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A REVIEW OF CHRISTOPHER D. BASS'S *THAT YOU MAY KNOW: ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IN 1 JOHN*¹

EDITOR

I. INTRODUCTION

This book is a revision of the author's doctoral dissertation written at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky under the tutelage of Tom Schreiner, Bruce Ware, and William Cook (p. xiii). Southern has become a 5-point Calvinist school under President Al Mohler. That is evident in this book with its repeated emphasis on the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

II. THE AUTHOR'S THESIS: ASSURANCE BY BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR

Bass' thesis is this: First John teaches that assurance is *grounded in* the cross work of Christ and is *supported by* the lifestyle of believers. This may sound like he is saying that the only condition of assurance of everlasting life is believing that Jesus died on the cross for one's sins, but Bass is clearly not saying that. In the first place the author refers to believing in the finished work of Christ on the cross as shorthand. He never specifically says precisely what one must believe.

In the second place, Bass indicates that perseverance in good works is essential in order to spend eternity with God. Bass repeatedly uses the word *vital* when discussing the works of the believer. He says, "The lifestyle of the believer serves as a vital corroborating support for...assurance" (p. 2). He also says that "assurance of eternal life is *fundamentally grounded* in the work of Christ and supported in a *vital yet subsidiary* way by the lifestyle of the believer (p. 30, italics his). And again,

¹ Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008. 240 pp. Cloth, \$24.99.

“The new birth brings forth a changed life that can be tested, and such testing serves as a vital support of one’s assurance” (p. 97).

He is even clearer under the heading, “Lifestyle of the Believer as a Vital Support to Assurance.” Bass writes,

John unambiguously teaches that while assurance is grounded in Christ, it is vitally supported by the way one lives his life. Therefore, *a person’s lifestyle serves as vital corroborating evidence as to whether he has truly placed his faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross for his sins.*²

The word *vital* means *essential, indispensable, or necessary*.³ By repeatedly using the word *vital* when speaking of the connection between assurance and the lifestyle of the believer, Bass is communicating that faith alone cannot assure anyone. Works are necessary for assurance of everlasting life.

Unfortunately, Bass never discusses how one can know if his works are sufficient to grant assurance. Is there some list in Scripture which indicates that once you have done these things for so many months or years, then you can be sure? There is not. And certainly the so-called *tests of life* in First John do not objectify assurance by works. Subjectivity is inherent in the author’s view. Later we will discuss the five examples the author gives of people struggling with assurance. There he makes clear what is implied throughout the book: *Because our flawed lifestyles are vital to assurance, certainty of one’s eternal destiny is impossible prior to death.*

III. BASS RESPONDS TO ZANE HODGES AND THE FREE GRACE VIEW OF ASSURANCE AND FIRST JOHN

The author is aware of us. He mentions our journal and he calls us “the grace movement” (pp. 27, 27 n 118, 122). He also mentions the views of Zane Hodges on First John in several

² p. 185, italics added; see also p. 192, the fourth illustration

³ See, for example, www.dictionary.com s.v. “vital.”

places, always negatively. Note the insulting language that he uses concerning Zane Hodges: “rather novel view” (p. 28), “Hodges...*imposes* [his theological construct of assurance] on the text of 1 John by way of *an innovative reading* of John’s tests” (p. 28, italics added), “against the overwhelming majority of New Testament scholars” (p. 28), “fanciful exegesis at a number of places” (p. 29), “against the clear teaching of the passage” (p. 29), “a rather innovative approach” (p. 122), “*completely ignores* the background issues of the letter and therefore *misses the whole point of the epistle*” (p. 123, italics added), and “Hodges’ special pleading” (p. 123, n 9).

Such comments are out of character for Bass. He is exceedingly gracious throughout the book—except when talking about the views of Zane Hodges. Those sorts of vitriolic statements are not made in dissertations or in scholarly books. Scholars are very deferential to the views of other scholars and avoid the use of any pejorative language—except when it comes to Zane Hodges and those who promote what the academy considers to be pseudo-scholarship.

IV. BASS DENIES THE CLAIM OF ZANE HODGES THAT THE TESTS-OF-LIFE VIEW OF FIRST JOHN RULES OUT CERTAINTY

Of great interest for *JOTGES* readers is that Bass says that Zane Hodges charges that the tests-of-life view of First John means that “one could not be certain of his salvation until death” (p. 29). Bass rejects this view saying, “Hodges is forced to come up with some fanciful exegesis at a number of places like 2:19” (p. 29).

Yet Bass has dodged the point. The point he is rejecting is that under his view one cannot be certain of salvation until death. Hodges did not prove *that point* by any fancy exegesis of 1 John 2:19 or otherwise. He proved it by logic.

To prove that Hodges actually says that under his view “one could not be certain of his salvation until death,” Bass points the reader to p. 51 of *The Gospel Under Siege*. Unfortunately, Bass does not quote Hodges. Here is what Hodges says on that page:

One well-known view of the purpose of 1 John maintains that the epistle offers us “tests of life.” That is, John confronts his readership with question about the quality of their Christian experience from which they may draw conclusions that they either are, or are not, true believers. Should they fail to measure up, they have no reason to think that they possess eternal life.

It would be hard to devise an approach to John’s first epistle more hopelessly misguided or more completely self-defeating. If the premise on which this approach is based were true, it would be quite impossible for either the original audience of 1 John or any of its subsequent readers to possess the assurance of salvation.

Since the writer repeatedly commands the “abiding” life marked by obedience to Christ’s commands, one cannot really be certain that he is saved until death, if “abiding” is a test of salvation. On the view we are discussing, if I stop “abiding” at some point in the future, I was never a Christian at all.⁴

We might put the argument of Hodges in a logical syllogism:

Major premise: All born again people persevere in good works until death.

Minor premise: No one can be sure he will persevere in good works.

Conclusion: No one can be sure he is born again until death.

In order to escape that logic Bass must either deny that he believes in the perseverance of the saints, or, he must assert that it is possible to be sure you will persevere, even though the Apostle Paul said that he himself was not sure he would persevere (1 Cor 9:27). Bass is trapped by his own theology. But rather than admit that, he tries a theological sleight of hand, getting the reader’s attention away from Hodges’s charge and on to what Bass considers a fanciful interpretation of 1 John 2:19.

⁴Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, Second Edition Revised and Enlarged (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1981, 1992), 51.

If, as Bass says, “a person’s lifestyle serves as vital corroborating evidence as to whether he has truly placed his faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross for his sins” (p. 185), then certainty of one’s eternal destiny would only be possible if one’s current lifestyle was sinless *and* if he had some special revelation from God that guaranteed him that he would not sin in the future. The word *lifestyle* looks not simply at how one is living currently, but also how one will continue to live in the future. As long as the believer constantly “falls short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), and as long as he always has sin in his life (1 John 1:8, 10), as Bass admits, then his lifestyle proves he is a sinner, not a saint.

Possibly Bass has some explanation of how people who sin many times each and every day, and people who know it is possible they could fall away in the future, can find certainty that they are born again by looking at their lifestyles. But he never once tries to explain this. That is odd for a book entitled, *That You May Know*.

III. BASS ARGUES THE OVERARCHING PURPOSE OF 1 JOHN IS FOUND IN 1 JOHN 5:13, NOT IN 1 JOHN 1:3-4

Bass’s argument is that there are five purpose statements in the letter (1:1-3, 4; 2:1, 26; 5:13) and that all five state the purpose for the entire letter (pp. 49 n. 66, 50), though he concedes that “most would argue that [these things in 2:26] refers only to what precedes” (p. 49, n. 66). The last of them, 1 John 5:13, however, is what he calls “the overarching purpose statement” (p. 51) for the whole letter.

I am not sure exactly what he means when he says that all five are the purpose for the whole book and yet one is “the overarching purpose statement.” If all five are the purpose of the entire book, then would there not be five overarching purpose statements?

Hodges, on the other hand, says that there are four purpose statements in the letter (1:3-4; 2:1, 26; 5:13) and that the last three state the purpose only for the material in that immediate context. In the view of Hodges, 1 John 1:3-4 alone states the purpose for the whole book.

Bass gives four lines of support for his view that 1 John 5:13 is the overarching purpose statement.

The first proof that 1 John 5:13 is the overarching purpose statement is that the expression “these things I (or we) write (or have written) to you” occurs four times in the letter and always refers to the purpose of the entire letter (p. 50).

If that expression always refers to the purpose for writing the whole letter, then none of the four would refer simply to the verses which precede it. Yet there is ample evidence (see Hodges) that 2:1 looks back to 1:5-10 and that 2:26 looks back to 2:15-25 and that 5:13 looks back to 5:6-12. Since 1:3-4 is at the start of the letter, it is extremely unlikely that that refers to 1:1-2. In addition, as stated above, if there are four statements of the purpose for the whole book, then there are four overarching purposes, not one overarching purpose. In fact, in a footnote Bass says of his first argument, “To be sure, this is the weakest of the arguments in support of this reading since each particular instance is debated” (p. 50, n. 69). Note that consensus, not context, is what makes him admit the weakness of his first point.

Bass’s second proof that 1 John 5:13 is the overarching purpose statement of 1 John is that “the believer’s assurance is the focal point of this epistle” (p. 50). This is taking one’s conclusion and then using it as proof of your conclusion. While he could be right in this conclusion, he would have to demonstrate that the believer’s assurance is the focal point of the letter. He would have to explain why John repeatedly makes statements that indicate that the believers already are born again (1 John 2:12-14, 20, 21, 25, 27; 5:13). Why would John affirm the regenerate status of the readers if he wanted them to look to their lifestyles to see if they were born again?

He would have to explain why doubting one’s eternal destiny produces fellowship with God (1:3-4; 2:1) and how it would help the readers fend off false teachers (2:26). Would not certainty of one’s eternal destiny (5:9-13) help one continue to walk in fellowship with God (1:3-4; 2:1) and to avoid being misled by false teachers (2:26)? Fellowship, not assurance, seems to be “the focal point of the epistle.”

The author’s third proof that 1 John 5:13 is the overarching purpose statement is that the purpose statement of John’s

Gospel is at the end of the book (20:30-31) and 1 John 5:13 is at the end of the letter (p. 51). What is not mentioned or discussed by Bass is that the Gospel of John contains but one statement of purpose. Since First John contains four such purposes, the argument breaks down. One of the four is the purpose of the whole letter and three are the purpose of the section in which they appear. We cannot determine which one is the purpose for the whole letter by comparing First John with the Fourth Gospel.

The fourth proof Bass cites that 1 John 5:13 is the overarching purpose statement of the epistle is that D. A. Carson says that it makes no sense that John waited till the end of the letter to deal with the issue of assurance of everlasting life (p. 51).

Why would Bass cite a comment made by someone else as proof of his own view? Why did he not simply make his own point? It is not as though the point made by Carson is one that Bass could not state just as clearly.

Beside, there are compelling reasons why John indeed waited till the end of the letter to deal with the issue of the continuance of the assurance of the readers. The readers were mature believers. They already had assurance (2:12-27). To suggest that they lacked assurance is a total misreading of the letter.

John's concern was not that they *gain* assurance, but that they *retain* it. He was concerned that they would lose their assurance if they were misled by false teachers. Since retaining assurance of one's everlasting life is crucial to walking in fellowship with God (cf. 2:26), it makes sense that John would deal with this issue. Putting it at the end of the letter makes perfect sense.

I would translate 1 John 5:13 in this way: *I have written these things [5:6-12] to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you might continue to know that you have everlasting life and that you might continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.* The NKJV puts the word *continue* only in the second of the purpose statements in v 13. But it should reasonably be put in both.

Here is how Bass responds to the view of Hodges that First John is about tests of fellowship:

Such an interpretation, however, completely ignores the background issues of this letter and therefore misses the whole point of the epistle. The issue in 1 John is that those who fail the various tests simply demonstrate that their fellowship is momentarily broken, temporarily concealing the fact that they are really believers [Hodges, *Epistles of John*, 139-46]. On the contrary, John makes every effort to demonstrate that those who fail the tests were neither presently nor previously in fellowship with God because they were liars, antichrists, and sons of the Devil as exhibited by their lifestyle.⁵

Bass misinterprets Hodges here. Hodges says nothing on pp. 139-46, or anywhere in his commentary, about “temporarily concealing the fact that they are really believers.” Indeed, on pp. 139-46 he repeatedly says that even if a believer is not in fellowship with God, he is still born again.

In Hodges view a person does not demonstrate he is a believer by his lifestyle. In his view a person demonstrates he is walking in fellowship with God by his lifestyle.⁶ Hodges says that the way we know someone is born again is by his confession that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for everlasting life.⁷

Thus in Hodges view people cannot be not guilty of “temporarily concealing the fact that they are really believers” by failing to live righteously. Since Bass does not provide a single quote that proves that Hodges says that, I am at a loss to figure out how he even came up with this suggestion.

In addition, it is ridiculous to suggest that Hodges “completely ignores the background issues of this letter.” His introduction to the commentary on the Johannine Epistles contains five pages on audience, date, and destination, three pages on its literary character, and five pages on the purpose of the book. In addition, in the commentary itself he devotes three pages to the discussion of 1:3-4; three pages to 2:1; one page to 2:26; and four pages to 5:13. He also devotes three pages to

⁵ Bass, *That You May Know*, 123.

