “logical order” God used to arrive at what would be His ultimate eternal decree. The very nature of these proposals suggests that God actually had to think about it before deciding!

Chafer reviews four schools of interpretation which contend for a certain order of the elective decrees saying,

These schools are: *supralapsarian*, the *infralapsarian*, the *sublapsarian*, and the *Arminian*, the first three of these being Calvinistic. Though the defense of these varying orders concerns primarily one subject—the election of some to be saved and the leaving of others to a just condemnation—the titles by which three of these schools are identified relates them to the fall of man. The word lapsarian refers to one who believes in the doctrine that man is a fallen being.⁴³

Essentially *supralapsarianism* (Lat. for “above the fall”) is the “doctrine that God decreed both election and reprobation before the [decree] of the fall.”⁴⁴ This is an Ultra Calvinistic position which orders the decrees as follows: 1) The decree to elect some for salvation and to reprobate the rest, 2) the decree to create both elect and nonelect men, 3) the decree to allow the fall of man, 4) the decree to provide salvation to the elect, and finally, 5) the decree to apply that salvation to those elected.

The moderately Calvinistic *infralapsarian*, (“Lat. for ‘after the fall’”⁴⁵) view orders the decisions of God this way: 1) the decree to create men, 2) the decree to allow the fall of man, 3) the decree to provide

⁴³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), 178. He reviews these views in 3:178-82.

⁴⁴ F. H. Klooster, “Supralapsarianism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1059.

⁴⁵ R. V. Schnucker, “Infralapsarianism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 560.

salvation for men, 4) the decree to elect those who would believe and allow the rest to remain under God's righteous condemnation, and 5) the decree to apply salvation to those who believe. In this view, the decree to elect comes *after* the decree to permit the fall of man.

The *sublapsarian* view (Lat. for "below the fall," is also moderately Calvinistic) lists the decrees thus: 1) the decree to create men, 2) the decree to allow the fall, 3) the decree to elect those who would believe and leave those who do not believe to condemnation, 4) the decree to provide salvation for man, 5) the decree to apply salvation to those who believe. Here the decree to elect also comes after the decree to allow the fall, but places the decree to provide salvation for man immediately after (*sub* or below) the decree to elect.

The Arminian view is that election follows the decree to provide salvation, and depends "on foreseen human virtue, faith, and obedience, whereas the infralapsarian view of election invests it with sovereign choice apart from any foreseen human merit whatsoever."⁴⁶

The justification used by those who pose such ideas is usually that logical order is not the same as chronological order. Everyone seems to realize that there can be no chronological order in a decree that is eternal. But logical order as asserted in the *lapsarian* arguments still represents a certain "cause and effect" relationship connecting the assertions. Cause and effect are two terms, which, when used together, suggest a chronological progression. One statement is considered to logically follow another, suggesting an order of occurrence. Charles Hodge reasons,

As all the decrees of God are one comprehensive purpose, no view of the relation of the details embraced in that purpose which does not admit of their being reduced to unity can be admitted. In every great mechanism, whatever the number or complexity of its parts, there must be unity of design. Every part bears a given relation to every other part, and the perception of that relation is necessary to a proper understanding of the whole. Again, as the decrees of God are eternal and immutable, no view of his plan of operation which supposes him to purpose first one thing and then another can be consistent with their nature. And as God is absolutely sovereign and

⁴⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:182.

independent, all his purposes must be determined from within or according to the counsel of his own will.⁴⁷

Therefore, it would seem that the suggested logical order within the eternal decree is a spurious representation of reality. Reality is what is eternally known within the immutable, omniscient mind of God.

B. THE PROPOSED BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CONDITIONALITY OF DIVINE ELECTION

Here is the proposed solution to the doctrine of election based on what has been established above. We have seen that God is an infinite Being whose attributes work in complete harmony with one another. He is eternal and as such is a self-existing Being having no cause and depending on nothing. Anything and everything He chooses to create is under His absolute control. So, His sovereignty cannot be questioned. He is also immutable and does not change either in His essence (who He is) or in His attributes (what He has). His essence and His attributes are one and the same. He cannot change in His eternal state for either the better or for the worse. He can't gain more knowledge or come to realize a new truth, and neither can He lose any of the knowledge that He has. To do either would violate His immutability, and therefore, His deity. We could correctly say that what God knows, He knows absolutely and eternally. That which He knows absolutely and eternally cannot be changed, for to do so would make what God knows subject to change. If God's knowledge could change, He would not have been correct in the first place, i.e., He would have been wrong and therefore not omniscient. What God knows absolutely and eternally must take place. If He has a purpose and a plan to fashion creation into the best of all possible worlds, He also must know the details of that path. So, what He knows is determined, and what is determined is the same as what He knows. We may refer to things as being "predetermined" because we are time-bound and find it hard to express any other way. But God just determines. We say "fore-know," but God just knows. What God knows, He determines, and what He determines, He knows. It could be no other way.

If we apply this understanding to God's selection of some for salvation, there could have been no point or moment in time in which God decided who the elect would be. This is because His eternal, unchanging,

⁴⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1975), 2:320.

all knowing nature would not allow it. Points or moments are “time” words, and God is above and beyond the realm of time. In God’s eternal mind, therefore, there is no “before” and “after,” because the impositions of those terms are adverse to the concept of eternity. If that is the case, the question as to what came before or after (as in the lapsarian proposals) become moot. Not only does the logical progression of these proposals suggest at least a hypothetical, chronological progression of decisions in His mind, but, in so doing, depreciate and ignore what we know about God’s omniscience as related to the co-harmonious qualities of eternity, omniscience, and immutability.

Therefore, it seems best to slip out of our inadequate time-bound way of understanding election and to see that God (an eternal Being that is always in the present tense) simply *elects* (present tense) from within His eternal, ever-in-the-present-tense, nature. To be more specific, we could say that He, in His eternal, timeless presence, *always elects*, and that those whom He elects were elected, are being elected, and will forever be elected. The identity of the elect are no more certain in God’s mind at one time than at another since it takes place outside the realm of time! From our present time in history, God’s election is past, but we were no more being chosen in the past than we are being chosen now, nor are we being more chosen now than we will be chosen in the everlasting future.⁴⁸ The elect are eternally chosen. He is eternally choosing us (present tense). We could say, then, that those who God eternally and unmistakably knows as a believer, He chooses, and those who He chooses, He eternally and unmistakably knows as a believer.

Now, how does this work out in the application of salvation to the elect? This is where the purpose of God comes into the equation. It is suggested that the purpose of God is to create the best of all possible worlds and thereby accomplish the glorification of Himself in the manifestation of His mercy, grace, justice, and glorious attributes, and for time-everlasting to receive the worship and praise of which He is infinitely worthy. In the process of bringing this about, another attribute (His omnipotence) operates harmoniously. He is omnipotent and this fact, when united to His eternal, unchanging knowledge and wisdom, is not only demonstrable by the physical creation of the universe and all

⁴⁸ Note that as long as there are things, events will occur. We do not thus enter into a timeless eternity when we die or go to heaven, but rather into the realm of everlasting time.

spiritual beings (angels and man), but is being manifested within the time/space universe, i.e., as history progresses.

As an omnipotent God, He *could* enforce His will upon everyone so that man would have no choice in his actions or decisions. He could coerce and compel proper actions, but like faith, our choices are also freely made in accord with our desires and within our circumstances. But who creates the circumstances? Is not God sovereign? Cannot God, in His omnipotent sovereignty, so affect *every* circumstance of the world in which we live (as He “works all things according to His good pleasure”) so that those that He elects (notice the present tense) freely accept the truth of the gospel when it is heard? God, being omnipotent, can certainly do this with ease, and, because He is sovereign and all-wise, He can do it without violating human freedom, negating human responsibility, or denigrating human ability to believe. It is not a violation of His sovereignty to understand that God’s election (eternally existing and operating) may easily operate, not in conflict with the freedom of man, but to actually operate alongside of or in accord with man’s freedom and responsibility to believe as God affects His election in historical, progressive time.⁴⁹ He moves this world along according to His purpose and plan toward His destined end.

What God knows He determines, and what He determines He knows. This being so, those who God eternally and unmistakably knows as believers He chooses. Consequently, those who believe are those who He chooses or elects. There need be no before or after, no logical or chronological progression in His eternal knowledge, no decision to elect based on anything except for the carrying out of His eternal decree, which decree was always in place. Therefore, there is no need to 1) postulate an eternal covenant between the members of the Godhead, 2) propose a logical order in relation to whether God’s decisions followed one or the other, 3) ask the question whether or not election is based on foreknowledge or whether foreknowledge of one’s salvation is based on election. As God elects, from His eternal, present tense perspective, He also works out His sovereign purpose within the framework of history on a moment-by-moment basis. His eternal electing activity is applied throughout the progression of history, which He is controlling, and He does so *in accord*

⁴⁹ For an excellent illustration showing the possibility of harmony between human freedom and divine sovereignty, see Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 69-70, 181-87.

with the ability of men to believe (and without coercion) when the gospel message is clearly presented, when we perceive the free offer of eternal life as most valuable and beneficial to us, and when we are fully assured and convinced by His Spirit that what God has promised, He is able to perform (cf. Rom 4:21).

THE GOSPEL UNDER SIEGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

To borrow a phrase from Zane Hodges, the gospel is under siege!¹

There is a battle presently being waged between those who hold to a grace understanding of the gospel and those who do not. There are three major systems attacking the gospel of grace: Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Arminian. All three are distinct theologies, but it is their commonalities that make them a united threat. This article seeks to demonstrate just that—that these three theologies are more similar than one might think.

II. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC POSITION

Justification is a lifelong process in Catholicism, which begins with baptism and continues within the confines of the church. Karl Keating says “[Christ] did his part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours.”² The Council of Trent states:

If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate, in order to obtain the grace of justification...let him be anathema.

If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law [canons and decrees of the church] are not necessary for salvation but...without them...men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of justification...let him be anathema.³

¹ Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1992).

² Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 166.

³ *The Council of Trent*, Session 6, Canon 9.

The Roman Catholic Catechism notes that “living faith works through charity”⁴ and “service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation.”⁵

From this theology, it logically follows that:

According to the Lord’s words “Thus you will know them by their fruits” [Mt 7:20]—reflection on God’s blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an ever greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty.⁶

Thus, looking for “fruit” and “God’s blessings” in one’s life is the way by which a person can know whether or not they will be saved.

The following summarizes Catholic teaching: “To gain the happiness of heaven we must know, love, and serve God in this world.”⁷ Without good works, no one will get to heaven.

III. THE REFORMED POSITION

Although the nomenclature “Reformed” and “Reformation” should connote drastic change, the position is closer to Rome than most would think. Radmacher states, “I fear that some current definitions of faith and repentance are not paving the way back to Wittenberg but, rather, paving the way back to Rome. Justification is becoming ‘to make righteous’ rather than ‘to declare righteous.’”⁸

Given the fact that S. Lewis Johnson calls the Westminster Confession the “standard of reference that evangelicals as a whole will accept in the main,”⁹ this document is a good place to start.

Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions:

⁴ See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 3, Sect 1, Ch 1, Art 7, Sub-Sect II, Paragraph 1815, <http://www.christusrex.org>.

⁵ *Ibid*, Paragraph 1814.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 3, Section 1, Chapter 3, Article 2, Sub-Section III, Paragraph 2005.

⁷ “Catholic Beliefs,” 1990-2001, catholic.org/clife/prayers/beliefs.shtml.

⁸ Earl Radmacher in “First Response to ‘Faith According to the Apostle James’ by John F. MacArthur, Jr.,” *JETS* 33:1 (March 1990): 40-41.

⁹ S. Lewis Johnson, “How Faith Works,” *Christianity Today* (September 1989): 21.

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.¹⁰

Thus, the Confession states that only those who truly believe, love God in sincerity, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before him, may be assured that they will make it to heaven.

James Montgomery Boice concurs:

...this is not only a matter of our demonstrating a genuinely changed behavior and thus doing good works if we are justified. It must also be that our good works exceed the good works of others...When Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law..." he meant, "Unless you who call yourselves Christians, who profess to be justified by faith alone and therefore confess that you have nothing whatever to contribute to your own justification—unless you nevertheless conduct yourselves in a way which is utterly superior to the conduct of the very best people who are hoping to save themselves by their own good works, you will not enter God's kingdom because you are not a Christian in the first place."¹¹

R.C. Sproul sums this view up by stating, "In the Reformed view works are a necessary fruit of justification."¹²

Charles Hodge, the famous Reformed theologian writes:

False security of salvation commonly rests on the ground of our belonging to a privileged body, the church, or to a privileged class, the elect. Both are equally fallacious. *Neither the members of the church nor the elect can be saved unless they persevere in holiness.* And they cannot persevere in holiness without continual watchfulness and effort.¹³

¹⁰ See www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html.

¹¹ J. Montgomery Boice, *Amazing Grace* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1993), 73-74.

¹² R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 156.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 181, emphasis added.

