

Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
“Faith Alone in Christ Alone”

VOLUME 22

Autumn 2009

NUMBER 43

Benefits of Christ’s Blood: Restricted and Unrestricted EDITOR	3-10
Acting on Our Union with Christ: Romans 6:12-23 ZANE C. HODGES	11-18
Perseverance: It Ain’t Over Till It’s Over STEPHEN R. LEWIS	19-28
The Return to Ritual: Should Free Grace Churches Adopt Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Other Emergent Church Practices? PHILLIPE R. STERLING	29-43
A Review of Peter M. Phillips’s <i>The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel</i> BOB SWIFT	45-54
The Evangelistic Message of the Emergent Church ROBERT VACENDAK	55-73
Dangerous Words: A Review of <i>Crazy Love</i> by Francis Chan BRUCE BAUER	75-91
A Critical Perspective: Orthodoxy, the Right Jesus, and Eternal Life LON GREGG	93-107
Book Reviews	109-119

Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
Published Semiannually by GES

Editor
Robert N. Wilkin

Production
Kyle Kaumeyer

Manuscripts, book reviews, and other communications should be addressed to GES, Director of Publications, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210 or submissions@faithalone.org.

Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210. You may call us at 940.270.8827 or email ges@faithalone.org. Subscription Rates: single copy, \$9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, \$18.50; 2 years, \$35.00; 3 years, \$49.50; 4 years, \$62.00; \$13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add \$4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and \$8.50 per year for all other international shipping.

Purpose: The Grace Evangelical Society was formed “to promote the clear proclamation of God’s free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship.”

Statement of Faith: “Jesus Christ, God incarnate, paid the full penalty for man’s sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in the risen Christ as his or her only hope of heaven, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life which, once granted, can never be lost.”

Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
©2009 Grace Evangelical Society

BENEFITS OF CHRIST'S BLOOD: RESTRICTED AND UNRESTRICTED?

BOB WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

It has been called to my attention that I wrote something 22 years ago, in the March 1988 GES newsletter (“Matthew 25:31-46—Works Salvation?”), which seems to contradict unlimited atonement. In that article I say, “Since those cast into eternal fire did not believe in Christ, their sins were not covered by His blood and hence they were doomed to eternal damnation.” I cited John 8:24 as proof.

That statement is not true, as I will explain in this paper.

I was guilty of some shallow thinking on the blood of Christ. But I'm not alone. Many people have never carefully considered who benefits from His blood. The truth, which is obvious when we look at the Scriptures, may surprise you.

UNRESTRICTED: UNLIMITED ATONEMENT: THE SIN BARRIER IS REMOVED FOR ALL PEOPLE, INCLUDING UNBELIEVERS (JOHN 1:29; 1 JOHN 2:2)

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus didn't *potentially* do that. He actually did that by His death on the cross. First John 2:2 reiterates that point. Jesus satisfied God's righteous judgment against sin by His death on the cross for 100% of Adam's offspring, including all unbelievers.

Lewis Sperry Chafer liked to say, “Because of Calvary, people no longer have a *sin problem*. Instead, they have a *Son problem*.”

Calvinists object, however, that if this is true, then everyone is born again. No one will be condemned. Not at all. Jesus' blood removes our sin as a barrier to our having life. But the cross doesn't give anyone life. John the Baptist went on to say that to get life a person must believe in Jesus (John 3:36).

No one will be eternally condemned because of his sins. Jesus' blood already removed the sin barrier. This is not only evident by the verses cited, but also by Rev 20:11-15, which shows that the basis of condemnation is not what is found in the books of works, but what is not found in the Book of Life. Anyone found not written in the Book of Life is condemned. Anyone found there is not condemned. Condemnation is not based on sins, but lack of life.

The Lord Jesus plainly told Nicodemus: "He who believes in Him [God's Son] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, *because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*" (John 3:18, emphasis added). Jesus pointed to unbelief, not sinfulness, as the basis for condemnation.

Many mistakenly think that would mean that the unbeliever has every benefit of the blood of Christ. However, John the Baptist never said that and neither did the Lord or His apostles. There are some benefits of the cross that only believers receive, and indeed some that only godly believers receive.

(It should be noted that *the blood of Christ* is not specifically mentioned in this regard. However, propitiation and taking away sins clearly occurred on the cross because He shed His blood.)

**UNRESTRICTED:
PRAYER MADE POSSIBLE BY THE BLOOD
OF CHRIST
(HEBREWS 10:19)**

The author of Hebrews says, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart..." (Heb 10:19, 22). In the OT only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and he only once a year. Because of the cross and the tearing of the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (cf. Matt 27:51), access to the presence of God is open to all people now, 24/7/365.

Though Bailey Smith famously claimed that God does not hear the prayers of unbelieving Jews, the truth is, God hears the prayers of anyone who sincerely prays to Him. While an unbeliever is not likely to have the boldness spoken of in Heb 10:19, he can nonetheless pray and be heard by God because the blood of Jesus has opened that access even for the unbeliever.

Cornelius in Acts 10 is a case in point. Though he was not yet born again (cf. Acts 10:44; Acts 11:14), his prayer was heard by God (Acts 10:4, 31). God even sent an angel to him to tell him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter who would come and tell him and his household the words by which they would be saved (cf. Acts 10:3-4; 11:13-14).

The blood of Christ makes prayer possible. (Of course, before the cross the promise of the blood of Christ is what made prayer possible.)

**RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY:
POSITIONAL FORGIVENESS
(COLOSSIANS 1:14; 2:13)**

Anyone who knows the Bible even a little knows that fellowship forgiveness is only for those believers who confess their sins (1 John 1:9). More on that in a moment. However, it is equally true that all believers have positional forgiveness. Paul said that Jesus has "forgiven you all trespasses"

(Col 2:13). How did He do that? Paul said He did so by wiping out that which was written against us by nailing it to the cross (Col 2:14).

Clearly that is not true of the unbeliever. The unbeliever does not have positional forgiveness. That benefit of the blood of Christ applies to all believers, but only believers.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY: BELIEVERS ARE NOT IN THEIR SINS (JOHN 8:24)

Jesus told an unbelieving crowd, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Many have wrongly concluded from this that the blood of Christ doesn’t apply to the unbeliever in any way. But that is not what the Lord says. He says that when an unbeliever dies, he dies “in his sins.”

What does it mean to die in your sins? It doesn’t mean one is eternally condemned or that he experiences the second death *because of his sins*. It does mean that the unbeliever eternally remains a sinner.

While even though born-again people sin (1 John 1:8, 10), it is not correct to say that believers are “in their sins.” To be in one’s sins suggests that one is still enslaved to sin. See Romans 6. There Paul says that the believer “has been freed from sin” and that he is *a slave of righteousness* (Rom 6:7; 18).

Unbelievers are slaves of sin and remain in that state even after death, though it is not likely God will allow sinful actions to occur at that time. After all, it is possible to run a prison in such a way that no crimes can be committed. However, unbelievers likely will forever have a desire to sin. Indeed, part of the torment of the lake of fire may be the inability of the unbeliever to be able to fulfill his sinful desires.

Note: Compare Paul’s use of a similar expression (“in trespasses and sins”) in Eph 2:1, 5. Paul speaks of the Ephesians before their new birth as those “who were dead in trespasses and sins.” He doesn’t say that they were dead *because of* trespasses and sins. The readers in Ephesus before their new

birth were in their sins in the sense that they were slaves of sin. The phrase *in trespasses and sins* states the sphere in which the spiritually-dead Ephesians lived.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY: PAST SANCTIFICATION (HEBREWS 10:29)

According to the author of Hebrews, if his Jewish readers were to return to animal sacrifices as a means to dealing with their sins, then they would be counting “the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified a common thing” (Heb 10:29). This reiterates the same truth taught earlier in the chapter, “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). This past tense sanctification refers to the fact that believers *have been set apart once for all into God's family and kingdom*.

Unbelievers have not been sanctified by the blood of Jesus. They must believe in order to experience this type of sanctification, which is something that occurs at the moment of regeneration and justification.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY: PEACE WITH GOD (EPHESIANS 2:13; COLOSSIANS 1:20)

In Ephesians 2 Paul reminds the believers in Ephesus that they were once aliens, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). He then adds, “But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

This seems to be linked to the peace mentioned in Col 1:20-21, which is specifically said by Paul to be “through the blood of His cross.”

See also Rom 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” While the blood of Christ is not mentioned in that verse, it is specified in the context (cf. Rom 3:25; 5:9). Indeed,

a few verses later Paul says that we have been *justified by His blood* (Rom 5:9). Peace with God and justification are by means of the blood of Christ. Without His shed blood, we would not be justified and we would not have peace with God.

This peace is, of course, positional. A believer may or may not live peacefully with God. This moves us to an even more restricted benefit of the blood of Christ, one that is only true of believers who walk in the light and confess their sins.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS IN FELLOWSHIP: ONGOING CLEANING OF THEIR SINS (1 JOHN 1:7)

Most well grounded believers know the truth of 1 John 1:9. They know that only if they confess their sins does God forgive the sins they confess as well cleanse them from all unrighteousness (which includes all the unknown sins). However, many are not aware of the truth found two verses earlier upon which 1:9 depends.

John says that “If we walk in the light...[then] the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Here is a benefit of the blood of Christ which is not only not for the unbeliever, but it isn’t even for all believers. This benefit of the blood of Christ is only for believers who are walking in the light. As Zane Hodges said in his commentary on First John, “To walk in the light must mean essentially to live in God’s presence, exposed to what He has revealed about Himself. This, of course, is done through openness in prayer and through openness to the Word of God in which He is revealed” (p. 61).

First John 1:9 would be a lie apart from the blood of Christ. Confession of sins has no power apart from the blood of the Savior. Calvary makes confession effective.

Of course confession is only effective for the one walking in the light. The person who is walking in the darkness may acknowledge something he has done as wrong, but if he si-

multaneously plans to go right on doing it, then he is not walking in the light.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS IN FELLOWSHIP: OVERCOMING BY HIS BLOOD (REVELATION 12:11)

In Free Grace theology we have a high regard for being an overcomer. The believer who overcomes in this life is the one who will rule with Christ in the life to come.

But overcoming is only possible because of the blood of Christ: "And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev 12:11). If Jesus had not shed His blood on the cross, then there would be no possibility of being an overcomer.

However, not all believers are overcomers as the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 make clear. The blood of Christ makes overcoming possible, but it does not guarantee it.

Only believers walking in the light actually do overcome by means of the blood of Christ.

SUMMARY: WHO BENEFITS FROM CHRIST'S BLOOD?

The question "Who benefits from Christ's blood?" is really tricky. We may want to rush in and say, "Everyone benefits from the death of Christ. He died for the sins of the whole world." Or we might be tempted to say, "Well, everyone *potentially* benefits from His death, but in actuality it isn't until a person believes in Jesus that he benefits." Neither of those answers is adequate or true.

Unbelievers benefit from the blood of Christ. They are able to have eternal life without having to deal with their sins at all. They don't need to turn from their sins to be born again (though by repenting an unbeliever might become more open to the promise of life). They don't need to be sorry for their sins. They don't need to confess their sins. They don't need to

lessen the amount of sins they commit. They merely need to believe in Jesus to be born again. He removed the sin barrier.

Believers and even unbelievers are able to be heard by God when they pray due to the blood of Christ.

All believers have positional forgiveness because of the cross. God sees the eternal part of the believer, the born-of-God self, as sinless and completely forgiven.

Because of the shed blood of Christ, believers are no longer in their sins. The blood of Christ sets all believers free from slavery to sin (positionally).

Believers have peace with God and believers are justified by means of the blood of the Christ.

All believers have experienced past sanctification as a result of Christ's atoning work at Calvary. That is, all believers have been set apart from the rest of humanity. They have been placed into the family and kingdom of God.

But only some believers benefit from the blood of Christ in terms of fellowship forgiveness and walking in fellowship with God. A person may well be born again and yet walking in darkness. Believers may be out of fellowship with God, not enjoying one of the major benefits of the cross.

While all believers are capable of being victorious Christians because of the blood of Christ, that is not to say that all Christians do overcome. The blood of Christ makes overcoming possible. But only believers who walk in the light of God's Word actually do overcome.

When you sing about the blood of Christ and think about it when drinking the cup in the Lord's Supper, I hope you aren't simply thinking about the fact that His blood made it possible for you to have eternal life. That is a glorious truth. But the blood of Christ has more impact in our lives than that. I hope you also think about positional forgiveness, fellowship forgiveness, no longer being a slave of sin, and the possibility of prayer and overcoming.

I've not even covered all the benefits of the cross here. There are many more. This would be a great topic for a thesis, dissertation, or book. It is surely something upon which we should meditate our whole lives. The more we live in light of His shed blood for us, the more we will please Him.

ACTING ON OUR UNION WITH CHRIST: ROMANS 6:12-23

ZANE C. HODGES¹

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey it with its lusts, neither turn over your body's members as instruments for unrighteousness, but turn yourselves over to God as people who are alive from the dead, and turn over your body's members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin shall not have authority over you, because you are not under the Law but under grace (Rom 6:12-14).²

In view of the spiritual reality expressed in the previous verse (v 11), believers should not only consider themselves to be “alive to God,” they should actively reorient their behavior in the light of that truth. Whereas formerly, in their unregenerate days, they had allowed **sin to reign in their mortal body so that they obeyed it with its lusts**, they are to do so no longer.

This previous obedience to sin's *lusts* had been put into effect by their turning **over their body's members as instruments for doing unrighteousness**. The *body's members* (that is, its eyes, arms, legs, etc.) had been used in the pursuit and enjoyment of sinful aims and activities. This kind of behavior should now cease.

The new lifestyle is to be marked by conscious commitment to God and to His will. Now they are to **turn themselves over to God as people who are alive from the dead**. They are not to think of themselves any longer as subjects reigned over by **sin** and death. Instead they should see themselves **as people who have been raised from the dead to walk in newness of life** (see 6:4). Their attitude of heart should be, “Here I am, Lord, **alive from the dead** and prepared to live for you.”

¹Zane Hodges was working on a commentary on Romans when he died in November of 2008. He had completed the commentary through Rom 14:15. This material is from that commentary. GES plans to publish Zane's commentary on Romans (with Rom 14:16–16:27 written by Bob Wilkin) by the end of 2010, Deo Volente.

²All translations in this article (and in the entire commentary) are the author's personal translation, based on the Majority Text (MT) readings.

The Greek verb rendered here by *turn over* (*parastēsate*), the same basic word as in the earlier part of v 13 (*paristanete*), signifies that something is made available for some purpose, that is, it is “*put at someone’s disposal*” (see BDAG, p. 778, 1.a.). Paul’s point is that, although they previously put the members of their body at sin’s disposal, they should stop doing so. Now they should put themselves *and* their bodies at God’s disposal.

The attitude expressed when they turn themselves over **to God**, should be followed by appropriate actions. They are to *turn over* their *body’s members* to Him *as instruments for righteousness*. That means, of course, that they are to employ the members of their body for the will of God. They are to use them *as instruments for* (that is, they are actually to *do*) *righteousness*. When both the attitude and the actions cohere, Christian living is experienced.

In addition, both the new attitude and the new behavior are appropriate and possible precisely because sin has lost its capacity to have authority over them. The future tense in the phrase **shall not have authority** (*ou kurieusei*) should be understood as an imperatival future (like: you shall not kill). Paul is saying, “You must not allow sin to rule you.”

Why not? **Because**, Paul insists, **you are not under the Law but under grace**. With these words Paul introduces the dominant theme of the discussion to follow (6:15–8:13). Although grace was referred to in 6:1, it has not been directly mentioned since then, and *the Law* has not been referred to in this chapter at all. The ineffectual nature of *the Law* figures prominently in the discussion that follows.

Contrary to the opinion held even by many Christians in Paul’s day (see Acts 15:5) the Mosaic Law was no more an effective instrument for Christian living than it was an instrument for justification (see 3:19-20). Those who lived under it could not truly escape the **authority** of sin in their lives. In contrast to this, freedom from sin’s *authority* can be experienced by Christian people precisely because they *are not under the Law but under grace*.

Paul now wishes to make this truth completely clear.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the Law but under grace? Far from it! Don’t you know that to whom you turn yourselves over as slaves in

obedience, you are slaves of the one you obey, whether of sin producing death, or of obedience producing righteousness? (Rom 6:15-16).

The first question to be raised is whether the fact that **we are not under the Law but under grace** gives us a license to sin. The words **far from it** emphatically deny that it does. The underlying Greek (*mē genoito*) is idiomatic and the phrase is to be translated as best suits each context. Here the words “that’s unthinkable” might equally well be used to express Paul’s idea.

Indeed, why should such an option even be considered? The question (**Shall we sin?**) was functionally equivalent, Paul goes on to suggest, to asking whether we should be the **slaves of sin**. Thus, after dismissing the suggestion categorically (far from it), he asks rhetorically, **Don’t you know you are slaves of the one you obey?** “Don’t you realize,” he says, “that sinning entails slavery to your sinful practices?”

Paul, of course, is not implying that anyone in the Roman congregation didn’t really know this. The question is treated as hypothetical and this barbed response is rhetorical, highlighting the absurdity of any suggestion that we *should* sin. The fact was that to whomever they might **turn themselves over as slaves in obedience**, they were **slaves of the one** they obeyed. They could therefore either become **slaves to sin** or to its opposite, **righteousness** (cf. v 18).

We should note that in Paul’s discussion here, the meaning expressed by the Greek verb *paristēmi* (to turn over) clearly denotes the idea of actually doing something. This might be either committing sin and thus **producing** (*eis*) **death** or it might be **obedience** (to God) and thus **producing** (*eis*) **righteousness**. Stated this way, the only reasonable choice was the *obedience* that produced *righteousness*, since who would wish to produce death?

But praise *is due* to God that you were the slaves of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching in which you were instructed. And having been liberated from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness (Rom 6:17-18).

Paul is grateful **to God** for the Christian experience of the Roman believers. In their unconverted days they had been **slaves of sin**, but after their conversion they had **obeyed from**

the heart (i.e., sincerely) the **form of teaching in which** they had been **instructed**. That is to say, they had responded obediently to the Christian teaching they had received.

The Greek underlying the phrase *in which you were instructed* (*eis hon paradothēte*) is at first surprising. The verb *paradidōmi* can mean “to pass on to another what one knows of oral or written tradition” (BDAG, pp. 762-63), but it is also often used as a technical term for turning someone over to the custody of the police or courts (BDAG, p. 762). Here Paul employs it as a kind of word play, though the literal sense is something like “to which you were handed over.” On the one hand, Christian teaching has been “passed on” to the Roman Christians. On the other, however, in accordance with the metaphor about slavery, they have been “turned over” to the authority of that teaching for their lives.

For the sake of clarity, my translation is a paraphrase, since the word play in question cannot really be communicated by a simple rendering. The NKJV translation (“to which you were delivered”) is not very meaningful in English. My rendering is also reflected in the Jerusalem Bible which translates: “you submitted without reservation to the creed you were taught.”

The phrase *that form of teaching* suggests that the content of what they were taught followed a particular pattern. The Greek word rendered *form* is *tupos*, which is properly assigned here by BDAG (p. 1020) to the meaning category: “a kind, class, or thing that suggests a model or pattern.” Paul is no doubt thinking of the general format in which Christian instruction was generally given to converts to Christianity. This Christian instruction and exhortation is sometimes referred to in technical literature by the term *paraenesis*.

The Roman Christians were not total strangers to Paul (see 16:1-20) and he even states that their “obedience” (*hupakoē*) has become widely known (16:19). Since they had obeyed the Christian *teaching in which they were instructed*, their personal experience had been one of being **liberated from sin** and of being **enslaved to righteousness**. In other words they had turned away from sin to do what was right in God’s sight. Their servitude was now to Him and not to sin.

(I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.) For just as you have turned over your body’s

members as slaves to uncleanness and to wickedness producing wickedness, so now turn over your body's members as slaves to righteousness producing holiness (Rom 6:19).

Paul is not altogether comfortable with describing their Christian obedience as being “enslaved to righteousness” (v 18). He has only adopted such **human** terminology due to **the weakness of their flesh**.

His concern is for their comprehension of the truth. A more abstract description—even if accurate—would have failed due to their limitations as human beings. The following words in the verse show he is working with an analogy, moving from the familiar (slavery to sin) to the unfamiliar (slavery to righteousness).

In the past they had **turned over their body's members as slaves to uncleanness and to wickedness** (*anomia*). The result of this servitude to sinful practices was, of course, simply *wickedness*. (The phrase **producing wickedness** translates the Greek words *eis anomian*.) Your former slavery, Paul states, was negative in its effects. It was unclean and wicked and productive of nothing other than an experience of evil.

[In my translation, I have rendered the Greek word *anomia* by the more general word *wickedness*. An examination of its uses in the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint) shows that it had become a very general word for what is evil. The modern tendency to interpret it in terms of its derivation (“lawlessness”) is most likely an example of the so-called “root fallacy.” A word's actual meaning at any given time is determined by usage, not by the meaning of its root.]

This past experience in *wickedness* is the backdrop for understanding Paul's reference to being enslaved to *righteousness*. As believers, the Roman Christians are **now to turn over their body's members as slaves to righteousness**. What was once done in submission to sin should now be done in submission to **righteousness**. The result of this new form of active obedience will be the production of **holiness**. Thus the evil result of the former servitude can be replaced by the good result of a new servitude.

The phrase *producing holiness* translates *eis hagianon*. BDAG (p. 10) reminds us that outside of Biblical literature the

word *hagiasmos* frequently signals “personal dedication to the interests of the deity.” In the NT it has come to mean especially “the state of being made holy.” In this context, however, an element of the basic meaning seems implicit in the context of being *slaves to righteousness*. The Greco-Roman world was familiar with the concept of someone who was permanently attached to a pagan temple as a servant of the god who was worshipped there.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. So what fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the result of those things is death (Rom 6:20-21).