⁶ See, for example, Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Grace Evangelical Society: Irving, TX: 1999), 74-92.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 115-19, 228-29.

discussing 1 John 2:19, a passage which Bass thinks refers to people who left the local church to which John was writing. (See next section.)

It is interesting that Bass himself says of 1 John 1:3, "At least one of the reasons John has penned this letter is so that his readers might have fellowship with him, which is also fellowship with the Father and the Son" (p. 45). Why then not understand that the purpose of the whole letter, what Bass calls "the overarching purpose," and see the other three as supporting this purpose? The reason seems to be theological, not contextual. His theology tells him that all who are truly regenerate will unfailingly manifest that regeneration by persevering in good works. Since one of the main proofs of the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is First John, it is not surprising that Bass settles on this "overarching purpose."

IV. WHOSE EXPLANATION OF 1 JOHN 2:19 IS FANCIFUL, BASS'S OR HODGES'S?

Bass is very dogmatic about his understanding of 1 John 2:19. He sees the view of Zane Hodges as being a fanciful one.

First John 2:19 reads:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Here is my summary of what Bass contends that means:

They went out from you, but they were not of you; for if they had been of you, they would have continued with you; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of you.

In other words, Bass sees the first person plural in 1 John 2:19 as referring to *the readers, not to John and the others in the Jerusalem church*.

This must sound like something I am making up. How could anyone suggest that when John says *we* he means *you*,

especially when in the very next verse he switches to the second person plural?

Here are Bass's own words:

The use of the phrase 'from us' (*ex hēmōn*) demonstrates that those he now refers to as 'antichrists' *were once part of the community to which he is writing*.⁸

The author fails to come right out and say that the first person plural stands for the second person plural here. Nor does he cite any evidence in First John or any of John's writings where *we* stands for *you*. But it is clear that he takes "from us" to mean "from the community to which [John] is writing."

After making this claim, Bass immediately moves on saying, "Those who had departed had probably made a Christological confession, been baptized, and taken on every appearance of one who has been born of God..." (p. 165). Bass simply states as fact the first person plural in 1 John 2:19 refers to the readers.

I find that statement amazing. Whereas the readers themselves do not give "every appearance of one who has been born of God," the antichrists do! Thus in Bass's view, the antichrists passed John's tests.

Indeed, Bass goes further. He ridicules Hodges for suggesting that "from us" and "of us" refers to the author and the Jerusalem church:

To support [his] view, however, Hodges is forced to come up with some fanciful exegesis of places like 2:19. Against the clear teaching of the passage, he insists that the "us" from which the false teachers have departed was not the community to which John was writing but the apostles themselves. He seems confident that these false teachers 'went out' from the Jerusalem church as opposed to a secession from the community to which John has written.⁹

Frankly, I do not understand why "from us" and "of us" should or even could mean "from you" or "of you." Nor do I understand why that is "the clear teaching of the passage" or

⁸ Bass, *That You May Know*, 165, italics added.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

why Hodges was “forced to come up with some fanciful exegesis of 2:19” in order to conclude that “from us” and “of us” means “from us” and “of us.”

Let me reverse Bass's last paragraph about his understanding of 1 John 2:19, replacing “Hodges” with “Bass” and replacing Hodges's view with Bass's view:

To support [his] view, however, Bass is forced to come up with some fanciful exegesis of places like 2:19. Against the clear teaching of the passage, he insists that the “us” from which the false teachers have departed was not John and the Jerusalem church but the community to which John was writing. He seems confident that these false teachers ‘went out’ from the community to which John has written as opposed to a secession from the Jerusalem church.

Bass does not discuss other uses of the first person plural before 1 John 2:19. If he had, he would see that most or all of them refer to the Apostle John and the others in the apostolic circle. Note 1 John 1:1-4 where the first person plural occurs eleven times, always in reference to John and his circle and never to the readers (see esp. 1 John 1:4 where *we* and *you* are contrasted).

Note too that in the very next verse, 1 John 2:20, John uses the second person plural twice. That he doesn't use the second person in v 19, but does in v 20, is very damaging to Bass's argument and very supportive of Hodges's.

Since Hodges spends three pages in his commentary explaining 1 John 2:19, I can't cite all of that here. But Hodges, unlike Bass, actually gives some support for his view. He writes,

The **us** which is repeated four times in this verse [1 John 2:19] obviously is in contrast to the “you” of the following verse [v 20], which is emphatic in Greek. Here we meet for the first time the “we”—“you”—“us” contrast which we also meet in a similar context in 4:4-6.¹⁰

The shift from the first person plural to the second person plural is a strong argument for Hodges's view that the first

¹⁰ Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 108.

person plural refers to the author and the Jerusalem church, not to the readers. Then he adds another argument, “The antichrists had most definitely not left the church or churches to whom John writes, for if they had they would no longer have been a problem!”¹¹

What Bass expects us to believe is that these false teachers were once part of the church of the readers, left because they did not fit with their theology, and now have returned and are receiving a welcome hearing from the very church from which they seceded over doctrinal grounds. I think it is Bass’s view which is fanciful.

V. FIVE PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF HOW BASS’S VIEW CAN BE APPLIED IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

The author is a pastor and so he brings practical application. This is very helpful, especially in a book on assurance of salvation.

According to Bass there are at least five different ways in which we should respond to people who express doubts about their salvation to us. He gives the reader five examples which seem to be drawn from his own personal ministry experiences. He calls them “case studies” and says that “each is a real-world situation.”¹²

A. THE MAN WITH AN INSUFFICIENT AMOUNT OF GOOD WORKS (BUT NOT WITH THE PRESENCE OF SERIOUS MORAL DEFECTION)

First, he speaks about “a man who had been attending your church for several years.”¹³ According to Bass he was interviewed when he first came to the church, evidently to determine whether he should be allowed to become a member. The man indicated “that he made a profession of faith when he was 10.” Evidently that explanation, even though it was very unclear, was sufficient for the man to be accepted as a member.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bass, *That You May Know*, 189.

¹³ Ibid.

In Southern Baptist circles one way a person can join a church is by his personal profession of faith. The person indicates that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ now and he tells when he first professed faith in Him. This man fits that profile.

The problem, Bass continues, is this:

As you and your staff have come to know him, it has become clear that there is virtually no evidence [in his works] that he is a believer.¹⁴

Note that the problem is not what he believes. The issue is in his behavior. Note too that the matter is not completely cut and dry. "Virtually no evidence" is not the same as "no evidence." It would be impossible, even under Bass's understanding of assurance, for the leaders of local churches to declare themselves as infallible arbiters of who is born again and who is not based on observing people's behavior over a few years. Even a born-again person, according to Bass's view, might go through a time that could last for years where he was not manifesting the abundance of good works that supposedly characterize born-again people.

The problem with this man is not that he is walking in open rebellion against Christ. We are not told about immorality or drunkenness or anything of a negative nature that makes the leaders doubt whether he is born again. The problem is *an insufficient amount of good works*.

The solution in this case, the author says, is to press him "regarding his indifference to living a holy life and [to] query him regarding his salvation."¹⁵ Now remember that the man had been asked about his salvation several years before when he first came to the church. The answer at that time was sufficient. Now it is time to question him again.

The man's answer this time starts out as unclear as before. He says,

"I have already done that. I've prayed the sinner's prayer, and once you've prayed this, you can never lose your salvation."¹⁶

Without commenting on that, Bass continues,

¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Then he looks at you and emphatically tells you, “The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus died for all my sins and I believe that. Moreover, the Bible teaches once saved always saved.”¹⁷

Rather than pointing out that there is no such thing as “the sinner’s prayer” and telling the man that he is correct that all who believe in Jesus are saved once and for all, we are to tell him that:

He has overemphasized the atoning sacrifice of Christ *and has completely disregarded* John’s teaching *on the necessity of a changed life...* Therefore, the pastor might take him to some of John’s tests of life and gently ask, “How do you reconcile your life with these verses?”¹⁸

It is amazing to see a graduate of Southern Seminary suggesting that a Baptist who has assurance based on once saved, always saved, but not based on self-examination of his own works, “has overemphasized the atoning sacrifice of Christ and has completely disregarded...the necessity of a changed life.” Works, not faith, for Bass, are the essential (or vital) element in assurance.

So with people who are regular church attenders and who have no outstanding moral failure, but who are not showing what the pastor thinks are sufficient concern about holy living, we need to tell them that a changed life is necessary in order to escape eternal condemnation. We should ask them to explain how they reconcile their lives with the personal holiness required to spend eternity with God.

I fail to see how this would lead the man to gaining assurance of his eternal destiny. If, as the pastor thinks, this man is not born again, then the issue is that he needs to be born again. If this line of questioning convinces the man that he is not really born again, as the pastor thinks, then why doesn’t Bass tell us how to proceed? Is it enough to strip church members of their assurance and to leave them afraid they are going to hell? Or after we take away their assurance based on faith in

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., italics added.

the promise of once-saved, always saved, shouldn't we replace it with the right kind of assurance?

If so, what is the next step with this man? What does he need to do now to gain assurance if he is born again, or to be born again if he is not? Bass implies that the solution is in his lifestyle. The man needs to cease being indifferent about holiness. That is, he needs to commit himself to working hard for the Lord. Maybe the solution is that the man needs to increase his church giving, to go on visitation each week, to volunteer regularly in the church's soup kitchen, and to faithfully attend classes on being a better husband and father.

While all of those things are good things, doing those things in order to avoid eternal condemnation is to do them for the wrong reason.¹⁹ That is works-salvation thinking.

B. THE PERFECTIONIST WITH YEARS OF WONDERFUL FRUIT WHO NONETHELESS FEARS SHE ISN'T HOLY ENOUGH

A second type of person is a woman whom "you personally led...to the Lord, and you have witnessed wonderful fruit over the course of several years."²⁰ Like the man in the first example, you've observed her for several years. The difference is that you've seen "wonderful fruit" in her life, whereas in his life you saw very little of that.

Another way to join Southern Baptist churches is by professing that you just now have come to faith in Christ. This woman is such a case.

She appears to be a perfectionist who is concerned because "she simply does not think that her life is holy enough."²¹ It would seem this is a great opportunity to point her to the promise of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Jesus as found in John 3:16. This would be a good time to tell her that her works have nothing to do with assurance or with her eternal destiny and that she indeed will never be holy enough to earn eternal life by her works. Instead we are told that the answer is that "the pastor must encourage her to look to the cross."²² Of

¹⁹ See, for example, Matt 7:21-23; John 6:28-29; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Rev 22:17.

²⁰ Bass, *That You May Know*, 190.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.* 191.

course, in Bass's view there is no certainty even if the woman looks to the cross, since he teaches that perseverance in a changed life is required to spend eternity with God. And that is what she is concerned about. How would pointing her to the cross alleviate her doubts?

There are two main differences between the first two examples. First, the woman, in the eyes of the pastor, had wonderful fruit and the man did not. Second, the man lacking wonderful fruit had assurance of his eternal destiny based on once-saved, always saved and the woman with the wonderful fruit did not have assurance.

It appears that Bass thinks it is better to lack assurance and to be concerned that you are not holy enough than it is to have assurance based on your faith apart from your works.

C. THE PERSON WHO DOESN'T LIKE SOME OF THE PEOPLE IN CHURCH

Example three concerns a young man who sounds like he has Asperger's Syndrome, agoraphobia, ADHD, or OCD. We are not told how long he has been attending the church, or even if he is a member. Possibly the author is using this young man as an example of one who is merely an attender, but has not yet actually joined the church.

In any case, Bass says that this young man...

...is bold in his assertion that he loves God. He rarely misses corporate worship, and yet he is always the first to leave when the service is over. In fact, this young man always has an excuse for not engaging in fellowship opportunities, and when you talk with him, he makes clear that he does not want to spend time with people, and even more to the point, there are other believers in the church that he simply does not like.²³

This leads the pastor to question whether he is born again. The solution Bass gives here is to tell him that unless he loves the brethren he is not born again.²⁴

No explanation is given as to why *not liking* someone is the same as *not loving* someone. Evidently the author equates

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 191-92.

the two. One wonders if it is not possible to love people whom you do not like. Isn't that the point of the parable of the good Samaritan?

Does the author actually *like* everyone in his church? Possibly. But I, for one, admit that I do not like every believer that I've ever met. At times I do not even like *myself*! I doubt there is a person on earth who always likes himself, his spouse, his own children, or everyone in his church.

I am amazed that a Southern Baptist pastor actually thinks that people who are quick to leave his services give strong evidence that they are not born again. No wonder lots of people in his church appear to struggle with assurance. If the pastor is keeping track of how quickly people leave his services and then is following up with quizzes and lectures about the need to like everyone in the congregation or else you prove you are on your way to hell, it is no wonder that lack of assurance is a major issue he must repeatedly confront.

D. A NEW CONVERT WHO REALIZES SHE STILL SINS

The fourth example is like example two, except she has only been born again for several months, not several years. Bass says:

She is living for God and has experienced some genuine fruit in her life, but she is confronted by the fact that she still sins and wonders whether she is really saved.²⁵

How does the author know she has experienced "genuine fruit"? I've never met a Calvinist who says he can infallibly determine what fruit is genuine and what is not. I am shocked to find Bass using such language. "Genuine fruit" is better than "wonderful fruit" in the second example. Whatever this woman did, it was enough to give the pastor, but not her, absolute certainty that she is born again.