In a small booklet by John Piper, in which he discusses Perseverance of the Saints, he writes, "Election is unconditional, but glorification is not. There are many warnings in Scripture that those who do not hold fast to Christ can be lost in the end."¹⁴

Arthur W. Pink makes the following "line in the sand" statement: "Readers, if there is a reserve in your obedience, you are on your way to hell."¹⁵ He elaborates elsewhere by saying:

There is a deadly and damnable heresy being widely propagated today to the effect that, if a sinner truly accepts Christ as his personal Savior, no matter how he lives afterwards, he cannot perish. That is a satanic lie, for it is at direct variance with the teaching of the Word of truth. *Something more than believing in Christ is necessary to ensure the soul's reaching heaven.*¹⁶

Again, Pink writes:

...all faith does not save; yea, all faith in Christ does not save. Multitudes are deceived upon this vital matter. Thousands of those who sincerely believe that they have received Christ as their personal Savior and are resting on His finished work, are building upon a foundation of sand.¹⁷

The Council of Trent authors would probably give a hearty "Amen!"

IV. THE ARMINIAN POSITION

The Remonstrants, followers of Arminius, wrote in reaction to the Calvinists, "True believers can through their own fault fall into horrible sins and blasphemies, persevere and die in the same: and accordingly they can finally fall away and go lost."¹⁸ The Remonstrants thus taught the possibility of a loss of justification.

¹⁴ John Piper and Bethlehem Baptist Church, *TULIP: What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism* (Minneapolis: Desiring God Ministries, 1997), 23.

¹⁵ A.W. Pink, *Practical Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Guardian, 1974), 16.

¹⁶ A.W. Pink, Quoted in Ian Murray, *The Life of A.W. Pink* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 248-49, emphasis added.

¹⁷ A.W. Pink, *Studies on Saving Faith*, www.reformed.org/books/pink.

¹⁸ Laurence Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, rev. ed. (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1991, 1999), 605.

John Wesley, in writing a letter to a Roman Catholic, tried to show how similar Catholics and Protestants are. He writes,

If he does not [act according to Christian principles], we grant all his faith will not save him. And this leads me to show you, in few and plain words, what the practice of a true protestant¹⁹ is...

A true Protestant believes in God, has a full confidence in his mercy, fears him with a filial fear, and loves him with all his soul. He worships God in spirit and in truth, in every thing gives him thanks; calls upon him with his heart as well as his lips, at all times and in all places; honors his holy name and his word, and serves him truly all the days of his life...²⁰

Shank concurs: "There is no valid assurance of election and final salvation for any man, apart from deliberate perseverance in faith."²¹ Agreeing Guy Duty states, "We have seen that God's salvation covenant is a continuing covenant. And it is a monstrous deception to teach that the continual sinner will be saved by a continued covenant that demands his continued obedience."²²

Daniel Corner's newsletter gives a vitriolic and thorough explanation of Arminian teaching:

to enter the kingdom of God Christians must endure hatred and persecution to the very end of their lives (Mt. 10:22; Heb. 3:14; Rev. 2:10, 11); live holy (Rom. 6:22; Heb. 12:14); bring forth good fruit (Mt. 7:19); and do good works (John 5:29), according to New Testament grace.²³

¹⁹ John Wesley notes, "I say *true Protestant*; for I disclaim all common swearers, Sabbath breakers, drunkards; all whoremongers, liars, cheats, extortioners; in a word, all that live in open sin. These are no Protestants; they are no Christians at all..." ("A Letter to a Roman Catholic," in *Selections from the writings of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Herbert Welch [New York: Eaton & Mains, 1901], 229).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Robert Shank, *Life in the Son* (Springfield, MO: Westcott Pubs., 1960), 293.

²² Guy Duty, *If Ye Continue* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1966), 65, 169.

²³ Daniel Corner, "Pairs of Truths," in *Fighting the Good Fight*, Vol. 8, Num. 2 (Summer 2002), 5.

It is clear that Arminians teach that by committing some gross sin the one who is justified can lose their justification and thereby forfeit heaven if they do not repent before they die. Thus, works are crucial in maintaining one's justification.

V. CONCLUSION

Anyone who reads from Catholic, Reformed, and Arminian writings will soon see that although they do not agree on everything, one thing is clear: all three believe that works are necessary in order to get to heaven. Consequently, all three fail to teach faith alone in Christ alone. In these systems, faith and works are co-conditions for entering into heaven. Such teaching has gone far astray from the Biblical doctrine that eternal life is given by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, in Christ *alone*, plus *nothing else*.

OLD TESTAMENT SALVATION— FROM WHAT?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Few would disagree that the subject of salvation is one of the most important themes in the Bible—so important that many theologians have subordinated all other themes under it.¹ And yet more confusion exists over the meaning of the words *save* and *salvation* than almost any other terms in the Bible.²

Cultural influences and contextual evidence, especially in the OT, are often ignored when determining the meaning of these terms. Therefore, the purpose of this article will be to establish the meaning of the terms *save* (*yāša'*) and *salvation* (*yešû'â*)³ from their Hebraic origins—not in light of the NT. In order to verify whether the term *salvation* underwent any changes in its translation from Hebrew to Greek, the

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 18, says that “the unifying principle of covenant theology is soteriology.” See also John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1963), 79.

² This is similar to the investigation on God’s wrath. (See René A. Lopez, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15 [Autumn 2002]: 45-66). Robert N. Wilkin, “Salvation in the Old Testament, Part 1,” *Grace in Focus* (Nov-Dec 1999): 2-3, observes that, “There is probably more confusion over the terms *save* and *salvation* than any other term in the Bible. Even...believers are sometimes confused by the use of these terms in Scripture. Most people think that the vast majority of uses of the words *save* and *salvation* in Scripture refer to salvation from eternal condemnation. Actually the exact opposite is true. Biblical *salvation* rarely refers to salvation from hell (even in the NT).”

³ Unless specified for some technical reason, the noun *salvation* will be used throughout the article, instead of mentioning at every point both *yāša'* and *yešû'â*.

Septuagint will also be examined. Finally, extra-biblical documents will be surveyed in order to see how these terms were used in secular sources, which were contemporaneous with the OT.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT USE OF SALVATION

To begin, one must ask if the Hebrew terms for *save* and *salvation* in the OT ever mean saved from eternal condemnation. In the OT, the covenant people were “heaven bound” by trusting in God’s promise of Messiah.⁴ However, they still needed to be delivered (saved) from sickness, enemies, pre-mature death, general problems or covenantal restitution due to sin (cf. Deuteronomy 28–30).⁵

The stem of the verb *save* (*yāšaʿ*) originally meant “to be roomy, broad,” which is the opposite of the concepts of “oppression” or “narrowness.” As a result, “to be constricted, [and] oppressed” seems to be the “rescue” one needs by “moving out into the open.”⁶ This is the basic

⁴ “Forensic righteousness” is taught in the OT, however, not as clearly as it is in the NT (cf. Gen 15:6; Is 53; 54:17; 61:10).

⁵ *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, ed. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), s.v. “Salvation,” 542, states the idea of “salvation” in covenant relationship: “The righteous may cry out for deliverance from unjust persecution or oppression or for rescue from undeserved illness and premature death. Following the prescription of Deuteronomy 28–30, the receipt of covenantal blessings may be sought by a sinful people who repent and ask for deliverance from the curses of the covenant.”

⁶ Georg Fohrer, “*sōzō*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964-76), 973. See also *BDB*, s.v. “*yāšaʿ*,” 446, which also gives the basic meaning of “placed in freedom” and “give width and breadth to, liberate.” It is also interesting to note that, not far removed from the Hebrew meaning, the Arabic equivalent means to “be capacious, make wide, spacious, make sufficient, be or live in abundance” (*BDB*, s.v. “*yāšaʿ*,” 446). Though J. F. Sawyer, “*yāšaʿ*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 6:442, does not agree with the common view of connecting the Hebrew *yāšaʿ* as a derivative of the Arabic *wasiʿa*, “be spacious” or *ʿawsaʿa*, “give room to,” he believes it comes from a “Proto-Semitic” word. Nevertheless, Sawyer understands the concept of OT *salvation* to mean “‘spaciousness,’ liberation

concept behind the usages of *save* and *salvation* in the OT. That is, since sin, enemies, and calamities are restrictions that hinder, rescue is needed to release one from these restrictions.

“Save” and “salvation” are used 363 times in the Masoretic text, appearing 319 times in the following seven distinct nuances (excluding the 44 times the noun appears as proper names):

A. SAVED FROM EXTERNAL EVILS IN GENERAL

“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ And You will not save” (Hab 1:2). Habakkuk questions the Lord’s delay in saving or delivering Judah from the violence that surrounded them, clearly a physical salvation.

Salvation from external calamities, namely natural disasters, can also be placed under this category: “If disaster comes upon us...judgment, pestilence, or famine...You will hear and save” (2 Chr 20:9). Judah’s enemies (Moab and Ammon) had come to battle Jehoshaphat (20:1-2). They must have been numerous because in v. 3 “Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself [as well as all the cities of Judah] to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.” Then in 20:9, Jehoshaphat appeals to the Lord, citing past deliverance from natural calamities (cf. 2 Chr 6:28-30). The king then petitions God to deliver them from their enemies (20:10), as He has from pestilence and famine (20:9).

One nuance of OT salvation is deliverance or help from experiencing general external evils that come as a result of sinful actions or natural calamities.⁷

B. SAVED CORPORATELY FROM ENEMIES OR IN BATTLE

In Ps 33:16, the psalmist writes, “No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered [yāšā‘] by great strength.”⁸ All

from restricting, oppressive experiences both physical and spiritual,” to occur frequently.

⁷ OT citations of yāšā‘ and yešū‘â that appear to be used under this category are found in Gen 49:18; Exod 2:17; Deut 28:31; 1 Sam 25:26, 31, 33; 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kgs 6:26, 27; Isa 46:7; 47:13, 15; Jonah 2:9; Pss 72:4, 13; 74:12; 76:10; 78:22; 107:13, 19; 109:31; Job 5:4, 11, 15; 26:2; 40:14. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the Psalms are taken from the Hebrew Masoretic Text numeration.

⁸ Robert N. Wilkin, “Salvation in the Psalms: Deliverance from Today’s Troubles, Part 2,” *Grace in Focus* (Jan-Feb 2000): 1, notices that deliverance from enemies is “the single most common use of the words *salvation* and *save* in

nations that go to war trust in their might, skills, men, and weaponry to save them from defeat (33:17). However, those that fear and trust in the Lord's mercy (33:18), although lacking military might, will be saved from defeat (Pss 44:6; 60:7). Actually, the Lord is the weapon that saves His people in battle. Salvation here means corporate deliverance or victory in battle.⁹

C. SAVED FROM MORAL TROUBLES

Proverbs 28:18 says, "Whoever walks blamelessly will be saved, but he who is perverse in his ways will suddenly fall." The Hebrew adjective "blamelessly" (*tāmîm*) used in this verse is translated "wholesome" and carries the concept of integrity.¹⁰ Moral integrity is set forth as a condition of deliverance and blessing (Prov 18:10; 28:10b). However, the

the Psalms (as in the rest of the Old Testament). Repeatedly the contexts in which these words occur indicate that the salvation in view is deliverance from one's enemies. Most often this concerns the deliverance of the nation of Israel from her enemies. On occasion it refers to deliverance of the individual from his enemies." The following discovery certainly bears this out. *TDOT*, 446, has also noticed that out of all OT books where *yāša'* appears "the largest concentration of occurrences is in the Psalms (136)." Since the Hebrew writer quotes extensively from the Psalms, T. Kem Oberholtzer concludes, "In the Old Testament, 'salvation' usually refers to the Lord's deliverance of His people from their enemies or trouble." ("The Warning Passages in Hebrews: The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 [January-March 1988]: 93.)

⁹OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešû'â* that appear to be used under this category are found in Num 10:9; Deut 20:4; 33:29; Josh 10:6; 22:22; 1 Sam 4:3; 7:8; 9:16; 10:19, 27; 11:3; 14:6, 23, 39, 45; 17:47; 23:2, 5; 2 Sam 3:18; 10:11, 19; 22:42; 2 Kgs 13:5; 14:27; 19:19, 34; 37:20, 35; Jer 15:20; 17:14 [2x]; 23:6; 30:7, 10, 11; 31:7; 42:11; 46:27; Ezek 34:22; Hos 13:4, 10; 14:4; Obad 1:21; Mic 7:7; Hab 3:8, 13 [2x], 18; Zech 3:17, 19; Pss 14:7; 17:7; 18:42; 20:6; 24:5; 28:9; 37:40; 43:5; 44:4, 5, 8; 65:6; 68:20; 69:36; 79:9; 80:3, 4, 8, 20; 85:5, 8; 106:8, 10, 21, 47; 145:19; 149:4; Neh 9:27; 1 Chr 11:14; 16:35 [2x]; 19:19; 2 Chr 20:17; 32:22. See also Sawyer, "yāša'," in *TDOT*, 6:451, where God's saving power is claimed in the War scrolls of Qumran (1QM 10:4 [quoting from Deut 20:4], 1QM 10:7 [quoting from Num 10:9] and 1QM 11:2 [quoting from 1 Sam 17:47]).

¹⁰ *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, ed. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), s.v. "*tāmîm*," 1071.