Paul continues to expand his analogy between the old servitude and the new one. As **slaves of sin** they had been **free from righteousness**. That is to say, *righteousness* was “powerless” in their lives. It had no control over what they did. It was not their “master.”

There could be no positive outcome or result from such a life. It could bear no constructive fruit, and in retrospect, it was a life that **now** made them feel **ashamed**. The rhetorical question, **So what fruit did you have then...?** assumes that there was none at all. How could there be, since **the result** [*telos*, end] **of those things** could only be **death**?

In speaking of *death* here, the Apostle no doubt had physical *death* in mind, but his concept of *death* is much broader than that. This becomes plain in his subsequent discussion, especially in 7:8-13 and in 8:6-13. For Paul, *death* is not the mere cessation of physical existence but is also an experience that is qualitatively distinct from true life.

As Paul puts it in Eph 4:18, the unregenerate are “alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them.” But as he will show clearly in the following two chapters, such “alienation” from God’s life is experienced also by the Christian when he submits to the desires of his spiritually-dead physical body.

But now, since you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your fruit producing holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:22-23).

Despite their unproductive past, however, **now** the Roman Christians are in a position to bear real **fruit** that actually produces (or, consists of) **holiness**. This is due to the transforming fact of their union with Christ that Paul had emphasized earlier in the chapter (see especially 6:1-11). This union has resulted in their being **freed from sin and enslaved to God**. As the Apostle expresses it in 6:7, “the one who has died [with Christ] is justified [*freed*] from sin.” Thus the believer is now to regard himself as “dead to sin, but alive to God *in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (6:11 emphasis added).

A new lifestyle is therefore made possible in which the believer can “walk in newness of life” (6:4). This “newness of life,” of course, is nothing less than *eternal life*. The believer’s “walk” in this new life is the outcome of possessing that life *in Christ*. Thus the end **result** [*telos*] of **producing holiness** is nothing less than an experience of **eternal life** itself. This idea is already implicit in the biblical quotation that Paul cites as part of his thematic statement for the entire book: “Now the one who is righteous by faith *shall live*” (Rom 1:17; emphasis added).

Paul can now wrap up the fundamental truths on which the entire unit (6:1-23) is based. On the one hand, **death** in all its aspects is the “pay-off” (**the wages**) of **sin**. The word rendered *wages* (*opsōnia*) is not essentially different from its counterpart in English and refers in ordinary use to “pay” or “compensation.” Obviously a statement like this is deliberately broad enough to embrace all the various aspects in which *death* is the “compensation” for sin. In other words, it states a principle, and should not be narrowed to an exclusive reference to the “second death,” or hell (Rev 20:14).³ Paul will later say to these believers that “if you live in relation to the flesh, you will die” (Rom 8:13) and that concept is one specific aspect of the principle he states here.

With **sin**, therefore, one receives what one has earned (**wages**). But **eternal life** is an *unearned* experience because, at its core, **eternal life** is **the gift of God** that is given **in Christ Jesus our Lord**. That is to say, by virtue of our being

³ Zane has written elsewhere that Rev 20:15 shows that the basis of the second death is unbelief, not sin, which Jesus already paid for at the cross (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). Apart from the cross the second death would be one of the wages of sin. But because of Calvary no one will experience the second death *because of his sins* (cf. John 3:18).

in Christ (see 6:3,4) we possess this *gift*. When we produce holiness, therefore, we are living out *the gift* that *God* gave us when we were justified by faith.⁴

The word used here for *gift* (*charisma*) is picked up from 5:15, 16 where its occurrences are the first ones in the body of Paul's argument. (It is used in another connection in 1:11.) As is clear from 5:12-21, for Paul righteousness and **life** are part of one and the same *charisma*. As a result, "those who receive the abundance of the grace and of the gift (*dōreas*) of righteousness shall reign *in life* through one Man, Jesus Christ" (5:17). The whole gracious bestowal can be described as a "justification sourced in life." (For the Pauline link between regeneration and justification, see also Titus 3:5-7).

The closing words of v 23, **in Christ Jesus our Lord**, are identical in Greek to the words that close v 11 (*en Christō Iēsou tō Kuriō hēmōn* [MT]). Thus they form an *inclusio* with v 11 and mark the present sub-unit (vv 12-23) as complete. The repeated words also serve to emphasize the truth that the *eternal life* which is given to us as a *gift* (by virtue of which we are "alive" [v 11]) is our possession *in union with* the Savior in whom we died and in whom we have been raised to walk in God's paths.

⁴ Editor's note: Zane does not understand Rom 6:23 as an evangelistic verse. A careful reading of his comments here shows that he sees this verse as uncovering the power of eternal life that is resident within every believer. The believer is capable of living a holy life because of his union with Christ. However, the believer still has the flesh and is also able to live an unholy life and to experience the wages of his sin, which is physical death. He comments on this much more in his discussion of Romans 8, especially Rom 8:13.

PERSEVERANCE: IT AIN'T OVER TILL IT'S OVER

STEPHEN R. LEWIS

President
Rocky Mountain Bible College & Seminary
Denver, CO

INTRODUCTION

To quote Charles Dickens:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.¹

This quote captures the times in which we find ourselves concerning the state of theology in our world and even in the Free-Grace Movement. We certainly find fault with the system developed by the Roman Catholic (RC) Church. One may believe that the Protestant Church has completely corrected RC theology and brought us back to biblical accuracy. It is further thought, by many, that Luther and the other Reformers reclaimed the theology of the NT writers. Upon closer examination, it appears that they made it back to 80+% of NT teachings, but not all the way.

Although the watchwords of the Reformation were *sola gracia* (also spelled *sola gratia*), *sola fide*, *sola Christi*, and *sola*

¹The opening sentence of *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, referring to the time of the French Revolution. *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition*, Edited by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002)

Scriptura, the Reformers did not completely break away from Roman Catholic (RC) theology. For example, following Calvin's death there was a meeting at Dort to answer the followers of Jacobus Arminius in their declaration called the Remonstrants. We have come to call that response TULIP.

This paper is attempting to address the fifth point of TULIP—Perseverance of the Saints and its similarity to the RC view of the same issue. The Reformed view has a system that gives no assurance. One never knows until they die. And the RC system has hope (although false) after death. To the RC, at least, it ain't over till it's over! The Free-Grace Movement has struggled to embrace TULIP (sometimes by re-defining the 5 points so that we can agree with them). We ought to proceed very carefully and allow the Text of the Bible to determine our belief; and *not* allow any system to determine our belief—no matter how close it may come or not to truth.

The doctrine of perseverance is the *logical* outcome of the other four points of Calvinism and of the particular view of God's sovereign will which underlies them all. If one holds to total depravity in the sense of total inability, then the system requires unconditional election. If one holds to unconditional election, then one needs atonement that is particular, or limited to those who are unconditionally elected. In order to guarantee that the elect will come to faith, one needs irresistible grace. And irresistible grace leads to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints (a true believer's sins ought to be "few and far between"; if that is not the case, he or she is not part of the elect or has the wrong kind of faith).

Surely, this sounds reasonable. But is it accurate? Is it Biblical? Should it be accepted because it has been held for most of Church history? What if Church history is wrong? What if the creeds of the churches are not a result of careful Biblical exegesis but simply a consensus of opinion? What if the "orthodox" view has been unduly influenced by the Greek philosophers by way of Augustine and Aquinas? Like any doctrine taught today, the doctrine of perseverance of the saints needs to be carefully evaluated on the basis of Scripture.

In the "Introductory" to the first of his Hibbert Lectures, 1888, Dr. Hatch presents the following comparison of the Sermon on the Mount with the Nicene Creed:

The one belongs to a world of Syrian peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers.

The contrast is patent. If any one thinks that it is sufficiently explained by saying that one is a sermon [sermon on the mount] and the other a creed, it must be pointed out in reply that the question why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century, is a problem which claims investigation.

It claims investigation, but has not yet been investigated. There have been inquiries, which in some cases have arrived at positive results, as to the causes of particular changes or developments in Christianity—the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, or the theory of a Catholic Church.

In investigating this problem, the first point that is obvious to an inquirer is, that a change in the centre of gravity from conduct to belief is coincident with the transference of Christianity from a Semitic to a Greek soil. The presumption is that it was the result of Greek influence.²

Sadly, this evaluation captures well the differences between the Scripture and the creeds of the early Church.³

It appears that throughout the Church history the philosophers had a much stronger influence on the development of systematics than did the exegetes. The converse should have been true. Systematic theology should have emerged from the process in which the first step is exegesis and the second step is biblical theology. Only after the completion of these two steps should the biblical data have been organized into a comprehensive, coherent system.

Within the first three centuries following the Apostles, theological errors arose, not from evil intentions of the Church leaders, but from their desire to find answers to everyday pastoral questions and to help people understand the text. Instead of going back to the text (existent, although hard to find) to form their theological views, they turned to the writings of previous

² Edwin Hatch, D. D., *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages Upon the Christian Church*, 1895, reprinted by Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, 1-2.

³ It is not certain whether the shift from conduct to belief truly occurred in the way he describes it, but this is clearly a de-emphasis of belief.

generations. Gradually, the vagueness of the early Christian works gave way to error.

As the use of the Bible faded out, theology—developed by consensus at Church Councils⁴—became increasingly dogmatic and philosophical. By the time of the invention of the printing press, theology—deeply rooted in philosophy—was already “complete.” Orthodoxy had been defined and little room was left for studies of the original text. Theologians focused their studies on the works of someone else who studied the works of someone else who studied the works of someone else (and so on) and debating the opinions expressed by their predecessors.⁵

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW OF FAITH

Faith is, indeed, the beginning and the continuing foundation of new life in Christ, but it is the faith of the Church and not Luther’s absolute confidence in personal salvation. This point is expressly made by the Council at Trent, which states that, “no one can know with the certitude of faith admitting no error, that he has obtained God’s grace;”⁶ or again: “If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he believes with certainty that he is absolved and justified...let him be anathema.”⁷

⁴Vincent of Lerins (5th Century AD), for instance, “[had] long been engaged in what we today call an empirical inquiry, a careful sampling process, something like a poll-taking exercise. He was deliberately inquiring of many believers, especially those well-grounded in sanctity, asking this simple question: How does the whole church come to distinguish the truth of Christian faith from falsehood amid conflicted opinions?” (p. 161) “Again the answer rings clear from all he asks—an answer that has become known as the Vincentian rule: In the world-wide community of believers every care should be taken to hold fast to what has been believed everywhere, always and by all” (p. 162). Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003).

⁵There were occasional innovators who worked with portions of the text (e.g., Luther worked in Romans), but their students had a strong tendency to study the innovators’ work rather than follow the example in studying the Word.

⁶D802; TCT566.

⁷D824; TCT588; cf. D823; TCT587.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW OF PERSEVERANCE

The RC Church has believed and taught that from the beginning of man's life to its consummation at the end, the work of salvation is inseparably the gracious gift of God and the free cooperation of man. Having affirmed this of man's preparation for justification, of the moment of justification itself, and of the whole life of the justified man, the RC Church at the Council of Trent affirmed this truth with regard to man's perseverance to the last moment of life. "If anyone says that without God's special help it is possible for a justified man to persevere in the justice he has received, or says that with God's special help it is impossible, let him be anathema."⁸

The key to RC's view of perseverance is based also in their view of sin. Catholicism evaluates sin according to the degree of seriousness. *Mortal* sin destroys charity in the heart and turns the Catholic away from God, necessitating the sacrament of Penance for resolution. *Venial* sin offends and wounds charity, but does not destroy it.

For a *sin* to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."⁹

Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother." The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger.¹⁰

Venial sin weakens charity...[and]...merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not set us in direct opposition to the will and friendship of God; it does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly repairable.¹¹

⁸D832; TCT596; cf. D806; TCT570.

⁹Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, MD: Ligouri Publications, 1994), no. 1857.

¹⁰Ibid., no. 1858.

¹¹Ibid., no. 1863.

AUGUSTINE IS THE LINK BETWEEN ROMAN CATHOLIC AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

The lines of divergence between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism really have their roots in this one man, Augustine,¹² although the process of divergence was not to be made manifest fully until the convergence of two circumstances which were largely responsible for the Reformation. The first was an almost total breakdown of Christian morality in the Roman Catholic Church, and the second was the appearance of a new spirit of free inquiry and independence in every area of human endeavor, including the exploration of the true meaning of the Gospel.

In his work, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, Augustine showed that the Perseverance of the Saints, by which he meant (in modern terminology) the eternal security of the believer, is not dependent upon the good works of the individual believer which would result from his conversion, but entirely upon the constancy and unchangeableness of God's elective choice.

Calvin took the ideas set forth by Augustine and developed them even further. Instead of just touching upon the ideas of predestination, final perseverance, and the believer's security, he developed an incredible system of thought that knows few rivals. John Calvin took the concept of Augustine and filled in the unanswered voids to form his theology. He followed these ideas to their logical end. If man is not free and God must predestinate, and all are not saved, then God must be Sovereign in salvation. This tends to ignore the fact that if God willed man to be free, and thus responsible for his own damnation, this would still mean that God is Sovereign. Sovereignty and predestination are in no way essential partners.

Calvinism was developed by Theodore Beza and the Synod of Dort, which met 50 years after Calvin's death. This counsel was convened to address the teachings of Arminius. Following the

¹² It was Pope Gregory (I) the Great (540-604) who took certain aspects of Augustine's theology and made them explicit as a foundation for the exclusiveness of the Church of Rome. Augustine's theology thus became the religion of the Middle Ages and underwent but little further development. (See "Gregory I", in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. S. M. Jackson, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969).

pattern provided by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent, Calvinism seated only Calvinists, declared itself orthodox, and then proceeded to persecute Arminians. The doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints is stated in the Westminster Confession in the following words:

They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.¹³

Or in other words we believe that those who once become true Christians cannot totally fall away and be lost—that while they may fall into sin temporarily, they will eventually return and be saved.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS IN REFORMED THEOLOGY

This doctrine does not stand alone but is a necessary part of the Calvinistic system of theology. The doctrines of Election and Efficacious Grace logically imply the certain salvation of those who receive these blessings. If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved. The doctrine of perseverance is articulated in the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter XVII), the London Baptist Confession of 1689, and may also be found in other Reformed Confessions.

Calvinism (Dort) and its doctrine of “Perseverance of the Saints” teaches that once God has renewed the heart of a sinner through the application of the redemption wrought by Christ upon the cross, he will continue to be saved and show forth the fruits of that salvation. The sinner perseveres because of Christ, but he continually shows himself as one who has been changed by Christ. God has saved the individual and will sanctify him until the end when he is ultimately glorified and in heaven. Those who are saved by grace, and changed, desire to

¹³ Chapter XVII, Section 1.

show forth the fruits of that salvation. God motions the heart to good work and continues that good work to the end.

HOW MUCH PERSEVERANCE IS ENOUGH?

Inevitably, the question must be raised, “How faithfully must one persevere? Or how continuous must the good works be?” The flip side of this asks the question, “how many sins and what degree of sin must one do to doubt their justification?”

If one cannot state precisely *how much* failure is possible for a Christian, true assurance becomes impossible. There is a need for the terms to be quantified: “Could he turn away almost completely? Or ninety percent? Or fifty percent?” To put it another way, the doctrines of perseverance and assurance are incompatible.

No quantifiable answers to the questions are actually possible unless one buys into the RC linear view of sin on a continuum. It is true that some believers do persist in sin for extended periods of time. But those who do, forfeit their right to rewards and not to the assurance of salvation (justification). To those of the Reformed tradition, any serious sin or unwillingness certainly *should* cause someone to contemplate carefully the question of whether he or she really loves the Lord (their equivalent to “believe/faith/trust”). And those who turn away completely (not *almost* completely, or ninety percent, or fifty percent) demonstrate that they never had true faith.

Roman Catholicism simply combined [at the Council of Trent] the two concepts into one: God justifies us through the process of our moving, by the power of God’s Spirit at work in our lives, from being unjust to becoming just. In other words, men and women are accepted before God on the basis of their cooperation with God’s grace over the course of their lives rather than on the basis of Christ’s finished work alone, received through faith alone, to the glory of God alone.¹⁴

The Catechism explains as follows: “...justification has two aspects. Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, and so accepts forgiveness and righteousness from

¹⁴Michael S. Horton, “What Still Keeps Us Apart?” in *Roman Catholicism*, John Armstrong, gen. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 257-58.

on high.”¹⁵ And, “Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man.”¹⁶

Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It is granted to us through Baptism. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us. It has for its goal the glory of God and of Christ and the gift of eternal life. It is the most excellent work of God's mercy.¹⁷

“Grace is the help God gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons.”¹⁸

“With justification, faith, hope, and charity are poured into our hearts and obedience to the divine will is granted us.”¹⁹

“Justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom. On man's part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent....”²⁰

CONCLUSION

Michael Eaton describes the plight of Calvinism: “Scholastic Calvinists must not assume the reality of [their faith]....[Their] awareness of sin threatens confidence about the reality of salvation.”²¹ According to Eaton, a Calvinist is worse off than an Arminian:

Is it not a fact of history that the Calvinist has tended to have less assurance of salvation than the Arminian? The Arminian is at least sure of his present salvation. As the result of the high Calvinist doctrine the Calvinist often doubts his present salvation and thus has a less contented frame of mind than his evangelical Arminian friend.²²

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2018.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 2019.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 2020.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 2021.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 1991.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 1993.

²¹ Michael Eaton. *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 20.

²² *Ibid.*

So where is the Calvinist's assurance? Is it in his perseverance? But perseverance "has died the death of a thousand qualifications."²³ The better a person knows the complete teaching of what is called "scholastic Calvinism," the more he questions his own salvation, plunging deeper and deeper into introspection. And as Eaton points out, "The introspective variety is decidedly not totally derived from the New Testament."²⁴

The one who holds to the high Augustinian doctrine of perseverance has to see "the warnings of Scripture as addressed to the danger of pseudo-salvation."²⁵ Calvinism assumes that good works are inherent in the saving faith, and therefore, "salvation and good works must stand or fall together."²⁶

In light of the data presented, "perseverance of the saints" as delineated by Calvinists is not a biblical doctrine. Biblical doctrine holds up to sound literal hermeneutics and exegesis. Since it is possible to hold to one or all points of Calvinism if they are redefined, some have stated that there is no need to "reinvent the wheel" by returning to the exegetical level, before developing a biblical theology and creating a systematic theology. However, if the conclusions of the present systematic theology are incorrect (as we have seen in the case of "perseverance"), the necessity of returning to the beginning can hardly be overstressed.

²³ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

²⁶ Ibid.

THE RETURN TO RITUAL: SHOULD FREE GRACE CHURCHES ADOPT ASH WEDNESDAY, LENT, AND OTHER EMERGENT CHURCH PRACTICES?

PHILIPPE R. STERLING

Pastor,
Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship
Coppell, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY?

*U.S. News and World Report*¹ and *Christianity Today* (CT)² not long ago ran cover stories about Evangelicals adopting historic church rituals. *Christianity Today* introduced its feature article with the cover-page declaration, “Lost Secrets of the Ancient Church: How Evangelicals started looking back to move forward.” CT senior managing editor Mark Galli wrote, “You might say a number of CT editors have a vested interest in this issue’s cover story. David Neff, Ted Olsen, Tim Morgan, and I have been doing the ancient-future thing for many years, at Episcopal and/or Anglican parishes.” The U.S. News article title was “A Return to Tradition: A New Interest in Old Ways Takes Root in Catholicism and Many Other Faiths.”

¹Jay Tolson, “A Return to Tradition,” *U.S. News and World Report* (December 13, 2007). <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/national/2007/12/13/a-return-to-tradition.html> (accessed March 15, 2010).

²Chris Armstrong, “The Future Lies in the Past,” *Christianity Today* (February 2008). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/february/22.22.html> (accessed March 13, 2010).

The same article featured the congregation of Trinity Fellowship Church in Richardson, Texas and introduces the church in this way:

An independent, nondenominational church of some 600 members, Trinity Fellowship is not the only evangelical congregation that is offering a weekly Eucharist, saying the Nicene or Apostles' creeds, reading the early Church Fathers, or doing other things that seem downright Roman Catholic or at least high Episcopalian. Daniel Wallace, a Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, which trains pastors for interdenominational or nondenominational churches, says there is a growing appetite for something more than "worship that is a glorified Bible class in some ways."

Carl Anderson, the senior pastor of Trinity Fellowship Church, is quoted in the article:

"Seven or eight years ago, there was a sense of disconnectedness and loneliness in our church life," he says. The entrepreneurial model adopted by so many evangelical churches, with its emphasis on seeker-friendly nontraditional services and programs, had been successful in helping Trinity build its congregation, Anderson explains. But it was less successful in holding on to church members and deepening their faith or their ties with fellow congregants. Searching for more rootedness, Anderson sought to reconnect with the historical church...Not surprisingly, that move was threatening to church members who strongly identify with the Reformation and the Protestant rejection of Catholic practices, including most liturgy. But Anderson and others tried to emphasize the power of liturgy to direct worship toward God and "not be all about me," he says. Anderson also stressed how liturgy "is about us—and not just this church but the connection with other Christians." Adopting the weekly Eucharist, saying the Nicene Creed every two or three weeks, following the church calendar, Trinity reshaped its worship practices in ways that drove some congregants away. But Anderson remains committed, arguing that traditional

practices will help evangelical churches grow beyond the dependence on “celebrity-status pastors.”