So why does she "wonder whether she is really saved"? Did she expect to be sinless? Or does she fail to see in her life the type of good works that she thinks she should see?

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

Where did she get the idea that she should look to her works for assurance? Evidently she was taught this by the pastor.²⁶ Then, rather than taking her to John 3:16; 4:10; 5:24; Eph 2:8-9; or Rev 22:17—all of which teach about the free gift of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Jesus, the solution is that “she needs to be pointed back to the cross.”²⁷ Of course, if she is a five-point Calvinist as Bass presumably is, then how does she know that Jesus even died for her? She must look to her works to see if she is elect. So she is back at her lifestyle, which she knows to be imperfect.

E. THE UNFAITHFUL HUSBAND WHO QUESTIONS HOW A CHILD OF GOD COULD BEHAVE LIKE THAT

The final example is not a church member or even attender. Here Bass gives the example of a stranger he (or some other pastor) meets on an airplane. This traveling businessman indicates he is heading home “in order to see his family and attend his home church where he serves as a deacon.”²⁸ But he then indicates “he has been struggling with his assurance over the course of the past three months.”²⁹ The pastor discovers that the man has been involved in an affair, and “now he is questioning how a child of God can behave in such a way.”³⁰

Bass is convinced that in such cases, where the sin is one that he considers big enough to question the person’s eternal destiny, the issue is not the root, but the fruit. (Unfortunately, Bass doesn’t give us a list of sins that make the issue the fruit. Jealousy? Envy? Strife? Outbursts of anger? Lying? Lust? Cheating on one’s taxes? Drunkenness?) Thus he doesn’t speak to the man about the promise of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Jesus (e.g., John 3:16). Rather,

You exhort him to repent, knowing that the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to cleanse such sins.

²⁶ As Bass’s book shows, people in 5-point Calvinist churches are taught the necessity of good works for assurance. In addition, see Philip F. Congdon, “Soteriological Implications of Five-Point Calvinism,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 1995): 55-68 and Zane C. Hodges, “The New Puritanism, Part 1: Carson on Christian Assurance,” *JOTGES* (Spring 1993): 19-31.

²⁷ Bass, *That You May Know*, 192.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, the caring pastor also reminds him that if he refuses to repent and persists in this lifestyle of sin, his struggles with assurance could well be God's kindness in showing him that he was never a believer in the first place.³¹

Bass doesn't even consider the most obvious possibility, that the man isn't born again, but because of this encounter, wants to be. Let's assume the man is convinced, after Bass says this, that he never was a believer in the first place. What would he need to do to be born again now? Presumably he already believes that Jesus died on the cross for his sins and rose from the dead. No one could be a deacon in a Southern Baptist church, as Bass tells us this man is, who didn't believe that. In addition, he almost certainly believes in once saved, always saved, since believing that is also required to be a Southern Baptist deacon.

So what does this man need to do in order to be born again if he isn't already? Bass seems to assume that the man will either repent and prove he is already born again, or not repent and prove he is not. But what if he is not born again and he repents? How does he become born again? The solution seems to be that the man needs to get to work. The man needs to have a godly lifestyle, because his problem is not with what he believes, but with his lifestyle.

F. ALL THESE EXAMPLES UNDERSCORE THE LACK OF ASSURANCE INHERENT IN BASS'S POSITION

The author fails to show how any of these five people could be sure of their eternal destiny by following what he suggests. Indeed, the opposite is surely true. Every one of these five people would leave these encounters convinced that they could not be sure of their eternal destiny until they died.

These applications underscore the dark side of Calvinism: assurance is impossible in this system.

These applications all illustrate something else. The author is clearly well intentioned. He wants what is best for these people. But he views himself as sent by God to be the arbiter of who is likely born again and who is not. Thus with people whom he thinks, based on observation, are really nice folks,

³¹ Ibid.

he grants them “assurance,” telling them not to be overly concerned about their works, but to look at the cross. But to those people he thinks, based on observation, are not nice folks, he tells them to be overly concerned about their works and to avoid thinking that the cross is all they need.

I, for one, am glad that I am not required to look at the works of people in order to determine whether they are born again or not. I think that is a burden that would really eat away at me. What if the pastor is wrong and the really nice lady with the “wonderful fruit” really isn’t born again? Then he has given her false “assurance.” And what if the guy who always is first to leave the service and doesn’t like some of the church members really is born again? Then he has tried to remove the assurance of one who is born again.

Is the pastor to do this with his own children? I have heard Calvinist pastors in open meetings do just that. I heard one pastor at a large Calvinist conference talk about his teenage daughter and son and publicly say that he thinks it is likely his daughter is really born again but that he has serious doubts about whether his son is the real deal. Imagine having your own Dad questioning whether you are regenerate because he doesn’t think you are holy enough.

I feel sorry for anyone living under such bondage. That Bass thinks that this is the system God wishes for His children is sad. Why would God wish for His children to doubt that they are really His children? Why wouldn’t God want His children to be sure of their standing?

VI. CONCLUSION

I highly recommend this book to any well-grounded believer. It is a very honest and open portrayal of the Lordship Salvation view of First John, complete with five practical illustrations.

This book shows how Calvinists view “assurance.” For them a godly lifestyle is essential in order to have “assurance.” Of course, since no one’s lifestyle is perfect now, it is no wonder that people who are pastored by people who hold Bass’s view on assurance constantly struggle with assurance of their eternal destinies.

DEGREES OF REWARDS IN ETERNITY: SANCTIFICATION BY WORKS?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Within the study of eschatology, differing perspectives on the nature of the Second Coming of Christ, the Millennium, and the doctrine of eternal punishment are well known and amply documented. Perhaps less known and documented is the abundance of perspectives with regard to the concept of degrees of reward in eternity for believers. On one side of the debate is the view that an eternal reward *in addition to* eternal life is a contradiction of the Protestant emphasis upon salvation by grace apart from works or merit. For example, Blomberg asserts that a doctrine of degrees of eternal reward in heaven leaves one “with justification by faith and sanctification by works.”¹ Additionally, he objects that “it is hard to reconcile any kind of doctrine of varying rewards in God’s kingdom with the notion of grace as something wholly undeserved.”² According to this school of thought, texts traditionally adduced as teaching such a concept have been misconstrued.³

¹ Craig L. Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” *JETS* 35 (June 1992): 159. It is available online at www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/35/35-2/JETS_35-2_159-172_Blomberg.pdf.

² Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 222.

³ Other representatives of this perspective in the debate include Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); and G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954). Though he affirms the “divine promise of reward—reward given to all who walk in His ways—is recorded in many passages of Scripture,” Berkouwer is critical of Kuyper’s view that there is a Scriptural

On the other side of the debate are those who affirm the concept of degrees of eternal reward. As Sauer expresses it: “Justification is a gift of free grace, but the measure of glorification depends upon personal devotion and steadfastness in the race.”⁴ However, there is a variety of perspectives within this general affirmation. For example, one perspective heartily affirms the concept of degrees of eternal reward for believers as a significant and pervasive theological motif.⁵ Indeed, some advocates of this perspective interpret many if not all NT warning passages in terms of the loss or gain of rewards.⁶ Others go as far as to teach the prospect of a virtual purgatory for those believers who were especially unfaithful in their Christian lives.⁷

“distinction between eternal life as such and a special honor or pleasure in eternal life” (ibid., 114, 119).

⁴ Erich Sauer, *In the Arena of Faith: A Call to a Consecrated Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 162.

⁵ Representatives include Paul Benware, *The Believer’s Payday* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002); Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1990; reprint, 2006); Kenneth F. Dodson, *The Prize of the Up-Calling* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1989); Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981) and *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1985); R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983; Chicago: Moody, 1985); Erwin W. Lutzer, *Your Eternal Reward* (Chicago: Moody, 1998); Joe Wall, *Going for the Gold: Reward and Loss at the Judgment of Believers* (Chicago: Moody, 1991); and Robert N. Wilkin, *The Road to Reward: Living Today in Light of Tomorrow* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003).

⁶ For example, with reference to the warning in Heb 10:26-39, Dillow states: “It is best to interpret Heb. 10 as a warning against the failure to persevere to the end. The consequences of this failure are ... not a loss of salvation but severe discipline in time.... The most severe punishment, however, is that God will have ‘no pleasure in Him’ [sic]. When the carnal Christian stands before His [sic] Lord in the last day, he will not hear Him say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord’” (Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 466). Conversely, Schreiner and Caneday tend to see all NT warnings in terms of salvation: “We have also argued that these warnings do not merely threaten believers with losing rewards but that eternal life itself is at stake” (Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 268).

⁷ For example, Craig is of the opinion that the rich man who died and descended to Hades, as described in Luke 16:19-31, will one day “come forth and take his place among the redeemed in glory” after “he shall have served out the sentence of judgment imposed on him by his Holy Judge” (S. S. Craig, *The Dualism of Eternal Life: A Revolution in Eschatology* [Rochester, NY: Published by author, 1916], 138). Similarly, Faust teaches that the “unfaithful Christian goes to the same place as the unbeliever and hypocrite

Yet another group of Evangelical exegetes and theologians give some credence to a doctrine of degrees of eternal reward, but they more stringently circumscribe the doctrine within certain theological boundaries and limit its expression to certain texts. Morris is typical of this perspective in the following paragraph:

There are some who object to the whole idea of eternal rewards, affirming that it is not true Christian service if we serve simply for reward. This affirmation may unhesitatingly be endorsed. Selfishness is not less selfishness because it is directed towards spiritual rather than material ends.... *But that does not mean that God is to put all men on a flat level in the hereafter.* Here and now the man who gives himself whole-heartedly to the service of Christ knows more of the joy of the Lord than the half-hearted. We have no warrant from the New Testament for thinking that it will be otherwise in heaven.⁸

Given the variety of ways in which this doctrine is either elucidated or else denied altogether, one wonders whether the Scriptures speak clearly to this issue and whether a theologically coherent doctrine of degrees of eternal reward can be Scripturally defended. As will be shown, this writer contends both these questions can be answered in the affirmative.

While much contemporary teaching focuses upon the present benefits of a consecrated life, less attention has been paid to the relationship between present sanctification and future glorification. In other words, to what end are believers being sanctified? Scripture attests to the value of those ends primarily or exclusively realized in the present (e.g., Matt 5:16; Eph 5:8-17; Phil 2:14-15; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pet 2:9, 11-17; 3:16, etc.). But what difference, if any, does present growth in Christ make for eternity? If a correlation between present sanctification and reward as an aspect of future glorification can be established,

until after the millennium (Luke 12:46)" (J. D. Faust, *The Rod: Will God Spare It?* [Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 2002], 408). Indeed, Pantou places those believers "guilty of the gravest offenses...temporarily in Gehenna" (D. M. Pantou, *The Judgment Seat of Christ*, 2d ed. [London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1921], 76).

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 66-67, emphasis added.

the value of such sanctification, especially for those who are assured of their salvation, is thereby enhanced. As Kim states: “[B]elieving that God rewards is an essential aspect of Christian faith (Heb 11:6). A proper, Biblical understanding of rewards is a powerful motivator that does not cheapen the Christian faith but strengthens and purifies it. It gives clearer focus to the sanctification process and weighty glory to our God.”⁹

In the view of some, even if there are degrees of reward for Christians, their impact is felt only at the believer’s judgment before Christ. However, while the receiving of praise and honor at the Judgment Seat of Christ is certainly an experience to desire and even strive for, the prospect of the *eternal* significance of such honor or reward would seem to provide an even greater motivation to present faithfulness.

Unfortunately, time and space do not allow for a full exegetical treatment of all relevant texts. Instead, following a brief summary here of the conclusions of such a treatment,¹⁰ this paper will focus upon response to a number of philosophical and theological objections to a doctrine of degrees of reward in eternity.

II. SUMMARY OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE PRIMARY PASSAGES ON REWARDS

A. FUTURE RAMIFICATIONS FOR PRESENT EARTHLY ACTIVITY

The relevant NT texts on rewards present a number of distinctive teachings.¹¹ Several texts indicate there will be *future ramifications* for present earthly activity. Romans 14:10-12

⁹ Paul D. Kim, “Reward and Sanctification” (Th.M. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001), 1.

¹⁰ See the writer’s unpublished (as yet) dissertation “Investing in Eternity: A New Testament Theology of Rewards” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Baptist Bible Seminary, 2008).

¹¹ The passages selected as “primary” for analysis in the dissertation are (1) Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–6); (2) the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30), the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27), and the Parable of the Vineyard Workers (Matt 20:1-16); (3) Paul’s teaching concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10–4:5; 2 Cor 5:10-11); (4) references to believers’ crowns (1 Cor 9:25; Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10; 3:11); and (5) the overcomer promises of Revelation 2–3.

establishes the principle that every believer will give account to the Lord for his conduct in this life. In particular, 1 Cor 3:8-15 teaches there will be rewards for those who have invested their lives and ministries in that which God esteems highly (“gold, silver, precious stones”). Others, who have invested in that which God does not esteem (“wood, hay, straw”), will suffer the loss of rewards. The possibility of the loss of rewards appears to be the teaching of Rev 3:11 as well. Likewise, 2 Cor 5:10 indicates that as a result of appearing before the Judgment Seat of Christ, the believer will “receive the things done in the body.” Thus, an identifiable link is established between a believer’s present conduct and a future, but unspecified recompense.