Hebrew word for “perverse” (*iqēš*) is parallel to “blameless” and means twisted and crooked. Therefore, those who refuse to live lives of integrity will find ruin and shame. Salvation in this context refers to a temporal benefit—directly conditioned upon one’s behavior—that brings spiritual or physical blessings (or both).¹¹

D. SAVED FROM DOMINION OF OTHER NATIONS

“For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver [*hōšîa’*] Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg 13:5). Those who lived in the days of the judges were rebellious and idolatrous and everyone did “what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). As a result of their wickedness, nations would come to devour and rule over them, which is consistent with God’s warning in Deut 28:45-51. The Book of Judges proves this warning true. Nonetheless, by God’s grace, twelve judges were raised up (2:16) in order to guide the people into national independence once again. In Judges 13, Samson was the promised judge who would “save” Israel from the Philistines. Salvation here clearly means national independence from the governing authority of other nations (i.e., rulership over Israel).¹²

E. SAVED INDIVIDUALLY FROM ENEMIES

In Job 13:16, Job declares that God “shall be my salvation,” which refers to the physical calamity he was presently undergoing. He claimed that God would personally vindicate him from his present demise. David also pleads, “Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; Save your servant who trusts in You!” (Ps 86:2). The entire Psalm is David’s petition to God to show His might (86:8-10) and mercy (86:3-4, 13-16) by delivering him from the proud and violent enemies who sought to

¹¹ Other OT citations of *yāša’* and *yešū’ā* that appear to be used under this category are found in Deut 22:27; 28:29; 2 Sam 22:28; Isa 63:8; Jer 4:14; Pss 7:11; 18:28; 34:19; 50:23; 51:14; 119:94, 117, 123, 146, 155, 166, 174; Job 22:29.

¹² Other OT occurrences of *yāša’* and *yešū’ā* that appear to be used in this category include Judg 2:18; 3:9, 15, 31; 6:14, 15, 31, 36, 37; 7:2, 7; 8:22; 10:1, 12, 13, 14; 12:2, 3; 13:5; Jer 2:27, 28; 8:20; 11:12 [2x]; 14:8, 9; Lam 4:17.

destroy him (86:14, 17). In this context, *salvation* is referring to the individual physical deliverance from personal problems or one's foes.¹³

F. SAVED IN PROSPERITY

"...He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase?" (2 Sam 23:5). The Davidic covenant is in view here. In David's last words (2 Sam 23:1) he remembers the everlasting covenant of rulership God had promised him (cf. 2 Sam 7:8-16; Ps 89:29). David could rest assured (even if his "house is not so with God") that his seed would prosper and remain forever. The phrase "salvation and all of my desire" is synonymously parallel to the phrase "make it increase." Salvation in this passage is equated with prosperity (spiritual, material, or both)¹⁴ for those who trust in God.¹⁵

G. SAVED NATIONALLY WITH SPIRITUAL CONNOTATION

"How beautiful are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace...[and] salvation" (Isa 52:7). Salvation in this context encompasses two ideas. First, God's people and His city will be restored

¹³ Other OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešū'â* that appear to be used under this category are found in Deut 32:15; 1 Sam 2:1; 2 Sam 8:6, 14; 22:3; 22:4, 47, 51; 2 Kgs 16:7; Isa 38:20; Pss 3:2, 8, 9; 6:5; 7:1; 9:15; 12:2, 6; 13:6; 18:3, 4; 18:36, 47, 51; 20:7, 10; 21:2, 6; 22:2, 22; 25:5; 27:19; 28:8; 31:3, 17; 33:16; 34:7; 35:3, 9; 36:7; 42:6, 12; 43:5; 54:3; 55:17; 57:4; 59:3; 62:2, 7, 8; 69:2, 14, 30; 70:5; 71:2, 3; 88:2; 89:27; 106:4; 108:7; 109:26; 116:6, 13; 118:15, 21; 138:7; 140:8; Job 13:16; 1 Chr 18:6, 13; 19:12. In this category, a corporate nuance could also be understood. That is, David could be speaking for himself but not to the exclusion of the people. This would be understood as a synecdoche (a part [David's plea] that stands for the whole [the people as well]). However, what is emphasized is David's individual deliverance as opposed to a corporate plea, as he makes on other occasions (Pss 65:6; 68:20; 69:36; 79:9; 80:3).

¹⁴ S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Book of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), 276, says, "*yāša'* like *yešū'â* as used by the prophets and psalmist, denotes *welfare*, spiritual and material combined," emphasis original.

¹⁵ Other OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešū'â* that appear to be used under this category are found in 2 Sam 23:5; Pss 9:15; 95:1; 96:2; 118:25; 132:16; Job 30:15; Prov 20:22; 1 Chr 16:23.

now and once and for all in that day (52:6).¹⁶ Second, to be part of Christ's future kingdom—known in the OT and the Gospels as “entering” the kingdom (Isa 53:1-5; Matt 19:16, 25; Mark 10:17, 26)—one must be eternally saved (i.e., rescued from eternal death, cf. Isaiah 51; 61:10-11; 64:5-6). Thus, spiritual salvation is in view in what follows (Isa 52:13–53:12), as God's means to “effect that deliverance”¹⁷ for the remnant (Isa 10:20-22; 11:11, 16).

The person who brings good news and proclaims peace and salvation in the whole context of 52:1–53:12 has spiritual salvation and Israel's national restoration in view. The context develops both of these thoughts.

In Isa 52:8 the Lord's “arm” is the “salvation” of God. Isaiah 52:13–15 describes Jesus Christ and His atoning work as His blood sacrifice (1 Pet 1:2) when it states, “So shall He sprinkle many nations.” This miraculous power by “His holy arm” (52:10; 53:1) and work refers to the works of Messiah (“Servant”) developed in 53:2-12.¹⁸ This would understand Isa 53:1-3 as looking back to the thought in 52:14. Thus, the nations and kings will “shut their mouths” and “see” (52:15, and perhaps “be amazed”)¹⁹ how the Servant who gave up His life and status gained it back for Himself and others through His faithfulness to God (52:12;

¹⁶ The phrase *in that day* in Isa 10:20; 11:6-14; 12:1; 19:16-25 appears to be used for Christ's future rule over all, as well as God's day of judgment in Isa 7:18, 20-21, 23.

¹⁷ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 382.

¹⁸ Oswalt, 382, says that, “*The arm of the Lord* here shows the direct connection of this poem with the preceding...What is being said here can only be understood in direct relationship to what has been said previously, especially in chs. 49–52. God has promised to deliver his people from their alienation from him so that they can indeed become His servants to the world. Now he tells the means by which he proposes to effect that deliverance. To attempt to understand this segment in any other way is to misunderstand the significance of the occurrence of the ‘arm of the Lord’ and the other contextual cues,” *ibid.*, emphasis original.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 380-81. The phrase, “what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider,” that renders the kings of the world speechless (“kings shall shut their mouth at Him”), conveys the idea of how one who took such a humble position can end in such a high place by sitting in God's throne (Rev 22:1, 3). Since being humble is contrary to the world's way of gaining victory, God's method of victory will surprise the world when Messiah's triumph comes to pass.

53:12).²⁰ Therefore, since the Messiah will accomplish God's work by giving up His life and position (52:13–53:12), the captivity and city that was lost (52:4-6) will be regained²¹ (54:3-4) and ruled by the Messiah and His partners (53:12a; Ps 2:8-9; Heb 1:9, 13-14; Rev 2:26-27).

Three contextual markers appear in OT passages where eternal salvation, in addition to temporal deliverance, is in view. First, God's grace and power appear as the only source able to save eternally (Isa 45:14-25; 49:10, 13; 54:8-10). Second, Messiah, or a picture of Messiah, appears to be the atoning sacrifice in the context (Isa 52:13–53:12). Finally, one cannot do anything to earn it, but simply trust in God's righteousness and act of salvation that will accomplish and fulfill His promise (Isa 41:1-20; 42:1–44:28). As will be evident, *some* of these contextual markers are found in extra-biblical literature as well, the exception being eternal redemption obtained solely through God's grace. That is the unique element of the Hebrew Scriptures and the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith.

Even if the terms *save* and *salvation* carry a sense of eternal salvation in some OT passages, there is no explicit instance where the term appears solely with a spiritual nuance.²² While salvation may come with a spiritual nuance, in the OT it always has a broader meaning. Salvation here comes by physically restoring national Israel to the land of promise, placing them in a position of blessing.²³

²⁰ Ibid., 405-406.

²¹ Ibid., 417-18.

²² Out of the 363 times the terms *yāšā'* and *yešū'â* appear, this writer could not find one single instance of a justification-salvation-only meaning.

²³ Although Messiah's sacrifice is the means by which God furnishes eternal-life-redemption for humanity (Isa 49:1–53:12; 65:1), one must notice that in Isaiah's writings (and in other prophets) it is also the grounds by which God will temporally and eternally rescue (by His mercy) Israel from her enemies and permanently restore her to the promise land and national prominence. In Isaiah the means and method—i.e., Messiah's sacrifice (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 37:32; 42–43; 49:1–53:14; 54–56)—of how God will restore Israel to the land of promise is an important element. However, the emphasis of the meaning of "salvation" lies, not on the means, but on the end result of rescuing Israel from her enemies, by restoring them to the promise land, and restoring peace on earth by which all humanity will benefit (Isa 2:1-4; 9:7; 10:20-34; 11:6–12:6; 27:2-13; 35; 37:1-7; 59:16–62:12; 65:17–66:24). Thus, salvation experience in Isaiah finds its basis in justification through Messiah's atonement (Isa 52:13–53:12),

H. SUMMARY

Deliverance from temporal and physical oppression dominates usage far more than deliverance from hell. The seven major categories of these terms that appear in the OT demonstrate the following sense of meaning: temporal physical deliverance (1) generally from external evils, (2) corporately from enemies or in battle, (3) from moral troubles, (4) from nations' dominion, (5) physically and/or individually from enemies, (6) in prosperity, and (7) to national restoration through spiritual means.

Many others have also agreed with these conclusions. A survey of the literature addressing this subject reveals that a consensus in biblical scholarship exists concerning the meaning of OT salvation by showing that a *broader* meaning always appears instead of the *deliverance-from-eternal-condemnation* nuance.²⁴ Therefore if anyone interprets salvation

but has a broader scope that encompasses all of God's national and universal promises to restore humanity to a place and position of blessing.

OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešū'a* that appear to be used under this category are found in Isa 12:2, 3; 17:10; 19:20; 25:9 [2x]; 26:1, 18; 30:15; 33:2, 6, 22; 35:4; 43:3, 11; 45:8, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22; 49:6, 8, 25, 26; 51:5, 6, 8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:1, 11, 16; 60:16, 18; 61:10; 62:1, 11; 63:1, 5, 8, 9; 64:5; Ezek 36:29; 37:23; Hos 1:7 [2x]; Zech 8:7, 13; 9:9; 10:6 12:7; Pss 67:39; 98:1, 2, 3.

²⁴ The view expressed in this article is held by others as well: John E. Hartley, "yāša'," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. Gleason L. Archer, R. Laird Harris, and Bruce K. Waltke, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 414, shows, without clearly stating this writer's conclusion, the lack of evidence supporting the "deliverance from hell" definition in his article, but instead defines *yāša'* as "to make wide or sufficient." Hence Hartley states that "... the majority of [OT] references to salvation speak of Yahweh granting deliverance from real enemies and out of real catastrophies" (*ibid.*, 414-15). In addition, R. E. O. White, "Salvation," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 967, seems to concur. White states that "'The Lord is...my salvation' is the heart of OT testimony, always...Later Judaism anticipated a messianic deliverance which includes political, national, or religious elements (Pss. Sol. 109; T. Benj. 9:10; cf. Luke 1:69, 71, 77)." Developing this same point Joseph C. Dillow states that, "The breath of salvation is so sweeping and intended aim so magnificent that in many contexts the words used defy precise definition. Yet these difficulties have not thwarted numerous interpreters from assuming, often without any contextual justification, that the words used invariably mean 'deliverance from hell' or 'go to heaven when you die.' It may come as a surprise to many that this usage of 'salvation' (Gk. *sōtēria*) would have been the least likely meaning to come to

in the OT as eternal condemnation, he will miss the meaning and application God intends to convey.

III. SALVATION IN THE SEPTUAGINT AND EXTRA-BIBLICAL LITERATURE

As developed above, the temporal, not *eternal*, deliverance meaning is well attested in the Hebrew Scriptures, but what about other literature? Does the “temporal-deliverance” meaning outweigh the eternal deliverance definition in the LXX, Classical period, and Koine period?

A. THE SEPTUAGINT

The LXX translates *sōtēria* (salvation) from the Hebrew noun *yešû‘ā* sixty-four times²⁵ and *sōzō* (save) from the Hebrew verb *yāšā‘* 159 times, or three fifths of its occurrences.²⁶ In other cases the LXX renders the

mind of a reader of the Bible in the first century,” (*The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* [Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1992], 111-13). Then, not surprisingly, (Wilkin, “Salvation in the Old Testament, Part 1,” pp. 2-3), says: “Biblical *salvation* rarely refers to salvation from hell (even in the NT). This is especially evident in the OT. During my doctoral work, I looked up every OT occurrence of the various words which mean *save* and *salvation*. I found that over 90% of the references concern salvation from enemies and from other difficulties in this life,” emphasis original. See for a further discussion on the issue of OT salvation and its broader emphasis: Allen P. Ross, “The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 161-78, 352-56; See also Kenneth E. Locklin, “The Significance of the Term SOTERIA in Romans” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 8-18, and Daniel Carl Esau, “Paul’s Concept of SOTERIA in Romans” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1969), 6-7; Colin Brown and J. Schneider, “Redemption,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 201-209; James K. Zink, “Salvation in the Old Testament A Central Theme,” *Encounter* 25 (1964): 405-414.