The Washington Post picked up on the return to ritual among Evangelicals in a March 8, 2008 story:³

Evangelicals observing Lent? Fasting and giving up chocolate and favorite pastimes like watching TV during the 40 days before Easter are practices many Evangelical Protestants have long rejected as too Catholic and unbiblical. But Lent – a time of inner cleansing and reflection upon Jesus Christ’s sufferings before his resurrection – is one of many ancient church practices being embraced by an increasing number of Evangelicals...This increasing connection with Christianity’s classical traditions goes beyond Lent. Some evangelical churches offer confession and weekly communion. They distribute ashes on Ash Wednesday and light Advent calendars at Christmastime...First Baptist Church of the City of Washington D.C. follows the liturgical calendar observed by Catholic churches. It lights candles at Advent, and observes Epiphany Sunday and the remainder of the traditional cycle of liturgical celebrations. “We find that following the seasons of the Christian year adds a lot of richness to our experience of worship,” said the Rev. James Somerville, the church’s pastor, adding: “We wouldn’t want the Catholics to get all the good stuff.”

Irving Bible Church, an independent Bible church in the Dallas area, now observes the liturgical calendar, follows the lectionary, and encourages congregants during the worship service to light candles to represent prayers or answers to prayers.⁴ I found posted at visualworshiper.com pictures of one of their Ash Wednesday services.⁵

³Jacqueline L. Salmon, “Feeling Renewed By Ancient Traditions,” *Washington Post* (March 8, 2008), B09.

⁴Several of the 2008 issues of *Chatter*, IBC’s monthly publication for its congregants, contain articles explaining its adoption of these practices and rituals.

⁵Camron Ware, <http://www.visualworshiper.com/gallery.html> (accessed March 15, 2010).

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

All of this is not entirely new. The reformers rejected much of the ritual and theology of the Roman Catholic Church. In the centuries following the Reformation there have been various movements to bring back liturgy in various denominations. For example, in the Anglican Church the role of ritual became a subject of great debate in the nineteenth century between High Church and Low Church movements. Some High Church arguments are that elements of Catholic ritual gives liturgical expression to a belief in the Real Presence and reinforces the centrality of the Eucharist in worship; enables worshipers to use all their senses in worship; and is the most effective form of worship for cultures that are highly visual. Some Low Church arguments are that ritualism encourages idolatry in that worshipers tend to focus their worship on ritual objects; downgrades the significance of preaching and biblical exposition; uses excessive elaborations in worship that cannot be justified on the basis of the descriptions of worship in the NT; and the concept of the Real Presence encourages an idolatrous attitude to the Eucharist.⁶ In 1976 a group of Evangelical leaders met to discuss ways in which the Evangelical tradition could adopt historic Christian rituals and practices. The group, led by Robert Webber and including Thomas Howard, Peter Gilquist, and others, issued a document called the Chicago Call in the spring of 1978, which appealed to Evangelicals to recover the theology and practices of the ancient church.

We believe that today Evangelicals are hindered from achieving full maturity by a reduction of the historic faith. There is, therefore, a pressing need to reflect upon the substance of the biblical and historic faith and to recover the fullness of this heritage.⁷

Christianity Today published the text in full, and the editorial page cautiously commended it. A movement began

⁶James Whisenant, *A Fragile Unity: Anti-Ritualism and the Division of Anglican Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003).

⁷"The Chicago Call," Wheaton College, <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/033.htm> (accessed March 15, 2010).

which some described as “the convergence of streams,” a coming together of the three major streams of Christianity, the Evangelical, the Charismatic, and the Liturgical-Sacramental.⁸ New denominations actually formed based on “the convergence of streams,” the Charismatic Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Episcopal Church, and others. The “journey” into historic Christianity did not stop for many. They continued on and found their way into the Roman Catholic Church,⁹ the Eastern Orthodox Church, or Anglicanism, while others are, as it is called, simply “swimming the Tiber” (the main watercourse of the city of Rome). Webber continued further work on convergence until his death in April 2007. Howard eventually converted to Roman Catholicism and Gilquist was ordained a priest in the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

In 2006 Webber and others issued *A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future*, which focused on issues in the emergent and postmodern discussions. Concerning the Church’s worship it says, “Therefore, we call Evangelicals to recover the historic substance of worship of Word and table and to attend to the Christian year, which marks time according to God’s saving acts.”¹⁰

Webber divided evangelicalism since 1950 into three phases, each dominated by a different paradigm: traditional (1950–1975), pragmatic (1975–2000), and younger (2000–).¹¹ Chris Armstrong in the February 2008 CT issue explained:

Traditionals focus on doctrine—or as Webber grumps, on “being right.” They pour their resources into Bible studies, Sunday school curricula,

⁸The Evangelical stream emphasized the authority, inspiration, and personal study of the Bible and called for a personal relationship with Jesus. The Charismatic stream stressed “life in the Spirit” and expressive forms of praise and worship. The Liturgical-Sacramental stream underscored the importance of ancient liturgies and weekly observance of the Eucharist.

⁹A recent example is Francis Beckwith, President of the Evangelical Theological Society until he resigned under pressure when he converted to Roman Catholicism in the spring of 2007.

¹⁰Robert E. Webber and Philip C. Kenyon, “A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future,” *Christianity Today* (September 2006). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/11.57.html?start=3> (accessed March 13, 2010).

¹¹Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002).

and apologetics materials. The *pragmatics* “do” church growth, spawning the culturally engaged (and hugely successful) seeker sensitive trend, with full-service megachurches and countless outreach programs. Currently, the *younger Evangelicals* seek a Christianity that is “embodied” and “authentic”—distinctively Christian...

For the younger Evangelicals (Webber’s tag refers to “emerging,” if not Emergent, evangelicalism), traditional churches are too centered on words and propositions. And pragmatic churches are compromising authentic Christianity by tailoring their ministries to the marketplace and pop culture. The younger Evangelicals seek a renewed encounter with a God beyond both doctrinal definitions and super-successful ministry programs.

So what to do? Easy, says this youth movement: Stop endlessly debating and advertising Christianity, and just embody it. Live it faithfully in community with others—especially others beyond the white suburban world of many megachurch ministries. Embrace symbols and sacraments. Dialogue with the “other two” historic confessions: Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Recognize that “the road to the church’s future is through its past.” And break out the candles and incense. Pray using the *lectio divina*. Tap all the riches of Christian tradition you can find.¹²

Leonard Sweet outlines the objectives of worship in the Emerging Community.¹³ The acrostic EPIC delineates that worship should be *experiential*, *participatory*, *image-driven*, and *communal*. Specifically, worship should go from rational to experiential, from representative to participatory, from Word-based to image-driven, from individual to communal. Sweet writes, “Postmoderns don’t want their information straight. They want it laced with experience.”¹⁴ Participatory means creative interaction that involves far more than a sermon and some songs. For example, stations with interac-

¹² Armstrong, “The Future Lies in the Past.”

¹³ Leonard Sweet, “A New Reformation: Re-Creating Worship for a Postmodern World,” in *Worship at the Next Level: Insight from Contemporary Voices*, eds. Tim A. Dearborn and Scott Coil (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

¹⁴ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 33.

tive elements may be established for participants to move to during a gathering for prayer, journaling, artistic expression, etc. The image-driven emphasis appears through art that might include murals, a variety of lighting and draperies, paintings, sacred images projected on screens. Community can be encouraged by decentralizing worship with many participating in their own way, emphasizing storytelling, stressing service and social transformation (worship can simply be participating together in a service project).

III. SOME PRACTICES AND RITUALS

Let's consider several commonly adopted practices and rituals from "historic Christianity" in many evangelical churches today.

A. ASH WEDNESDAY

When I was a student at Virginia Tech, I observed some students emerging from the campus chapel on a Wednesday afternoon in February with a grayish sign of the cross on their foreheads. They were Catholic students who had just observed a ritual that was part of Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday is a time of repentance that marks the beginning of Lent. Ashes were sometimes used in the Bible to express repentance. For example Job says to God in Job 42:6, "I repent in dust and ashes" (see also Num 19:9; Matt 11:21). The observance of Ash Wednesday and the accompanying rituals are not, however, found in the Bible. The first datable liturgy for sprinkling ashes is found in the Romano-Germanic pontifical of 960.¹⁵ At the beginning of the 11th century, Abbot Aelfric notes that the faithful took part in a ceremony on the Wednesday before Lent that included the imposition of ashes. At the end of that century, Pope Urban II called for the general use of ashes on that day which would later come to be called Ash Wednesday.

¹⁵Lawrence E. Mick, "Ash Wednesday: Our Shifting Understanding of Lent," *Catholic Update*, (February 2004). <http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0204.asp> (accessed March 16, 2010).

Ashes prepared by burning palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday celebrations are mixed with water or olive oil to form a paste. A priest, minister, or officiating layperson uses this paste to make the sign of the cross on the foreheads of each participant at an Ash Wednesday service. The priest or minister says, while applying the ashes, "Remember, O man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return."

Roman Catholics observe Ash Wednesday with fasting, abstinence from meat, and the confession of sins. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer designates Ash Wednesday as a day of fasting. Many Protestant denominations such as Lutherans and Methodists observe Ash Wednesday with a service that focuses on repentance.

B. LENT

Lent is a forty day time of prayer and preparation before Easter. The number forty is connected with several biblical events such as the forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai with God (Exod 24:18), Elijah spent walking to Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8), Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1-2).

The season of Lent began in the fourth century as a time of preparation for Christian converts who were to be baptized on Easter eve. The whole Christian community soon was called to observe the Lenten fasts, penitential prayers, practices of self-renunciation, etc., in solidarity with the catechumens and for their own spiritual benefit. Today, many churches that observe Lent focus on it as a time of prayer, penance, repentance, and focus on the need for God's grace that culminates in the celebration of Easter. Some participants abstain from a normal part of their daily routine during Lent to remind themselves of the sacrifice of Christ. It might involve refraining from eating certain favorite foods or from entertainment or, though not abstaining, engaging in service to the less fortunate.

There are several holy days within the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. The Sixth Lenten Sunday, Palm Sunday, marks the beginning of Holy Week. Thursday

is known as Maundy Thursday which commemorates the Last Supper. Good Friday follows to remember Jesus' crucifixion and burial.

There is no command or inference in the Bible that institutes the observance of Lent. There are some things taught in the NT that discourages presenting such an observance as normative Christian practice. There are no "Christian Holy Days" (Gal 4:8-10; Col 2:16-17). The "Lord's Day" is the only special day—but there are no prescribed fasts (Rev 1:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 6:1-2). We are to be careful of following the traditions of men—human additives to the worship of God in spirit and truth (Matt 15:1-9). Lent is a human tradition without biblical sanction.

C. THE CHURCH YEAR

Following earlier Jewish tradition, some in the historic church have used the seasons as an opportunity for festivals and holy days, "sacred times" to worship God. While Jewish celebration focused around the Exodus from Egypt, the Church year focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus.

The "Christian calendar" is organized around two centers of "sacred time": Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany; and Lent, Holy Week, and Easter, concluding at Pentecost. The rest of the year following Pentecost is known as Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time is used to focus on various aspects of the Christian faith including its mission to the world.

D. THE LECTIONARY

The Lectionary Scriptures are read in a liturgical service. These consist of an OT reading, a reading from the Psalms, an Epistle reading, and a Gospel reading in a three year cycle. It is a structured way to cover the range of biblical revelation on a regular basis. The sermon corresponds in some way to the biblical readings of the day. Some maintain that the reading of the same Scriptures by churches around the world reflects the unity of the church and facilitates a move out of sectarianism to be part of the larger Church.

E. THE EUCHARIST

The word Eucharist conveys the meaning of thanksgiving and grace. Many in the liturgical movement consider the liturgy of the Eucharist to carry the participants into the mysterious presence of Christ with a fresh experience of grace. The Eucharist becomes a means of grace. In a real sense the worshiper receives God's grace by partaking of the elements. It goes beyond being simply a memorial of Jesus accompanied with confession, reflection, and recommitment. It becomes a spiritual encounter that is important for spiritual vitality.¹⁶

F. CANDLES, ICONS, AND PRAYER STATIONS

The liturgical movement and the emergent church want worship to be more than preaching and music. The service of worship should involve all the senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing; and embrace mystery. Kimball describes a few of the forms of the new style of worship:

...incense and candles to promote a spiritual feeling, crosses scattered liberally around the room, prayer stations and art stations for a creative outlet during the service, pictures of Jesus to keep things Christ-focused, tapestries to add a tabernacle feel to the room, ancient art work projected onto the wall to help set the mood.¹⁷

IV. WHAT'S THE APPEAL?

Why are so many Evangelicals attracted to liturgy?

A. SOME ASSERT THAT IT IS A WAY OF MAKING GOD TANGIBLE

Mark Galli explains in a *Christianity Today* article what attracted him to liturgical worship as an Evangelical. He quotes Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who, before he became

¹⁶ See the chart of the five views of the Eucharist on this website: <http://christianityinview.com/eucharist.html> (accessed March 18, 2010).

¹⁷ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

Pope, wrote “The grandeur of the liturgy does not rest upon the fact that it offers an interesting entertainment, but in rendering tangible the Totally Other...” Galli then asks, “How exactly does God render himself tangible in the liturgy?” He answers,

Certainly in the Eucharist itself, in which he makes himself known in the breaking of the bread... Less obviously, God makes himself known through the words and drama of the liturgy.¹⁸

He concludes concerning the Western liturgy followed for centuries:

Why this liturgy? Why this form? Because not only its content but also its shape have ushered people into a transcendent culture where they meet the Trinitarian God and take their first baby steps in his kingdom.¹⁹

B. SOME ASSERT THAT IT IS A WAY OF ENCOUNTERING THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST

Many believers today seek a direct experience of Christ. Through contemplative prayer they seek to encounter the real presence of Christ within themselves. Through a liturgical sign they seek to encounter the real presence of Christ in a physical context. The Bible does not present liturgy or contemplative practices as a means of experiencing a mystical presence of Christ.

V. WHY NOT ADOPT ANCIENT LITURGICAL PRACTICES?

What are some reasons for not returning to the rituals of “historic Christianity”?

¹⁸Mark Galli, “A Deeper Relevance,” *Christianity Today*, (May 2008). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/may/36.38.html> (accessed March 18, 2010).

¹⁹Ibid.

A. MOST LITURGICAL PRACTICES ARE NOT DERIVED FROM APOSTOLIC TEACHING

The return to liturgy from the “historical church” may be inconsistent with an adherence to the sufficiency of the Bible for the beliefs and practices of the church. Many such practices are not derived from the NT but from later church history. T. A. McMahon aptly comments, “The Ancient-Future search to discover gems from “Classic Christianity” comes up short by a century – the century in which the NT was written.”²⁰

The return to ritual signals a return to man-made traditions. The warnings of Paul in Galatians and Colossians concerning “the basic principles of this world” (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*) may apply (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 16-23). In summarizing his study of this Pauline phrase, Andrew J. Bandstra asks “What are these *stoicheia tou kosmou* from whose slavery the church has been redeemed but which continue to threaten the freedom of the church?”²¹ He believes from his research that they are the principles of law and flesh operating outside of Christ. He concludes:

The contexts in both Galatians and Colossians indicate that when the law functions in the context of the flesh then religious regulations arise that seem to offer redemption but which really bring religious bondage. In Galatians it appears to be kinds of regulations that are thought to give us right standing before God. In Colossians the law and the flesh combine to bring forth regulations that are thought to promise a kind of mystic experience in participating with the angels in their worship of God. In both cases, the *stoicheia tou kosmou* become a kind of “enslaving power” that is “not according to Christ.” It brings religious bondage.²²

From his study of the phrase in Galatians and Colossians, Gary DeLashmutt sees an application to the danger of ritu-

²⁰T. A. McMahon, “Ancient-Future Heresies,” *The Berean Call* (February 28, 2008). <http://www.thebereancall.org/node/6535> (accessed March 18, 2010).

²¹Andrew J. Bandstra, “Rescued from the Basic Principles of This World,” *Theological Forum* (March 1994). <http://www.recweb.org/TF-Mar94-bandstra.html> (accessed March 18, 2010).

²²Ibid.

alism. He defines ritualism “in the sense of making ritual observance a primary focus of the Christian life and means of its expression.”²³ A return to OT type rituals as a means of salvation or spiritual growth is inappropriate for the Christian because those rituals merely foreshadowed the substance or reality which believers now enjoy in the person and work of Christ. A return to ritual does not result in spiritual growth but rather spiritual regression. DeLashmutt concludes, “While New Testament rituals remain a legitimate aspect of Christianity, ritualism as the means of relating to God has been ‘outgrown’ and rejected.”²⁴

B. A LIFE OF FAITH DOES NOT REQUIRE TANGIBLE VISIBILITY

Bob DeWaay sees an analogous situation to the believers addressed in the book of Hebrews who were considering going back to temple Judaism:

The key problem for them was the tangibility of the temple system, and the invisibility of the Christian faith. Just about everything that was offered to them by Christianity was invisible: the High Priest in Heaven, the once for all shed blood, and the throne of grace...All of these are invisible.

But the life of faith does not require tangible visibility: “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (Hebrew 11:1). The Roman Catholic Church has tangibility that is unmatched by the evangelical faith, just as temple Judaism had. Why have faith in the once-for-all shed blood of Christ that is unseen when you can have *real* blood (that of the animals for temple Judaism and the Eucharistic Christ of Catholicism)? Why have the scriptures of the Biblical apostles and prophets who are now in heaven when you can have a real live apostle and his teaching Magisterium who can continue to speak for God? The similarities to the situation described in Hebrews are striking. Why have only the Scriptures...when

²³ Gary DeLashmutt, “Paul’s Use of ‘*Ta Stoicheia Tou Kosmou*’”, Xenos Christian Fellowship <http://www.xenos.org/ministries/crossroads/OnlineJournal/issue5/tastoch.htm> (accessed March 18, 2010).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

the Roman church has everything from icons to relics to cathedrals to holy water and so many other tangible religious articles and experiences?

I urge my fellow Evangelicals to seriously consider the consequences of rejecting sola scriptura as the formal principle of our theology. If my Hebrews analogy is correct, such a rejection is tantamount to apostasy.²⁵

C. A LIFE OF FAITH DOES NOT SEEK TO INDUCE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

The new liturgical movement and emergent worship emphasize mysticism and ritualism. Contemplative prayer practices and ritual are used as means of encountering and experiencing a real presence of God within and without. This opens the way for counterfeit spiritual experiences and is contrary to a walk of faith.

VI. CONCLUSION

Two questions to ask of any church practice are:

1. Does the Bible teach the practice as normative for the church?
2. Does the practice conflict with any doctrine or principle taught in the NT?

The church is only bound to observe that which Christ and the apostles commanded as normative. A church can, within the parameters of normative biblical commands and principles, add meaningful cultural elements to its services. But these elements are not to be viewed as a means of receiving grace and experiencing God.

Some liturgical practices fall under the category of doubtful things, but there is nothing inherently evil about them. Believers and churches may choose to include them in a service. But it may not be wise to structure the spiritual life of a

²⁵ Bob DeWaay, "Why Evangelicals Are Returning to Rome," *Critical Issues Commentary* (2008). <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue105.htm> (accessed March 20, 2010).

church around a liturgical calendar and experiences that are not grounded in the Bible.

There is great desire today in the Evangelical community for a multi-sensory spiritual experience and a mystical encounter with God. But we are to live by faith and not by sight in this age. We are to focus on our mission, not on rituals. Our primary mission is to share the saving message and make disciples. Free Grace churches should continue to ground worship in the Word and to focus on the mission of evangelism and discipleship.

**A REVIEW OF PETER M. PHILLIPS'S
*THE PROLOGUE OF
THE FOURTH GOSPEL*¹**

BOB SWIFT²

Flower Mound, TX

This is a book that Free Grace readers should take a look at for more than one reason. First, and just as the title states, it contains an interpretation of crucial subject matter – the first eighteen verses of John's Gospel known as the Prologue. If truly a "threshold" through which Phillips draws readers from divergent backgrounds into the world of the "Johannine community" (p. 2), it will orient his readership to the point of view he wishes them to come to and to remain with. It provides interpretive direction for the narratives and the discourses which speak of eternal life more frequently and clearly than any other book in the Bible. Second, Phillips employs a reading strategy which he terms "sequential disclosure" (p. xi). Rarely does there come a "reading strategy" out of academia that is equally useful to both pastors and scholars. "Sequential disclosure" could be such a methodology. But more on this below.

The book is essentially Phillips' doctoral thesis from Sheffield. It is well organized in seven chapters, clearly written, and interacts with what seems to be the whole spectrum of relevant literature, be it ancient or modern. Bibliography is extensive, footnotes numerous and appropriate to the subjects under discussion. The preface, introduction (chapter one), and chapter two define the methodology and interact with the literary theorists (Wolfgang Iser, Catherine Emmot, Umberto Eco) upon whose ideas the methodology draws most heavily.

¹Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the John's Gospel: A Sequential Reading*, (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 258 pp., hardcover.

²Editor's note: Bob was a hospice chaplain until being laid off earlier this year. He is currently seeking another ministry position.

Chapter three elucidates the role of “rhetoric” (i.e., the artful use of persuasion) in the Prologue of John’s Gospel with special attention given to repetition and irony. Phillips views these as the two key rhetorical devices employed by John to engage and then educate the reader into acceptance of his presentation of the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, John’s purpose in writing is evangelistic above all else (preface, p.xii, p.156, et al.). “Mission is an integral focus of this Gospel.” (p. 226, with references on this same page to the different communities associated with this Mission). Repetition serves to give the Prologue its movement of thought structured in a “spiral” or “concentric” pattern (pp 47-51). Irony serves as the technique through which the author initiates the reader into his perspectival realm. When irony has completed its work, the reader will share the “lofty perch” of the author. That is, the proper viewpoint from which to understand the development of the characters and the progress of events in the story to follow (pp. 51-55). The forthcoming story will teach him to side with a *logos-theos-zoe-phos* (Word-God-Life-Light) “matrix” of concepts while discouraging him from remaining under the influence of darkness, ignorance, and death.