B. DURATION OF THE REWARD OR LOSS OF REWARD

While the *duration* of the reward or loss suffered is never explicitly specified, there are a number of indications that it is *eternal*. First, contextual factors in 1 Cor 3:10-15 point toward outcomes that endure forever. That is, the severity of the consequences of the judgment depicted there coupled with the detailed description of both the positive and negative effects of this judgment argue against a mere momentary discrimination between believers. To limit the results of this judgment in any way has the effect of nullifying its meaningfulness. Second, the specific terminology employed in Matt 6:19-21 (“treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys”), 1 Cor 9:25 (“imperishable”) and 1 Pet 5:4 (“does not fade away”) to describe future rewards and promised crowns is strong testimony to their eternal nature. Third, the duration of the loss of reward would necessarily need to be permanent or else the very purpose of having a judgment would seem to be pointless. However, any regret, remorse, or shame experienced (1 Cor 3:15; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 John 2:28) will not endure forever in light of texts such as Rev 21:4. Finally, within dispensational theology the Millennium is considered the first phase of the eternal kingdom.¹² By implication, the parables describing the reward

¹² McClain explains: “As we pass from chapter 20 into 21 of the Apocalypse...the Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord ends, not by abolition, but by its mergence into the Universal Kingdom of God. Thus it is perpetuated forever, no longer as a separate entity, but in indispensable union with the original Kingdom of God from which it sprang” (Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959; reprint,

of kingdom responsibilities (Matt 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27) imply an everlasting benefit.

C. CRITERIA FOR RECEPTION OF REWARDS

Various *criteria for the reception* of these rewards is indicated in several texts. For example, Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount mentions adherence to Christ's teaching (Matt 5:19) and purity of motive (Matt 6:4, 6, 18) as the basis for future reward. Correspondingly, his parables in Matt 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27 emphasize character, faithfulness, and the degree of responsibility and gifting. This latter criterion leads to the teaching of reward in proportion to one's fidelity to the opportunities given for service.

Like Jesus, Paul also mentions purity of motive and faithfulness (1 Cor 4:1-5) as key criteria for reward. In addition, he emphasizes the *quality* of each person's work in 1 Corinthians 3, which in context is related to fidelity to the revelation of God in Christ. He also speaks of personal and voluntary sacrifice for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:24-27) and fruitfulness in evangelism (Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19) as a basis for future reward. In 2 Tim 4:8 Paul highlights finishing one's life and ministry well in view of a longing for Christ's return that has practical import in the life of the believer. Peter promises a special reward for elders who shepherd the church in a Christ-honoring manner (1 Pet 5:1-4). Finally, while the crowns promised in Jas 1:12 and Rev 2:10 most likely refer to the promise of eternal life for all believers, they also highlight the importance of perseverance in faithfulness to Christ in the face of persecution. On the other hand, the lack of perseverance or faithfulness is the implied basis for the loss of reward in Rev 3:11.

D. NATURE OF THE REWARDS

While the exact nature of these rewards is not specified, several texts suggest the granting of *varying responsibilities* in the kingdom (Matt 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17, 19). Other texts speak of receiving *praise* from God (Matt 25:21, 23, Luke 19:17; 1 Cor

Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974], 513). With regard to the church itself, Pentecost affirms: "The church enters into her eternal state at the rapture" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964], 577).

4:5). Some theologians speculate that the promised rewards are directly related to an enhanced capacity to enjoy fellowship with God.¹³ This thought may be the point of the scene depicted in Revelation 4, where twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the throne.

E. THE GRACIOUS BASIS OF REWARDS

The *gracious basis* of all rewards is underscored in several texts. One such text is the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30). Here the surpassing greatness of the reward in comparison with the service rendered underscores the gracious basis of the reward itself. However, this gracious basis is most clearly emphasized in the Parable of the Vineyard Workers (Matt 20:1-16). Here there is also an implicit teaching that those converted later in life will not necessarily suffer a disadvantage with regard to the rewards they may receive for faithful service.

In summary, a number of texts affirm the concept of degrees of eternal reward in a manner that underscores the gracious basis of those rewards. At the same time they link the reception of rewards to the degree to which the believer has faithfully lived his life and conducted his ministry in conformity with the revelation of God in Christ.

III. SYNTHESIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF DEGREES OF REWARD WITHIN A CALVINISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Besides the task of summarizing the teaching on rewards into a coherent doctrine of rewards, it is important to demonstrate the consistency of this doctrine with one's systematic theology. In this regard, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate the consistency and compatibility of the doctrine of degrees of reward within a Calvinistic theological framework.¹⁴

¹³ This idea will be further explored in the following section of this paper.

¹⁴ Editor's note: Bozung does not indicate his level of agreement with Calvinism (e.g., 3 point, 4 point, 5 point). His point here is that the idea of degree of rewards is not antithetical to Calvinism. See Section IV.B. (p. 32) for Bozung's comment on Blomburg's understanding of the fifth point of Calvinism.

Because of the inherent emphasis of Calvinism upon the sovereignty and gracious initiative of God, both in salvation and the process of sanctification, any teaching which suggests recognition of the initiative and meritorious activity of human beings would seem to be implicitly, if not explicitly, suspect. However, as will be shown, in the case of a doctrine of degrees of reward such a conflict is more illusionary than substantive.

One way to demonstrate the consistency and compatibility of the teaching of degrees of reward with a Calvinistic systematic theology is through a response to several objections to this doctrine from a fervent adherent of Calvinism. One such adherent is Craig Blomberg. In a 1992 *JETS* article,¹⁵ Blomberg voices numerous objections, many of a theological nature, to the doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven. His central thesis is that “there is not a single NT text that, when correctly interpreted, supports the notion that believers will be distinguished one from another for all eternity on the basis of their works as Christians.”¹⁶ A secondary assertion is that such a doctrine “can have highly damaging consequences for the motivation and psychology of living the Christian life.”¹⁷

To this writer’s knowledge, no definitive response to this article has ever been written, though references to some of his objections can be found in a few works.¹⁸ Since Blomberg writes from a Reformed or Calvinistic perspective, a proper and detailed response to these objections will ensure this doctrine can be accommodated within such a framework. The following discussion represents this response.

¹⁵ Craig Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” 159-172. In his introduction, Blomberg states that during the previous twenty years of his Christian life he had “grown progressively more uncomfortable with any formulation that differentiates among believers as regards our eternal rewards” (159).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For example, Kim cites a handful of Blomberg’s objections in his chapter on “The Problems of Reward,” but he chooses not to address them directly (Paul D. Kim, “Reward and Sanctification” [Th.M. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001], 4). And Lewis and Demarest, Blomberg’s colleagues at Denver Seminary, after referring to this article, give a three sentence response at the end of their less than one page discussion of rewards for believers (Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Three Volumes in One* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 3:478).

IV. A RESPONSE TO EXEGETICAL OBJECTIONS

Blomberg's objections to the concept of degrees of reward in eternity can be characterized as exegetical and theological. While nearly all of his exegetical objections are addressed in this author's 2008 doctoral dissertation,¹⁹ it is worth reviewing his principal exegetical objections for the sake of ensuring a proper synthesis with Calvinism.

A. PARABLE OF THE DAY LABORERS (MATT 20:1-16)

He begins with the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1-16), which he claims is viewed by "almost everyone" as "teaching about a fundamental equality here among those who are truly his disciples. All are rewarded alike."²⁰ Taken in isolation from the rest of Jesus' teaching, one could conceivably conclude this parable negates the concept of degrees of reward. However, while there is an equality stressed in this parable, it is an equality made possible by God's grace. Such grace means that all of God's gifts, whether salvation, or the kinds of rewards to which Peter alludes just prior to this parable (Matt 19:27-30), are not ultimately attributable to human merit. Furthermore, this emphasis upon equality that underscores the gracious initiative of God is not inherently inconsistent with the concept of degrees of reward, unless one insists on a strict monergism to the extent that any role for humanity is denied. In light of numerous texts that exhort believers to *strive, persevere, and diligently labor* (e.g., 1 Cor 15:10; Phil 1:27; 2:12; Col 1:29; 1 Tim 4:10; Heb 10:36; 2 Pet 1:6), such a denial would seem to be a contradiction of Biblical testimony. As Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema affirms:

Salvation, to be sure, is wholly of grace; yet the Bible indicates that there will be variation in the rewards which will be received by God's people.... The relation between our works and our future reward ought, however, to be understood not in a mechanical but rather in an organic way. When one has studied music and has attained some

¹⁹ See pp. 45-165 of this writer's dissertation, referenced above.

²⁰ Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 160.

proficiency in playing a musical instrument, his capacity for enjoying music has been greatly increased. In a similar way, our devotion to Christ and to service in his kingdom increases our capacity for enjoying the blessing of that kingdom, both now and in the life to come.²¹

In summary, while this parable does represent a notable challenge to the doctrine of degrees of reward, it can readily be understood as teaching the complementary truth that all such rewards are ultimately the result of the gracious initiative of God. That God chooses to recognize the role of a believer in progressive sanctification in response to that divine initiative does not diminish its glory (cf. 1 Cor 15:10; Phil 2:12-13; Col 1:29).

B. CROWN PASSAGES (1 COR 9:25; 2 TIM 4:8; 1 PET 5:4)

Another exegetical objection concerns the crown passages, which Blomberg understands uniformly as metaphors for eternal life.²² These texts are comprehensively dealt with in this writer's dissertation,²³ where it is concluded that the majority of references are to a reward for faithful service. However, it is worth noting here that Blomberg's approach to these texts appears to be conditioned by his prior commitment to the Reformed doctrine of perseverance, but in such a manner that he allows for virtually no distinctions among Christians in terms of their striving for the imperishable crown (1 Cor 9:25), their longing for Christ's appearing (2 Tim 4:8), or their service as elders in the church (1 Pet 5:4). Thus, perhaps it is Blomberg's particular conception of the doctrine of perseverance, rather than the exegetical evidence itself, that is at odds with the concept of degrees of reward as he understands it.

C. *BĒMA*

A third exegetical objection relates to texts dealing with the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10). Blomberg is adamant that "nothing in the text says anything about these

²¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 262, 264.

²² Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 163.

²³ See pages 97-142.

distinctions among believers' experiences [at the Judgment Seat] persisting for all time."²⁴ However, one may equally inquire: "Where in the text does it state that these differences will be only momentary?" In fact, Blomberg's understanding of Paul's teaching fails to do justice to the importance and gravity of this judgment. That is, Paul's detailed teaching on this subject would appear to be beside the point if both the rewards enjoyed and the consequences experienced have merely *momentary* ramifications. In addition, as already noted, the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30) provides a genuine precedent for the granting of personal responsibilities in the future kingdom *in addition to* praise received. Thus, this objection is also at serious odds with the exegetical data.

In continuation of his discussion of the Scriptural data, Blomberg states that the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4-5 are likely angelic and therefore irrelevant to the issue of rewards for believers. And even if they do represent the church, Blomberg asserts that the casting of their crowns proves there are no eternal differences.²⁵ However, as can be cogently argued,²⁶ the casting of crowns is an act of worship that *continually* acknowledges the One to whom all glory belongs. Therefore, it does not by itself negate the very real possibility that some will enjoy a greater capacity to worship God or other privileges in eternity.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., 165.

²⁵ Ibid., 164-165.

²⁶ The fact that this act of worship is linked with the worship of "the four living creatures" (v 8), who "do not cease" in their worship of the Lord, argues strongly for a *continuous* expression of worship on the part of these elders as well rather than a one-time event. In addition, Quick rightly observes: "[T]hrough they cast their crowns before him, they do not cast their *thrones*, nor do they give up their position and proximity to Him. The casting of the crowns before the throne is symbolic of the words they say, 'Worthy art thou...to receive glory and honor and power'... But this action *in no way changes the glory or honor he has bestowed on them. They keep it permanently*" (Kenneth B. Quick, "Living for the Kingdom" [D.Min. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1989], 234, emphasis original).

²⁷ Blomberg deals with several other texts, most of which are discussed in this writer's dissertation. In some instances, there is agreement with this writer on the misuse of certain texts to validate the doctrine of rewards.

V. A RESPONSE TO THEOLOGICAL OBJECTIONS

Turning to Blomberg's theological objections, there are at least seven which can be identified.