²⁵ Fohrer, “*sōzō*,” in *TDNT*, 7:971. However, the LXX translates the noun *sōtēria* mostly for the Hebrew stem *yāšā‘* (81 times).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 970. In the Masoretic text *yāšā‘* occurs 241 times. The Hebrew verb *yāšā‘* still remains the most important out of the 15 different Hebrew verbs

Greek verb *sōzō* from three Hebrew stems *plt*, *p^llîê*, and *mlt* (fugitive, escape, or deliver) in one fifth of its occurrences. Finally, the stem *nšl* (preserve or spare) occurs twenty-four times and makes up one fifth of all other occurrences.²⁷

The Septuagint's renderings of *save* (*sōzō*) and *salvation* (*sōtēria*) exhibit the same range of meanings²⁸—as would generally be expected—as in the Hebrew OT.²⁹ These include: (1) Saved from external evils in general,³⁰ (2) Saved corporately from enemies or in battle,³¹ (3) Saved

translated as *sōzō* in the LXX (Brown and Schneider, "Redemption," in *NIDNTT*, 3:206).

²⁷ Fohrer, "sōzō," in *TDNT*, 7:970.

²⁸ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 330, understands how easy anachronistic interpretations (i.e., taking something chronologically out of place) can distort our view of the OT use of "salvation" since the Hellenists chose the well known NT word *sōtēria* to translate the Hebrew term *yāša'*: "When the Jews of the Hellenistic period were to translate this word into Greek, they used a word which played a very great part at that time, i.e., *sōtēria*, one of the words which later on came to designate a fundamental idea in the New Testament. The word *salvation* has throughout become charged with contents of the *sōtēria* of the New Testament, and when it is used to render the above-mentioned Hebrew words (*yāša'* and *yešū'â*) it is apt to cause ideas from the domain of the New Testament to be transferred into these Old-Israelitic terms. Salvation instinctively suggests the idea of something beyond, a deliverance from the misery of this world into another world. When we use the word with relation to the Old Testament, we must know that the meaning is a different one, life and happiness here always being bound up with this earth."

²⁹ Foerster, "sōzō," in *TDNT*, 7:972. See also Locklin, "The Significance of the Term SOTERIA in Romans," 9-10, and Esau, "Paul's Concept of SOTERIA in Romans," 6-7.

³⁰ "The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation [*sōtērian* = *yešū'â*]..." (Exod 15:2).³⁰ The Lord appears as Israel's deliverer who fights for them. He "throws the horse and rider...into the sea" (cf. 15:1, 4-10). "The Lord is a man of war" (15:3). Salvation here means deliverance in battle. The Lord is Israel's deliverer from her enemies. In this context salvation is attributed to God as a "deliverer in war" or from any external evils.

³¹ "Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them" (Judg 2:16). The people are delivered (*esōsen* = *yāša'*) in v. 16 from enemies (2:14). Salvation here, as shown previously, means deliverance from enemy hands.

from moral troubles,³² (4) Saved from nations' dominion,³³ (5) Saved physically and/or individually from enemies,³⁴ (6) Saved as prosperity,³⁵ and (7) Saved with a spiritual connotation.³⁶

B. CLASSICAL PERIOD

In extra-biblical literature ranging from the Classical period (900 B.C. to 330 B.C.) to the Koine period (at least 300 B.C. to

³² "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation [*sōtērian* = *yāśa'*] of God" (Ps 49:23, numeration in English translation). In this passage David illustrates God's physical and spiritual deliverance based on honoring Him and having upright moral character.

³³ "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you who have escaped [*sōtōmenoi* = *p'lēte*] from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god that cannot save [*sōzousin* = *yāśa'*]" (Isa 45:20). Here, Israel was trying to escape from nations who were holding them captive. This expresses the same idea found in v. 20 of deliverance from captivity (as indicated by the word at the end of the verse). Salvation here means escape (or deliverance) from the nation that had enslaved them.

³⁴ "Flee, save [*sōsate* = *p'lēte*] your lives! And be like the juniper in the wilderness" (Jer 31:6, English numeration). Saving one's physical life by fleeing is the concept found in Jer 31:6. Genesis 32:31 (English numeration) conveys the sense of preservation (*esōthē* = *mlt*) of Jacob's physical life from harm.

³⁵ "Terrors are turned upon me; they pursue my honor as the wind, and my prosperity [*sōtēria* = *yešū'ā*] has passed like a cloud" (Job 30:15). All of Job's family, wealth, and health were gone (1:3-22), which in 30:15 means he lost his "prosperity." Although Job lost everything, he would regain much more at a later time, as seen in 42:10.

³⁶ "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke...But My salvation [*sōtērian* = *yešū'ā*] will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished" (Isa 51:6). The recipients are those "who follow after righteousness...who seek the Lord" (51:1), "who know righteousness...[and] in whose heart is [His] law" (51:7). *Righteousness* as a synonym for eternal (45:17; 56:1) *salvation*, accomplished solely by God, occurs in Isa 45:8 and 46:13. Here, as shown above, eternal salvation (prosperity) is to a place and position of blessing and is based solely upon the Lord (51:3-16; 53:1-12). Salvation in this context has a dual concept by also referring to future deliverance from present Babylonian oppression through eternal spiritual means.

A.D. 140),³⁷ there seems to be no noticeable difference in the Greek usages of *save* (*sōzō*) and *salvation* (*sōtēria*).³⁸ For example, in Classical literature the concept of “deliverance and preservation” appears for the noun *sōtēria* in Herodotus 5:98. In Aristotle’s *Politica* 1301^a23, *sōtēria* is defined as “ways of preserving.”³⁹

Foerster cites several Classical references from the mystery religions that define *sōzō* as a person’s “blissful life beyond death.”⁴⁰ This, perhaps, comes close to the biblical concept of a person’s salvation from hell. Nevertheless, the above evidence suggests that the “temporal deliverance” definition for salvation—as used in the OT—is still commonly used in Classical Greek for *sōzō* and *sōtēria*.

C. KOINE PERIOD

Linguistically, the Apocrypha and Qumran writings do not belong in this section—since Greek usage, not Hebrew, is the subject matter here. However, due to the importance of its contemporaneous nature, it will be included.

1. Salvation in the Apocrypha.

In the Apocrypha, the salvation/save word-group almost always means physical deliverance from afflictions.⁴¹ It refers to how “a raft in

³⁷ W. White, Jr., “Greek Language,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenny, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975-76), 828. Obviously, White concludes, this includes the LXX which “is the largest body of text in the *Koiné* dialect. At points the tr. drew upon purely Gr. concepts for its rendering of Hebraic expressions while in other passages the Heb. was followed so closely to be unintelligible in Gr.”

³⁸ *A Greek English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), s.v. “*sōzō*,” 1748, Also, see, s.v. “*sōtēria*,” 1751.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, s.v. “*sōtēria*,” 1751. See *LSJM* for helpful examples that show how classical Greek usage of *sōtēria* and *sōzō* are in line with OT usage and meaning of the term.

⁴⁰ Foerster, “*sōzō*,” in *TDNT*, 7:969.

⁴¹ An exception to the common meaning exhibited in the Apocrypha may be found in 4 Macc 15: 2, 3, 8, 27 where a woman allows her seven sons to be burned, but trusts in the God of Abraham who promises to save and give them eternal life (see 4 Macc 14:20; 15:3, 28), although they presently died. Also see

the sea saves (delivers)” (Wis of Sol 14:5), and how “a door in the house can ‘protect’ more than idols” (Lett of Jer 58). It is not common to find men “saving” other men, but the idea does exist: Eleazar sacrificed himself before the battle “to save [sōsai] his people” (1 Macc 6:44) and Judas Maccabaeus was the mighty “savior [sōzōn] of Israel” (1 Macc 9:21).⁴²

By far the majority of usages refer to the “deliverance of the righteous by God.”⁴³ He saved people from demons (Tob 6:17-18) and the child Moses from danger (Wis 18:5). God also saved Moses when he crossed the Red Sea (1 Macc 4:9), was in war (1 Macc 9:46), and through His wisdom (Wis 9:18; 10:4; Sir 3:1).

2. *Salvation in the Qumran writings.*

In the Qumran writings deliverance came by God-given rulers: “by the hand of our kings You ‘rescued’ [hwś’tnw] us” (1QM 11:3), and from God Himself, called “the God of deliverance” (lyśw’wt), so that the “priest and Levites praise[d]” Him for His “acts of deliverance” (1QS 1:18-19). God also delivered by revealing the law which “was concealed for a short while, to the time when help (yś’kh) was manifested” (1QH 5:11). Finally, “in relation to the end-time it is said that God has created the righteous ‘to open every affliction of his soul to eternal deliverance [lyśw’t’wlm]” (1QH 15:16).⁴⁴

2 Macc 7:25-29. In Baruch 4:22, 24, 29 *sōtēria* seems to come with eternal life verities but the context and term also carries a national *deliverance* concept.

⁴² The following passages appear to have the meaning of *preserving one’s physical life*: Jdt 10:15; 11:13; Tob 14:10; 1 Macc 2:44, 59; 3:18; 4:9, 11; 5:62; 9:9; 10:83; 11:48; 2 Macc 12:25; 13:3 [welfare is the meaning]; 14:3; 4 Macc 4:12; 5:6; 6:15, 27; 10:1; Bar 6:49.

⁴³ Foerster “sōzō,” in *TDNT*, 7:981-82. The following passages appear to have the meaning of *preserving one’s physical life by God*: Esth 10:9; 13:9, 12; 16:22; Jdt 8:17; 1 Macc 3:6; 4:25; 2 Macc 1:11; 2:17, 39; 7:25; 11:26; 3 Macc 6:13, 33, 36; 7:16, 22; 4 Macc 4:12; 9:4; 15:2, 3, 8, 27; Obe 4:13; 12:14; Wis 5:2; 6:24; 10:14; 14:4; 16:6-7; 18:7; Sir 2:11; 34:13; 36:9; 46:1; 51:8, 11; Bar 4:22, 24, 29; Dan 3:66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 983. Foerster sees eternal redemption here (1QM 1:12; 18:11).

Indeed, the Dead Sea Scrolls understand “salvation” to be eternal deliverance from *sheol*. That is why one finds the statement, “I extol thee that thou hast redeemed [pryth] my soul from the pit and hast caused me to rise up from the sheol of perdition to the heights of eternity” (1QH 3:19). Although these texts do

In the Qumran writings, the word *salvation* can denote physical deliverance as well as eternal redemption. However, the *temporal* nuance of the word dominates its usage.⁴⁵

3. *Salvation in secular Greek writers.*

Secular first century Greek writers, like Philo and Josephus, also commonly used the term for preservation, blessing, deliverance, and/or health.⁴⁶ Evidence from a papyri suggests that *sōtēria* was used with a nuance of health and prosperity: “To all this I swear by Almighty God and by the supremacy, salvation and preservation of our most pious sovereigns, Flavius Heraclius and Aelia Flavia.”⁴⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

After surveying the OT, Septuagint, and extra-biblical literature, several conclusions can be drawn. Use of the terms *save* and *salvation* in the OT and *save* (*sōzō*) and *salvation* (*sōtēria*) in the LXX, have the same basic meaning: deliverance from hindrances in life, specifically national and individual foes. Extra-biblical usages also parallel Jewish concepts of *yāša*^c and *yešū’ā*. While specialized usage for eternal salvation does occur, it is always with a broader range of meaning that could include one or more combinations of the non-eternal categories of usage.

Thus the commonly understood justification-only meaning of the term *salvation* does not occur in the OT. May all grace proponents heed Earl D. Radmacher’s call to avoid missing God’s meaning of the term *salvation*:

not use the term *yešū’ā*, it does appear in 1QH Fr 18:5 and in 1QH 15:15 with eschatological verities; yet these references contextually allow for understanding *yešū’ā* to also carry a *national deliverance* meaning as well.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 982-83. In the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* XII, *sōzō* is understood as having an “eternal” nuance earned by obedience. It is also understood that “the individual with God’s help and cooperation achieves temporal and eternal salvation” (ibid., 984).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 986, 988. See also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 982-83, 985-86.

⁴⁷ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 622.

Have you ever said something to a friend only to discover later that while he heard what you said he missed the meaning? This often happens when we read the Bible. How easy it is to bring a meaning to a Bible passage that was not what the writer had in mind. When we do that, we missed the mind of God and are in serious danger of following the enemy of our souls. To protect ourselves from that danger we need to study the meaning of words and how they are used in their contexts. And this is especially true of the word *salvation*.⁴⁸

In Israelite culture and in the majority of the Hebrew Scriptures, salvation did not mean salvation from eternal condemnation, but instead it was understood to include a broader range of meaning: “physical and temporal deliverance.”⁴⁹ Hence when someone refers to OT salvation, remember to ask, “From what?” lest we miss God’s application for us.