The fourth chapter is devoted to “sociolinguistics.” That is, the role of language as it interacts between author, audience, and the various “ingroups” and “outgroups” of a society. Ultimately, the readers are invited to join the Johannine “ingroup” and experience the above matrix of benefits. Detailed analysis of “sociolinguistics” is beyond the scope of this brief review, but any reader will certainly note the centrality of these concepts to Phillips’ methodology. With the conclusion of chapter four, most, if not all, of the concepts and terminology of “sequential disclosure” are defined and defended.

The next two chapters of the book are the application of this “reading strategy” to the interpretation of the Prologue. Chapter five explores the “intertextuality”³ of the key lexeme⁴

³Relating to or deriving meaning from the interdependent ways in which texts stand in relation to each other. Thefreedictionary.com, s.v. “intertextuality,” <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/intertextuality> (accessed March 28, 2010).

⁴The fundamental unit of the lexicon of a language. Thefreedictionary.com, s.v. “lexeme,” <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/lexeme> (accessed March 28, 2010).

logos. Phillips provides a fresh, in depth, and detailed look at the usage of this term in both the Biblical and extra-biblical sources. His conclusions are surprising, and in my view, almost certainly correct. Phillips' conclusion (pp. 138-41) concisely summarizes his view. His final paragraph of the chapter (pp. 140-41) states:

After the Prologue, the Logos disappears because the historic individual known as Jesus has replaced the concept. The concept is no longer important – it has done its work and so the author discards it. However, it seems to have done its job too well. Now, whenever scholars look back and find the lexeme in a text, they immediately begin to focus on hypostatic beings rather than concepts. There seems little evidence that this focus pre-dates John. Like tailors fashioning the Emperor's New Clothes, scholars have dreamt up so many different sources for logos, so many different possibilities clamouring to be *the* answer to the logos problem. In fact, just like Heraclitus, the gospel has no logos-doctrine. The Gospel only has Christology. The use of the lexeme is just a way of getting as many readers as possible into the story, a path towards understanding that the focus is on Jesus not actually on logos at all.

Chapter six is a verse by verse, phrase by phrase interpretation of the entire Prologue using his reading strategy of “sequential disclosure”, to which (before some highlights from chapter six), I turn next. In his preface (p. xi) Phillips says:

Basically ‘sequential disclosure’ is about allowing the text to speak for itself - exploring the ambiguities, the gaps, the unresolved issues relating to the reading process, allowing these features to have their full effect upon the reader without bringing in a host of other information to short-circuit the subsequent lack of clarity.

In his conclusion (p. 227) he says:

The importance of sequential reading, though, is not the unearthing of (real) readers, but the engagement with the text at its own level, allowing

the text to unfold its rhetorical strategy and to see it in action.

To “allow the text to speak for itself” requires, says Phillips, a linear, sequential, reading strategy. That is, the text is interpreted as it is encountered, word by word, phrase by phrase, clause by clause, sentence by sentence. And, at times, ambiguity may be as essential to an author’s purpose as is clarity. It keeps the reader from drawing firm conclusions until the writer wishes him to do so. “Ambiguation” may serve to suspend the reader’s ability or willingness to conclude a matter. With the reader thus suspended, the writer may ironically “destabilize” any or all previous conclusions or assumptions that the reader brought to the text. As these “gaps” in a reader’s comprehension arise, they should be allowed to persist, per Phillips, until the author supplies subsequent clarity, “disambiguation.”

When this happens, the reader finds his original understanding about a term or a “lexeme” to be “resemanticized.”⁵ Its signification in the context either expanded or contracted to the author’s now unambiguous viewpoint. The reader, of course, may reject this viewpoint, or he may accept the new understanding, the “antilanguage” of the Johannine community, and join the community of those who share this understanding of Jesus Christ. This is precisely what Phillips demonstrates in his fifth chapter treatment of *logos*. It is an attempt at the outset of the Gospel to provide an opening to converge with other traditions and bring them into the Johannine fold by the deliberate use of a multivalent term, *logos*, the true authorial meaning of which is not revealed until vv 17-18. There is no “*logos* being”, there is only the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ.

...there seems to be an attempt, at least in the Prologue, to offer an opening to other traditions, to other readers. In other words, a superficial veneer has been laid over a deeply Jewish foundation. ...

⁵ Editor’s note: Phillips has used a variation of the word *semantics* as a way of explanation. Though not a commonly recognized word, “resemanticized” has become more and more popular in scholarly circles to refer to moving a reader away from traditionally accepted ways of understanding words.

an author whose work naturally shows a deep understanding and perception of the Jewish scriptural traditions, ...has apparently made a decision to ambiguate his text and to converge with those who do not share that heritage. Rather than assume that readers have had a basic course in Johannine theology, or even in Hebrew Bible or Septuagint Studies, the author makes his text accessible to a wider audience. He lowers the threshold, widens participation, throws wide the gates (p. 225, and similarly, p. 224, first paragraph):

Any reader, whatever his background (traditional Judaism, Rabbinical Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism, Greek philosophical, Stoic, pagan, or even Christian), will by vv 17-18 have a new idea of what the Gospel author means by *logos*. John has re-educated them within the brief span of his Prologue by "resemanticizing" this multivalent, polysemic⁶ lexeme. Once his readers have converged upon this understanding, John discards the term and never again uses it in this sense. Note also Phillips' concluding remarks, p. 224, (first paragraph).

Finally, before leaving this extended discussion of the nature of "sequential disclosure" as a "reading strategy", I should note one of Phillips' most strident points: The danger of metatextual⁷/paragrammatic⁸ incursions into the domain of sequential disclosure. His own words say it best (pp. 27-28).

In a field of study dominated by critical readings, it is important to remember that texts are experienced sequentially. Most commentaries seem to deal with texts sequentially, since they work through the texts verse-by-verse, sometimes even word-by-word. However, even though they follow the sequence of the text, commentators constantly introduce interpretative elements from the rest of the text or

⁶ Having more than one meaning; having multiple meanings; also called polysemous. Thefreedictionary.com, s.v. "polysemic," <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/polysemic> (accessed March 28, 2010).

⁷ Of or pertaining to a form of intertextual discourse in which one text makes critical commentary on another. Wiktionary.com s.v. "metatextual," <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/metatextuality> (accessed March 28, 2010).

⁸ From "*para*," meaning beyond; incorrect; abnormal and "grammatic," meaning conforming to the rules of grammar, Thefreedictionary.com, s.v. "*para*" and "grammatic," <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/para> and <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/grammatic> (accessed March 28, 2010).

from other associated texts or from other general sources. This process of metatextual gap-filling disables sequential disclosure in much the same way that authors can disrupt the flow of discourse-time. In other words, just as an author can introduce a flash-back or flash-forward into a text, or can pause the action by moving into descriptive mode, so the sequential flow of the reading process can also be influenced by the introduction of material that has not yet been provided for the reader by the author. This process short-circuits or bypasses the affective quality of the narrative by filling in gaps inappropriately. In other words, the metatextual process disambiguates the text prematurely and so removes the power of any rhetorical or stylistic effect that the text is meant to achieve. Indeed, by revealing information too soon, or by providing information from another source, metatextuality can completely change the affective quality of the text by creating what is, in effect, a new text. ...

Metatextuality inhibits the process of reading a text *per se*. By approaching a text 'from above', paragrammatically, critics can too easily move from analysing the effects of *a text on a reader* to analysing the effects of Biblical Literature in general upon readers in general, a move from sequential reading of a narrative to a paragrammatic reading of Biblical Literature.

This thesis seeks to look at the effect of the Prologue upon its reader and so attempts to reverse the tendency to provide metatextual readings by focusing on the effect of sequential disclosure. Such a reading is important because it unmask the primary nature of this text as a narrative unveiling its information gradually or sequentially. This act of revelation provides a rhetorical effect upon its reader and it is this effect which we are aiming to explore. Sequential disclosure, to adapt Staley's terminology, reveals the affective quality of the text.

The above is just as relevant to the preacher and Bible teacher as it is to the scholar. To stay within the bounds of what the biblical writer gives is sound methodological advice. Do not be over anxious to supply from a theological, philosophical, literary, or any other methodological grid what the

writer has not yet given permission to supply. To do so is to rewrite, not to interpret, a text. And, most of the time, we do not even realize we are rewriting rather than exegeting or expounding. In fact, if “sequential disclosure” is valid, the author may be in the very process of deconstructing (or at least suspending) any or all of the reader’s existing “grids.” He does this with unresolved ambiguities introduced and maintained until the author himself supplies the needed clarity in subsequent text. At that point and not before, reader and writer share a new “grid”, now common to both writer and audience. This new understanding has gradually arisen out of the convergence of the reader’s original ideas with the new insights sequentially given by the author. To prematurely introduce material outside of this process “short-circuits” the writer’s strategy of ambiguation, followed by disambiguation, followed by resemanticization of terms with the now uniquely Johannine content. In my view this is a very valuable insight which safeguards exegesis against a subtle form of eisegesis—the surreptitious importation of outside-of-the-context ideas because we have been unwilling to wait for the author to supply final, definitive clarity.

And so having captured the essentials of “sequential disclosure”, it remains to examine Phillips’ application of this “reading strategy” to the interpretation of the Prologue. This is the subject of his sixth chapter.

He begins chapter six with a disclaimer:

...this is a partial exegesis in that it fails to deal comprehensively with issues of text, source, form, redaction, structuralism, deconstruction, and so on.

His treatment, however, is much more thorough than most, if not all, commentaries (recent or otherwise), devoting 86 pages to the exegesis of these eighteen verses. All of the traditional “crux” passages are dealt with, most in depth and with careful attention given to letting the text “speak for itself” sequentially, often pointing out the errors of commentators, journals, monograph writers, and even the lexica who slip prematurely into the metatextual/paragrammatic trap.

Hence, the burning question—how consistent is Phillips’ exegesis with his thesis? Does he provide a cogent example

of the “sequential disclosure” reading strategy and does it unfold accurately the meaning of John’s Prologue? In my opinion, he substantially succeeds. The Prologue begins with a multivalent, polysemic lexeme, *logos*, a cosmic but *conceptual* assertion of what has always been from the beginning. It then moves from the conceptual to the *personal* as the author associates *logos*, *theos*, *zōe*, *phōs* in a “matrix” of ideas that he distills climactically into a single persona—Jesus Christ the unique Son of God. He is God incarnate, gracious and truthful revelator of His Father’s full glory. Look for this Person to be made manifest in the story to come.

His treatment of v 1 (pp. 143-55) is a good example of “sequential disclosure” in action. In the exposition of the key lexemes *logos*, *archē* (the beginning), and *theos* the viability of this “reading strategy” shines. Even where most Free Grace readers might disagree with his conclusions, they will probably appreciate at least the full discussions and honest attempts to tackle the exegetical problems the text presents. Two brief examples will suffice.

Following many modern textual critics, Phillips punctuates 1:3c with a full stop after *oude hen*. He thus joins *ho gegonen* with the first clause of v 4, reading *ho gegonen en autō zoē en* (was in Him life). While well aware of the interpretative difficulties (or absurdities?) this option continues to generate, he feels that an objective look at the evidence calls for this conclusion. Recent critical editions of the Greek text and many “modern” translations also concur. As with this particular “crux,” Phillips’s handling of the many other difficulties in the Prologue provides at the very least a good encyclopedic summary of the latest lexical, critical, and exegetical thinking on the point under discussion. As such, they are usually worth consulting before teaching or preaching.

An example of where he seems inconsistent with his own methodology is seen in his handling of the nature of faith in John. To Free Grace readers this will not be a minor point. In fact, Phillips actually becomes a textbook example of the “metatextual /paragrammatic” method he otherwise condemns. In discussing v 7 (pp. 177-78) he doesn’t even mention *pisteusōsin* other than to loosely characterize it as

“belief focused upon the witness [of John the Baptist] about the light.” He does no better in v 12 (p. 193) where he should make a definitive statement. There is simply no lexical, exegetical, or contextual examination of *pisteuō*. Without this he dogmatically, and without offering any evidence states, “... through *continuous belief* (italics mine)” one gains authority to be a child of God. He repeats the same uncritical assertion in connection with v 13, “Having expressed that those who *continue to believe* (italics mine) in the name of the Lord *will be given* (italics mine) authority to become children of God”, and (p. 194) “Entry into a kinship relationship with God is by *persistent belief* (italics mine) in the Logos.” Never mind that this violates the aorist of *edōken* in v 12 as well as the image of birth as an event (not a process!) clearly pictured in v 13. While this error is an egregious one, fortunately such dogmatism is rare elsewhere in this work.

One final point before concluding. Competent scholarly works have a way of unsettling long-settled opinions. In regard to a well known difficulty in v 16, Phillips offers one to try on for size. Many modern commentators view the preposition *anti* as indicating the general idea of accumulation and translate the phrase “*charin anti charitos*” something like “grace upon grace.” Phillips follows evidence put forth by Ruth Edwards in a 1988 *JSNT* article⁹ and concludes that this usage is unsupportable and is never found in the Greek language. Edwards carefully examines the only two or three claimed occurrences of this usage and finds them invalid. I must say I have been persuaded that Edwards’s objections are valid and that some other force must be given to the preposition in this context. Phillips opts for “an exchange relation” and seeks to interpret the phrase in relation to the contrast with the Mosaic Law in v 17. While not agreeing entirely with Phillips or Edwards in just how to translate the phrase, I have been persuaded that the above majority view of *anti* needs rethinking in context.

⁹Ruth Edwards, “Charin Anti Charitos (John 1:16) Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988), pp. 3-15.

As stated, I recommend this book to Free Grace readers for two primary reasons: There is a good, in-depth treatment of John's Prologue. It is worth consulting before you preach or teach this material. Second, "sequential disclosure" is a methodology from which much can be gained. Is it an item you'll want to purchase? The price tag (about \$142.00 new from T&T Clark) may discourage purchase; but even if you read a library copy, it is well worth the effort. I found a damaged copy for \$65 and snapped it up. I've not regretted it.

THE EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE OF THE EMERGING CHURCH

ROBERT VACENDA

*Senior Pastor,
Ridge Pointe Fellowship, Dallas, TX*

I. INTRODUCTION

Describing the Emerging Church (designated as EC hereafter) is difficult.¹ This is due to the fact that the EC movement is a somewhat recent phenomenon (most say it began in the 1990s) and is fairly diverse in most theological categories. In 2007, the Myers Professor of Ministry at Northern Seminary, Robert Webber, said that we must: “keep in mind that the emerging church is too young to have produced a full-orbed theology.”² While this may be true, there are enough books in print to at least get an idea of what EC writers believe about what a person must do to be born again.

II. THE EMERGING CHURCH DEFINED

Before listing any specific definitions, it would be wise to say a few words about a subset of the EC that is called “emergent” or the “emergent village.” This is the more theologically liberal group in the movement and would include pastors and authors like Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt.³

Based on research done in the US and UK, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger assert:

¹ Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 17.

² Robert Webber, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 195.

³ “...the emergent church is part of the Emerging Church Movement but does not embrace the dominant ideology of the movement. Rather, the emergent church is the latest version of liberalism. The only difference is that the old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates post-modernity” (Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2006), 21.

Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.⁴

Ed Stetzer, research team director and missiologist at the North American Mission Board, recognizing the diversity of the movement, sees three distinct groups with differing characteristics. First, the “Relevants” are:

...often deeply committed to biblical preaching, male pastoral leadership and other values common in conservative evangelical churches. They are simply trying to explain the message of Christ in a way their generation can understand.⁵

The next group, the “Reconstructionists:”

...think that the current form of church is frequently irrelevant and the structure is unhelpful. Yet, they typically hold to a more orthodox view of the Gospel and Scripture. Therefore, we see an increase in models of church that reject certain organizational models, embracing what are often called “incarnational” or “house” models. They are responding to the fact that after decades of trying fresh ideas in innovative churches, North America is less churchied, and those that are churchied are less committed.⁶

Finally, the “Revisionists” are:

...questioning (and in some cases denying) issues like the nature of the substitutionary atonement, the reality of hell, the complementarian nature of gender, and the nature of the Gospel itself. This

⁴ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 44.

⁵ Ed Stetzer, “First-Person: Understanding the Emerging Church,” January 6, 2006, Baptist Press News Website, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=22406> (accessed March 16, 2010).

⁶ *Ibid.*

is not new—some mainline theologians quietly abandoned these doctrines a generation ago. The revisionist emerging church leaders should be treated, appreciated and read as we read mainline theologians—they often have good descriptions, but their prescriptions fail to take into account the full teaching of the Word of God.⁷

Scot McKnight, professor of religious studies at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL, wrote an article for *Christianity Today* in 2007 and said that he sees five “streams” that flow through emerging churches. The first he calls “prophetic rhetoric”:

One of the streams flowing into the emerging lake is prophetic rhetoric. The emerging movement is consciously and deliberately provocative.

In a similar way, none in the emerging crowd is more rhetorically effective than Brian McLaren in *Generous Orthodoxy*: “Often I don’t think Jesus would be caught dead as a Christian, were he physically here today...Generally, I don’t think Christians would like Jesus if he showed up today as he did 2,000 years ago. In fact, I think we’d call him a heretic and plot to kill him, too.”⁸

McKnight then goes on to define the second stream, those who “minister *as* postmoderns”:

Living as a Christian in a postmodern context means different things to different people. Some—to borrow categories I first heard from Doug Pagitt, pastor at Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis—will minister *to* postmoderns, others *with* postmoderns, and still others *as* postmoderns.

The vast majority of emerging Christians and churches fit these first two categories. They don’t deny truth, they don’t deny that Jesus Christ is truth, and they don’t deny the Bible is truth. ...some have chosen to minister *as* postmoderns. That is, they embrace the idea that we cannot know absolute truth, or, at least, that we cannot know truth

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” February 2007, *Christianity Today*, found at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>.

absolutely. They speak of the end of metanarratives and the importance of social location in shaping one's view of truth. They frequently express nervousness about propositional truth.⁹

McKnight calls the third stream *praxis-oriented*, and there are three emphases within this stream:

At its core, the emerging movement is an attempt to fashion a new ecclesiology (doctrine of the church). Its distinctive emphases can be seen in its worship, its concern with orthopraxy, and its missional orientation.

I've heard folks describe the emerging movement as "funky worship" or "candles and incense" or "smells and bells." It's true; many in the emerging movement are creative, experiential, and sensory in their worship gatherings.

They ask these sorts of questions: Is the sermon the most important thing on Sunday morning? If we sat in a circle would we foster a different theology and praxis? If we lit incense, would we practice our prayers differently? If we put the preacher on the same level as the congregation, would we create a clearer sense of the priesthood of all believers? If we acted out what we believe, would we encounter more emphatically the Incarnation?

A notable emphasis of the emerging movement is orthopraxy, that is, right living. The contention is that *how a person lives* is more important than *what he or she believes*.

In addition, every judgment scene in the Bible is portrayed as a judgment based on works; no judgment scene looks like a theological articulation test.

The foremost concern of the praxis stream is being *missional*. This holistic emphasis finds perfect expression in the ministry of Jesus, who went about doing good to bodies, spirits, families, and societies. He picked the marginalized up from the floor and put them back in their seats at the table; he attracted harlots and tax collectors; he made the lame walk and opened the ears of the deaf. He cared, in other words, not just about lost souls, but also about whole persons and whole societies.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

McKnight calls the fourth stream “post-evangelical”:

A fourth stream flowing into the emerging lake is characterized by the term *post-evangelical*. The emerging movement is a protest against much of evangelicalism as currently practiced.

The emerging movement tends to be suspicious of systematic theology. Why? Not because we don't read systematics, but because the diversity of theologies alarms us, no genuine consensus has been achieved, God didn't reveal a systematic theology but a storied narrative, and no language is capable of capturing the Absolute Truth who alone is God.

An admittedly controversial element of post-evangelicalism is that many in the emerging movement are skeptical about the “in versus out” mentality of much of evangelicalism. Even if one is an exclusivist (believing that there is a dividing line between Christians and non-Christians), the issue of who is in and who is out pains the emerging generation.

They say what really matters is orthopraxy and that it doesn't matter which religion one belongs to, as long as one loves God and one's neighbor as one's self. Some even accept Spencer Burke's unbiblical contention in *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity* (Jossey-Bass, 2006) that all are born “in” and only some “opt out.”¹¹

McKnight describes the last stream as follows:

A final stream flowing into the emerging lake is politics. Tony Jones is regularly told that the emerging movement is a latte-drinking, backpack-lugging, Birkenstock-wearing group of 21st-century, left-wing, hippie wannabes. Put directly, they are Democrats. And that spells “post” for conservative-evangelical-politics-as-usual.¹²

McKnight concludes his article on the five streams of the EC by saying:

I see the emerging movement much like the Jesus and charismatic movements of the 1960s, which

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

undoubtedly have found a place in the quilt called evangelicalism.¹³

In probably the most intricately researched and yet user-friendly book written about the EC, entitled *Why We're Not Emergent*,¹⁴ Kevin DeYoung shares a list constructed by David Tomlinson on the shifts that have occurred between the modern and post-modern church:

from propositional expressions of faith to relational stories about faith journeys; from the authority of Scripture alone to a harmony between the authority of Scripture and other personal ways God mysteriously and graciously speaks to Christians; from a theology that prepares people for death and the afterlife to a theology of life; from a personal, individualistic, private faith to harmony between personal and community faith; from the church being a place where people take up space to the church as a mission outpost that sends people out; from arguing faith to the “dance of faith”; from salvation by event to a journey of salvation; from motivating through fear to motivating through compassion, community, and hope; and from a search for dogmatic truth to a search for spiritual experience.¹⁵

As you can see, defining the EC is somewhat complicated, but not impossible. Being a relatively young movement, emergent can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. However, there is enough information in circulation to get a general idea of the characteristics of this movement—a movement that in many quarters steers clear of contending “earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Quoting DeYoung:

It would be unfair to say that every emergent leader has thrown doctrine out the window. But I think it is fair to say that even for those who affirm core doctrinal beliefs, and that does not include everyone in the movement, orthodoxy as a set of immovable

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent*, 150.