A. DOCTRINE OF REWARDS PRODUCES SANCTIFICATION BY WORKS

As noted in the introduction, Blomberg asserts that this doctrine produces "a sanctification by works" that is implicitly contrary to salvation by grace through faith.²⁸ Ironically, Blomberg himself seems to promote a "sanctification by works"—if not, a salvation by works—when he states: "one of the main reasons for trying to live as good a Christian life as possible is to make sure we do in fact persevere, so that we do not lose out on eternal life altogether."²⁹ But is it true that by adopting a doctrine of degrees of reward one has thereby abandoned the faith and grace basis of the believer's salvation and sanctification? Harris observes:

Since the tribunal of Christ is concerned with the assessment of works, not the determination of destiny...the Pauline concepts of justification on the basis of faith and recompense in accordance with works may be complementary. Not status but reward is determined *emprosthēn tou bēmatos tou christou*, for justification as the acquisition of a right standing before God anticipates the verdict of the Last Judgment. But, already delivered from *ergōn nomou* (Rom. 3:28) by justifying faith, the Christian is presently committed to *tou ergou tēs pisteōs* (1 Thess. 1:3), "action stemming from faith," which will be assessed and rewarded at Christ's tribunal.³⁰

Fuller rightly points out that the objection that a doctrine of rewards promotes a works-righteousness that undermines the gracious basis of the believer's salvation is based upon a false

²⁸ Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁰ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2005), 408-409.

assumption of just two options: “either men and women must do sufficient works to earn God’s favor, or his blessings are purely of grace, unconditional, with nothing being required of the recipients.”³¹ However, as Piper states, there is a third option: “[C]onditional promises of grace are woven all through the New Testament teaching about how to live the Christian life [e.g., Matt 6:14; Heb 12:14; Jas 4:6; 1 John 1:7].... Some popular conceptions of grace cannot comprehend any role for conditionality other than legalism.”³² In this regard, believers are exhorted to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). That is, the believer is exhorted to demonstrate a faithfulness that, though enabled by God’s grace and empowering Spirit (cf. Phil 2:13), is nevertheless the fruit of personal discipline. Accordingly, Paul underscores the “profit” (*ophelimos*) of godliness, “having promise of the life that now is *and of that which is to come*” (1 Tim 4:7-8, emphasis added). In the performance of such works of faith there is no implied merit. Fuller aptly illustrates:

[A] patient has a need, and seeks the physician’s help to meet it. Because he or she has confidence in the expertise of this professional, the patient will then carefully follow the health regimen that is prescribed; these are “works”—or an obedience—that stem from *faith* in the physician. The blessings of restored health that the physician is able to provide will not be realized apart from this obedience; nevertheless such obedience cannot be said to have *earned* these blessings, nor has the patient in following the doctor’s orders done anything that merits praise.... To the contrary, the praise belongs to the *physician*, whose expertise has made possible the return of health.³³

Thus, Fuller concludes:

³¹ Ruth M. Fuller, “A Pauline Understanding of Rewards: Its Background and Expression in First Corinthians” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990), 324.

³² John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 12.

³³ Fuller, “A Pauline Understanding of Rewards” 328-29, emphasis original.

[W]orks are essential for the receiving of rewards, but there is nothing meritorious or heroic about them, nothing to provide grounds for boasting. Rather, they are works of *faith*, done not to provide some needful service for God but simply in one's own self-interest, i.e., because doing these works is the *sine qua non* for the continued enjoyment of fellowship with God and the rewards he promises to those who trust him. Therefore, far from endangering grace, such works magnify it, for they underscore both the delight...that God has in blessing his children, and the supreme value that he represents to those who thus exert every effort to run the race and win the prize.³⁴

In summary, Blomberg's assertion that the doctrine of degrees of reward is theologically at odds with the gracious basis of the believer's life in Christ is shown to be false. Rather there is Biblical and theological compatibility between the teaching of both a grace-enabled faith and life and the call for works of faith (1 Cor 15:10; Phil 2:12-13) as well as the subsequent recognition of those works of faith done in the power of God.

B. THE "VAST GULF"

A second theological objection is that "the vast gulf" between God's standards and the righteousness of believers diminishes any sense of differentiation that would be eternally significant.³⁵ However, while this may be true *in the sight of God*, what is important here is whether such differentiation is meaningful *to believers*. Clearly, what is insignificant for an infinite being can nevertheless be quite meaningful to a finite being!³⁶ For example, a twenty-five cent raise per hour would be much more meaningful to a teen earning minimum wage than it would be to a billionaire. Furthermore, what likely makes rewards truly meaningful is their capacity to deepen the believer's experience of and fellowship with God, both in this life and the next. As

³⁴ Ibid., 347, emphasis original.

³⁵ Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 162.

³⁶ As Ken Gardoski puts it: "This is like asking whether Jesus' permanent humanity is significant in light of the vast gulf between the divine and human natures!" (8 February 2008; personal conversation with this writer).

Kim states it: “The recognition of God is more valuable to those who have a deeper love relationship with God, and positions of service are rewards in that they are opportunities for more complete fellowship with God.”³⁷

C. IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE REDEEMED TO FULLY ENJOY HEAVEN

Yet another theological objection to the concept of degrees of reward is that it would be impossible for the redeemed to enjoy heaven with a consciousness that they did not achieve all they could have while on earth.³⁸ But who says believers will be conscious of their failures for all eternity? Blomberg himself acknowledges that according to Rev 21:4 God will wipe away all tears and pain such that there will remain “absolutely nothing to make one sad.”³⁹ This implies God may wipe away in some sense any memory that could foster tears or sadness. Alternatively, Michael Stallard suggests God may arrange eternity in such a manner that all potentially tear- or pain-inducing memories will not have the effect of saddening us.⁴⁰ While ultimately we must confess our ignorance as to how God will accomplish the promise of Rev 21:4, there is no insurmountable tension between the concept of degrees of eternal reward and possible memory of one’s past life as Blomberg alleges.⁴¹

Blomberg replies that if our memories are erased of all recollection of failure, then the distinctions based upon differing degrees of reward will also be unrecognizable in eternity and that therefore the present purpose of such future rewards—providing motivation for faithful living now—has been

³⁷ Kim, “Reward and Sanctification,” 16.

³⁸ Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” 162.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ 10 February 2008; personal conversation with this writer.

⁴¹ Editor’s note: There is a difference between tears caused by physical or emotional pain and regret. It is possible that even if a believer had a sense of regret, he would enjoy eternity. Don’t we all have regrets in this life? Won’t we all regret things we said and did in this life? (Surely David regrets his acts of adultery and murder, yet they are in the eternal Biblical record.) In glorified bodies we will be able to handle regrets perfectly. Zane Hodges even suggested in personal conversations with me that there will be shades of negative emotions like regret, irritation, and disappointment. Without negative (yet not sinful) emotions, Zane said, the joys would have less meaning.

negated.⁴² In response, Erickson surmises it may be that “the difference in the rewards lies not in the external or objective circumstances, but in the subjective awareness or appreciation of those circumstances.”⁴³ As a result, “[n]o one will be aware of the differences in range of enjoyment, and thus there will be no dimming of the perfection of heaven by regret over wasted opportunities.”⁴⁴ Kim offers the following illustration:

Suppose two sons go away to college. One son calls regularly, thinks often of his parents, and misses them dearly. The other son could not wait to leave home, does not call, and is forgetfully busy with his new found friends at school. Both sons return home for Thanksgiving break, and both are “rewarded” with the presence of their parents. They have the same (objective) reward, the same parents, but the first son has a greater (subjective) reward in his enjoyment of them. We shall all be with God in heaven, but not all will enjoy him to the same degree.⁴⁵

Thus, the knowledge that in eternity we can enjoy God to the degree to which we are faithful in service to Him *now* should provide plenty of motivation to that end whether or not we are objectively conscious of the differences we experience in eternity.

Blomberg continues to object that such speculation is a contradiction of the more common view of rewards “that, subjectively, we all appreciate differing objective realities.”⁴⁶ However, presently believers are quite conscious of objective differences among themselves in terms of gifting and opportunities. Yet they can—and are even commanded to—be joyful in all circumstances, despite evident differences among them in this life. Is it not conceivable that in eternity, having been freed from sin completely and the temptation to envy, believers will be able to rejoice fully in their diversity? Simply because we cannot find an explicit text that addresses this issue does not invalidate its

⁴² Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven,” 162.

⁴³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1241.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1242.

⁴⁵ Kim, “Reward and Sanctification,” 18.

⁴⁶ Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” 162.

potential as a valid explanation of what is not yet revealed. At the very least, this is both a logical and reasonable solution to Blomberg's objection.

D. IMPOSSIBLE TO SPEAK OF DEGREES OF PERFECTION

A fourth theological objection is that since heaven represents perfection, it is impossible to speak of degrees of perfection.⁴⁷ Similarly, Erickson asserts: “[W]e will not grow in heaven. We will, however, continue to exercise the perfect character which we will have received from God.”⁴⁸ But both authors appear to assume that believers will be in a state of pure actuality in heaven with no potentiality. However, in light of the experience of the sinless God-man, who *grew* “in wisdom and stature” as a child (Luke 2:40, 52),⁴⁹ is it not reasonable to expect we will also continue to grow in the knowledge of God's infinite person and through our service for Him *learn* from our experiences throughout eternity? Accordingly, Lewis writes:

The promise of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised (1) that we shall be with Christ; (2) that we shall be like Him; (3) with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have “glory”; (4) that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and (5) that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe—ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God's temple. The first question I ask about these promises is “Why any one of them except the first?” Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ?...The variation of the promises does not mean anything other than God will be our ultimate bliss; but because God is more than a Person, and lest we should imagine the joy of his presence too exclusively in terms of our present poor experience of personal love, with all its narrowness and strain and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 162-63.

⁴⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1240.

⁴⁹ This thought was brought to this writer's attention by Michael Stallard. He also added that most likely the sinless Adam and Eve also grew in the Garden before their fall (10 February 2008; personal conversation with this writer). Admittedly, in both examples they were in non-glorified bodies.

monotony, a dozen changing images, correcting and reliving each other are supplied.⁵⁰

It may also be added that all these images present a picture of *continuous activity and learning* in eternity, all of it centered upon the person of Christ. As Piper states it: “Heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God’s glory with great and ever greater joy in him... The perfection of heaven is not static.”⁵¹

In summary, though all will surely enjoy “perfection,” there will also be opportunity for growth and development commensurate with the new capacities and opportunities enjoyed both as a result of the common experience of resurrection but also, presumably, as result of degrees of reward. Since there is no inherent logical contradiction in such a supposition, it is therefore a reasonable solution to another of Blomberg’s objections to this doctrine.

Furthermore, this understanding is entirely consistent with a steady stream of Reformed thinking on the issue. For example, in a section of his works entitled “Justification by Faith Alone,” Jonathan Edwards states

[t]hat Christ, by his righteousness, purchased for every one complete and perfect happiness, according to his capacity. But this does not hinder but that the saints, being of various capacities, may have various degrees of happiness, and yet all their happiness be the fruit of Christ’s purchase.... So that it be still left with God, notwithstanding the perfect obedience of the second Adam, to fix the degree of each one’s capacity by what rule he pleases, *he hath been pleased to fix the degree of capacity, and so of glory, by the proportion of the saints’ grace and fruitfulness here. He gives higher degrees of glory, in reward for higher degrees of holiness and good works, because it pleases him.*⁵²

⁵⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., 1949; reprint, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 35.

⁵¹ John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 37.

⁵² Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth

Likewise, Bavinck states:

In proportion as a person has been faithful in using the talents given him he will in the kingdom of God receive greater honor and lordship (Matt. 25:14ff)... Thus all, it is true, share in the same blessings, the same eternal life, and the same fellowship with God. *But there is nevertheless a difference among them in brilliance and glory. In proportion to their faithfulness and zeal, the churches receive from their Lord and King a different crown and reward.*⁵³

Thus, Blomberg's fourth theological objection is at variance not only with a reasonable expectation of the nature of eternity but also with the teaching of some of Reformed theology's most prominent theologians.

E. GOD'S BAR OF JUSTICE IS TO DECLARE BELIEVERS ACQUITTED

In a fifth theological objection, Blomberg asserts that "[t]he purpose of Christians' standing before God's bar of justice is to declare them acquitted, not to embarrass them before the entire cosmos for all their failings (Rom 2:7; Rev 22:14; Matt 12:37a)."⁵⁴ However, this assertion does not fully square with clear statements of Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor 3:15; 1 John 2:28) that some believers will experience "loss" and "shame" before the Lord.⁵⁵ Whether or not such loss and shame will be observed by "the entire cosmos" is debatable, but that issue in itself does not invalidate the concept of degrees of reward.

F. DOCTRINE OF DEGREES OF REWARDS PROMOTES COMPETITION AND COMPARISON

Still another theological objection is that the doctrine of degrees of reward implicitly promotes a spirit of competition and comparison through a "performance-centered conception of the

Trust, 1974; reprint, 1984), 646, emphasis added.

⁵³ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 567, emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 167.

⁵⁵ See pp. 79-95 of this writer's dissertation for a fuller explication of these particular texts.

Christian life.”⁵⁶ However, only the perversion of Scriptural testimony as to the true basis for Christian motivation would validate this objection. That is, the promises of rewards must be held in balance with other prominent motivations for Christian living and service, such as seeking first the kingdom of God and His glory in all things (Matt 6:33; 1 Cor 10:31). Certainly any time one Scriptural truth is over-emphasized to the neglect of others error will result. Obviously, the believer’s goal in life is not to “beat” or “better” his brothers in Christ, which is a sinful motivation Paul addresses during his imprisonment (Phil 1:15, 17). Rather, it is to strive to “attain” all that God has promised (cf. Phil 3:9-14), to earnestly desire the maximum possible experience of God and heaven. As Kim states:

For the Christian, if he seeks God for some material gain, some prestige or accolade, then let him be considered mercenary, selfish and a dishonor to God. But if the Christian seeks God for the joy of knowing God, beholding God, glorifying God, then he should hardly be condemned for seeking this reward. Indeed, he is to be praised.⁵⁷

Likewise, Lewis observes:

I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back. But proud misunderstanding is behind that dislike. In the end that face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.... To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But it is so.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., 169.