⁴⁸ Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 3, emphasis original.

⁴⁹ Nuesner and Green, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 542, suggest that “...the manner in which ‘salvation’ is construed has often oversimplified the breadth of biblical and post-biblical tradition.”

They continue, “Two misimpressions prevail in particular. First, for reasons inherent in the New Testament, Christians usually construe salvation as deliverance from sin and its consequences: guilt and divine condemnation. In fact, the Hebrew Bible and much post-biblical tradition employ the Hebrew root *ysh* and the Greek verb and noun *sōzō/sōtēria* (save, salvation; rescue; deliver[ance]), as well as a number of other terms and metaphors, to denote a range of divine activity that includes rescue from one’s enemies, healing from illness, and deliverance from death, in addition to forgiveness of sin and release from its consequences...Second, much that is defined as ‘salvation’ does not involve God saving anyone from anything. Rather, God is bestowing on the covenant people the blessings that they have been promised, without any sense that they have hitherto been deprived of these things.”

THE MARROW CONTROVERSY

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I. INTRODUCTION

A common belief exists today that one of the byproducts of the Reformation was unity on the doctrine of *sola fide*. After all, the message of faith alone in Christ alone was the very cry of the Reformers. However, just as there is presently debate on what constitutes justification by faith alone, so there has been since the days of Luther and Calvin. It was their successors, Melanchthon and Beza respectively, who added “faith that saves is never alone” to *sola fide*.

This doctrinal disunity in Europe continued for nearly two centuries until the Marrow Controversy erupted in 1720. Although this debate over what constitutes faith alone did not occur until the early eighteenth century, the Marrow Controversy began brewing nearly two hundred years prior. Beginning with Melanchthon and continuing with Calvin and Beza, the Marrow Controversy merely illustrates the great debate that has always existed among those who profess to believe in faith alone in Christ alone.

II. SIXTEENTH CENTURY LUTHERANISM

In 1546, with death looming over his head, Martin Luther called together his closest Wittenberg colleagues, including Melanchthon, who would become Luther’s main interpreter after his death.¹ He remarked,

Hitherto you have heard the real, true Word, now beware of your own thoughts and your own wisdom. The devil will kindle the light of reason and rob you of your faith. This is what happened to the Anabaptists and the antisacramentarians, and now we have nothing left but instigators of heresy...I foresee that, if God does not give us faithful ministers, the devil will

¹ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day*, Vol. 2 (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985), 173.

tear our church apart through the sectarians and he will never cease until he has accomplished it...If he cannot do it through the pope and the emperor, he will accomplish it through those who are still in accord with us in doctrine.²

It would not be long before Luther's prediction would become a reality.

Soon after Luther's death, the Lutherans began arguing over the doctrine of justification. The strict Lutherans held that Melanchthon's belief that good works were "a result and witness to it [faith],"³ was in basic disagreement with Luther. This caused a schism between the strict Lutherans who believed in justification by faith alone and the Philippists, those in agreement with Melanchthon, who believed that works were a necessary result of justification. The debate climaxed with the Augsburg Interim, the vehicle through which the Pope and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, attempted to force the Lutherans to compromise.

Unlike Luther, Melanchthon was a man of peace and unity.⁴ Consequently, although he and the rest of the Lutheran leaders were not excited about this Interim because it was effectively a Lutheran/Papal marriage, Melanchthon, along with the Wittenberg theologians, signed the Leipzig Interim—a modified version of the Augsburg Interim.

The Leipzig Interim was designed by Melanchthon with the intended purpose of helping Protestants avoid Catholic persecution by compromising not on doctrine but on practice. It states, "Our concern is based upon our desire to be obedient to the Roman Imperial Majesty and to conduct ourselves in such a way that his Majesty realize that our interest revolves only around tranquility, peace, and unity."⁵ However, the evidence within the document indicates that practice was not all that was compromised. While the papal influence exerted over the Augsburg Interim was toned down in the Leipzig Interim, it is evident nonetheless. The document states,

² Martin Luther, "The Last Sermon in Wittenberg, 1546," in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 51, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 377-78.

³ González, *The Story of Christianity*, 174.

⁴ For instance, Luther broke ties with Erasmus over doctrinal issues concerning justification by faith alone; however, Melanchthon continued relations.

⁵ "The Leipzig Interim," in *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, trans. Oliver K. Olson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 184.

For this reason, to say it briefly, it is easy to understand that good works are necessary, for God has commanded them. Those who act against them are discarding God's grace and the Holy Spirit. Such sins merit eternal damnation...It is true that eternal life is given for the sake of the Lord Christ by grace, and that at the same time all are heirs of eternal salvation who are converted to God and receive forgiveness of sins and faith through the Holy Spirit. At the same time, these new virtues and good works are also most necessary so that, if they are not awakened in the heart, there is no reception of divine grace.⁶

With Melancthon's compromise, came a gradual espousal of a Roman Catholic understanding of justification.

The strict Lutherans accused the Philippists, headed by Melancthon, of forsaking Reformed doctrine. Since Melancthon wanted to keep the peace, not only with the Catholic Church, but also with the Lutherans, he drafted a document entitled "adiaphora." This document was designed to establish a distinction between those elements which were essential and those which were not. In effect, it was an attempt to justify his religious compromise.

III. SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CALVINISM

Since a generation divided them, John Calvin and Martin Luther never met, yet there is no doubt that Calvin was well acquainted with Luther's works—especially his views on justification. Luther's works greatly influenced the writings of John Calvin. And although the beliefs of Luther were being diluted by Melancthon, Luther's view of faith alone remained in tact in his writings.

Although the impact of Luther upon Calvin is sometimes underestimated, Calvin's *Institutes* remain influential in their own right. The *Institutes* were originally written in Latin and contained only six chapters. Anderson writes,

When John Calvin first published his *Institutes* in 1536 there were only six chapters. He defended forensic justification by faith alone from Romans 4. He understood that one could be declared righteous at a moment in time when a sinner's faith intersected with God's offer of the free gift of eternal life

⁶ Ibid., 190.

through His Son Jesus Christ. As such, no sins past, present, or future could bar the sinner-turned-saint from entrance to God's Kingdom.⁷

Calvin clearly spoke of a "full and fixed certainty," "full assurance," "sure confidence in divine benevolence and salvation," "assurance of his salvation," "fruit of great assurance," and "indestructible certainty of faith."⁸ Nevertheless, the Council of Trent convened from 1545 until 1563 and unmistakably condemned the Reformers. They called anyone who preached *sola fide* anathema and labeled the Reformers as Antinomians. Their influence upon Calvin was unmistakable. Once again, Calvin began to write:

You cannot possess Christ without being made partaker in his sanctification.

In our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.

Of those who openly wear his badge, his eyes alone see the ones who are unfeignedly holy and will persevere to the very end [Matt. 24:13]—the ultimate point of salvation.⁹

It is clear from these quotes that Calvin, although he once spoke of a certain assurance, made a soteriological shift, which has been highly influential in the last four centuries. Anderson continues,

To tell people their future sins are already forgiven in Christ is to tell them they can live any way they want and still go to heaven when they die. This kind of preaching will promote loose living, the Council accused. These attacks needed answers. So John Calvin continued to write. When he finished his *Institutes* in 1559, there were eighty chapters. And under pressure from the Council of Trent, Calvin remarried justification and sanctification.¹⁰

A century after Calvin's *Institutes* were published, one of the most influential Reformed documents ever written, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, was formulated. It was, in essence, the sum of Calvinistic

⁷ Dave Anderson, "The Soteriological Impact of Augustine's Change from Premillennialism to Amillennialism: Part Two," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 2002): 24.

⁸ See Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.15-16, 24.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, III.16.1; III.11.1; IV.1.2.

¹⁰ Anderson, 24.

doctrine of its day. The Assembly that drafted it met from 1643–1649. It was this document that formed the backdrop for much of the theology of England and the British Isles. Even today, S. Lewis Johnson believes it to be the “standard of reference that evangelicals as a whole will accept in the main.”¹¹ However, it is clear that the confession provides assurance for only those who persevere in love and good deeds. Chapter XVIII Section I of the *Confession* 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.¹²

This statement accurately reflects the state of Reformed thought in the mid-seventeenth century.

IV. POST-REVOLUTION¹³ BACKGROUND

In a small window in time during the post-revolution era of the Church of Scotland, The Marrow Controversy arose. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, by Edward Fisher (1627–1655),¹⁴ was published in 1646 in London—the same year the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was introduced. David Lachman notes that *The Marrow* “was a work of popular divinity which largely reflected the orthodox Reformed thought of its time. That it became the focus of theological controversy in early eighteenth-century Scotland indicates the extent of the changes which

¹¹ S. Lewis Johnson, “How Faith Works,” *Christianity Today* (September 1989): 21.

¹² This 1646 version of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* can be viewed online at http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html.

¹³ This revolution in Scotland (1596–1651) was characterized by severe persecution of those in the Reformed Church.

¹⁴ There is some dispute about who the author actually was since the work was published under the initials “E. F.” See Steward Mechie, “The Marrow Controversy Reviewed,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 22 (1950): 20.

had occurred in Reformed thought over the previous century.”¹⁵ The book spoke of “free grace,” “appropriating persuasion,” and “faith alone.” Fisher’s theology was most likely influenced by the teachings of John Cameron¹⁶ (1579–1625), Jeremiah Burroughs (1599–1646), Moise Amyraut¹⁷ (1596–1664), and Richard Baxter¹⁸ (1615–1691), who believed that the theology of Calvin was distorted by theologians such as Theodore Beza and the Synod of Dort.¹⁹ Although the cry of the Reformers was faith alone, Beza began adding the addendum “but faith that saves is never alone” to *sola fide*.

It was believed that the faith of the Reformers (Luther and Calvin) had been hijacked. Thus, Hall writes, that *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, “sought to delineate clearly the biblical, or Reformed, way of salvation.”²⁰ Consequently Burroughs asked,

Where is the blessedness you spoke of? What’s the meaning of this blessedness? Certainly this blessedness in my text was this blessed doctrine—St. Paul being the first one who brought

¹⁵ David C. Lachman, “Marrow Controversy,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 547. Contra Joseph H. Hall, “The Marrow Controversy: A Defense of Grace and the Free Offer of the Gospel,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 239-57. He writes, “The pristine orthodoxy of the Scottish Reformation had begun to wane by 1700.”

¹⁶ Professor of Divinity at Saumur whose followers were sometimes called the Cameronites.

¹⁷ Professor at Saumur whose followers were commonly called Amyrauldians. Demarest notes, “A master of the literature of Calvin, Amyraut held to the main tenets of Calvinistic theology. Nevertheless he sought to revise what he judged to be the unacceptable teachings of seventeenth century scholastic Calvinism on grace and predestination and to forge a return to Calvin himself.” (B. A. Demarest, “Amyraut, Moise,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 42.) It is interesting to note that the infamous Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, has often been referred to as an Amyrauldian.

¹⁸ Concerning Burroughs, Baxter wrote, “If all the Episcopalians had been like Archbishop Ussher...and all the Independents like Jeremiah Burroughs, the breaches of the church would soon have been healed,” which is quoted on the inside cover of Jeremiah Burrough’s work *Gospel Remission*.

¹⁹ See a series of articles in *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* beginning in Spring 1988.

²⁰ Hall, “The Marrow Controversy,” 243.

it to the Galatians, concerning the free justification of a poor soul by faith in Jesus Christ, in the free pardon and remission of his sin by faith in Christ.²¹

Burroughs' first question was borrowed from Paul. The truth had been delivered to and accepted by the Galatians; however, they had lost sight of it. Thus, Paul asked, "What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*?" (Gal 4:15a) hoping to stir their hearts once again. So Burroughs asked that same question at a time when the gospel was becoming foggy in the minds of his colleagues.

Though an extraordinary shift in thought had occurred, the post-revolution Church of Scotland was characterized by immense doctrinal pride. David Lachman comments, "In the years following the Revolution, there was little cause to deny the truth of their [the ministers and laymen of Scotland] claim that the Church of Scotland was an example for all the Reformed Churches."²² Nevertheless, much of this was false pride.

Although the purging of Reformed thought through severe persecution had ceased with the end of the Revolution (1651), a new way of eradication had begun. The placement and removal of parish ministers was now based on civil loyalty. The ministers that remained preached sermons that were decidedly legal and which avoided distinct Reformed doctrine. Furthermore, Church and State both recognized the Westminster Confession as the avowed Confession of Scotland. Thus began the silent, rather than violent, purging of Reformed distinctives. The State found that it could not force doctrine upon its people through persecution; however, silent legislation was working perfectly. The State would not stop until what they saw as their crowning achievement came to fruition—doctrinal purity in Scotland. It was in this setting that the Marrow Controversy erupted and it was for this reason that much disdain would soon accompany Fisher's work.

²¹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Remission* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1668, reprint 1995), 5.

²² David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Rutherford House, 1988), 74.