¹⁵ David Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 42-43.

theological assertions is largely downplayed, if not completely rejected.¹⁶

III. THE EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE OF THE EMERGING CHURCH

The EC's answer to the question "What must I do to be saved?" is difficult to answer in a few words because the movement is so diverse and their answers to that question run the gamut. But one thing is for sure, Jesus' command that "You must be born again" (John 3:8) is practically non-existent in EC literature. Now I am not saying that every emerging pastor denies that a person must be born again, but it is unmistakable that a clear proclamation of the message of life and the assurance of salvation is not a priority for many in this movement.

A. GOD'S GRACE NOT SPOKEN OF MUCH IN EMERGENT LITERATURE

When one reads EC literature, he learns a lot about the call to live like Christ, but not much about the "wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all our sin." DeYoung says:

Now, I'm sure that many in the emergent church would also talk about grace, but I don't read much about grace in their books...I despair when I hear Pagitt say, 'The good news is not informational... Instead we have an invitation into a way of life—life we constantly realize is not ours alone.' If the good news is an invitation to a Jesus way of life and not information about somebody who accomplished something on my behalf, I'm sunk. This is law and not gospel.¹⁷

In a book referenced earlier, *Burke's Guide to Eternity*, mankind is already a recipient of God's grace, and faith in Christ is unimportant:

¹⁶ DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent*, 106.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

Faith is many things, but it is not a requirement. It is faithfulness, the giving of oneself, trust in God, and belief that something greater than the material world exists for all of us... In reality, nothing stands between us and God's grace.¹⁸

DeYoung states:

This is maybe the biggest difference between emergent Christianity and historic evangelical Christianity. Being a Christian—for Burke, for McLaren, for Bell, for Jones, and for many others in the emerging conversation—is less about faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the only access to God the Father and the only atonement for sins before a wrathful God, and more about living the life that Jesus lived and walking in His way.¹⁹

B. EMPHASIS ON SALVATION THROUGH WORKS

According to Rob Bell, an extremely popular EC pastor and writer, “the gospel is good news for the world because it means we start living like Jesus, which makes life better for every one.”²⁰ DeYoung sees this as prevalent in the EC:

Although McLaren in a few places acknowledges that the old question about getting saved still matters, this clearly is not the most pertinent question for the emergent church. The question is not “How do I get to heaven after death” but “what kind of life does God want? What does life in the kingdom look like?” Salvation isn't something we get but something we experience and spread as a part of God's mission.

For emergent Christians the good news is that God is doing a new work right here, right now on planet earth:

“I am discovering (to my wonder, joy, and amazement) that I have mistakenly placed emphasis of the good news on the eternal. In the Gospels, Jesus wasn't talking about something distant when he proclaimed the good news. It was something for NOW. People would become a part of the Kingdom

¹⁸ Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor, *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 184-85.

¹⁹ DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent*, 120.

²⁰ Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 166.

of God...not a heavenly dwelling but the place where God is King. The place where God turns everything upside down. The place where the light shines and people can be known for who they are and loved.”²¹

Notice how Bell interprets what Jesus meant in calling Himself “the way, the truth, and the life”:

Jesus was not making claims about one religion being better than all the other religions. That completely misses the point, the depth, and the truth. Rather, he was telling those who were following him that his way is the way to the depth of reality. This kind of life Jesus was living, perfectly and completely in connection and cooperation with God, is the best possible way for a person to live. It is how things are...Perhaps a better question than who’s right, is who’s living rightly?²²

Notice once again, the EC emphasis on practice at the expense of biblical truth. Jesus is the way, according to Bell, not because He alone saves, but because He shows us the best possible way to live.

DeYoung, referencing Brian McLaren, says:

The stuff of our evangelistic tracts—‘God’s grace, God’s forgiveness...the free gift of salvation’—is, at best, only ‘a footnote to a gospel that is much richer, grander, and more alive, a gospel that calls you to become a disciple and to disciple others, in authentic community, for the good of the world.’²³

Bell adds: “The meat of the gospel has to do with justice, compassion, and transformation.”²⁴

C. DOUBT IS OF THE ESSENCE OF SAVING FAITH

DeYoung has a lot to say about the EC and the issue of certainty, not only in reference to eternal life, but to certainty about many other areas as well:

²¹ DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent*, 185.

²² Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 21.

²³ DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent*, 186, from Brian McLaren in *The Church in the Emerging Culture*, Leonard Sweet, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 215.

²⁴ Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 166.

Certainty, for the emergent church, is the same as pinning down Jesus and summing up God, while uncertainty is a breath of fresh air. ‘Drop any affair you may have with certainty, proof, argument—and replace it with dialogue, conversation, intrigue and search,’ argues McLaren.²⁵

....

Emerging leaders equate uncertainty with humility.²⁶

....

...Peter Rollins argues that instead of thinking in terms of destination (we became Christians, joined a church, are saved), we should think in terms of journey (we are becoming Christians, becoming church, becoming saved). Hence, we ‘need to be evangelized as much, if not more than those around us.’²⁷

....

“The reason traditional faiths are having a hard time of things,” offers Taylor, “is that the present situation is one in which certainty is suspect and sanctity is being redefined.” Taylor’s alternative is a commitment to “nondogmatic specificity.”²⁸

Several quotes from *Why We’re Not Emergent* illustrate the proclivity of the movement to bask in the “joy” of post modern uncertainty:

[Another] problem with the emergent view of journey is that it establishes doubt as the essence of faith.²⁹

....

²⁵ DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent*, 39.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 33.

²⁸ Ibid., 106.

²⁹ Ibid., 49.

For emergent leaders, faith is a personal trust commitment despite the uncertainty of our knowledge and the doubt we all experience. In other words, doubt is the good friend of faith.³⁰

....

The key to the emergent appreciation for doubt is the distinction made between trusting God versus trusting in doctrines about God. Doubt is good...³¹

If doubt is good, why did Jesus rebuke those who harbored doubts and possessed little faith? In Matt 14:31, Jesus asked Peter, “Why did you doubt?” and was clearly unhappy with his lack of faith. Paul told the Ephesian church that being “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14) was a bad thing, not a good thing. But in the EC,

...one of the hallmarks of the movement is that being thought of as a Really Smart Guy...And one of the tenets of being a Really Smart Guy is questioning everything.³²

E. DISDAIN FOR PROPOSITIONAL TRUTH

Not only does the EC dislike absolute truth claims, but it also has a disdain for propositional truth.

“Christianity is a relationship with a person, not affirming a set of propositions” is how the concern is usually voiced. Or, “we worship the Word made flesh, not the words on a page.”³³

Leonard Sweet put it this way:

Postmodern spirituality is different from modern spirituality. A continental drift of the soul has taken place whereby spirituality is less creedal, less propositional, more relational, and more sensory. Logic is no longer converting anyone—only the transforming experience of the living Christ.

Postmoderns are truth-seekers first, truth-

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 57.

³³ Ibid., 73.

makers second. Whereas modern seekers sought the knowledge of the truth, postmodern seekers want to know the truth in the biblical sense of that word “know”—that is, experience the truth.³⁴

F. MESSAGE OF EVANGELISM ACCORDING TO EC LEADERS

In *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, five EC leaders spanning the theological spectrum share their views on the Scripture, the atonement, and the Trinity. Here are some of their own words concerning the message of evangelism beginning with the conservative side of the spectrum.

1. Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA

Simply by dying for everyone, Jesus purchased everyone as his possession, and then he graciously forgives the elect who repent of sin and applies his wrath to the non-elect who are unrepentant of their sin. As a result, Jesus’ death was sufficient to save anyone and only efficient to save those who repent of their sin and trust in him. Therefore, Calvinists like me do not believe anything different than our Arminian brothers and sisters; we simply believe what they believe and more. I call this position unlimited limited atonement. And regarding this point, I do believe it is a secondary matter and don’t fuss with faithful Christians over it.³⁵

....

Salvation is made possible through Jesus Christ alone and there is no possibility of salvation apart from him.

From God’s perspective, salvation is accomplished by God choosing some people for salvation. From our perspective, salvation is accomplished by repenting of sin and turning to Jesus Christ in faith. Salvation is accomplished through God’s grace alone.³⁶

....

³⁴ Ibid., 149.

³⁵ Webber, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 31.

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

...the Bible is one story about the Trinitarian God who created us, mercifully endures our sin, and sent Jesus to live and die in our place, thereby saving us from eternal wrath if we repent of sin and trust in him alone. This is the true gospel revealed to us by God through Scripture.³⁷

As you can see, for Driscoll faith alone in Christ for eternal life is not sufficient. He is one of the more theologically astute pastors in the EC movement and yet, contrary to the Gospel of John—the Gospel given with the express purpose of bringing unbelievers to faith in Christ (cf. John 20:30-31)—he sees repentance from sin as a condition of receiving eternal life.

2. John Burke, Gateway Community Church, Austin TX

Honestly, I'm not that interested in internal church debates about who has the right or wrong form of theology or Christian practice if the outcome doesn't impact a hurting, broken world. Jesus came to seek and save what was lost, to restore all things. So I write mainly from a concern that his church be his body, on his mission, in his world.³⁸

....

Theologically, the emerging church must wrestle with what the Scriptures say God has revealed about the uniqueness of Jesus in relation to the world's religions. Why must we wrestle with this question? Because instead of helping people find their way home to Jesus as the only one who can save, we often put up barriers to belief by the way we communicate what Scripture reveals.³⁹

....

Jesus' ministry felt messy, didn't it? Didn't Jesus' body live among the "sinners" of his day? Wasn't Mary Magdalene a demonic? Weren't Matthew and

³⁷ Ibid., 35.

³⁸ Ibid., 52.

³⁹ Ibid., 55.

Zacchaeus thieving tax collectors? Wasn't Judas a traitor who looked like a follower? Didn't Jesus treat Judas as an insider even though he never truly submitted his heart to God?⁴⁰

Burke doesn't go into an extended discussion on the terms of eternal life, but it is telling that in reference to Judas Iscariot's unbelief, he states: "...he never truly submitted his heart to God." On its face, this sounds as if Burke believes that submission is necessary to receive eternal life.

3. Dan Kimball, Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, CA

I know myself, and I have no problem admitting I am a sinner as the Bible describes. As a sinner, I am so incredibly thankful that God provides a way to atone for our sinful nature. Although I don't understand the mystery, I rejoice that God chose to accomplish it through Christ's death and resurrection. I believe that we are saved through Jesus alone by substitutionary atonement. No human works or religious efforts bring salvation. Only Jesus.⁴¹

Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of data to work with here. It is good that Kimball stresses that human works and religious effort do not bring salvation. His view of the reception of eternal life could have been a lot clearer had he simply quoted the words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

4. Doug Pagitt, Solomon's Porch, Minneapolis, MN

Because theology is connected to real life, answering particular questions, concerns, and opportunities of the day, it will be ever-changing.⁴²

....

⁴⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁴¹ Ibid., 100.

⁴² Ibid., 121.

All theology has developed in a context, and those contexts are tenuous at best, so theology must always be developing.⁴³

....

The gospel of Jesus is meant to be good news in its particulars.⁴⁴

....

I do think that too often people understand the Christian profession of believing in the Word of God to mean belief in the Bible rather than Jesus, but that is another issue.⁴⁵

....

My presupposition is that the gospel calls us to participate in the things of God wherever we find them. I find the Bible to be plumb full of stories of people finding the agenda of God beyond both their religion and their culture. This is why the sending of the Messiah/Christ/Savior to the world rings so richly the declaration of Jesus that “The time has come....The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” is a call that is radically Good News in our day. I believe the nearness Jesus speaks of is not only in time, but he is saying that it is close enough that people can step into it.

The call of Jesus is not simply to believe, but to join in and participate.⁴⁶

....

What kind of Jesus-way would we have if we no longer saw Christendom, or perhaps the church, as being the sole proprietor of the hopes of God through Jesus?...The questions theology must deal with in our pluralistic world are of this nature.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., 124.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

....

I certainly believe in sin and forgiveness, but they are not built around a Greek judicial model of separation, rather around a relational call to return to a life in full agreement and rhythm with God. So God does not move away in the midst of our sin, but he moves closer. Sin is atoned for and we are again integrated into the life of God.⁴⁸

This is a *radical revision* of the good news and is heretical. Pagitt preaches salvation based on good works as people “participate in the things of God” and encourages sinners not simply to believe but to “join in and participate.” He believes that the reception of eternal life is a “relational call to return to a life in full agreement and rhythm with God.” Thus, according to Pagitt, if a person desires eternal life, they will need to start relating to God appropriately and get in full agreement with Him.

5. Karen Ward, Church of the Apostles, Seattle, WA

I resonate with [a] firm holding to the atonement of Christ as Lord and Savior. I affirm no other Savior than Jesus Christ, yet at the same time, I feel no need to know with certainty the final destination of those of other faiths who have either no knowledge of Christ or who do not accept the Christian claims of atonement. My view of God is high enough to leave such matters to God, while at the same time never downplaying the twenty-four/seven calling of Christians to make bold our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁹

....

...what being “emerging” is in my view. There is a movement to it, recognition that we hold a living faith, and that, as the United Church of Christ’s brilliant motto puts it, “God is still speaking.”

So theology is not a done deal and a sealed canon written for us by others, that we need to swallow

⁴⁸ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 46.

whole and espouse, but instead it is a living “art form” to which we as Christian practitioners are all given a brush.⁵⁰

....

...we are learning to embrace the fact that we are all heretics and idolaters—and bound to be so, because our conception of God inevitably differs from God’s true nature. So we’ll enter into the dialectic of Christian dogmatics, but with a grain of salt, knowing that if we get saved in virtue of our correct theology, we’re all in trouble.⁵¹

Ward, a believer in community hermeneutics, quotes a blog:

Salvation, like everything else concerning God’s address to humans, is a relational reality. To be saved or atoned for is to have and experience a love relationship with God that is evidenced by living in a loving manner here upon the earth, as “God is love.”⁵²

The blog continues a little later:

It says in 1 John 4:7 that “Love comes from God,” and “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God,” so anyone who loves God knows God already, even if they know God without a name.⁵³

....

...“evangelism” is not something we do to attract seekers, instead we simply invite others to join us and be part of what God is doing in the world around us, and to help us put God’s eschatology into practice in doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.⁵⁴

....

⁵⁰ Ibid., 156-57.

⁵¹ Ibid., 164.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 171.

...instead of giving folk tracts with “spiritual laws” and invitations to pray the “sinner’s prayer” off of cards, we try to come alongside seekers and be a community of sound spiritual guidance and good spiritual company as newcomers embark on a life-altering journey into “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵

....

We do not possess truth or seek to correct the truths of others, but we seek to live faithfully in light of the truth of God in Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

Once again, we see that salvation is a “relational reality”—inviting people “to be part of what God is doing in the world.” “Anyone who loves God knows God already, even if they know God without a name.” Of course, this is simply unbiblical drivel. In regards to eternal life and Jesus’ name, the apostle Peter boldly declared: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12—emphasis mine).

IV. CONCLUSION

As a local church pastor, I admire the ECs desire to motivate people to follow the example of Jesus in being a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt 11:19). The evangelical church as a whole has been in a relational cocoon in regards to unsaved people for so long that meaningful friendships with neighbors, co-workers, and relatives have become extremely low on the spiritual totem pole. In most cases they are non-existent. Emergents have reacted to this style of Christianity with a desire to befriend unsaved postmoderns and bring them to Christ. This is a good thing *but only if the saving message they share is the message of grace*—eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone. If the EC shares a message of salvation by works (as it does in many sectors of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 179.

the movement), it is not walking in the footsteps of Christ, but in the footsteps of the Pharisees, producing converts who are undeniably religious but eternally lost. Jesus said: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matt 23:15, emphasis mine).

DANGEROUS WORDS: A REVIEW OF *CRAZY LOVE* BY FRANCIS CHAN¹

BRUCE BAUER

Lancaster, CA

I. INTRODUCTION

A. DRENCHED IN HYPE

“Waking up the sleeping church!” “Potent paradigm shift.” “A clarion call to ‘on-fire’ living for Christ!” These are a sampling of glowing tributes found on online book sites about Francis Chan’s *Crazy Love*. A minority of comments stands in stark dissent: “Works-based theology!” “Mean-spirited.” “Confused.” “Unbiblical.”

Count me among the latter group, the disenchanted.

B. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis Chan is the senior pastor of Cornerstone Community Church of Simi Valley, California. He is a graduate of Master’s College and Seminary, both founded by and presided over by John MacArthur. Chan also established a school himself called Eternity Bible College, having the goal of making Bible education affordable. The college meets at the church and at satellite facilities.

The church’s website contained a standard evangelical statement of faith. The school’s statement was more extensive, having strong Calvinist (TULIP) doctrines subtly interwoven.²

In addition to his duties as a pastor and college president, Francis Chan speaks regularly at conferences, particularly

¹ Francis Chan with Danae Yankoski, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 187 pp.

² <http://www.eternitybiblecollege.com/about/sof.html>, 1-4.

youth gatherings, nationwide. He also preached to millions as a guest on the *Hour of Power* program in February of 2009. Chan maintains a website with videos introducing each chapter of *Crazy Love*.³

II. STRENGTHS OF *CRAZY LOVE*

A. THE BOOK'S POPULARITY

Since its release in May, 2008, the book *Crazy Love* has climbed the sales charts worldwide. As of July, 2009, *Crazy Love* stands in the number *three* ranking out of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association's Christian Bestsellers.⁴ It ranks ahead of such top-sellers as, *The Purpose Driven Life*, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, and perennial favorite, *My Utmost for His Highest*.⁵ An old saying goes, "Never argue with success!" However, I question such wisdom when referring to a book which may be proffering unsound doctrine.

B. ITS GOOD INTENTIONS

After reading *Crazy Love* and after viewing several of Francis Chan's sermons online, I believe that he is sincere in wanting Christians to experience radical living for God. Chan claims to model such a lifestyle: "We ended up moving into a house half the size of our previous home, and we haven't regretted it. My response to the cynics, in the context of eternity, was, am I the crazy one for selling my house? Or are *you* for not giving more, serving more, being with your Creator more?" (136).

Chan is fond of using the word "crazy," he employs it often in his writing and sermons. Usually, he means all-out devotion to God. On at least two occasions in the book he uses "crazy" to disparage his critics. It's as though he is sending out a warning to any who might dare to challenge his extreme theological stances. Chan even created a brief online

³ www.CrazyLoveBook.com.

⁴ <http://www.ecpa.org/bestseller/index.php>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

video to stave off criticism called, *When You're Too Popular*.⁶ In it he quotes Luke 6:22, 23, 26 in saying that false prophets were praised while true prophets of God were scorned. "If I am really saying everything that God would have me to say, there will be plenty of people who are against me."⁷

As much as I may admire the author's apparent sincerity, good intentions, or convincing style, I nonetheless will always take content over delivery, substance over style, actual words over intentions. If the chief goal of the author in writing the book is to stimulate committed Christian living, who could argue with that? *But*, at what price? If the objective is accomplished by promoting a works-oriented "gospel" which destroys many Christians' assurance of salvation, has the cost been too great?

III. LORDSHIP SALVATION TAKEN TO AN EXTREME

A. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

There is no question that the book *Crazy Love* advocates a teaching called *Lordship Salvation*. I identify Francis Chan's variation as extreme, primarily because *Crazy Love* dwells heavily on condemnation to a severe level that I have not witnessed personally in the writings of other Lordship Salvation proponents, e.g., John MacArthur, John Piper, and J. I. Packer. It appears that in Chan's thinking, only a tiny minority of professing Christians will be counted worthy to make it to heaven.

As the title *Crazy Love* suggests, Chan focuses overwhelmingly upon obsessive living for God (especially chapter eight, "Profile of the Obsessed"), apparently even to abandoning balance in areas of personal safety and financial security.

I found no allowances for what I call "what about" situations: What about someone who *is* a believer but has fallen into sin? What about differences in background, personality,

⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID1fPcT_x18.

⁷ *Ibid.*

age or spiritual maturity? What about biblical cases of those who could be labeled *lukewarm*? Lot was a backslider his entire adult life, yet Peter calls him a righteous man in 2 Pet 2:7. Samson was a womanizer, David was a murderer—both are listed in the Hebrews 11 hall of faith. The Corinthian church was filled with worldly, spiritual babes, much like the Laodicean church of Revelation 3. Yet Paul refers to them often as brothers. For these reasons, I call *Crazy Love* extreme.

B. FOSTERING A CULTURE OF UNCERTAINTY

As with all Lordship Salvation teaching, *Crazy Love* muddies the distinction between justification and sanctification, melding them together while distorting the simple message of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. The Lordship camp says that it's not good enough to become saved by trusting Christ for salvation; one must also promise a lifetime of commitment to Christ, then follow through with that commitment or else be in danger of not making it to heaven one day. Charlie Bing calls it a "front-loading" of the gospel:

Well, the Lordship Salvation camp says that we should front-load the gospel and raise the ante. Let's raise the standard so that we make sure that only those who are committed to going on can really become Christians to begin with, they would say. Is that the answer? Doesn't that breed legalism and insecurity which never produces spiritual maturity and Christlikeness?⁸

Chan unknowingly answers Bing's question. In *Crazy Love*, he tells of many people from his congregation asking him questions like, "If I divorce my wife can I still go to heaven?" "Do I have to be baptized to be saved?" "If I commit suicide, can I still go to heaven?" (86). It seems that Chan's application of Lordship Salvation teaching to his own church has created such questioning doubts among his people. A Blogger named *Dave* responds to these quotations above:

⁸ Charlie Bing, "Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Discipleship," *JOTGES* (Autumn 1999), 38.