⁵⁷ Kim, “Reward and Sanctification,” 14.

⁵⁸ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 36-37.

Thus, while the *idea* of eternal reward can be perverted by sinful motives, its *reality* cannot be questioned when viewed in light of its likely nature: a greater capacity to know and enjoy God.

G. THE “GREATEST DANGER”

Blomberg’s final theological objection is what he perceives as the greatest danger presented by this teaching:

The greatest danger of the doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven is that it has misled many people into thinking that the very nominal professions that they or their friends have at one time made will be sufficient to save them, even if they fail to receive as high a status in heaven as they might have.⁵⁹

In response, it must be observed that there is a significant difference between those who live in blatant sin and those who “continue to believe but remain unduly immature in their faith (1 Cor 3:3),” as even Blomberg admits can happen.⁶⁰ Accordingly, on the one hand, this writer heartily agrees with Blomberg that “saving faith does over time lead to visible transformations in lifestyle and to growth in holiness (Matt 7:15-27; Gal 5:6, 19-24; Jas 2:14-26; 1 John 3:4-10).”⁶¹ On the other hand, in some instances believers are disciplined with premature death, because of sin and rebellion against God (e.g., Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 5:5; 11:29-32; cf. 1 John 5:16). Furthermore, rightly understood the doctrine of rewards does not promote the antinomianism with which Blomberg falsely associates it. Rather a right understanding of the doctrine should motivate the true believer to diligent obedience in pursuit of all God has promised can be his.

⁵⁹ Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven,” 172.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. Editor’s note: Many *JOTGES* readers may disagree with this statement and the suggestion that the verses cited prove it to be true. However, note the discussion which immediately follows. I personally say Amen to the overall tenor of what the author is suggesting.

H. OTHER OBJECTIONS

Besides these objections, Blomberg makes a couple of theological assertions that call into question the validity of the doctrine of degrees of reward and therefore merit a reply.

Gratitude is the only proper motivation. Blomberg asserts that the idea of rewards is unnecessary since “proper Christian motivation for pleasing God should stem from a profound sense of gratitude for what Christ has already done for us.”⁶²

There are a couple of responses to this assertion. First, assuming the assertion is correct—though no Scriptural support is cited—Blomberg ignores the fact that the Scriptures themselves provide at least a dozen additional, distinct motivations for living the Christian life: (1) to express love for God and Christ (John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6); (2) to maintain a clear conscience (Rom 13:5; 1 Pet 3:16; 2 Tim 1:3; cf. 1 Tim 1:5, 19); (3) to be an effective (useful) servant for God’s purposes (Eph 2:10; 2 Tim 2:20-21); (4) to ensure one’s life counts for eternity (Matt 6:19-21; 1 Cor 9:24-27); (5) to glorify God (Matt 5:14-16; 1 Cor 10:31; Phil 1:9-11); (6) to bring others to a saving knowledge of Christ (1 Cor 9:19-23; 2 Cor 2:14-17; 1 Pet 3:1-2); (7) to not be ashamed at the Judgment Seat of Christ but rather to be rewarded (Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:9-10; 2 Tim 4:7-8; 1 John 2:28); (8) to be properly prepared for the Lord’s coming (Matt 24:42-44; Mark 8:38; 2 Pet 3:10-13); (9) to demonstrate one has been set free from the power of sin (Rom 6:1-14; 7:1-6); (10) to experience the fullness of God’s love, joy, and blessing now (Ps 16:11; Matt 5:8; John 15:10; Rom 6:23; 12:1-2; Eph 3:14-19; 1 Pet 3:9-12; Jude 21); (11) to avoid experiencing the discipline of the Lord now (1 Cor 11:26-32; 1 Tim 5:20; Heb 12:3-11; 1 Pet 1:17; 1 John 5:16-17; Rev 3:19); and (12) to reflect the character and nature of the Father (Matt 5:48; Luke 6:36; Eph 4:32-5:1; 1 Pet 1:14-16; 1 John 2:6). While there is some degree of overlap in these motivations, the point is amply made that to limit Christian motivation to the lone aspect of *gratitude* is not consistent with Biblical testimony.

Second, the assertion itself may be challenged. In this regard, Piper argues the Scriptures *do not* present gratitude as a primary motivator for Christian living as Blomberg alleges. That is, while the Scriptures do in fact command gratitude as

⁶² Ibid., 170.

a Christian *duty* (e.g., Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18), they rarely if ever use gratitude as an explicit *motivator* of behavior.⁶³ For example, it is a lack of *faith*, not ingratitude, God highlights as the reason behind Israel's moral failure (Num 14:11; Deut 1:31-32; Ps 78:15, 17, 22). Likewise, in the NT:

We find Christian obedience called the “work of faith,” never of [*sic*] the “work of gratitude” (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). We find expressions like “live by faith” (Galatians 2:20) and “walk by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7), but never any expression like “live by gratitude” or “walk by gratitude.”... Faith in future grace, not gratitude, is the source of radical, risk-taking, kingdom-seeking obedience.⁶⁴

The danger in making gratitude a primary motivator for Christian behavior is it can easily degenerate into what Piper calls the “debtor’s ethic... ‘Because you have done something good for me, I feel indebted to do something good for you.’”⁶⁵ Likewise, Fuller states: “[I]f gratitude is set forth as a primary motive for obedience, there is an inherent danger that God’s grace will be seen not as a free gift but as a gift incurring obligation that must in some way be met.”⁶⁶

Third, with regard to reward itself as a viable motivation in Scripture, Turner observes: “More often than not reward is used to encourage those who are suffering for their faith and are in need of endurance rather than to promote self-centeredness. The radical demands of the gospel are made acceptable by the promise of reward.”⁶⁷ Indeed, several texts appeal to the desire for reward as a motivation for right conduct (e.g., Matt 5:19; 6:4, 6, 18, 33; 1 Cor 3:14; 9:24-25).⁶⁸ As Kim observes:

⁶³ Piper, *Future Grace*, 33-34.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 43. Piper does rightly acknowledge, however, there “are ways that gratitude helps bring about obedience to Christ. One way is that the spirit of gratitude is simply incompatible with some sinful attitudes.... There is a sense in which gratitude and faith are interwoven joys that strengthen each other...faith is strengthened by a lively gratitude for God’s past trustworthiness” (*ibid.*, 48).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁶ Fuller, “A Pauline Understanding of Rewards,” 321.

⁶⁷ Layne H. Turner, “The Use of Eternal Reward as a Motivation in the New Testament” (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), 203.

⁶⁸ See this writer’s dissertation for a fuller explication of these texts.

We would affirm that Christ does exhort us to deny ourselves (Mt 10:37-39; Lk 9:23-24; 14:26-27; Jn 12:24-25). However, this call to self-denial is not an end, but a *means* for *gain*: we deny ourselves so that *we might have life*.⁶⁹

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the author of Hebrews, who is seeking to motivate his readers not to abandon their Christian profession, frequently employs the theme of future reward (10:35; 11:6, 24-26). Though these texts do not explicitly refer to a doctrine of degrees of reward, the point is made that in these texts the prospect of a future reward is held out as a legitimate motivation for right conduct. Even Jesus was motivated in part to endure the cross by the promise of the *joy* that awaited him (Heb 12:2). Thus, reward as a valid means of motivation is affirmed in Scripture, contrary to Blomberg's contention.

We can't repay God. Blomberg also argues against the doctrine of rewards saying, "[n]othing we could ever offer to God could begin to repay him for the immense gift of forgiveness he has wrought on our behalf through the death of his dear Son."⁷⁰ While this is a true statement, in no way does it mitigate against a doctrine of degrees of reward. Nowhere has it even remotely been suggested that in their hope of future reward Christians labor to "repay" God. Rather, God in His grace chooses to bestow upon His children blessings commensurate with their service to Him, service which God himself has enabled.

VI. CONCLUSION

The doctrine of degrees of reward has been shown to be compatible with the doctrines of justification and sanctification by faith. Indeed, numerous scholars attest to the validity of the doctrine.

The application of this doctrine to the life of the contemporary church is manifold. First, the doctrine underscores the importance of the diligent performance of works of faith and service against an antinomianism that would so emphasize the

⁶⁹ Kim, "Reward and Sanctification," 7, emphasis original.

⁷⁰ Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 170.

grace of God in salvation as to preclude the importance of good works in the life of the believer.

Second, this doctrine provides additional motivation and encouragement for perseverance in the Christian life.

Third, the doctrine of degrees of reward underscores the eternal significance of all that a believer does, regardless of position or responsibility in the church.

Fourth, this doctrine rebukes half-hearted service and devotion to the Lord with the solemn promise that each will give account and that there is the possibility of genuine loss of some kind at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Finally, this doctrine provides further encouragement for the believer to look forward to the eternal state with eagerness and anticipation. May God's people be encouraged to "run the race" with all diligence so as to "win the prize" and achieve all that God has for them!

ACTS 1:8 RECONSIDERED: A STUB TRACK, A SIDING, OR A MAIN TRACK?

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Acts 1:7 Jesus refused to answer the eleven's question about if He was about to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time. Acts 1:8 starts with *alla* (but), a strong disjunction. We can safely say that v 8 stands in contrast with v 7, but the crucial question is: *What is the nature of that contrast?* Three options exist, but most people are only familiar with two of them: a non-dispensational approach and the traditional Dispensational approach. Zane Hodges introduced me to another Dispensational interpretation (the third option) in his Acts course at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1984.

Non-dispensationalists view the Church as an end in itself, a spiritual kingdom that replaced Israel. They do not see history as a track leading to the Millennium.

Most Dispensationalists view Acts 1:8 as if Jesus said, in effect, "Don't concern yourselves right now about when the Father will restore the kingdom to Israel. Abandon your thoughts of Israel and focus on the Church now."

Zane Hodges viewed Acts 1:8 as a continuation of God's preparation for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. In effect, this view says, "Fellows, the Father has not said when the restoration of Israel is coming. However, as my witnesses near and far, you have an important role in preparing for the return of Israel's kingdom."

In this article I illustrate the three views with three different railroad tracks. A stub track is a short dead end track leading away from the main track and ending in a bumping post

or other obstruction. A side track is a relatively short railroad track that is joined to the main track by switches. It runs parallel to the main track and allows other trains to pass.

II. NON-DISPENSATIONALISTS: ACTS 1:8 TEACHES THAT THE CHURCH REPLACES ISRAEL

Non-dispensationalists reject any restored kingdom to Israel. If the disciples' expectation that Jesus might then restore the kingdom were correct, these theologians would need to abandon their model. Thus, non-dispensationalists strive to see v 7 as: "Don't ask when the kingdom will be restored," and v 8 as: "Instead (*alla*), you will be My witnesses for the spiritual kingdom (which replaces the idea of a restored kingdom to Israel)." Non-dispensationalists have an agenda. They must present Acts 1:8 as a dead end. They must attack the disciples, claiming that their question about the kingdom was completely wrong-headed. They must treat Acts 1:8 (as well as v 7) as if Jesus were rebuking the disciples, even though v 9 says that He ascended immediately after speaking vv 7-8: *Now when He had spoken these words [vv 7-8], while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.* Calvin's accusations (following) say more about him than about the eleven (or this passage's meaning):

...they betrayed no less ignorance than if they had never heard a word. **There are as many errors in this question [v 7] as words.** They ask Him concerning the Kingdom; but **they dream of an earthly kingdom...**And while they assign the present as the time for restoring this Kingdom, **they desire to enjoy the triumph before fighting the battle.** Before setting hands to the work for which they are ordained they desire their wages; they also are mistaken in this, that **they confine to Israel after the flesh the Kingdom of Christ** which is to be extended to the farthest parts of the world. **The whole question is at fault** in this, that they desire to know things which are not right for them to know...**Christ in His short**

reply briefly reprimands their errors one by one, as I shall presently indicate...7. *It is not for you to know, etc. This is a general rebuke of the whole question...*¹

8. *Ye shall receive power. As the best means of bridling their curiosity*, Christ calls them back both to the promise of God and to His commandment...

'Ye shall be my witnesses.' By this one statement He corrects two errors. **For He shows that they must fight before they can hope to triumph: and that the nature of Christ's kingdom is other than they thought.**²

If the disciples were utterly confused, needing such a sharp rebuke, why would Luke include vv 6-7? Jesus' last words should not be seen as a scathing rebuke. If they were in error, He would instead have guided them into truth, since only ten days later (Pentecost) they needed to be straight. See how easily the text would read, if Luke had omitted vv 6-7.

⁴And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," *He said*, "you have heard from Me;⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now...

⁸But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. ⁹Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Calvin would have preferred for Luke to omit vv 6-8; he characterizes vv 7-8 as a rebuke of v 6. Unfortunately, many parrot Calvin regarding Jesus' parting remarks as a rebuke, but still treat the apostles as paragons of orthodoxy ten days later at Pentecost. John Stott merely rehashes Calvin:

¹ John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. John W. Fraser and W.J.G. McDonald, Calvin's Commentaries, ed. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:29. Bold is mine; italics are his.

² *Ibid.*, 31.