V. THE MARROW CONTROVERSY

A. THE EFFECTS OF *THE MARROW OF MODERN DIVINITY*

The year that Robert Sandeman²³ was born in Perth, Scotland, marked the beginning of the Marrow Controversy. In 1718 Thomas Boston, a Scottish preacher, recommended *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* to a fellow minister. Boston had borrowed the book from a friend years earlier and enjoyed it so much that he purchased it. In a day when libraries were small but highly esteemed, it had become one of his most prized possessions. After the *Marrow* was recommended to a friend, it eventually fell into the hands of a fiery Scottish preacher named James Hog who republished the work in 1718, adding a preface. In his preface, noting his disdain for the gospel that many in the Church of Scotland espoused, Hog blasted,

Nevertheless, while the world is wandering after the beast, behold! evangelical light breaks forth in papal darkness...That the tares of such errors are sown in the reformed churches, and by men who profess reformed faith, is beyond debate; and these, who lay to heart the purity of gospel doctrine.²⁴

It is no wonder why controversy soon erupted. Because of Hog's guileless approach, it was clear to his opponents that Hog believed them to be heretics.

After the *Marrow's* republication, a pamphlet war ensued between Hog and James Hadow, principal and professor at St. Mary's College. Hall writes,

Hadow distinguished himself as the leader against the Marrow men. He charged Hog and the *Marrow* with teaching antinomianism and unlimited atonement, a charge that Hog viewed as demonstrating clearly that the Church of Scotland had compromised faithful preaching and teaching of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. In

²³ See Michael D. Makidon, "From Perth to Pennsylvania: The Legacy of Robert Sandeman," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 2002): 75-92.

²⁴ James Hog, "Preface to Edward Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity*," in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1837), 7.

short, in Hog's eyes, many in the Scottish Church failed to understand the nature of the gospel.²⁵

The Marrow of Modern Divinity, which was originally published three quarters of a century earlier, had seen little controversy until 1718. John Brown, a minister from Haddington, wrote:

the Assembly, 1720, fell upon it with great fury, as if it had been replete with Antinomian errors, though it is believed many of these zealots never read it, at least had never perused it, in connection with the Second Part of it, which is wholly taken up in the manifestation of the obligation, meaning, and advantage of observing the law of God.²⁶

It is unfortunate, but many of the critics of the work were grossly uninformed of its content, nevertheless they condemned it as heresy. Soon those who subscribed to it were condemned as well.

In 1721 the Marrow Men, those who subscribed to the doctrines expressed in the *Marrow*, met in order to respond to these charges. On May 11 they drafted what was known as *Representation and Petition*.²⁷ This was their formal response to the Assembly. The Assembly, not pleased with these twelve men, rebuked them with several queries. Query VIII asked,

Is knowledge, belief, and persuasion, that Christ died for me, and that he is mine, and that whatever he did and suffered, he did and suffered for me, the direct act of faith, whereby a sinner is united to Christ, interested in him, instated in God's covenant of grace? Or, is that knowledge a persuasion included in the very essence of that justifying act of faith?²⁸

To this, the Marrow Men answered:

From all which it is evident, they [Protestant Divines: Luther, Calvin, etc.] held, that a belief of the promises of the gospel, with application to oneself, or a confidence in a crucified Saviour, for a man's own salvation, is the very essence of

²⁵ Hall, "The Marrow Controversy," 244.

²⁶ John Brown, "The Occasion of the 'Marrow' Controversy," in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 344.

²⁷ Because of this document, the Marrow Men (also called the Twelve) would come to be known as the Representatives.

²⁸ Edward Fisher, *The Marrow*, 358.

justifying faith; or, that we become actually possessed of Christ, remission of sins, etc., in and by the act of believing, or confidence in him, as above mentioned. And this with them was the assurance of faith...²⁹

Their response illustrates their belief that indeed assurance is the essence of saving faith.

Because the Marrow Men did not back down from their convictions, the Assembly was further enraged. Soon negative connotations would surround the book and so Boston decided to republish the work (1726) with a large number of annotations. Because of the pejorative connotation, Boston wrote in his preface,

Reader, lay aside prejudices,—look and see with thine own eyes,—call things by their own names, and do not reckon Anti-Baxterianism or Anti-Neonomianism to be Antinomianism, and thou shalt find no Antinomianism here; but thou wilt be perhaps surprised to find, that that tale is told of Luther and other famous Protestant divines, under the borrowed name of the despised Mr. Fisher, author of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*.³⁰

B. THE THEOLOGY OF EDWARD FISHER AND THE MARROW MEN

While Edward Fisher was at times unclear, as were his forerunners who at times spoke of baptismal regeneration and an assurance satiated with works, his doctrine of justification was generally clear. Consequently, for those who were tempted to marry justification with sanctification, he reminded:

Therefore, whensoever, or wheresoever, any doubt or question arises of salvation, or our justification before God, there the law and all good works must be utterly excluded and stand apart, that grace may appear free, and that the promise and faith may stand alone: which faith alone, without law or works, brings thee in particular to the justification and salvation, through the mere promise and free grace of God in Christ; so that I say, in the action and office of justification, both law and works are to be utterly excluded and exempted, as things which have nothing to do in that behalf...therefore

²⁹ Ibid., 363.

³⁰ Thomas Boston in his preface to *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 11.

faith only is that matter which justifies a man before God, through the strength of that object Jesus Christ.³¹

Fisher clearly believed that assurance was the essence of saving faith. This is clear in his comments concerning the Philippian jailor:

Wherefore, as Paul and Silas said to the jailor, so say I unto you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That is, be verily persuaded in your heart that Jesus Christ is yours, and that you shall have life and salvation by him; that whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for you.³²

The General Assembly thought Fisher's beliefs were blatantly heretical. In reaction, the Act of the General Assembly of 1720 wrote,

The same [doctrine of absolute certainty] is asserted [in *The Marrow* on], pages 121, 122, 123, 124, 131, 136, 137, 175, 176, 177, and in many other places in the book. This notion of *saving faith* appears contrary to scriptures...

They believed that the Scriptures, the Confession, and the Larger Catechism demonstrated that Fisher's doctrine of assurance was heresy.

Fisher also understood the distinction between rewards and eternal life. He wrote of the fear of punishment and reward for those Jews who had believed:

But, alas! the spirit of faith was very weak in most of them, and the spirit of bondage very strong, and, therefore, they stood in need to be induced and constrained to obedience, by fear of punishment and hope of reward.³³

He knew that this punishment was only temporal for believers, however it remained a possibility:

Were not Moses and Aaron, for their disobedience, hindered from entering into the land of Canaan, as well as others? (Num 20:12). And was not Josiah, of his disobedience to God's

³¹ Fisher, *The Marrow*, 341. Fisher seems to be quite clear concerning the distinction between discipleship and justification; however, in a section entitled "Marks and Evidences of True Faith" he seems to deviate from an otherwise clear work.

³² *Ibid.*, 118.

³³ *Ibid.*, 79.

command, slain in the valley of Megiddo? (2 Chron 35:21, 22). Therefore assure yourself, that when believers in the Old Testament did transgress God's commandments, God's temporal wrath went out against them, and was manifest in temporal calamities that befell them as well as others (Num 16:46). Only here was the difference, the believers' temporal calamities had no eternal calamities included in them, nor following of them; and the unbelievers' temporal blessings had no eternal blessings included in them, and their temporal calamities had eternal calamities included in them, and following of them.³⁴

Although the papacy was trying to rid Scotland of this "heresy," the Marrow Men did not step down. In a section entitled "On Faith," Ebenezer Erskine wrote, "Its appropriation or assurance. (1.) The ground of this. A particular application is grounded on the word, for faith relates to testimony, believing on a word to be believed."³⁵ For Erskine, the testimony of God was the only assurance that one could have of his justification. Erskine wrote in his memoirs:

Because it is charged on us [The Marrow Men] as an error, that we preach *assurance* to be of the essence of faith, I design to publish the substance of some sermons on that subject from Heb. 10:22; from which I hope it will appear, that our principles on that head are agreeable unto the scriptures of truth and the ancient and modern standards of truth in this church.³⁶

The Marrow Men did not stop fighting for the truth of the gospel. Concerning justification, Thomas Boston wrote,

That there can be no mixing of our own righteousness, in greater or lesser measure, with the righteousness of Christ, in our justification. . . . And evident it is, that we cannot pretend to a perfect righteousness of our own, and therefore must go wholly to Christ for one.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., 78.

³⁵ Erskine, in *The Marrow* (1718 ed.), 278-79.

³⁶ *Gospel Truth*, ed. John Brown (Canonsburgh, PA: Andrew Munro, 1827), 47.

³⁷ Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 11:200.

Boston was clear that man's righteousness has no part in justification. Like the other Marrow Men, he also believed that assurance was the essence of saving faith. This is evidenced in his belief that no one "can go to heaven in a mist not knowing whether he is going."³⁸ He believed that his understanding of assurance was different than that of the Confession in that it was not a subjective "kind of assurance which the Westminster Confession expressly treats, but an assurance which is in faith...a fiducial appropriating persuasion."³⁹ For Boston, if the gospel is not by faith alone, preaching it "would be of no more value than a crier's offering the king's pardon to one who was not comprehended in it."⁴⁰

Though the Marrow Men were being attacked on all sides and were being charged with distorting the beliefs of the Protestant divines (Luther and Calvin), they stood strong. They held out so that men like Robert Sandeman could continue the battle for the gospel.

VI. CONCLUSION

Controversy among those who hold to the doctrine of *sola fide* is nothing new. This debate began shortly after the dawn of the Reformation and has existed ever since. Just as the Marrow Men contended for the gospel of grace in the eighteenth century; so, we should fight so that grace is not forgotten in the twenty-first century.

May we, like the Marrow Men who came before us, remember that when faith alone is not alone, its essence ceases to be. May Paul's words in Romans soberly remind us of this fact: "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom 4:4-5). When faith and works are mixed, grace disappears.

We have a high calling to stand firm in preaching the gospel—that Christ justifies all who simply believe in Him for eternal life. May we faithfully preach this message of grace.

³⁸ Ibid., 2:18.

³⁹ Boston, in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 95.

⁴⁰ Boston, *The Complete Works*, 7:263.

BOOK REVIEWS

In the Presence of My Enemies. By Gracia Burnham with Dean Merrill. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003. 307 pp. Cloth. \$22.99.

Martin and Gracia (pronounced “gray-sha”) Burnham became known worldwide. This book tells the story of their kidnapping and being held hostage for one year and eleven days. It also tells of their courtship, marriage, and ministry prior to being captured.

The Burnhams were missionaries in the Philippines with New Tribes Mission. That organization was founded by Doc Latham and is solidly in the Free Grace camp.

This is not a theological book. Rather, it is as the cover suggests, “A gripping account of the kidnapping of American missionaries and their year of terror in the Philippine jungle.”

Gracia shows how the Muslims who held them, as well as all Muslims, are striving for eternal life based on their works. She writes, “Muhammad will intercede with Allah, who will judge humanity, consigning those with good deeds to paradise and condemning those who fall short to hell—unless they were fallen *mujahideen*, those who had died in holy war and were thus already rewarded” (p. 152).

She then concludes: “With this way of thinking, clearly the odds of reaching paradise were slim to none.”

Gracia makes it clear that she and Martin prayed regularly for their captors and that on at least one occasion they told them that Jesus died for our sins (p. 151). One of their captors responded, “I don’t want *anybody* paying for my sin. I’ll do my own paying” (p. 151).

Martin witnessed to one of the captives, Guillermo, whom it appeared the Abu Sayyaf were about to kill. Martin told Guillermo that “we can’t save ourselves and that without God’s mercy, we all face eternal death” (p. 108).

I found it very difficult to find in the book where Gracia clearly told what one must do to escape eternal death and have eternal life. When recounting her own testimony she said, “When I was seven or eight, I had a wonderful Sunday school teacher who explained to me the

importance of *committing my life to Christ*. Not long after that, I remember begging for the opportunity to be baptized” (p. 22, italics added). I was surprised that she used confusing language like that to describe her own new birth. (See also pp. 142-43.)

The clearest statements she makes are found when one Sunday she wrote down a list of promises she could remember from God’s Word. Ninth in this long list was, “He that believeth in Me, tho dead, shall live” (p. 185). Seventeenth on the list was, “He that believeth in Me shall not perish but have everlasting life” (p. 186). Unfortunately, many will miss the point since these Scriptures are never mentioned when they were witnessing, are never explained, and are merely two of eighteen promises given in a long list that people are likely to rush through.

Evidently the intended audience is those who are already born again and who know the saving message. However, I wonder, in light of her notoriety, if many of the readers might be people who do not yet believe in Jesus for eternal life. Many in Christendom think that they must persevere in faith and good works to make it into the kingdom. I wish somewhere she had made it clear that all who simply believe in Jesus have eternal life.

This book is quite challenging. Martin and Gracia held up for over a year under terrible conditions. Even after the death of her husband, due at least in part to many botched raids by the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines), Gracia did not turn her back on God.

I recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Saved from What? By R. C. Sproul. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002. 128 pp. Cloth. \$14.99.

The title of this book really grabbed my attention. For a long time I have felt that a key to proper biblical interpretation on passages using the words *save* and *salvation* is to ask *saved from what?*

I was disappointed to discover that only 25 pages of the book actually deal with the question raised in the title (pp. 13-37). The second

major section of the book is over twice as long and deals with *Saved by What?* (pp. 41-99). The final section is about the same length as the first section and answers the question, *Saved for What?* (pp. 103-123).