It is my opinion that the reason many people ask whether they can divorce and still go to heaven and so on is all due to a works-oriented gospel out there. Instead of grace teaching a person to deny all manner of unrighteousness, the church uses fear and hell instead and then their version of grace to add the cherry on top. The reasons for those type of questions has to do with the confusion that is out there today. Francis Chan should note that most Lordship people I know ask such questions as they live under the weight of guilt and not those that are free grace and have a KNOW-SO assurance....To me it is obvious that the god of Lordship Salvation is nothing more than a god that expects A's instead of B's. Their god is nothing more than a god of conditional love based on good behavior. It should be no wonder that these law bound, guilt suffering people will be asking such questions as what Francis Chan shared.⁹

C. ABSOLUTE COMMITMENT REQUIRED

In the quotations below, Chan utilizes elements of two Scripture-bending erroneous lines of argumentation: the “obvious fallacy” and “straw-man” sophistry. James Sire describes the first:

Interpretations of some biblical texts require great study. Even then, honest scholars are uncertain and disagree with each other. Yet we frequently find cult writers [I am not accusing Chan of being a cult writer] drawing conclusions with great ease and expecting us to follow their lead. The impression the interpreter wants to give is that the case is closed. His view is the obvious one [emphasis added].¹⁰

Charles Ryrie defines straw man: “a weak or imaginary opposition (as an argument or adversary) set up only to be easily confuted.”¹¹ He adds,

⁹ <http://expreacher.com/2009/02/24/macarthur-type-new-apostasy/>, April 2, 2009, 8-9.

¹⁰ James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 99.

¹¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 27.

Realize that a straw man usually is not a total fabrication; it usually contains some truth, but truth that is exaggerated or distorted or incomplete. The truth element in a straw man makes it more difficult to argue against, while the distortion or incompleteness makes it easier to huff and puff and blow the man down.¹²

Chan tells people that 100% devotion to Christ is required to be a Christian:

My conclusion? Jesus' call to commitment is clear: He wants all or nothing. The thought of a person calling himself a 'Christian' without being a devoted follower of Christ is absurd (85).

Chan makes an interpretation based, by his own admission, upon a superficial, childlike reading of the Gospels. He cites no specific Scripture whatsoever. To which Gospel is he referring? It's doubtful that he spent much time in John, for it says repeatedly that eternal life comes through believing in Christ alone for salvation: John 3:16-18, 36; 5:24; 6:28-29, 37, 40; 7:38; 10:9; 11:25-26; 14:6; 17:3. Chan must have targeted *discipleship* passages, spoken primarily to the apostles and intimate disciples, most of whom were *already* believers! Jesus warned of troubles they would face as his followers. Indeed, all of the eleven apostles, following Judas Iscariot's exit, would one day experience torture and/or martyrdom. Again, without biblical reference, Chan, using the *obvious* argument, declares, "Jesus' call to commitment is clear: he wants all or nothing" (85). He bolsters his contention by slamming and caricaturizing the opposing position of believing in Christ alone for salvation: "The thought of a person calling himself a 'Christian' without being a devoted follower of Christ is absurd" (85). Chan would be hard-pressed to contort the verses cited from John, or Acts 16:30-31, Rom 4:5, Eph 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5 to prove his *commitment* salvation.

Chan makes it clear that he believes perseverance in obedience is required to make it to heaven:

Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will obey what I command' (John 14:15). And our question quickly

¹² Ibid., 27.

becomes even more unthinkable: *Can I go to heaven without truly and faithfully loving Jesus?* I don't see anywhere in Scripture how the answer to that question could be yes (86).

In context, His crucifixion looming, Jesus was comforting and guiding His closest disciples, who were *already believers!* [Judas had already gone off to betray Jesus.] This verse was *not* a call to salvation or perseverance. Wilkin comments:

The concept of obeying God's commands does occur in John's gospel using other terms (for example, John 14:15, "If you love me, *keep* My commandments"; see also 15:14). However, none of those are connected with obtaining eternal salvation or of guaranteed perseverance. There is no promise in John that those who believe in Christ will persevere in good works. In fact, there are warnings that they might not (John 15:6).¹³

To get a sense of what Jesus meant by *what I command*, we must examine the immediately-preceding context. John 13:35 declares, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."¹⁴ John 14:1 enjoins, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." Following Philip's plea for Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus charges the disciples in 14:11, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." Preceding John 14:15, Jesus promises the disciples: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Summarizing, I might paraphrase John 14:15: "Whoever loves Me will keep guard over My commands to love each other, to trust the Father and Me so your hearts won't be troubled, and to believe confidently in who I am, the Son of the living God." In a nutshell: love, trust, and believe.

¹³ Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 271.

¹⁴ *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (New York: New York International Bible Society, 1978). NIV cited unless otherwise noted.

According to Chan, heaven is only for those who persevere in committed discipleship:

Some people claim that we can be Christians without necessarily becoming disciples. I wonder, then, why the last thing Jesus told us was to go into all the world, making *disciples* of all nations, teaching them to *obey all* that He commanded? You'll notice that He *didn't* add, "But hey, if that's too much to ask, tell them to just become Christians—you know, the people who get to go to heaven without having to commit to anything" [emphasis Chan's] (p. 87).

Chan misquotes Matt 28:19-20 [incomplete quotation] from the NIV without citation. He says this was the last thing Jesus told us; actually Jesus' final words are recorded in Acts 1:8. Chan constructs a straw man, then razes it. Without legitimizing his mocking mischaracterization of the Free-Grace position, I've never heard anyone else define Christianity that way. When the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30-31 came trembling from an earthquake to Paul and Silas, "He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.'" Chan amalgamates the gospel message of salvation by faith in Christ alone with issues of discipleship and commitment, which creates a complicated mess, placing unreasonable demands upon the unsaved. Bing remarks:

The Lordship Salvation view of discipleship assumes a Christian response from unbelievers. But what would an unbeliever understand about carrying his cross? What would an unbeliever understand about loving God with all his heart? He doesn't know God. Would we expect an unbeliever to give up all his possessions or be willing to? What kind of logic is it that demands an unbeliever such sophisticated, mature Christian decisions that I am still grappling with in my own life? It just doesn't make sense to expect from someone who is dead in sin, to expect from someone whose mind has been veiled by Satan himself, to respond to God with a fully loving heart at the moment of salvation, to respond to God in

total commitment and total submission, to be willing to suffer for Him.¹⁵

Matthew 28:19-20 reads, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” *Therefore go* can indicate *going* or *while going*. *Disciple* (*mathētēs*) means “learner,” as a rabbi’s student. Jesus had disciples—intimate and broader groups; John the Baptist also had disciples. Ryrie explains:

The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 commands us to make disciples. This involves two activities—baptizing and teaching. Baptizing is a single act; teaching is a continuous process. Disciples have to be baptized (an evidence of salvation—therefore, one may say that disciples must first be saved); then they have to be taught over and over to obey (observe all things). In New Testament times, baptism served as one of the clearest proofs that a person had accepted Christ. Baptism was not entered into casually or routinely as is often the case today. Although it is clear in the New Testament that baptism does not save, to be baptized was to signify in no uncertain terms that one had received Christ and was also associating himself with the Christian group, the church. . . . normally, a baptized person was a saved person; and a saved person was a baptized person. This is why our Lord’s Great Commission can use “baptism” as equivalent to “salvation.”¹⁶

So, what is the proper order of discipleship according to the Bible? First, lead people to salvation through faith in Christ alone; second, baptize them as outward evidence of their eternal salvation; third, teach them the Bible and how to grow in their faith (sanctification). I find it significant that Chan failed to quote Jesus’ words in Matt 28:19-20, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” yet Chan *does* include the part about *obey*-

¹⁵ Charlie Bing, “Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Discipleship,” 44.

¹⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 93-94.

ing everything Jesus commanded. This striking omission eliminates the gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, intrinsic to the call to baptize [see Ryrice above]. Furthermore, it implies that salvation comes through obedience to God's commands, in spite of Rom 3:20.

D. ORIGIN OF CHAN'S EXTREME TEACHINGS

Online magazine *Today's Christian* explains the genesis of Chan's radical beliefs:

In 2002, a trip to Uganda changed Chan forever. There he saw real poverty, and it became personal. Little girls the age of his daughters rooted through dumpsters for food. Chan began to ask himself, *What does it look like to love my neighbor as myself?* His answer was to move his family of four out of their 2,000-square-foot house into one half that size so they could give more to missions. "I couldn't reconcile how I could live in such a nice house while others were starving," Chan says. But while he was beginning to respond to God's difficult calls in his personal life, Chan wasn't sure he could do whatever God demanded of him as the leader of his church. So in May 2006, he announced his plans to resign as Cornerstone's pastor. He wasn't sure he'd ever return.¹⁷

Francis Chan returned to Cornerstone on October 8, 2006, preaching a sermon entitled, *Lukewarm and Loving It* (available on YouTube). In it, he expressed that he had experienced doubts of his own salvation when he left the church.¹⁸ Much of *Crazy Love* appears to emanate from that sermon. The sermon is an excoriating condemnation of Chan's congregation and of evangelical Christianity today. Combining his interpretations of the rich, young ruler in Luke 18 with the *spitting out* of the lukewarm Laodicean church of Revelation 3 (more on this later) he says, "We are so weird. We are so

¹⁷ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/peopleoffaith/profiles/francischanscrazylove.html?start=2> (Jennifer Schuchmann, "Francis Chan's Crazy Love: Why this pastor's church gives away half its budget," *Christianity Today's Online Version, Today's Christian, September/October, 2008*), 1.

¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBhqrtMqrv8> (Sermon, "Lukewarm and Loving It," placed on YouTube October 14, 2006; 40 minutes in length).

filthy, filthy, filthy rich. And yet, most of you think you're not."¹⁹ Continuing, "It's not gonna be easy; it's not gonna be probable; but, by the power of God, *some* of you *could* go to heaven. I have this haunting fear that some of you here at Cornerstone Church, possibly *many, many of you* are going to hell. It keeps me up at night."²⁰ Cornerstone's reaction a week later: Chan preached a follow-up sermon *Slavery Can Be Fun* (also available on YouTube).²¹ In it he said, "People keep asking our pastors, 'What should I do?' You know, I had people say, 'It was like you stuck a dagger in my gut' and I was like 'aw you're absolutely right'; that is, the more I heard it, I said, Wow, this is so cool. This is exactly the way the church is supposed to respond."²² Chan shares more responses, "'I will do anything!' People are just going, 'Whatever, whatever, whatever!'"²³ It is pretty sad to see Christians living in such bondage and insecurity!

E. CRAZY LOVE'S CHARACTERIZATION AND DEMOLITION OF THE LUKEWARM

In chapter four, *Profile of the Lukewarm*, Chan concocts descriptions of what he considers to be lukewarm churchgoers. Here is a sampling (Bible quotations are not included):

LUKEWARM PEOPLE attend church fairly regularly. It is what is expected of them, what they believe "good Christians" do, so they go (68).

....

LUKEWARM PEOPLE are moved by stories about people who do radical things for Christ, yet they do not act. They assume such action is for "extreme" Christians, not average ones.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., emphasis his.

²¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mG7EStr8s3I> (Sermon, "Slavery Can Be Fun," placed on YouTube October 17, 2006; 47 minutes in length).

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Lukewarm people call “radical” what Jesus expected of all His followers (70-71).

....

LUKEWARM PEOPLE rarely share their faith with their neighbors, coworkers, or friends. They do not want to be rejected, nor do they want to make people uncomfortable by talking about private issues like religion (71).

....

LUKEWARM PEOPLE say they love Jesus, and He is, indeed, a part of their lives. But only a part. They give Him a section of their time, their money, and their thoughts, but He isn’t allowed to control their lives (72).

....

LUKEWARM PEOPLE are continually concerned with playing it safe; they are slaves to the god of control. This focus on safe living keeps them from sacrificing and risking for God (77).

After creating his list of the lukewarm, Chan mows them down like grass in chapter five, *Serving Leftovers to a Holy God*. Listen to his striking words of condemnation: “As I see it, a lukewarm Christian is an oxymoron; there’s no such thing. To put it plainly, churchgoers who are ‘lukewarm’ are not Christians. We will not see them in heaven” (84). Think about the drastic implications of Chan’s statement. He has just said, in effect, if you are not in that possibly two or three percent of superchristians, then you simply are not going to heaven! What is his evidence for lashing out with such acrimony? It stems from his perception of the passage about the Laodicean church of Revelation 3. Listen to Chan’s interpretation of Rev 3:15-18. To be fair to him, and because his view of this passage is the linchpin of much of his argumentation in *Crazy Love*, I am quoting his discussion in its entirety:

This passage is where our modern understanding of *lukewarm* comes from. Jesus is saying to the church that because they are lukewarm, He is going to spit them out of His mouth. There is no gentle rendering of the word *spit* in Greek. This is the only time it is used in the New Testament, and it connotes gagging, hurling, retching. Many people read this passage and assume Jesus is speaking to saved people. Why?

When you read this passage, do you naturally conclude that to be “spit” out of Jesus’ mouth means you’re a part of His kingdom? When you read the words “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,” do you think that He’s describing saints? When He counsels them to “buy white clothes to wear” in order to cover their “shameful nakedness,” does it sound like advice for those already saved? I thought people who were saved were already made white and clothed by Christ’s blood.²⁴

F. RESPONDING TO CHAN’S VIEW OF THE LUKEWARM OF REVELATION 3:14-22

Let’s examine the text in greater detail.

1. The Laodicean Church: A Body of Believers

My contention is that the Church in Laodicea was a Christian church made up mostly of true believers in Christ with some unbelievers in the mix, much as any large Christian church today. Many clues within the text support this position. It is *vital* to make this distinction from Chan’s view that the *entire* Laodicean church was comprised of unbelievers. Why is this differentiation so crucial? Because Chan builds his case of condemning the lukewarm primarily from his view of this passage and applies it to the Christian church of today. The repercussion? There’s hardly a believer left!

2. Evidences of a Believer-based Church in Laodicea

What is the Church? The letter is addressed to a church, *ekklesia* in Greek. It is one of the seven churches in Revelation

²⁴ Chan, *Crazy Love*, 84-85.

to which Christ addressed his words of commendation and admonition. A church, throughout the New Testament is a body of believers in Christ, namely, *Christians*. The church is called *the body of Christ*, Col 1:18, 24. Christ is also the Savior and head of the church—Eph 5:23. Christ *loves* the church and gave himself up for her—Eph 5:25. Chan’s own school website affirms: “We believe the Church, which is the Body and espoused Bride of Christ, is a spiritual organism made up of all born-again persons of this present age”.²⁵

The church is built on the solid bedrock foundation of Christ. Matthew 16:18 reads, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Peter is the small stone—*Petros*; but the church is built on Christ, *this rock*, the contrasting *petra*, an enormous rock or bedrock. Picture the difference between a little pebble and Half Dome at Yosemite!

What is the traditional view of “lukewarm”? Lukewarm, *chliaros*, has no other usage in the NT. We must look at other clues to explain it. Rudwick and Green define the standard opinion, although they hold to a somewhat different view: “Most other commentators, both patristic and modern, have taken ‘lukewarmness’ to denote a compromise between the fervent ‘heat’ of a believer, and the indifferent ‘cold’ of an unbeliever. Thus the *chliaros* (lukewarm man) is the Christian who lacks zeal.”²⁶

How might we modify the view of lukewarm? Cold, *psuchros*, has only one other usage in this form in the NT, Matt 10:42 “And if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” Hot, *zestos*, means “boiling hot or hot.”²⁷ Lukewarm water was the normal drinking fare of Laodicea, “which [having] no local water supply, had developed a stone aqueduct system to bring water from the hot springs of Hierapolis some six miles away. By the time

²⁵ <http://www.eternitybiblecollege.com/about/sof.html>, 3.

²⁶ M. J. S. Rudwick and E. M. B. Green, “The Laodicean Lukewarmness,” *The Expository Times*, Jan, 1958; 69: 176 (<http://www.sagepublications.com>).

²⁷ Robert L. Thomas, General Editor, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 1654.

this water reached Laodicea, however, it was tepid and distasteful.”²⁸ “At Hierapolis the hot spring water was much prized for its healing properties, and the extensive and opulent remains of the city show the breadth of its popularity and appeal.”²⁹

Colossae, ten miles away, had an abundant supply of cold fresh water. Rudwick and Green hold that *cold*, used in Revelation 3, cannot refer to the spiritual coldness or deadness of an unbeliever because, “It implies that even the apathy of a pagan is preferable in God’s sight to the half-heartedness of a Christian, a doctrine that would be difficult to defend from other passages of Scripture. Moreover, the application of the adjectives ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ to spiritual temperature, though natural to us, appears to be almost entirely foreign to the Ancient World.”³⁰ Matthew 10:42 bolsters the view that the word “cold” must refer to the notion of refreshment, as in a cup of cold water, undoubtedly a most welcome sight in the arid Middle East.

It appears that the Laodicean church, although comprised primarily of believers, had become complacent about its faith, more interested in making money than nourishing lives. “It was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick.”³¹

Let’s examine the term “about to spit you out.” The key word here is about [to], *mellō*. It warns the Laodicean church to return to fellowship and service to God. It should not be seen as an immediate threat, rather as God’s loving call! It should especially not be viewed as a threat of losing one’s salvation or of never having been saved. Referring to *mellō*, Marshall says, “As so often (see also ch. 1.19, 2.10), this verb does not necessarily connote imminence, but only simple futurity.”³² In fact two other uses of the term in Rev 1:19

²⁸ Earl F. Palmer, *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John, Revelation*, General Editor, Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 152.

²⁹ M. J. S. Rudwick and E. M. B. Green, “The Laodicean Lukewarmness,” 177.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

³² Alfred Marshall, *The New International Version Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 967.

and 3:10, from John's vantage point, speak of the far-distant future—the end times!

Wretched, pitiful: meaning, distressed, miserable, suffering hardship³³—these are all conditions that the people brought upon themselves through complacency.

Poor, blind, naked: The Laodiceans were poor and blind, clouded in thinking, interested in making a buck, failing to embrace the riches of spiritual blessings that Christ already lavished upon them when they became believers (see Eph 1:7-8). Naked can mean, *without clothing, lightly clad, without an outer garment, or without proper clothing*.³⁴ Revelation 3:18 entreats them to live befitting the spiritual heritage that they already possessed in Christ, looking forward to heaven one day.

They're called to heal their myopia and clothe the "nakedness" of self-assuredness. The phrase *buy from Me gold refined in the fire* beckons enjoying the delights of relationship with God, referring to Isa 55:1. In Rev 3:4 Christ promises that one day in glory believers will walk with Him, dressed in white.

Revelation 3:19 refers unmistakably to believers: *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline*. Hebrews 12:6 calls those disciplined by God "sons," clearly, "believers." Jesus calls the Laodicean church to repent, *not for salvation*, but for believers to get right with God, returning to blessing and fellowship with him.

Revelation 3:20 gives an open invitation to return to a place of restored blessing, of communion. Jesus' promise to dine with them is a rich Middle Eastern metaphor for having intimate fellowship with them.

To him who overcomes in 3:21 is a common phrase in Revelation 2-3. It always refers to victorious believers. This passage, like the other letters of Revelation 2-3, is a call to be a wholehearted believer who will overcome in his experience. However, it is not a call for unbelievers to get to work

³³ Robert L. Thomas, General Editor, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 1686, 1747.

³⁴ James Orr, General Editor, "Entry for 'NAKED; NAKEDNESS,'" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1915, <<http://www.studylight.org/enc/isb/view.cgi?number=T6257>>.

so that they might overcome in their experience and hence merit everlasting life.

IV. CONCLUSION

I bear no animosity toward Francis Chan. I do not know him personally. What I know of him comes entirely from reading his book and from watching some sermons. It is clear that he views his convictions as correct and he obviously wants people to experience closer relationships with God. But has he really carefully examined all the Scriptures pertaining to his viewpoints?

Words have meaning and impact! Words can edify or harm. The book *Crazy Love*, through, in my opinion, poor exegesis, consigns all lukewarm and not fully-committed Christians to hell: “To put it plainly, churchgoers who are ‘lukewarm’ are not Christians. We will not see them in heaven” (83-84). Isn’t there bound to be fallout from such an egregious, albeit well intentioned, misrepresentation of Scripture?

Crazy Love is currently a Christian best-seller. Its impact is destined to be substantial. Most, I fear, will have no understanding of the broad theological implications of the book as outlined in this article. My greatest apprehension is the potential for wholesale devastation of Christians’ assurance of salvation.³⁵

³⁵ Editor’s note: In addition, there is the very real danger that unbelievers will read this book and will be cemented in legalistic unbelief as a result.

A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: ORTHODOXY, THE RIGHT JESUS, AND ETERNAL LIFE

LON GREGG

Director of Chaplains
Denver Rescue Mission
Denver, CO

I. INTRODUCTION: ERROR AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

Many years ago, before YouTube, before even “Candid Camera,” television host Art Linkletter made a big hit with the “Kids Say the Darndest Things” segment on his weekly show. Children would say cute things that struck his studio audience (and millions of homemakers tuning in for the late-afternoon show) as just crazy enough to laugh Mr. Linkletter all the way to the bank. Now those “kids” have all grown up, but they have not changed a bit. I know, because I have met them. In church. Christians still say (and believe) the “darndest things.” Recently I learned that one self-styled Christian group was teaching that degenerate descendants of the cursed seed of Ham were still alive in the Northeastern United States. Why do we not hear about them on the news? They congregate only at night, and they travel only along the open spaces under high-tension power lines.