As Calvin commented, ‘there are as many errors in this question as words.’ The verb, the noun and the adverb of their sentence all betray doctrinal confusion about the kingdom. For the verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment. In his reply (7-8) Jesus corrected their notions of the kingdom’s nature, extent, and arrival.³

Calvin’s explicit rejection of the Millennium underlies the effort to see Acts 1:8 as a stub track, the permanent scathing rebuke of the eleven for believing that Israel’s kingdom has a future. Instead, Calvin spiritualizes the kingdom into something within the heart:

So we see that the Chiliasts [Millennialists] (i.e., those who believed that Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years) fell into a like error [as the apostles], and so took all the prophecies which describe the Kingdom of Christ *figuratively on the pattern of earthly kingdoms*...let us learn to apply our minds to hear the Gospel preached, which prepares *a place in our hearts for the kingdom of Christ*.⁴

Thus, Calvin has relegated the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (the Millennium) to a stub track, spiritualizing it into something within a Christian’s heart.

I. Howard Marshall is even bolder (in one sense) than Calvin. He spiritualizes away the Millennium in his comments on v 6, not waiting until v 8. He characterizes the question as to *whether* (not *when*) Jesus plans to restore the kingdom to Israel:

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World, The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Leicester, UK: Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, 1990; reprint, Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 41. The prior note to Calvin, *Acts*, cites the same English translation of Calvin as Stott used.

⁴ Calvin, *Acts*, 32, emphasis mine.

6. Luke portrays a fresh scene in which the disciples take up the reference to the kingdom of God in v 3. The question is **whether** Jesus intends *to restore the kingdom to* (or 'for') *Israel*. This may reflect the Jewish hope that God would establish his rule in such a way that the people of Israel would be freed from their enemies (especially the Romans) and be established as a nation to which other peoples would be subservient. If so, the disciples would appear here as representatives of those of Luke's readers who had not yet realized that Jesus had transformed the Jewish hope of the kingdom of God by purging it of its nationalistic political elements.⁵

Robert Maddox clarifies the rationale for seeing Acts 1:8 as a stub track, the end of the line for the idea of a restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Specifically, Israel had rejected the kingdom on many occasions, it has missed its last opportunity:

The new note in v. 6 is the apostles' suggestion that the Kingdom is something that belongs to Israel. Luke has already amply shown that this is a false belief...The hopeful intention of the birth narratives for the redemption of Israel (1:68; 2:38) is not after all to be fulfilled, for Israel has rejected its opportunity (13:34; 19:44b; etc.). Not the redemption of Israel (24:21), but the fulfillment of the Father's promise for Jesus' disciples (v. 49); not the kingdom for Israel (Acts 1:6), but the power of the Holy Spirit for the church (v. 8). Thus, the point is repeatedly made that the Kingdom has nothing to do with Israel, nor with Jerusalem...⁶

The nice thing about what Maddox is saying is that it is easily falsifiable. If (in the book of Acts) a single occasion after Acts 1:8 exists where the kingdom is offered to Israel, his thesis falls apart. This paper will devote much attention to Acts 3,

⁵I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 60. Bold is mine; italics are his.

⁶Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke—Acts*, ed. John Riches. (Göttingen, Ger: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982; reprint, Edinburgh: Clark, 1985), 106.

where the offer of the kingdom to Israel uses wording quite reminiscent of Acts 1:6-8.⁷

III. RESPONSE (FROM ASCENSION NARRATIVES) TO THE NON-DISPENSATIONALIST VIEW

Luke 24 and Acts 1 are Luke's ascension narratives. In other words, the end of Luke 24 parallels the start of Acts 1. Unfortunately, the non-dispensational interpreters have ignored an important part of the context: Luke 24:45. Jesus had *opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures*, before the disciples asked when He would restore the kingdom (Acts 1:6). Scripture speaks of the future restoration of the kingdom to Israel, a truth which the disciples understood, especially now that Jesus had opened their mind to understand the OT. No passage specified exactly when that restoration would occur,⁸ but both John the Baptist (Matt 3:2) and Jesus (Matt 4:17) had preached: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. If the kingdom were at hand three and a half years earlier, it was natural to expect that it was even more at hand now. These men understood the Scriptures, but wanted to know something not found there. Calvin, Stott, and many others castigate the disciples as if the eleven did not understand the Scriptures.

IV. TRADITIONALLY DISPENSATIONALISTS VIEW ACTS 1:8 AS A SIDING

From the introduction of this paper, it is evident that we will propose a modification to the usual Dispensational view of Acts 1:8. Let me preface my analysis of the siding view with the observation that a siding more closely resembles the main track than a stub track. The assessment of the siding view will be upbeat, because both views see the Church in the same way

⁷ See p.57-60 of this paper.

⁸ Daniel 9's Seventy-Heptad prophecy may have led them to conclude that the timetable was very close. We now know of the interval between the sixty-ninth and seventieth heptad, but they did not yet know this.

and both see Israel in the same way. What is different is how Acts 1:8 fits into the picture.

Traditionally Dispensationalism sees Acts 1:8 as a railroad siding. Jesus just said that the Father has not revealed the date for restoring Israel's kingdom, but the kingdom train has just entered a siding. Thus, until the Church train passes by, the eleven are witnesses to Him within the Church. Someday, the Church train will pass and the restoration of Israel train will return to the main track. In regard to Acts 1:8 Lewis Sperry Chafer says that after

...forty day's ministry in teaching His disciples regarding the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), Christ in His answer to the question "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" said "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:6-7; cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-2), there is no rebuke to these Jewish disciples because of their reverting to the national hope of Israel. That hope will be fulfilled in God's "times" and "seasons." However, these disciples had yet to learn that a new enterprise had been introduced and of that new enterprise Christ went on to say, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This ministry of testimony will eventually be terminated by the return of Christ...⁹

The New Scofield Bible says about Acts 1:7:

Observe that the Lord did not rebuke them for their inquiry about the restoration of the kingdom. Their question was a valid one. But His answer was in accord with His repeated teaching: the time is God's secret (Mt. 24:36, 42,44; 25:13; cp. 1 Th. 5:1).¹⁰

⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:266.

¹⁰ *New Scofield Reference Bible*, new ed. Ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, *et al.* (New York: Oxford, 1967), 1160. Cf. *Scofield Reference Bible*. Ed. C. I.

Charles Ryrie, says:

1:7 There is no rebuke in Christ's answer, for God is not through with Israel, and the kingdom will eventually come (Rom. 11:26). In the meantime, the gospel must be preached throughout the whole world (v. 8).¹¹

The Nelson Study Bible says about this verse:

Jesus did not correct His disciples' views concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (v. 6). Instead He corrected their views concerning the timing of the event...¹²

The foregoing statements are good, but drawing upon Luke 24 and Acts 3 would be helpful. As promised earlier in this paper, the critique of how most Dispensationalists see Acts 1:8 was gentle. Luke 24 and Acts 3 adjust the perspective on Acts 1:8 slightly.

V. THE MAIN-TRACK VIEW

It is true that Acts 1:8 launches the eleven into a new adventure. Once Jesus spoke these words, He ascended to the Father as v 9 explains. Pentecost, only ten days later, instituted the Church Age. Although it was the Church dispensation, the apostles continued to offer the kingdom to Israel. They did not know when the kingdom would come, but they knew that the Father would start the countdown, when Israel responds to the offer of the kingdom. It is in that light that Acts 1:7-8 is how the Church has a role in preparing Israel to believe in its Messiah and have the kingdom restored to her. In other words, Acts 1:8 was not only supposed to benefit the Church, but was also to awaken Israel from stupor, so Christ could restore its kingdom.

Three passages in Luke-Acts show that offering the kingdom to Israel was front burner in Acts: Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:6-8;

Scofield (New York: Oxford, 1909), 1147.

¹¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 1729.

¹² *The Nelson Study Bible*. ed. Earl D. Radmacher (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997), 1814.

and Acts 3:19-21. Zane Hodges opens the chapter of *Harmony with God* entitled “New Birth, Forgiveness and Repentance,” with the following:

According to Luke 24:47, our Lord commanded “that repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” This mandate is definitely carried out in the book of Acts as is made clear by Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; and 8:22 in which both topics—repentance and forgiveness—are mentioned together.¹³

There are many parallels between these three texts in Luke 24 and Acts 1 and 3.

Repentance and the remission of sins are mentioned in Luke 24 and Acts 3.

In the last chapter of Luke and the first chapter of Acts the Lord tells the apostles that they will be His witnesses to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

Acts 1 and Acts 3 share references to the time of restoration for Israel. The words *kairos* (time, times, or seasons) and *chronos* (times) are found in both Acts 1:6-8 and Acts 3:19-21.

The clear emphasis in all three of these passages is on the apostolic worldwide witness for Jesus that is associated ultimately with repentance and the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of the Kingdom for Israel.

VI. A CLOSER ANALYSIS OF ACTS 3:19-21

When the disciples asked if Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel at this time (*chronos*), Acts 1:7 says that it was not their prerogative to know the times (*chronos*) or seasons (*kairos*) established by the Father. But Peter said in Acts 3:19-21 that seasons of refreshing and times of restoration would come to Israel, if Israel were to repent.¹⁴

¹³Zane C. Hodges, *Harmony with God: A Fresh Look at Repentance* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 2001), 65. Brackets are in original.

¹⁴Acts 3:19 has two sequential purpose clauses: 1. The purpose of repenting and turning is so sins may be blotted out. 2. The purpose of sins being blotted out is so times of refreshing may come and God may send Jesus again to earth.

It is easy to miss something crucial. The following will clarify. Acts 1:6-7 shows that God has not said when Israel's kingdom will be restored, but Acts 3:19-21 has Peter saying that Israel's kingdom will be restored when Israel repents.

Now, the question is: Did Peter disregard Acts 1:7? No, Peter did not know whether Israel would repent at that time (it did not). What Peter knew was that God would set in motion the steps for restoring the kingdom to Israel, whenever national repentance occurred.

An expanded paraphrase of Acts 1:6-8 may help:

Acts 1:6-8: ⁶Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons [*which include (among other things) the following: 1. the national repentance of Israel, and 2. the restoration of the kingdom to Israel*] which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The national repentance of Israel is a trip-wire that would set in motion God's plan to restore the kingdom to Israel. Thus, the eleven serving as witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8) would (potentially) be the instrument in God's hand to enable restoring the kingdom.

Consider what Zane Hodges says about Acts 1:8:

The Apostles are to witness in the power of the Spirit. The outcome belongs to God...

The words *esesthe moi martures* [you will be My witnesses] (1:8) recall Isa. 43:10 *genesthe moi martures* [you are My witnesses], 43:12 *humeis emoi martures* [you are My witnesses], and 44:8 *martures humeis este* [you are My witnesses]

That the [national] salvation of Israel would bring the "conversion" of the nations is a datum of OT prophecy (cf. Isa. 59:20–60:1-22). N.B. [Isaiah] 60:3 says, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy [Israel's] light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." *Thus the commission given in Acts*

1:8 is in no way inconsistent (at this point)¹⁵ with Jewish expectations.¹⁶

Hodges views Acts 1:8 as the main track, not as a siding. That is, as the eleven served as witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth, their message to Jews included what Peter said in Acts 3:19-21.

They preached repentance to the Diaspora, so Christ could restore the kingdom.

Some may see something that may not appear to fit the issue of a proclamation of repentance for Israel. Luke 24:47 speaks of witnesses *preaching repentance to all nations* and Acts 1:8 speaks of witnesses going *to the end of the earth* with this message. Our first response is to think that this implies carrying the message of repentance to the Gentiles. (After Cornelius, we do see a message of repentance for Gentiles also, but that is not the focus of this paper.)¹⁷

However, Deuteronomy 30 helps to contextualize this message of repentance. The Lord *opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures* (Luke 24:45). Deuteronomy 29:2–30:1 warns that Israel’s disobedience would cause God to disperse the people all over the world. Deuteronomy 30:1-4 promises to regather them from dispersion, when (in v 2) they *return to the LORD* (i.e., when they repent).

Deut 30:1-4: *¹Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, ²and you return to*

¹⁵ Hodges says “at this point,” because Acts 10, when the mystery (of Jews and Gentiles with equal access to God in one body) began. Prior to Acts 10 the Church was a new entity, but it was reasonably similar to Israel (only new and improved). After Acts 10, the Church is totally different from Israel. The Church Age dispensation began at Pentecost, but Acts 10 is when it became clear just how different from Israel this new entity actually is.

¹⁶ Zane C. Hodges, “The Synthesis of Acts: Structure, Overview, Special Problems” (Course notes for NT 219, “The Book of Acts”: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 8a. Italics in original. In the original, each sentence was its own paragraph. Sentences have been grouped into block paragraphs to save space.

¹⁷ In the interest of space, it is necessary to recommend Hodges, *Harmony with God*, on that topic.

the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus commissioned the eleven as witnesses, who would carry (in keeping with Deuteronomy 30) a message that Jesus Christ, God's life-giving Son and Israel's Messiah, would re-gather Israel and restore the kingdom to Israel. In this regard, what Peter said at the end of his sermon in Acts 3 is significant. Note vv 25-26:

Acts 3:25-26: ²⁵You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, "**And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**" ²⁶To you **first**, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.