The first chapter, "Saved from What?" bears the same title as the book and the first section. Sproul says that the biblical words for *save* and *salvation* are not fixed words which always relate to eternal salvation from hell. He gives a number of NT examples where some other type of deliverance is in view. That is helpful. Unfortunately, he doesn't deal with problem texts like Jas 2:14 or Matt 16:24-27 or Phil 2:12 and show how the deliverance in question is something other than justification salvation. Of course, he wouldn't, for in his other works he makes it clear those are dealing with eternal salvation.

Surprisingly, he suggests what we need to be saved from is God: "We need to be saved *from God*...God in saving us saves us from Himself" (p. 25). While he rightly points out the fallacy of promising salvation from earthly problems to those who believe, he wrongly says that we need saving from God. Part of the reason he says this is because he understands salvation from the wrath of God in passages like 1 Thess 1:10 and 5:9 as referring to escaping eternal condemnation (pp. 22-24), not to escaping the Tribulation via the Rapture.

The only other chapter in the first section doesn't seem to fit. It is entitled, "The Shattered Self-image." His point is that when confronted with God's holiness, we see our weakness and need. But how this fits under a section entitled "Saved from What?" is not clear.

The section entitled, "Saved by What?" reviews the cross and its significance. *JOTGES* readers will be especially interested in Chapter 7, "Appropriating the Cross." Unfortunately, he isn't very clear here. Sproul's main focus is on the double imputation of our sins to Christ and His righteousness to us. When he actually discusses appropriation, he speaks vaguely of "the moment I embrace Jesus Christ" (p. 98), and "the only way we can have the righteousness and the merit of Christ transferred to our account is by faith" (p. 99). The latter is better. But he then goes on to say, "We can only trust in it [His righteousness] and cling to it." That makes it sound like one is not justified at the moment of faith, but only after clinging to Christ's righteousness for a lifetime.

The third section discusses what people are saved to do. Unfortunately, the section is way too short to do the subject justice. Additionally, the sole chapter in this section is entitled, "Adoption and the Beatific Vision." How does that answer the question, "Saved for What?"

The title of this book is excellent. The book itself, while having some helpful content, devotes too little attention to each of the three questions discussed. If all 128 pages had been devoted to the question raised in the title, then the topic might have been adequately covered. As is, the book only delivers a little of what the title suggests.

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

The Professor and the Madman: The Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary. By Simon Winchester. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1999. 256 pp. Cloth. \$22.00.

At first, this may seem like a subject ill suited for a review in a theological journal. However, it is an interesting book dealing with both social and intellectual history and contributing significant insights into contextual and etymological studies. The author demonstrates a good grasp of the military, political, and medical aspects of the American Civil War and a working knowledge of nineteenth-century England from almost a Dickensian perspective. Winchester traces the lives of three key figures in this account. One key figure is, of course, James Murray, the man who was credited with the compilation of the first Oxford English Dictionary. As this character goes about acquiring entries for this new dictionary, he comes across a Dr. William C. Minor, who, over a long period of time, contributes over ten thousand entries. Intertwined with the story of Minor, there is the life of George Merritt, a seemingly insignificant person whose encounter with Dr. Minor changes both of their lives forever.

Although the story is captivating and enjoyable, the real contribution of the book lies in the description of the process of compilation of the Oxford English Dictionary [OED] (the first edition was published in 1927). In 1879, James Murray published an open invitation calling for readers to participate in the collection of material for the New English Dictionary (now known as the OED) by reading texts and submitting quotations that might be of assistance to the editors. Over the years,

many thousands of people responded to his invitation and contributed to the remarkable process of preparing the OED.

The key to its success and value is in the “guiding principle,” which is the same principle that should be used by Bible scholars and theologians in the process of defining biblical terms in their context(s). Winchester affirms that the principle “that has set it [OED] apart from most other dictionaries...is its rigorous dependence on gathering quotations [contextual usages] from published or otherwise recorded uses of English and using them to illustrate the use of the sense of every single word in the language” (p. 25).

He continues: “The reason behind this unusual and tremendously labor-intensive style of editing and compiling was both bold and complex. By gathering and publishing selected quotations, the dictionary could demonstrate the full range [this is key] of characteristics of each and every word with a great degree of precision. Quotations could show exactly how a word has been employed over the centuries; how it has undergone subtle changes of shades of meaning, or spelling, or pronunciation; and, perhaps most important of all, how and more exactly when each word slipped into the language in the first place...Only by finding and showing examples could a full range of a word’s possibilities be explored” (pp. 25-26).

What a unique perspective. Many of the NT “dictionaries” that exist today are generally compiled from a particular theological perspective and with a theological bias.

A case in point is the way in which most theologians interpret *sōzō* or *sōtēria* in the NT: whenever they see this word, they oversimplify and attach to it the meaning of “justification” or “receiving eternal life.” Yet, when one closely examines the contexts, one discovers that those words most (if not all) of the time would be better understood as “deliverance from” (a temporal concept) and not as “justification.”

It is clearly seen in Paul’s use of the word in Rom 10:9-10. After stating that “whosoever calls upon the Lord will be saved,” he proceeds with a qualification: one can only call upon whom one has already believed; thus, those who call upon the Lord are believers seeking deliverance from a present situation.

Winchester's book gives the reader a glimpse of a very valuable linguistic process, as well as entertains him or her with an intriguing detective story. I have purposely left out of this review the plot and the story of how the book gets its title. I leave that to the reader to discover.

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Listening to the Spirit in the Text. By Gordon D. Fee. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000. 180 pp. Paper. \$12.00.

Gordon Fee certainly needs no introduction. He is considered one of the greatest NT exegetes of our day. Although much of Fee's work is aimed at a scholarly audience, he also has the rare ability to be of benefit to the person in the pew. In this fascinating compilation, Eerdmans unveils Fee's "greatest hits." Eleven of the twelve chapters were gathered from previous publications between 1981-1995, some of which, were originally delivered orally. The only new material is Chapter 8, "The Holy Spirit and Worship in the Pauline Churches." Although this book is a collection, the unifying emphasis is the spirituality of Paul as expressed in the Scriptures.

There are two overarching sections in this book. The first section is "The Text and the Life in the Spirit" (pp. 3-87). In these seven chapters, Fee discusses the balance between exegesis and spirituality. He also reflects on commentary writing, being a Trinitarian Christian, and Pauline spirituality. The first two chapters are very helpful for those immersed in biblical studies. Fee's determination to ensure his heart is right before God is inspiring. Like the Apostle Paul, he is not only a man of the Word; he is a man of the Spirit. Fee's diligent approach in writing commentaries is also noteworthy. For example, I was struck by the following: "Every morning I ran off a hard copy of the previous day's (sometimes days') work and read it aloud in its entirety, including footnotes. Every time I stumbled over a sentence, or had to catch my breath, I assumed another reader would also have difficulty; so I rewrote until I felt it read aloud smoothly. I also read the entire product through aloud one final time before submitting it to Eerdmans; not all the bugs are out,

but I am convinced this has been the key to what measure of readability it might have” (p. 18). This explains why this reviewer has appreciated Fee’s momentous work: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

The last three chapters focus on the NT view of wealth and possessions, Paul’s perspective on gender issues, and the bishop and the Bible. In this final chapter, Fee takes John Spong (a liberal Episcopal bishop) to task for his liberal view of the Scriptures as they relate to homosexuality. This chapter serves as a great example of how to graciously and firmly critique.

The second section in this book, “The Text and the Life of the Church” (pp. 91-180) speaks to the questions of worship, tongues, clergy/laity distinctions, church order, and the Church’s global mission. Each of these chapters is worthwhile reading for those involved in pastoral ministry. Fee’s chapter, “Toward a Pauline Theology of Glossolalia” (pp. 105-120) is worthy of careful consideration. Regardless of where one comes down on the issue of tongues, we would all benefit from reading the perspective of the man who has been called, “the greatest Pentecostal scholar alive.”

I heartily recommend *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* as a tool to inform and transform the reader. May those who read this work be challenged to be both scholarly and spiritual.

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The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel. By James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002. 240 pp. Cloth. \$17.99.

The Doctrines of Grace by the late James Montgomery Boice, and his successor at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Philip Graham Ryken is an explanation and defense of Calvinistic theology. I read the book because I used to be a five-point hyper-Calvinist. Having since rejected the entire system, I occasionally like to see if any of the arguments have changed or developed. I discovered they have not. Although the tone of this book is the most gracious introduction to Calvinism I

have ever read, the content of the book is typical Calvinism in that there really is not much grace, and very little gospel.

The book begins with the following statement: "The world should realize with increased clearness that Evangelicalism stands or falls with Calvinism" (p. 17). We are also told that "evangelicalism stands for the gospel and Calvinism stands for grace...the gospel is not really the gospel unless it is a gospel of *grace*" (p. 18).

How do the authors define and defend such a statement? In the first two chapters, they present the necessity of Calvinism for Evangelicals throughout history. Chapters 3-7 explain and defend the five points of Calvinism, and the final two chapters apply Calvinism to Christians today.

In the first section, regarding the necessity and historicity of Calvinism, I was pleased to read a fairly clear and accurate explanation of how Calvinism came to be. Very rarely do Calvinistic defenders recognize that the system known as "Calvinism" was actually developed many years after Calvin died in response to certain teachings associated with the Reformer Jacob Arminius (p. 18). Calvinism is responsive theology, which, as most historical theologians will admit, is not the most reliable way to do theology.

Another commendable trait in the book is its diagnosis of modern Christianity. The authors identified six negative trends which characterize evangelicalism today. They are: secularism, humanism, relativism, materialism, pragmatism, and anti-intellectualism (p. 21). Most pastors and church leaders today would heartily agree with the diagnosis, but maybe not with the prescription. Boice and Ryken recommend Calvinism as the cure.

One of the strongest aspects of the book is that each of the chapters which discuss the five points, also devote a short section to explaining the tough texts which seem to contradict that particular point. For example, in the chapter on Limited Atonement entitled "Particular Redemption," texts like 2 Pet 2:1 and 1 John 2:2 are given a Calvinistic explanation (pp. 126-29). In the chapter on Perseverance of the Saints, the authors give their understandings of passages such as Heb 6:4-6 (p. 172) and the parable of the four soils in Matthew 13 (pp. 170-71).

Although there is much commendable information in the book itself, there is much that simply reaffirms my conviction to leave TULIP where it wilted. First, although the problem passages are gallantly dealt with, their approach leaves much to be desired. There is very little pure exege-

sis in the book. In nearly every instance where a tough passage is introduced, the authors turn to tradition for an explanation.

For example, regarding the doctrine of Total Depravity (renamed Radical Depravity), several passages are cited which seem to imply a human will which is able to choose or reject the gospel. Without attempting to explain the verses, the authors state that “the best way to approach [this] subject is through the debates that took place between the theological giants of past days” (p. 80). Then they recount the debates between Augustine and Pelagius (p. 80), and Luther and Erasmus (p. 82), and provide numerous quotes from Jonathan Edwards (p. 83), the Belgic Confession (p. 83), the Thirty-Nine Articles (p. 83), the Westminster Larger Catechism (p. 87), the Westminster Confession of Faith (p. 87), and the Baptist Confession (p. 87). This is nothing more than an appeal to tradition, one of the very things Luther fought against.

Another shortcoming of the book is the use of circular reasoning. Although we are told that “Calvinism begins in the mind” [p. 183] (rather than the Bible?), many fallacies are evident. In one place we are told that “if [Calvinism is] false, then preaching the gospel is a complete waste of time, for without sovereign grace sinners cannot possibly be delivered from their lost and deadly condition” (p. 210). In other words, if Calvinism is false, then evangelism is pointless, for there is no eternal salvation apart from Calvinism.

The other Calvinistic errors which originally caused me to reject the system were present as well. They confuse terms like “atonement” and “redemption” (p. 119), they make faith a work (p. 124), redefine the words “all” and “world” (p. 130), and teach that regeneration precedes faith (pp. 149-50).

On the issue of the assurance of salvation they seem unclear. In one place they say that assurance is found through faith alone in Christ alone, not by looking to one’s works and that the only way to know one is elect is by whether or not they have believed in Christ (p. 143). Works are for the purpose of aiding faith in the process of sanctification (p. 196). But elsewhere we are told that there is the possibility of false assurance and that the only way to really know if one has been chosen by God or not is if they persevere until the end (p. 157).

In the end, there is nothing new under the sun. This book gives the same, traditional Calvinistic teachings, just presented with new packaging and in the most gracious style I have ever seen. For any *JOTGES* reader who wants to touch up on or become more familiar with the teachings of Calvinists, I would heartily recommend this book. On the other hand, any reader looking for an accurate explanation of biblical grace will have to go elsewhere.

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Baptism: The Believer's First Obedience. By Larry Dyer. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000. 92 pp. Paper. \$3.95.

In this short booklet, Dyer adeptly and succinctly addresses the doctrine of Christian baptism. The book answers several important questions about baptism such as: What is it? Why do it? What is the mode of baptism? Who should be baptized? Where can it be done? He also gives some helpful practical suggestions about baptism.

Dyer asserts that "baptism is...an outward picture or symbol of what God has done in the life of the believer through faith" (p. 22). The author also records several passages that indicate that faith in Christ is the sole means of obtaining eternal life (pp. 82-86). He also briefly, but effectively, addresses a few passages which have mistakenly been thought to teach water baptism as a requirement for salvation (pp. 72-78).