Of course, these haywire beliefs make great job security for theologians; without them, would anyone believe correctly? Someone must straighten out the multitudes. Of course, there is the small matter that such thinkers contradict each other on points far and wide, large and small, from the number of angels on the head of a pin to the age of the universe. Even so, we may yet turn the others around before too long (although to say so may add one more “darndest thing” to the growing list).

Fortunately, haywire beliefs need keep no one from eternal life. Readers of this journal hold that faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life is a sure bet. I will argue in this paper that as it is Jesus Himself who offers that life, He lets neither the quality of belief about Himself (orthodoxy), or quantity of these beliefs (ignorance), stop Him. Jesus Himself gives eternal life to anyone who simply comes to believe He can do so. In other words, “the right Jesus” is the one who gives life to anyone who can believe it so, just as He promised. Jesus is exactly the “right kind of Person” to be able to do this, and He is unhindered to do so by any other beliefs, haywire or not, or lack of beliefs, which we may hold.

This perspective is, of course, far from universal. To some, the idea that one can be certain of eternal life without knowing a substantial theology of Jesus Christ is itself a “haywire belief,” to be resisted as if it were cultic. (Having recently written on this topic,¹ I have quickly become aware of its opponents’ very determined point of view.) This paper will respond to the idea that belief of a certain theological framework about Jesus is a necessary aspect of faith for eternal life. We will assert that “faith,” which in the biblical sense does not require orthodoxy, in this respect differs not at all from good common sense about belief. Further, this “common-sense” view of faith is far more direct and effective in dealing with cults than the “right Jesus” approach. Finally, I intend to show it more broadly scriptural than the view emphasizing orthodoxy for salvation.

II. LOOKING FOR “MR. RIGHT”: BELIEF AND SAVING BELIEF

To begin with an everyday example, a woman I recently met, about fifty years old, with at least some college education, reported she will not fly. This woman was otherwise very reasonable, but she still will not board an airplane; flight is too dangerous for her. My psychologist brother-in-law reports that this woman represents a fair-sized class of

¹“Alp Upon Alp,” *Grace in Focus*, Grace Evangelical Society, 24:1 (January/February 2009).

people; in his practice, he has helped such people gain the confidence necessary for taking flight. On the other hand, my four-year-old granddaughter gives absolutely no thought to the dangers of air travel. Armed with her mother's and father's assurance alone, she anticipates flying to see her extended family with relish. What is the difference between my granddaughter and the grandmother who will not fly? The granddaughter has every good and right reason to believe her parents; meanwhile, the older woman apparently has found no one yet to convince her that flight is safe.

Of course, great numbers of fliers board aircraft every day completely and blissfully unaware of the underlying mechanics. Lifting a 350-ton conveyance 32,000 feet in the air and descending safely to the passenger's destination thousands of miles distant, often across vast spaces of water, must, after all, depend on very strong principles. But few passengers give any thought to the physical laws of Bernoulli or Newton that underlie aeronautical lift. How many consider the billions of dollars spent every year to orchestrate departures and arrivals and to keep pilots and support staff trained and disciplined? Fliers of course really need not know the sustaining principles to be confident of their destination. It is enough, and millions find it so, to depend on what can be as simple a reason as "my mommy said I'm going to go see Grandpa."

Christian faith is much the same. A four-year-old can have full confidence, with none of the underlying knowledge, that her flight will arrive where and when it should. Should we think it necessary that an inquirer know the principles of substitutionary atonement, or hypostatic union, or any number of other truths about Christ before believing His promise of eternity? To ask the question in this way is to highlight the illogic of requiring theology before claiming eternal life. Truth naturally helps toward the saving persuasion, but what is absolutely necessary may be completely different for each individual; a checklist cannot be prescribed. It is belief in the bottom line, eternal life, that counts; instrumental beliefs are just that—the means of attaining to faith.

Consider another common-sense example: the starry-eyed teenage girl who heads off for the first time in her father's

classic car. All she may know is that the process of turning the ignition and steering while applying pressure to the gas will transport her to Johnny's house. Need she understand anything of mechanical engineering? Combustion? The friction coefficient of rubber on roadways? For that matter, what difference does it make if she holds to an unorthodox theory; say that "flubber" fuels the car? Or if the flier believes the "flubber" theory of flight? Inadequate and unorthodox evidence can negatively influence belief, it is true, but belief may equally well arise without any understanding of the instrumentals. Again, the application to Christian faith is transparent; the underpinnings of Jesus' ability to grant eternal life assists in bringing people to faith, but for an evangelist to require them as an article of faith is overreaching.

More to the point under consideration, consider the case of the young woman who begins looking for "Mr. Right." She hopes one day to meet a man (if not "Johnny") whose vow of love and life-long care she can believe, and so live happily ever after. She may very well find "Mr. Right" without the soundness of wise parental counsel, private investigators, data from online dating applications, or even responses to a personal questionnaire. Intuition, his wink, the color of his truck, or any number of considerations may bring the young woman to the conviction (true or false) that she has finally found "Mr. Right." Ultimately, however, it is not *correct* information about Prince Charming, but *persuasive* information, that wins her heart.

Likewise with orthodoxy about Christ. In this respect, the "right Jesus" to believe for eternal life is no different from the "Mr. Right" of teenage dreams. Can I be convinced, based on information hopefully helpful but sometimes haywire, that Jesus' promise of eternal security to believers is mine for the believing? If so, I have believed in the "right Jesus," simply the Man, Jesus, whose enormous promise of eternal salvation is rendered credible by the manifold witness of the NT.

In all this, the critical issue is not correctness or comprehensiveness, but credibility. While sound information lends credentials to any proposition or person, correctness is a secondary consideration. I come to believe in Jesus not through

an airtight perception of His person or work, but because my data—accurate, extensive, or not—lead to the conviction that He gives me eternal life. To insist on orthodox Christology or soteriology as a mark of the faith valid for that eternal life is to misunderstand the process of believing in Jesus Christ. It converts the evangelist into a dogmatist; it throws up theological “Alp upon Alp” between the prospective believer and the goal of eternal life. And, I am saying, it manifests a lack of common sense whenever it does so.

This common sense about Christian faith is of course also the biblical sense. To paraphrase the argument of Gordon H. Clark’s *Faith and Saving Faith*, they are of the same kind. To believe in Jesus Christ is to be persuaded of the proposition, from evidence of varying quality and quantity, that Jesus is the Guarantor of eternal life to all believers. For the readership of this journal, a detailed proof of this contention should be unnecessary. Below, nonetheless, is a review of several passages illustrating the point.

In Paul’s evangelism, the man Jesus—not the orthodox Person of systematic theology—is the object of faith (Acts 13:38), and eternal life is the end result (13:46, 48).² Paul’s preaching is likewise in perfect harmony with his own testimony, as stated in 1 Tim 1:16: “However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to *believe on Him for everlasting life*.” For Paul, Christian belief is no different from believing in the pilot to carry me safely to a destination or believing in Prince Charming for the happily-ever-after. Paul was convinced from the moment he met the Savior (“it is *Jesus*, whom you are persecuting”—Acts 9:5) that Jesus was Lord of life, and that he (Paul) had received it.

As might be expected from its stated purpose, however, the Gospel of John provides the preponderance of clear NT examples of common-sense faith in Christ (John 20:30-31). Here, where belief in Jesus is equivalent to recognizing Him

² For an extended treatment of this argument, see Zane Hodges, *Did Paul Preach Eternal Life? Should We?* (Dallas, TX: Kerugma, Inc., 2007).

as Christ,³ Guarantor of eternal life, every account of conversion richly illustrates the simple sense of faith described above. John's record of Jesus' first converts highlights Jesus' power to effect this persuasion. Despite his very brief introduction, Andrew's conviction of Jesus' Messianic identity (1:41) already on his first day with Jesus prompts him to bring his brother Peter to Christ. Similarly, having heard only two statements from Jesus, Nathanael believes in Him (1:49).⁴ Such openness "surprises" even Jesus: "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these" (1:50). Nathanael's dramatic shift from his momentarily earlier skepticism ("Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?") may have been naïve. Naïve or not, however, Nathanael's faith stands as a record of Jesus' instantaneous credibility. Naturally, both Andrew and Nathanael previously possessed a framework of anticipation about the coming Messiah (alloyed though it was with misconception). It was however what little they knew of Jesus the person, and not any systematic theology or catechism, that brought the saving persuasion to these men.

Among these earliest disciples, Philip is the patron saint of such faith. When he invites his friend Nathanael to Christ,⁵ Philip identifies Him as "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." In this theologically unsophisticated invitation, Jesus is named only by family name and hometown,⁶ and likely then only to distinguish Him from other men so named. Even then, of course, calling Jesus "the son of Joseph" is technically incorrect. Against a backdrop of John the Baptist's lofty affirmation regarding Jesus' parentage (1:34), Philip's confession stands as a patent unorthodoxy. He is appar-

³"pisteuein eis Xriston Ihsoun (Gl. 2:16), eis auton and eis Eme (often in Jn.) etc. simply means pisteuein oti Ihsous epethanen kai enesth ... (1 Th. 4:14; cf. R. 10:9) or oti Ihsous estin Xristos (Jn. 20:31) etc. In Jn. esp. pisteuein eis and pisteuein oti are constantly used interchangeably in the same sense." Rudolph Bultmann, "pisteuw," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 203.

⁴The two confessions of 1:45 and 1:49 are literarily equivalent to that of 1:41.

⁵See previous footnote. "Him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote" is in context a Messianic assertion.

⁶Greek word order.

ently blissfully in error about Jesus' exalted Person⁷ (as of course might well be expected on day one), but this error does not keep him from the saving belief⁸ that Jesus is Christ.⁹ Philip's belief is inerrant nonetheless. As with the rest of John 1:41-54, Philip's confession serves the author's purpose to corroborate the overwhelming early credibility of Jesus, the man, as the Christ. As such, the story is an eyewitness account with its warts, not a reflection of the Gospel writer's own mature faith. Philip's example serves to establish that knowing the identity of Jesus, not the orthodoxy, is sufficient grounds for the faith that saves. Simply "finding" Jesus as the Messiah (1:45) is perfectly adequate for that.

Other Johannine examples of this unsophisticated faith include the woman at the well, whose regenerating belief apparently did not require Jesus to be deity. Her persuasion about eternal life is more directly explained by her persuasion that Jesus was the Messiah, the Prophet who would tell the truth about all things (John 4:25-26). Fully apart from knowing whether Jesus was God, she could aptly reason that the promise of eternal life to her if she believed (John 4:14c), as it was from the lips of the truth-telling Prophet, should be believed. There is likewise no record that her fellows, the townspeople of Sychar, recognized Jesus' deity (John 4:42; cf. 20:31a, 1 John 5:1), but their faith also stands in John's record as exemplary. The blind man of John 9 similarly lacked only the knowledge about the identity, not the Person, of the man standing before him (John 9:36-38) before he came to the faith that in the Gospel of John imparts eternal life.

These examples are only to be expected in a book where "believing in Jesus Christ" (John 6:47 [*Maj*]) is most perfectly

⁷ Cf. 1:18; see also 7:27-29.

⁸ Cf. 20:30-31.

⁹ Philip's statement that Jesus is *apo Nazaret* may also represent a technical factual error. Nathanael's response that nothing good comes *ek* ("out of") suggests source and hence likely birthplace. Philip does not correct the misimpression; likely, he also incorrectly believed at that time that Jesus was born in Nazareth, rather than Bethlehem. Further, of course, Philip is apparently nowhere near the persuasion that Jesus is the Word made flesh (1:17), whose origin would necessarily be heaven. None of these misimpressions, however, affects the validity of his faith in Jesus as Christ, nor its inevitable issue, eternal life (20:31).

illustrated by John 3:14-15. There, Nicodemus needed only acknowledge the identity of the person who was shortly (cf. John 2:19-21) to hang on a cross (cf. John 8:28, 12:32-34), and God would in response give him eternal life, the life that issues from the new birth under discussion (John 3:3, 5, 7-8; cf. also 1:12-13). According to John, belief that the man Jesus is the Guarantor of eternal life is sufficient.¹⁰ While Christology and soteriology are a major theme of the Fourth Gospel, there is life offered for a look to the Savior, with no limits on the level of information or orthodoxy prompting that look. The book also suggests the age-long pertinence of the message, as if applicable to some pre-Pauline period only; John concludes the book with the Guarantor of the promise still afoot on earth, not absent and ineffectual to fulfill it.

John's Gospel exemplifies most clearly the belief in Christ that is not unlike all other belief; the persuasion of Jesus as Savior follows the common sense of all persuasion. Pre-qualifying through orthodoxy, according to the NT as a whole, as well as to John, is not necessary for eternal life. It is the credibility of its Guarantor, not the correctness or completeness of one's view of Him, that brings people to the faith in Jesus Christ that saves forever.

III. THE "RIGHT JESUS" AND CULT ERRORS

I am convinced that standing alone, this principle can counter the concerns of those who worry about the professions of cult adherents. Much concern about correct theology in evangelism is from those who properly wish to protect the ranks of Christianity from cults. The "right Jesus" approach serves as a convenient Shibboleth to ferret out professing believers whose religious ties are suspect.¹¹

¹⁰ Bultmann's view is noteworthy here: "It is characteristic that in [John], as distinct from [Paul], the cross of Jesus is not the real offence, i.e., the fact which throws doubt on His claim. The offence is His humanity as such, i.e., the fact that His divine quality is not demonstrable." Rudolph Bultmann, "pisteuw," in TDNT, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 224, footnote 354.

¹¹ This paper acknowledges legitimate pastoral concerns with cultic influence in a church setting, as well as the necessity of indoctrination. The issue under

But this strategy of screening is as unnecessary as it is flawed. The doctrinal legalism¹² which results from insistence on orthodoxy is flawed in its departure from the adequacy of faith in Jesus simply understood. But this strategy is also unnecessary. When cultists say they believe in Jesus Christ, they do not usually mean that they believe in Jesus to give or to have given them eternal life. Cultists are typically “works” people. Their final salvation depends not on something so simple as believing a promise, but ultimately on the dedicated works associated with their belief. In the experience of this writer, cult adherents essentially universally deny that Jesus (or anyone else.) can give anyone an irrevocable eternal life. That a person could be eternally saved with no deference to the cultist’s group, books, or style of works, is anathema. In my conversations, cultists often believe they have eternal life only by searching their scriptures, rather than by believing Christ for that life. An effective antidote to this presupposition is simply to bring the discussion to its “bottom line,” Jesus’ ability to impart eternal life to every believer, and not to raise the bar of orthodoxy.

Of course, in an important sense, cultic legalism is not at all unique; this error is the same kind we encounter in essentially every unbeliever. The reason many contemporary unbelievers remain in unbelief is the same reason cult adherents do not believe: they have not yet been persuaded that Jesus is able to impart life in response to simple belief of a promise. We should therefore dispense with tests of orthodoxy and rather use an approach that brings to light Jesus’ claim to impart eternal life. The ultimate issue after all is not Jesus’ nature, but His claim (whatever that nature) to give life. The evangelist drawn into Christological dispute has lost sight of the goal. A pure Christology can of course assist greatly in convincing the inquirer that Jesus is the “right kind” of person to be awarding eternal life to anyone who simply believes Him. But to require cult adherents—or

consideration in this paper however is evangelism strategy. The message to the unchurched, it is argued, should be short on dogmatics and long on rhetorics.

¹²Zane Hodges, “The Hydra’s Other Head: Theological Legalism,” *Grace in Focus*, Grace Evangelical Society, 23:5 (September/October 2008).

anyone else—to believe in the “right Jesus,” simply turns evangelism into polemics.

I have said above that cultists “usually” do not acknowledge Jesus as the Guarantor of eternal life to believers, but I do not believe that to be universally so. One Saturday a decade or so ago I answered a knock on my door at home, and engaged a man and his young protégé in a short conversation about the Bible and Jesus Christ. A few weeks later, the same man returned, this time with an elder of their church. After a few Saturdays, the man brought a man whose hometown in another state suggested him as a more or less “official” representative of the church. After listening to their brief presentation, I asked the articulate new evangelist if Jesus’ promise in John 5:24 (using their Bible, which offered a serviceable translation here) did not seem to promise passage from death to an irreversible eternal life at the moment a person believed that promise. To my surprise, the man admitted that it did. Even more surprising, however, was his profession that he believed it. He clearly stated that he knew his eternity was secure, whether he knocked on another door as long as he lived.

How to explain such an encounter?

The man (or I) may possibly have misunderstood a critical part of the discussion. I would not put this past my own imperfect presentation, although I have very carefully considered this method of bringing the issue to a head before and since.

The man may have been so entangled in legalism that he did not consider the contradictions of the “official” positions of his church to the utterance he had just made. (The same myopia can afflict even the orthodox.) As an official in the church, however, it seemed unlikely that he could have overlooked the tension between his words and the church’s words.

The man may, just then as we spoke, have been convinced by simple exposure to Jesus’ direct promise of eternal life. Because this was a brief conversation, I have doubted this possibility. Admittedly, however, the disciple Nathanael passed from thorough skeptic to confessing believer in a matter of moments (see John 1:46-50), based on a similarly

simple exposure to Jesus' words. We believers should never underestimate the power of the clear promises of Jesus (John 3:14-16, 5:24, 6:47, 10:27-28, and 11:25-26, among others) to impart eternal life. The man may never have "put it all together" as he did at that very moment, when he heard Jesus for himself.

I tentatively offer one last possible explanation for the man's response. Is it not possible that the man fully believed Jesus' promise of eternal life, and *at the same time* believed in some imperfect theory about Jesus' nature? The scriptural examples given above would seem to suggest this as a possibility. If this is the case, need we necessarily deny the man's regeneration?

I was intrigued to learn recently that aerodynamic science still is not fully agreed on the precise physical force that causes lift. Some cite Bernoulli's principle of fluid mechanics, while some believe that Newton's law ("every action brings an opposite and equal reaction") better explains flight. Presumably, one view may one day triumph, and the other view be rejected as irrelevant or flawed. In the meantime, however, both views fully admit to the bottom line, namely that flight occurs.

Need the Christological views of a cult adherent, repugnant to a thorough student of scripture, necessarily rule out the possibility of holding a sincere belief in eternal life through Jesus Christ, despite even rank errors in understanding the principles underlying that life? Even if such belief would seem a remote possibility, it strikes the present writer as presumptuous to deny it out of hand.

There may be other explanations behind the man's apparent profession on that day. Whatever that brief discussion represented, however, there seems no need to deny such professed faith by consigning it to a "wrong Jesus." Jesus makes the promise of eternal life to anyone who believes, no matter the background. I for one would not presume to counsel Jesus to refuse such inquirers eternal life.

An evangelist need not require correct theology from those of cultic persuasion as a condition of eternal life, any more than from everyday unbelievers. Can knowing the deity of

Jesus Christ help someone toward believing His ability to impart life? The question need hardly be asked. But I, as the evangelist, should not allow such issues to dominate or sidetrack fruitful discussion about eternal life; I should stay on message, press the point that Jesus claimed to give such life to anyone who believes, and answer questions that arise around this saving proposition. I should not plunge by default into theology, except as it may help an open inquirer grasp why Jesus can make such a claim. I will by this means avoid “winning arguments but losing souls,” which (if my experience is any measure) occurs all too frequently with those of us who lay claim to biblical knowledge.

IV. “ANOTHER JESUS”?

While an uncomplicated faith in Christ for eternal life hence not only accords with common sense and proves practicable in witness to cult adherents, there remains a final challenge. Some who hold to the “right Jesus” perspective believe that various scriptural statements absolutely insist on orthodoxy as a condition for salvation. Among these, 2 Cor 11:4 is representative, and is worthy of a brief consideration. In this passage, expressing his jealousy for the spiritual wellbeing of the church he had fathered, Paul says, “For if he who comes preaches *another Jesus* whom we have not preached, or [if] you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it.” Paul is worried that the liberal spirit of the church may welcome someone whose views of Jesus may endanger their continued growth and happy presentation before Christ at His coming. But if “another (wrong) Jesus” is given sway, then as today, the argument goes, salvation is impossible; orthodoxy is here a necessary condition of final salvation.

Of course, as stated above, several weaknesses of this view are immediately apparent.

Unless we are convinced either of the unregenerate state of the Corinthians¹³ or of the necessity of their perseverance in faith in “the right Jesus” before their eternal life could be assured,¹⁴ there is no need to conclude that Paul’s worry about “another Jesus” was a concern for the eternal destiny of his readers. Final salvation is clearly not at stake in “wrong Jesus” faith, as far as this passage is concerned. It simply cannot be argued here that faith placed in “another” Jesus cannot “save” in the final sense; Paul is concerned with the deleterious effects of wrong doctrine on sanctification,¹⁵ not on justification.

Paul’s fear was rather that the Corinthian believers might stray from “the Jesus whom [he] preached.¹⁶ But who was “that Jesus”? According to the historical record, it was a Jesus whose death and resurrection proved He is the awaited Messiah (Acts 17:2-4), but not necessarily that He is a substitutionary sacrifice or the hypostatic union of God and man (Acts 13:16-41, a fuller description of Paul’s standard synagogue “stump speech,” similarly calls Jesus simply the “man” whose career proved Him Messiah).¹⁷ As such, the Jesus Paul preached to the Corinthians was He who gave “us” our Christian existence, as he had previously reminded them in 1 Cor 8:6. Of course, this is very close to saying that Jesus is He who gives eternal life, as Luke also explicitly includes as the critical crown of Paul’s evangelistic proclamation of Jesus.¹⁸

Of course, Paul’s *teaching* ministry later likely elaborated about Jesus’ Person. But as for that Jesus who gave them

¹³ But cf. 2 Cor 10:15, to name one passage in the immediate context, among many in the two books, affirming Paul’s view of their spiritual state.