This book would serve well as a teacher's guide for anyone desiring to teach a series of lessons on the doctrine of baptism. It is easy to read, well organized, and thorough. It is also an excellent resource for any new believer seeking to understand more about baptism.

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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

“A Review of R. C. Sproul’s *The Last Days According to Jesus: An Analysis of Moderate Preterism, Part I*,” Mike Stallard, *The Conservative Theological Journal* (March 2002): 55-71.

In recent years, an old theology known as preterism has had a revival. It is a theology teaching that virtually all prophecy has already been fulfilled, primarily in the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. It is particularly popular among covenant theologians, especially covenant postmillennialists, although some covenant amillennialists have also adopted this view. A recent convert to this view is R. C. Sproul who produced it in his work *The Last Days According to Jesus*. A full preterist is someone who believes that all prophecies including the prophecies of the resurrection and the Second Coming have been fulfilled in the year A.D. 70 although they obviously have to spiritualize and allegorize these events. Thus, the Second Coming is a coming in judgment against Jerusalem. Moderate preterists believe that all prophecies have been fulfilled in the year A.D. 70 with the exception of the Second Coming and the resurrection. Sproul would fit into this category.

Mike Stallard, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Baptist Bible Seminary at Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, has written an excellent critique of Sproul’s book, the first part of which was published in *The Conservative Theological Journal* of March 2002. This review is of Part I only since at the time of this review, Part II had not yet been published.

After clearly defining the terms and showing where Sproul fits, Stallard does an excellent job of pointing out some rather unique inconsistencies. For example, dispensationalists are heavily criticized by covenant theologians for holding to a two-phase Second Coming, the rapture and the Second Coming itself. Stallard notes that in essence those who are moderate preterists end up believing the same thing. On the one hand, they believe that the Second Coming occurred in one form, in judgment when Jerusalem was destroyed in the year A.D. 70, and yet they still hold to another Second Coming, a more literal one, in the

future. They, too, have a two-phase coming of Christ. Furthermore, the dispensational one is not separated by the great length of time that the preterist must assign to his (about 2,000 years now between the two phases). At least with the dispensational ones, both the rapture and the Second Coming can be taken literally rather than allegorizing one and taking the other one literally.

Stallard also points out that what motivates Sproul's preterism is his concern to respond to liberals: "In short, Sproul's preterism is an apologetic designed to defend the Bible against the attacks of higher criticism" (p. 59). Stallard knows that it is a worthy goal, "However, it is not at all clear that preterism is the solution to the dilemma." Furthermore, it means that the liberals are determining how the conservatives interpret the Bible rather than letting the Bible speak for itself regardless of how the liberals may criticize it. It is doubtful that any liberal would be impressed by Sproul and other preterists allegorizing so much of the Second Coming prophecies just to explain away a presupposed "time element."

Stallard observes that to arrive at their conclusions they must make a very "limited and selected use of the Old Testament" (p. 61). He notes that while Sproul's book includes 276 references to the NT, it has only 29 for the OT, and yet the details of prophecy are found in the OT to a much greater degree than they are in the NT. Indeed, Stallard notes, "Premillennial futurists have long suggested, consistent with their belief in the significance of the progress of revelation for Bible interpretation that premillennial faith is based largely upon Old Testament teaching and not just upon verses in the book of Revelation, or Olivet Discourse" (pp. 62-63). Even when Sproul does refer to the OT, he is rather selective and chooses not to deal with the whole context. Stallard notes Sproul's use of Amos 5:18-20 in reference to the coming of the Day of the Lord, but he ignores Amos 9:11-15 that deals with Israel's final restoration. Such selective use of the OT is highly inconsistent.

Stallard's incisive conclusion on this point is: "The burden of proof is on the preterist who wants to divorce the negative predictions from the positive ones to avoid the obvious problem that there was no national restoration of Israel in 70 AD. Sproul's overly selective use of Old Testament passages in this particular area causes the futurist to wonder if that selective use of the Old Testament is also part of his theological method" (p. 65).

The first part of the article ends with a detailed evaluation of Sproul's interpretation of the phrase "end of the age" showing that here again Sproul is selective and does not deal with all five usages of the phrase, because as Stallard notes, it would be impossible to apply all five phrases only to A.D. 70.

This is an article well worth reading for someone who wants to have a more concise evaluation of preterism in place of reading the detailed criticism in the more recently published work, *The End Times Controversy* by La Haye and Ice. I look forward to seeing the Part II installment and for those whose appetites are whetted by Stallard's article, they can go on to the more detailed critique in the above mentioned work.

I have had my own correspondence with Sproul after he wrote a rather sharp criticism of dispensationalism in an article in his newsletter. What he wrote was so far off the wall that I wrote to ask him if he really bothers to read what dispensationalists write since we simply do not hold to what he has charged us with. I received a response from his secretary saying that he has read dispensational theologies and knows what they teach which led me to the following conclusion. If he *has* not bothered to read dispensational theologians, then his wrong evaluation is a matter of ignorance, but if it is really true that he has read dispensational theologians and still comes out with the same criticism, it makes him nothing short of something else indeed.

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"A Biblical View of Discipleship," James G. Samra, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 2003): 219-34.

Within the last decade, a surge of discipleship material has flooded the market. In fact, after just five years in print, the popular *Experiencing God* workbook had sold over 2 million copies. Although there is an abundant supply of discipleship material in print, James Samra, a recent graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, rightly believes that there still "seems to be confusion on what constitutes discipleship and on what the word 'disciple' means" (p. 219). Thus, his article seeks to answer three

questions “What is discipleship? How is discipleship accomplished? [and] What is involved in prompting discipleship?”

Samra begins his discussion of “What Is Discipleship?” by noting that it can carry the sense of being educated by a teacher (intellectual) or becoming like one’s master (imitation) [p. 219]. He acknowledges that it can also refer to those who “occasionally followed Christ” as in Matt 8:21. This case illustrates the fact that discipleship can be “a process whereby the masses learned more about Christ” (p. 220).

At this point, one might be inclined to think that J. Dwight Pentecost had positively influenced Samra with his three Cs of discipleship (curious, convinced, and committed) in his book *Design for Discipleship*. However, Samra makes it explicitly clear in a footnote that “J. Dwight Pentecost’s discussion of Jesus as a discipler is helpful, although the present writer does not agree with Pentecost’s distinction between ‘believers’ and ‘disciples’” (p. 231, n. 37). Clarifying this claim, Samra remarks, “At times the focus is on the entrance into the process (evangelism), but most often the focus is on growing in the process (maturity)” (p. 220).

Unfortunately, John 6 eludes Samra’s discussion. John states in v. 60, “Therefore *many of His disciples*, when they heard *this*, said, ‘This is a hard saying: who can understand it?’” Then, several verses later, referring to this same group of disciples, Jesus remarks, “But there are *some* of you *who do not believe*” (v. 64a). Many of His *disciples* betrayed Him (v. 64b) and stopped following Him (v. 66). Thus, some of those who Jesus referred to as His disciples did not believe and later even abandoned Him. This illustrates the distinction between being a disciple and being a believer.

Samra’s second section is on “How Is Discipleship Accomplished?” He deals first with discipleship in the Gospels, noting that in the Gospels “discipleship (becoming like Christ) was accomplished by being physically with Christ” (p. 221). This is supported by passages such as Mark 1:18 where Simon (Peter) and Andrew had to leave their nets in order to follow Christ. Samra also states that in the Gospels “to become like Him His disciples would have to go through what He would experience” (p. 221). In other words, you cannot imitate someone without knowing them and you cannot know someone until you have first walked in their shoes. He then deals with discipleship in the rest of the NT which he believes takes the form of imitation. Since “Christ was not physically present, becoming like Him could not be accomplished by spending time

with Him” (p. 223). Thus, other words are used for discipleship like “imitate” (*mimeomai*) or “imitator” (*mimētēs*).

The third section of the article is called “What Is Involved in Helping Someone Become like Christ?” Samra suggests that humility, self-sacrifice, unconditional love, commitment, receiving and sharing the gospel with joy, holy living, lives of faith, and suffering for Christ are all discipleship concepts (pp. 228-29). If this section were taken by itself, the reviewer would not express any discontent with what is discussed. Nonetheless, given that fact that Samra believes that there is no distinction between a disciple and a believer, conditions of discipleship are consequently transformed into conditions for eternal life.

It is true that there “seems to be confusion on what constitutes discipleship and on what the word ‘disciple’ means.” However, there also seems to be great confusion on what constitutes the gospel. It is unfortunate when conditions for discipleship become conditions for eternal life. When these two distinct entities are not differentiated correctly, grace is turned into debt and assurance is turned into doubt thus compromising any efforts made towards discipleship. If imitation is the key to discipleship and God is seen as a legalist, legalism is what will be imitated, not grace. May we teach the gospel clearly so that our disciples will become convinced and committed rather than confused and capricious.

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“What Conversion Is and Is Not,” John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Christianity Today* (February 2003): 70-75.

In the unending discourse concerning what *does* and *does not* constitute ‘true conversion,’ there seems to be no end to the efforts to say the same old thing—namely, that salvation is not *really* by faith alone, but by faith *and* works, or a faith *that* works, or—as here—a faith *that does good*. In the midst of much that is both challenging and positive, therefore, this article sadly has the lasting effect of confusing the clear gospel of grace, and blatantly undermining assurance.

Stackhouse, professor of theology and culture at Regent College, recounts time spent with a liberal instructor, Professor Sack (not his real name), during doctoral studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School. The man was traditional and “evangelical” in some of his views, but unbiblical in others. Stackhouse says that this caused him to wonder whether or not the man was saved. And this compelled him to “reconsider the paradigm of conversion and mission I had inherited.” That ‘paradigm’ was that “everyone needed to have a conversion experience” and that it “must result in both orthodox conviction and holiness of life.” But was his professor saved? How could he know? Here his head and his heart conflicted: “I needed to figure out whether Professor Sack was truly a Christian. And I realized that his views were not lining up nicely on my grid. The readings, so to speak, were ambiguous.” In other words, he wasn’t sure whether Professor Sack was saved because of his liberal theological views.

Instead of heading to the pristine waters of Scripture, Stackhouse instead wanders down a philosophical path to uncertainty. He proposes “a new way of looking at conversion that entails a new way of looking at the Christian mission to one’s neighbor.” This leads to the conclusion that “our missionary goal...is not just to introduce someone to Christ.” He submits that “our goal is to help our neighbors to be fully *converted* into all God wants them to be.” This hazy destination, of course, has less to do with simple faith in the finished work of Christ than the production of good works which accompany it.

Stackhouse, in fact, never talks about belief or faith in any depth. Instead, he spends the bulk of his time discussing *metanoia*, a discussion which is not in itself unhelpful. But his *a priori* linking of repentance with “conversion” leads into the quagmire of good works for salvation. He writes, “To be converted (*metanoia*), then, does not mean to immediately have a fully converted mind, but to begin with a fundamentally reoriented mind...that is then on its way to complete maturity.”

One will immediately ask, “But is the person ‘converted’ when he first believes?” Stackhouse answers with a parable of him driving with you from San Francisco to San Diego, but going north instead of south. When it becomes evident that he is going the wrong direction, you must “convert” him. He writes, “What is it, exactly, that you want when you want me to convert? First, you want me to recognize my error...But let’s suppose I agree, and I say, ‘Yes, by golly, this sure looks a lot more like Pacific rain forest than California coastland’—and yet I don’t care...

Surely true *repentance* is what you seek from me. Merely recognizing my mistake is not enough. I must *regret* that mistake...Then I must take further action. I must abandon the path I'm on...and get a new start... Suppose I do all this. Are you now satisfied? Have I fully converted? No. Not until I drive us all the way to San Diego, which is the point of the exercise." In other words, you're not "converted" until you "pull into heaven"!

The result of this is destructive to any assurance of salvation, of course. Stackhouse writes that we should stop asking of our neighbor, "Is he saved?" because, in his words, "I don't know, and I cannot know until 'the roll is called up yonder.' *The actual condition of another's heart is mysterious, even to that individual*" (italics mine). One must immediately ask, "Professor Stackhouse, are *you* saved? If not—and since you've just said no one can know if they are, you yourself cannot know—why should we read or accept what *you* are writing?"

Encouraging believers to show love to their neighbors is certainly a needed message. Pointing out that simply giving someone the gospel is not fulfilling the Christian mission is a lesson believers should take to heart. But demolishing the gospel by confusing faith with repentance, belief with good works, and salvation with sanctification is too high of a price to pay for such a message. Furthermore, stealing the assurance of salvation from those who have believed is a blueprint for spiritual failure, not spiritual success.

Finally, what does Stackhouse's view do to evangelism? It reduces it to a fatalistic attitude that might best be dubbed *¡Qué será, será!* ("What will be, will be"). Reflecting back to his doctoral mentor, he writes, "As for Professor Sack? Well, I think we did each other the good that we could do...I simply must entrust him to the ongoing care of Christ and his church—as I hope Professor Sack has done with me." Thank God that thousands of evangelists and missionaries are not so passive, but aggressively proclaim with the Apostle Paul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

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