¹⁴ But cf. 1 Cor 6:3, 11b, 14, 15, 19 as one instance of Paul’s assurance of his readers’ future, weak and subject to straying though they may be.

¹⁵ Paul’s concern is that a false teacher will come “to you” (believers).

¹⁶ I.e., preached when he evangelized the Corinthians. That is when the Corinthians “received the Spirit,” and “accepted the gospel,” as described in the balance of 11:4. Paul’s later ministry is normally described as “teaching,” not “preaching.” Likewise, when the false apostles preached, imparted the spirit, and proclaimed their gospel, these would have characterized the initial activities, the evangelistic phase, of their ministry.

¹⁷ We may assume that the initial speech as recorded in Acts characterized Paul’s similar synagogue presentation in Corinth, Acts 17:2-4.

¹⁸ Hodges, *Did Paul Preach Eternal Life?*, 14-15.

eternal life, the record indicates Paul gave them nothing to be believed beyond His identity as the historical character whose home was Galilee in Palestine. To stray from the Jesus preached by Paul would be a terrible tragedy for the Corinthians, but to do so would not in any way suggest that this theologically unelaborated Jesus “cannot save” eternally.

For Paul, in fact, the “Jesus other than whom we preached” was rather an absurdity. “Yet for us [Paul and his readers] there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but *one Lord, Jesus Christ*, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor 8:6). There is really no “other” Jesus of Nazareth than He whom Paul preached, the historical person who, contrary to expectation but proven by his ministry, is He who gives eternal life to believers. Using similar terminology, Paul dismisses “another gospel” in Galatians as in fact “not another” (Galatians 1:6; Greek *allos* is used there for “another” gospel as here for “another” Jesus); just as there is no reality to that false message as “gospel,” there is in reality no “other” Jesus to be preached.

Paul’s worry for the Corinthians then was that his readers might fall under sway of a non-entity; it was not that they were in danger of a spiritual being somehow “like” Jesus but not He. Paul’s use of this literary foil should well have provoked the very shame intended by the verse. The naïve hospitality of the Corinthians could result in their yielding to the oratorical spell of false “apostles,” whose message and spirit could undermine or destroy their spiritual health and prospects. But to presume by this verse that Paul was worried about the Corinthians believing (for eternal life or otherwise) in a literal “wrong Jesus” stretches credulity. There is no literal “right” or “wrong” Jesus in which to put one’s faith for eternal life. There is only one Jesus, about whom, on a very broad range of topics, one may believe correctly or not.¹⁹

¹⁹The lively rhetoric around disparate views of God in the three Abrahamic faiths provides an analogy. Clearly, the theology proper of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are at odds. To call the Deity of these religions “different Gods” may well score a striking rhetorical point. But as all three faiths are monotheistic, it is more accurate to say that all three faiths affirm the same one Creator God, but are at odds in their ascriptions. These are not “different Gods”; they are

But as to the supposed necessity of belief in “the right Jesus” for eternal life, 2 Cor 11:4 has nothing to say at all.

A legitimate application of this verse is that wherever we meet false teaching about Jesus Christ, we should oppose it. We should, as Paul did, propound orthodox Christology as a means to the holy presentation of those we serve; impure teaching will always affect standing at the *Bema*. But 2 Cor 11:4 in no way legitimizes expecting orthodox Christology either as a precondition or inevitable accompaniment of regeneration; we should remove the verse from our tool chest when trying to certify worthy candidates, or even true converts, of our evangelistic efforts.

V. CONCLUSION

The Scriptures—including 2 Cor 11:4—simply confirm the thesis argued earlier. Any conception of belief in Jesus Christ that requires orthodoxy for salvation is in violation, not only of the biblical model, but also of the common-sense principles by which we come to believe in anyone for anything. Only by overlooking the normal processes of believing can the preacher require orthodoxy as a necessary concomitant of final salvation. The message of salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ, perfectly or imperfectly understood, alone, is alone the message that God will continue to use to bring eternal life to a dying world.

Praise God for His mercy.

“different” Gods. Likewise, the “different” Jesus whom Paul resisted was likely not literally “another” Jesus, but the same Jesus described so differently (Paul does not directly identify the “differences”) as to render Him nearly unrecognizable, save, of course, for the saving name. (Cf. the poem “The Blind Men and the Elephant” by John Godfrey Saxe [1816-1887]. By their descriptions, if you didn’t know better, you’d think the blind men were each describing a different animal!)

BOOK REVIEWS

Hyper-Calvinism & the Call of the Gospel. Revised Edition. By David J. Engelsma. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994. 216 pp. Paper, \$13.95.

The author, a committed Calvinist, on the one hand rejects that hyper-Calvinist view that God is not calling everyone to believe in Christ and be born again. However, on the other hand he also rejects the view that God wants all to be saved. In Engelsma's view, God wants all to hear, but He doesn't desire all to be saved (e.g., p. 67).

Unlimited atonement is rejected, of course, by Engelsma (pp. 61-65).

Engelsma says that hyper-Calvinism is in a sense antinomian! He writes: "Hyper-Calvinism is antinomianism with reference to the preaching of the gospel, especially the imperative of the gospel, and with reference to the duty of men so addressed...The gospel is to be preached only to the elect, and only they are to be called to faith" (p. 204).

He labels both Arminianism and hyper-Calvinism as heresies! He speaks of the need to "check the wildfire spread of the free-will cancer" (p. 193) and "the Arminian heresy" (p. 194). Yet he also warns that "a Reformed church must guard against the subtle inroads of the hyper-Calvinist heresy with all vigilance" (p. 205).

Amazingly the author chides hyper-Calvinists for being afraid of preaching the simple message of John 3:16! Note these biting words: "The spirit of hyper-Calvinism is embarrassment and hesitation, that is fear...over declaring the promise 'Whosoever believes shall not perish, but have everlasting life.' This language is not suspect. It is not the language of Arminian 'free-willism.' It is pure, sound, biblical language" (p. 208).

Scripture, Reformed writers from the past and present, and the Reformed confessions are the basis for Engelsma's defense of his position.

This book is an opportunity to listen to a committed five-point Calvinist speaking to other five-point Calvinists about what he

considers to be an extreme form of Calvinism on the one hand, and the free-will positions of Arminians, on the other. It is a fascinating book. I think it is well worth reading and having.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World. By David F. Wells. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005. 339 pp. Paper, \$18.00.

Wells powerfully captures the influence of postmodernity on the church in America today. Lots of books on postmodernity are written for scholars and are hard to follow. Not so with this book. It is clearly written and for the most part easy to follow.

The author's discussion of Open Theism (and especially the transformation of Clark Pinnock, pp. 243-51) and of the seeker-sensitive Willow Creek type of church (pp. 263-309) is truly eye opening. Wells shows that what is happening in Evangelical seemingly conservative churches today is very akin to what liberalism did in the past. The concern among many church leaders today is not what the congregation *needs to hear*. Rather, the congregation is now viewed as *the customers* and as such the concern of the leaders is what they *want to hear* (p. 276). Now many churches are not only eliminating coats and ties, pulpits, hymnals, and choirs. They are also eliminating much of what is taught in the Bible as well!

"There is much in Scripture that is not of much interest to many in these new churches, and much which does not seem to make any connection with their lives. These themes therefore fade away [i.e., are not preached] in much the same way as an unwanted product, sooner or later, will be taken off the store shelf" (p. 305).

Concluding the last major chapter, the one on megachurches and consumerism, Wells writes, "Christianity is not up for sale. Its price has already been fixed and that price is the complete

and ongoing surrender to Christ of those who embrace him by faith. It can only be had on his own terms. It can be had only as a whole. It refuses to offer only selections of its teachings. Furthermore, the Church is not [a] retailing outlet. Its preachers are not its peddlers and those who are Christian are not its consumers” (pp. 308-309). While his reference to surrendering to Christ and embracing Him by face might imply more than Lordship discipleship, his sentiment is certainly right on target in terms of the Great Commission. We are to make disciples. We are to teach people to observe all that the Lord Jesus commanded.

This book should be read by pastors, church leaders, and believers who are seeking Christ’s, not the Evangelical world’s, approval.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision. By N.T. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009. 279 pp. Hardcover, \$25.00.

Whether you have been following the theological battle between those that refer to themselves as New Perspective on Paul and those that are referred to as Old Perspective, Wright’s newest work will give you a good taste of what the former means by justification in Paul. *Justification* serves as Wright’s final volley, with Piper (and his book *The Future of Justification*) as the primary target, in a match of obscurity. While I would describe the book as a murky and arrogant diatribe ironically intended to make Wright’s position clear, the hubris does serve a purpose—the book would be dreadfully boring without the verbal outbursts. He repeatedly wonders whether Piper will ever understand his views even though they have been explained (in his opinion) in numerous ways. At one point, he writes, “It is (to coin a phrase) just as if I’d never said it” (p. 59). Yet, in the end

this is a battle between two authors that travel down different paths but arrive at the same misguided end. They both believe that we are justified by faith (Wright would at times define faith as faithfulness) that must be confirmed by the Holy Spirit's work (Piper, 110-11). Both emphatically defend their position as faith alone in Christ alone with the caveat that it must evidence itself in works. Thus, they both believe that works must be present in one's life to receive eternal life.

Wright believes that the Western church has long suffered from "truncated and self-centered readings...and [the church] is not well served by the inward-looking soteriologies that tangle themselves up in a web of detached texts and secondary theories..." (p. 25) He lambastes those that think the Christian life "is all about me and my salvation" (p. 23). While I do agree that the Church could be less self-centered, the NT writers make it clear that *you* and *your* eternal state do matter. Jesus asked Martha, "Do *you* believe this?" (John 11:26). The Philippian Jailer inquired of Paul and Silas, "What must *I* do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Paul and Silas did not chastise the jailer and tell him that he was asking the wrong question. They responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ..." Paul and Jesus were in agreement—one's eternal salvation was significant and personal.

Wright believes that justification means "membership in God's true family" (p. 121) and when the phrase *dikaiosynē theou* occurs, he believes that it means "God's faithfulness to the covenant with Abraham, to the single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world" (179). He believes this because of the "massive sense it makes of passage after passage, the way in which bits of Romans often omitted from discussion, or even explicitly left on one side as being irrelevant to the main drift of the discourse, suddenly come back into focus with a bang" (p. 179). Without completely rehashing Daniel Wallace's cogent response on the bible.org website, I will mention several key points. Wright's exegetical treatment of these passages leaves much to be desired. He only deals with certain passages, which seems to fly in the face of his own reasons for rejecting the "Old Perspective" views. Wright's sociological explanation, Yahweh's covenantal faithfulness, of Rom 1:17 does not adequately explain the indictment of Rom 1:18–3:20. Wright also uses Habakkuk 2, referenced by Paul in

Rom 1:17, to justify his view of God's covenantal faithfulness, yet the emphasis in Habakkuk 2 is on the faithfulness of God's people. Thus, Paul's point is that only when God's people live *by faith* can they truly be called *faithful*.

Wright also blasts the Reformers view of justification by stating, "Part of the problem with the 'old perspective' on Paul is that it has followed the long mediaeval tradition" (p. 195). Wright states that he put the Greek and NIV side-by-side and he "discovered that the translators had another principle, considerably higher than the stated one: to make sure that Paul should say what the broadly Protestant and evangelical tradition said he said" and "I do know that if a church only, or mainly, relies on the NIV, it will, quite simply, never understand what Paul was talking about" (p. 52). Yet, his views on justification began with Ambrosiaster, a late fourth century Church father. He defined *dikaiosynē theou* in Rom 1:17 as "God's fidelity to His promises." Yet, Ambrosiaster had no access to the Greek. He got this by reading from the Latin manuscripts.

Wright's explanation of how someone can gain eternal life and his concept of judgment should be especially interesting to *JOTGES* readers. First, although he thinks "How can I gain eternal life?" is the wrong question (p. 146), he infers many times that one must have good works in order to have final salvation. He explains, "Paul never says that the present moral life of the Christian 'earns' final salvation. It looks toward it, it 'seeks for' it (Rom 2:7)" (p. 237). Yet, Rom 3:9-20 makes it clear that our problem is that we don't seek good. We have all turned away. Wright also makes it clear that the "signs of the Spirit's life must be present: if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, that person doesn't belong to him (Rom 8:9)..." (p. 237). Wright clearly does not differentiate between past (justification) and present (sanctification) salvation in Romans.

Nevertheless, to his credit, Wright does see a danger in assuming every instance of "salvation" refers to eternal salvation (p. 170). Unfortunately he doesn't employ this logic in Phil 2:12-13 where Paul says, "Work out your own salvation..." Wright uses this to say, "Clearly he is not talking about the security of justification by faith. That is given, solid, emphatic, unassailable. He is talking about the journey toward the final judgment, the ultimate resurrection" (p. 152). His logic is that the Spirit

will “bring it [final salvation] to completion” (Phil 1:6) in the end. Yet, Phil 1:6 is actually about participating in Paul’s ministry (cf. Phil 4:15-17) and Phil 2:12-13 is about being like Christ so that you will be *rescued* from the consequences of not conforming to Christ and instead will receive reward (cf. 1:19; 3:14; 4:17). To his credit, Wright does acknowledge the rewards view (p. 186). Nonetheless, he does not agree and often lumps the Bema Seat and the Great White Throne Judgment into one (pp. 184-85).

While I commend N.T. Wright for dealing with the text, the book was admittedly rushed (p. 13), at times wanders aimlessly, often seasoned with an arrogant tone, and rushes blindly through the text. Whether you are a scholar or a lay teacher, if you want to learn more about the New Perspective on Paul and N.T. Wright’s views on justification, *Justification* is an important work.

Michael Makidon
Ph.D. Student
Rowlett, TX

Dispensationalism Tomorrow & Beyond: A Theological Collection in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie? Edited by Christopher Cone. Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2008. 490 pp. Paper, \$29.00.

As a classic Dispensationalist I am always pleased to see works from a truly Dispensational perspective. This is one such book.

The authors in this work are Dispensational scholars including Charles Ryrie, Robert Thomas, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Paul Benware, Michael Stallard, and John Hart. All together there are chapters by 17 different authors, with several writing more than one chapter. Thus there are 23 chapters in all.

Seven of the chapters (1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 22, and 23) are reprints. While there is nothing wrong with using reprints, it is more normal either to have a book made up entirely of reprints (e.g., journal articles from a single journal) or one that merely has one

or two. It struck me as odd that about one-third of this book is made up of reprints.

The structure of the book doesn't seem to be well thought out. The 23 chapters are not subdivided into various Dispensational topics, though it would have been fairly easy to do so (e.g., Dispensational distinctives [chaps. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18], Dispensation hermeneutics [chaps. 5, 6, 9, 10, 16], Dispensationalism and Daniel 9:24-27 [chaps. 14, 15], Dispensationalism and practical Christian living [chaps. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23]). The chapters do not flow in any sort of logical progression.

Even though the book seems merely to be a collection of articles thrown together without much planning, there is much helpful information here. I especially liked the chapters on the use of the OT in the NT by Robert Thomas (chap. 9), on the kingdom of emergent theology by Gary Gilley (chap. 20, including his rejection of a this-worldly kingdom and "salvation," pp. 426-31), and the chapter on the importance of eschatology in Christian living by Paul Benware (chap. 23).

JOTGES readers will find this work to be basically friendly to Free Grace issues. Authors like Fruchtenbaum, Benware, Ryrie, and Hart are strongly Free Grace. However, Heslop writes about saving faith (chap. 11) and muddies the waters. He cites and rejects the view of Zane Hodges that one simply believes in Jesus for eternal life (p. 237). According to Heslop one must believe in God as Savior and also must believe in God Himself (p. 234). "The person of God has always been and will always be what must be believed in. The message or instrument whereby God presents Himself as the One to be believed in does change" (p. 235). Frankly, I do not understand what Heslop believes one must believe today, or what one had to believe in ages past, to be born again. He says clearly that the message has changed over time due to the progress of revelation (pp. 245-51), but it is hard to follow what the message was or is.

In a passing comment on his own testimony, John Whitcomb writes, "The Gospel message was graciously presented, and after several months of teaching, I surrendered to the claims and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 33). This sort of seemingly Lordship Salvation comment is not found in the other authors.

For the pastor or church leader who is especially interested in eschatology, this volume is worth reading and having.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Denton, Texas

Does God Lie? Faith then Elect or Elect then Faith. By Melvin R. Nelson. Xulon Press, 2007. 257 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

One of the central questions in the Calvinism debate is whether God has a group of people called his “elect” that have not yet exercised faith in Christ. Does faith come before election or does election precede faith? Melvin Nelson answers both questions yes and no while proffering “a third option that leads to a new way to read the debated texts; one that says that we are free to choose while God gives us faith in Christ, our salvation” (p. 31). Confused? You are not alone. I found the book very confusing. I also found it repetitious and rambling. Yet, Nelson, a psychologist with “no formal theological training” (back cover), expands upon an important point I raised in my book *The Other Side of Calvinism* that helps us to correctly interpret some passages in John and Acts that are the mainstay of Calvinists. The main problem with the book is twofold: his presentation and his attempt to apply a truth to the entire NT.

Nelson calls his perspective on Calvinism “faith to faith” (obviously from Rom 1:17). He is no doubt correct that he has “not found any referenced work that teaches this view” (p. 27). He claims that his view “will modify three of the five points under TULIP, reject one point in full, and leave one intact with no change” (p. 31). The rejected point is Limited Atonement, which even some Calvinists discard; the intact point is Perseverance of the Saints, which Nelson wrongly equates with eternal security.

According to Nelson: “Many of the Hebrew people in Palestine at the time of Christ truly believed God before Christ came on the scene” (p. 56). These are the “elect,” and as such are “sheep” (John 10:26-29), “given to Christ” (John 6:37, 65, 17:6), and “drawn” by

the Father (John 6:44, 45). Those outside of Palestine are “other sheep” (John 10:16) and “the children of God that were scattered abroad (John 11:52). The “elect” therefore included John the Baptist (John 1:32-33), the first disciples (John 1), devout men (Acts 2:5), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), Cornelius (Acts 10:1), men that feared God (Acts 13:26), the Gentiles that were ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48), Lydia (Acts 16:14), devout Greeks (Acts 17:4), Justus (Acts 18:7), many of the Corinthians (Acts 18:10), Apollos (Acts 18:24), and the twelve disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7).

During the transition from the OT to the NT, those that had a “faith relationship” with God were “handed over” or “drawn to” Christ (p. 70). They are God’s “elect” that “have yet to believe Christ, but who will do so without fail” (p. 83). So, faith in God comes before election to salvation but faith in Christ comes afterward.

Although we may disagree on semantics, this is all well and good. The problem, though, is that Nelson attempts to apply this teaching throughout the entire NT: “Just like OT saints who believe God, NT saints believe God and are given the promise, but now the promise fulfilled rather than the promise that was yet to come” (p. 105). The elect are “those who truly believe God” (p. 143). Election is verified “when we put our faith in Christ for salvation” (p. 147). And “God grants people to have faith in Christ if and only if they believe God” (p. 116).

So every time it refers to someone believing in the Pauline Epistles, Nelson ponders whether the object of belief is Christ or God. This results in some strained interpretations of the some passages in the Pauline Epistles like Rom 4:5, 24, 8:30; Gal 3:22; Eph 1:3-4; 1 Thess 1:4, 8-10; and 2 Thess 2:13-14. And Nelson never does explain what it means for someone in the Church Age to have faith in God. Millions of people certainly claim to believe in God. Many of these are no doubt sincere and devout. But without Christ they are religious, lost, and, according to Nelson, elect.

Like in Calvinism, the elect “will put their faith in Christ” (p. 143) because “to truly believe God leads to faith in Christ every time” (p. 215). But “when a person refuses to put their faith in Christ they make God a liar; so, they clearly did not, in fact, believe God in the first place.” This sounds strangely similar

to Calvinists stating about the fifth point of Calvinism that if someone is really saved, one of the elect, then he will persevere in faith until the end of his life or he was not saved in the first place.

Nelson is also confusing when it comes to the question of the time that might elapse between believing in God and Christ. On the one hand, he says that “those who are saved believe God through faith in Christ” (p. 147), that “we cannot believe one without faith in the other” (p. 194), and that “God the Father cannot have one set of believers and the Son of God another” (p. 224). But on the other hand, he talks about a “time gap between belief in God and faith in Christ” (p. 108) and says that “for most people today faith in God and in God the Son take place almost simultaneously” (p. 138).

None of this refutes Calvinism, however, as Nelson himself recognizes: “I am almost certain that strict Calvinists will now say that believing God is caused by and comes from God too” (p. 80). Thus, we are still stuck with the same problems: Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace.

And aside from its style and content, the book has other problems as well. Because there is very little introductory material on the Calvinism debate, the reader must be familiar with at least the basic history and doctrines of Calvinism. The book could also use some careful editing. Book titles mentioned in the text are underlined instead of italicized even though italics are used elsewhere in the text. However, book titles are italicized in the bibliography (except for the four books that were overlooked). Some books mentioned in the text are not included in the bibliography; some books mentioned in the text and included in the bibliography have incorrect titles or publication dates. And shouldn't the subtitle end with a question mark?

Does God Lie? should also be much shorter, and for two reasons. First, as I have indicated above, Nelson should have just focused on John, Acts, and the transition from the OT to the NT. This alone would be a good antidote to the Calvinist interpretation of certain verses, especially in John's Gospel. And second, the book appears much longer than it really is. There are unnecessary spaces between paragraphs, at the bottom of pages, at the beginning of chapters, and at the end of sections

within a chapter. And nothing is really consistent. The lack of hyphenation also means that there is an inordinate amount of space between some words.

The bottom line is this: Due to the author's attempt to apply his thesis to the entire NT, I can only recommend the first four chapters of this book.

Laurence M. Vance
Vance Publications
Pensacola, FL