The OT had promised (as early as Gen 12:3, which Peter cites) to bless Gentiles through Israel. Note well the word *first* in v 26. My sense is not that Peter is saying that God sent Jesus first to you Jews and second to Gentiles (He did not exactly send Him to Gentiles, although the Gospels record occasional ministry to Gentiles). Instead, my sense is that God sent Jesus to Jews within the land of Israel first, but secondarily to scattered Jews of the Diaspora. In other words, even though Peter is speaking to people in Jerusalem, the message of Acts 3:19-21 is a message that he would also speak to scattered Jews of the Diaspora. It is the Jews of the Diaspora that Deut 30:1b-2 specifically addresses: ^{1b}*and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, ²and you return to the LORD your God.*

Deuteronomy 30 underlies Matt 3:2 and 4:17. Matthew 3:2 says that John the Baptist preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Matthew 4:17 says, "From that time

Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” John was a forerunner to Christ, anticipating Jesus’ message. This is in keeping with Isa 40:3, which Matt 3:3 cites: “For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’””

VII. ACTS 2

Since Pentecost is a Jewish pilgrim feast, many diaspora Jews came to the Temple, as Acts 2:5 indicates: *And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.* Verses 9-11a list places from which Diaspora Jews and proselytes came:

⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ^{11a}Cretans and Arabs.

Thus, even before leaving Jerusalem, the eleven were witnesses to the end of the earth. The message was quite appropriate for those living in dispersion as well as for permanent residents of Israel.

Verse 36 sums up what Peter wanted people to believe: *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. Know assuredly equals believe.* That verse sounds remarkably like John 20:31, does it not? It is a message for the whole house of Israel, including the Diaspora, to believe.

Many present believed, as v 37 indicates: *Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* As Zane Hodges observes,

...such a reaction presumes their acceptance of Peter’s claim that they have crucified the One who is Lord and Christ. If that is what they now believed, then they were already regenerate on John’s terms, since John wrote, “Whoever

believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”
(1 John 5:1; cf. John 20:31).¹⁸

Note that v 38 addresses *them*, those who had newly believed in v 37.

Thus we might translate Acts 2:38 in this way: *Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the Holy Spirit as a gift.”*¹⁹ The important thing to note here is that the people were already believers, before Peter commanded them to repent.

Believing in Jesus gives people everlasting life, but national repentance by Israel would have set Acts 3:19 into motion—restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Acts 2:36-38 differentiates the issue of individually believing in Christ as Messiah from the national repentance that Deuteronomy 30 requires for re-gathering the Diaspora.

Zane Hodges summarizes the issue of Israel’s national repentance well:

Repentance and baptism, as we have seen, were conditions for forgiveness during the ministries of John the Baptist [cf. Matt 3:2], of the apostles and of our Lord Jesus Himself [cf. Matt 4:17 and Luke 24:47]. But this was only true for the Israelites of Palestine, who were called to national repentance by the Baptist and, after the crucifixion of Christ, were called again to repentance by the apostles (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Following baptism and forgiveness, the believing Israelite from Palestine could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

¹⁸Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1992), 117f.

¹⁹Author’s rendering. Many people think that the gift of the Holy Spirit refers to a spiritual gift, but it is a genitive of apposition. My rendering (Holy Spirit as a gift) prevents such a misunderstanding. Peter speaks of God requiring for believers (during Acts 2-9, prior to Cornelius) to repent and be baptized before receiving the indwelling Spirit. Cf. Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege*, 117-21; and Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 89-107, for brief treatments of the special circumstances of Acts 2-9.

²⁰Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 111-12.

VIII. CONCLUSION

As a result of taking a course on the book of Acts with Zane Hodges in 1984, my thinking on repentance was changed because of his treatment of Luke 24 and Acts 1-3. In my opinion, it is unfortunate that his later writings on repentance did not highlight the connection between Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:6-8; and Acts 3:19-21. This paper has, in effect, been a time machine to transport us all back to the Acts class twenty-seven years ago.

Acts 1:8 is not a stub track. Neither is it a siding. Jesus intended it as the main track to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. The apostolic witness went forward earnestly in the expectation that Israel might soon repent and God would send His Son back from heaven to bring about seasons of refreshing and restoration of all things, including the kingdom to Israel. They did not know when Christ would restore the kingdom, but they knew that He would do so whenever Israel repented nationally.

MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Church¹ in America faces a significant existential threat that will eventually sweep countless congregations into history's dustbin.² This threat is the result of two powerful currents: America's transition from modern to postmodern culture and several serious flaws in Church Growth thinking.³ As a result the Church has been dismissed from its role as chaplain to the culture and Christians have been co-opted to such a degree

¹ I use the lower-case "church" (or "congregation") to refer to the church localized and the capitalized "Church" to refer to the Church universal.

² Church attendance is significantly lower than that reported in polls that rely on telephone survey responses. Morgenthaler noted that in 2003 attendance at Evangelical churches was only 9% of the national population while attendance at Mainline churches was only 3.4%. She states, "Christian worship in the U.S. is becoming a rarified experience." Sally Morgenthaler, "Windows in Caves and Other Things We Do With Perfectly Good Prisms" *Fuller Theological Seminary News and Notes* (Spring 2005): 13-15, 25. Eileen W. Lindner, *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2011* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), indicates that Evangelical and Mainline denominations remain in the grip of protracted decline. An abstract is available at <http://www.nccusa.org/news/110210yearbook2011.html>. Accessed March 23, 2011.

³ There is a lack of consensus about the definition of postmodernism. It is common to refer to contemporary culture as postmodern; I follow that convention here. See John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 15-18 for discussion of the challenge in defining postmodernism and how it influences evangelical thought. Sine explains how the globalized consumer culture adversely affects the Church. Tom W. Sine, Jr. "Globalization, Creation of Global Culture of Consumption and the Impact on the Church and Its Mission" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27:4 (October 2003). Accessed in Libronix Software electronic edition, as a hard copy was unavailable.

that they fail to see that they have been domesticated. Today the typical congregation offers little to justify its existence.⁴

Missiologists, theologians, and pastors have wrestled with these problems over the last thirty years, largely independent of one another. The emerging fruit of their collective work is a new paradigm that we shall refer to as the Missional Church [MC hereafter].⁵ Rooted in a careful critique of the theological and methodological foundations of the contemporary Church, it offers an alternative to the current but now fading Attractional Church paradigm [AC hereafter]. Missional thinking encourages pastors, church planters, and congregations to re-think congregational identity and re-design congregational life in light of God's redemptive initiative.

This paper will describe both paradigms, identify key differences between them, and show that motifs of missional ecclesiology are seen in the Book of Acts. My purpose is not to prove the MC paradigm or disprove the AC paradigm but to introduce the MC paradigm, offer Biblical justification from the Book of Acts, and motivate others to consider it for themselves.

I do not approach these issues from a neutral position. My colleagues and I have seen the unintended and damaging consequences of the AC paradigm first hand.⁶ I have attempted to remain mindful of these experiences in writing this paper. The reader will determine whether the following analysis is measured and even-handed.

⁴ Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 78.

⁵ I use the capitalized "Missional" and "Mission" to refer to the missional paradigm and the lower case "mission" and "missional" refer to the local congregation. Although Missional is a widely used term, it is not universal. Cole, for example, speaks of the "organic" church: Neil Cole, *Organic Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005) and *Church 3.0* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

⁶ I am associated with the Transition Ministries Group of Huntington Beach, CA. We have collectively led over 100 churches through difficult transitions.

II. THE ATTRACTIVE CHURCH PARADIGM

Many MC advocates use the term “Attractional Church” to refer to the dominant paradigm that has guided pastors, congregations, and denominations for the last forty years. As a product of the Church Growth Movement, it rests on a host of questionable assumptions, four of which will be examined here: congregational purpose, the spiritual interests of the unchurched, the definition of *ekklesia*, and the relationship between discipleship and attendance.⁷

⁷ Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God* (n.p.: Wipf & Stock, 2005) and *Understanding Church Growth* 3rd Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990). As Dean Emeritus and Senior Professor of Mission, Church Growth and South Asian Studies at Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission he is widely credited as the father of the Church Growth Movement. His early work relied on the social sciences with scant attention to theology, a shortcoming that is a hallmark of the movement. Only when his work received notice did he grapple with theological issues. One may argue that the more extravagant excesses and shortcomings should be attributed to his disciples; here we only observe that pragmatism, consumerism, reliance on social sciences, and lack of theological clarity are intrinsic to the movement. McSwain, for example, says of the homogenous unit principle, “what McGavran first stated as a sociological observation has been restated by his followers as a theological and strategic necessity.” Larry L. McSwain, “A Critical Appraisal of the Church Growth Movement” *Review and Expositor* 77, no. 4 (1980), 527. For similar criticisms see, e.g., Sidney H. Rooy, “The Concept of Man in the Missiology of McGavran: A Model of Anglosaxon Missiology in Latin America” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (1975): 175-206; Elmer L. Towns, “The Relationship of Church Growth and Systematic Theology” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 1 (1986): 63-70; Ken L. Sarles, “An Appraisal of the Signs and Wonders Movement” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145, no. 577 (1988): 58-83; David J. Bosch, “Church Unity Amidst Cultural Diversity A Protestant Problem” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 8 (1984): 248-60; John F. Havlik, “Trends and Issues in Evangelism Today” *Faith and Mission Today* 2, no. 2 (1985): 1-11; Orlando E. Costas, *The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1974); Wilbert R. Shenk, *The Challenge of Church Growth, a Symposium* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973). In the U.S. the Church Growth Movement has produced no significant or lasting results. See, e.g., Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 36.

A. ASSUMPTION: THE PURPOSE OF CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITY

The first assumption in the AC paradigm is the notion that the congregation's primary purpose is to increase attendance.⁸ Cole's description captures this assumption.

With the attractational form the flow is always coming into the church, which is rooted and bound to a geographical location. In a sense, the attractational expression of church is like a lake, waiting to receive from other tributaries.⁹

The assumption is shocking because one searches in vain to find any Biblical mandate to this effect. To the contrary, building the Church and, presumably, the congregation is Jesus' work.¹⁰

The Western church has tended to shape and fit the gospel into its cultural context and made the church's institutional extension and survival its priority... [T]he church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness.¹¹

The loss of Biblical mission is due in part to the obligations a congregation incurs when it purchases property, builds, or hires staff. The congregation may understand that it exists for the purpose of mission, but it is ultimately overcome by organizational requirements. This may be due to rapid growth that pressures it into expansion or a loss of membership that saddles those who remain with crushing debt. In either case, mission is replaced as the guiding principle. Sadly, survival, expansion, and maintenance are inadequate substitutes for the Lord's purpose for the congregation.¹²

⁸ "[T]he chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth", McGavran, *Understanding*, 22. Church Growth focuses on attracting outsiders to the congregation. Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 30.

⁹ Cole, *Church 3.0*, 47.

¹⁰ Matthew 16:18.

¹¹ Guder, 5.

¹² Guder, 240.

B. ASSUMPTION: THE SPIRITUAL INTERESTS OF THE UNCHURCHED

Another assumption concerns the spiritual interests of the unchurched. It imagines that people instinctively know they should attend church and would if they found one to their liking. The assumption may have been valid in the past; now it is a serious error.¹³ Roxburgh and Boren explain.

The assumption of the attractational imagination is that people outside the church are looking for a church and know they should belong to one; therefore church leaders should create the most attractive attractational church possible. The mission, then, is to get people to attend.¹⁴

This assumption leads congregations to rely on consumer impulse to attract and retain people. In this way the congregation becomes a storefront for a vendor of religious goods and services. The congregation attends to the needs and interests of the insiders and engages mission to draw outsiders in.¹⁵ Guder offers trenchant criticism:

...[T]he social order in modern societies was defined by the fact that freely choosing, autonomous individuals decided out of rational self-interest to enter into a social compact and construct a progressive society. Also defined in this way were the various social entities within society, including the church. The church as one such voluntary association lives off the willingness of its members to remain in it. *Gaining the loyalty of members and retaining that loyalty takes priority in a voluntary association* [emphasis mine].¹⁶

¹³ See David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons *unChristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... and Why It Matters* Reprint Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007) for a detailed rebuttal of this assumption.

¹⁴ Roxburgh and Boren, 18. See also Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 33-40.

¹⁵ Roxburgh and Boren, 30.

¹⁶ Guder, 84; Roxburgh and Boren, 29-30.

The AC paradigm produces believers who consider congregational life but one component in a rounded, fulfilling life. The congregation plays a limited role in informing spiritual life and has little influence in their daily lives. Thus, the AC paradigm is the source of the problem that Lordship theology seeks to address. Lordship theology has produced a flawed soteriology when the source of the problem lies in their ecclesiology.

C. ASSUMPTION: THE DEFINITION OF *EKKLESIA*

The AC paradigm rests on a faulty definition of *ekklesia*; the New Testament term typically translated as “church.” Since the Reformation congregations, local instances of the true Church have been defined by various activities: the place where the gospel is preached, the sacraments are administered, church discipline is directed, fellowship is celebrated, and spiritual maturity is cultivated.¹⁷ The result is the modern view that church is “the place where certain things happen.”¹⁸

This assumption has been the subject of recent scrutiny. Several centuries of worldwide missionary endeavor, the collapse of European colonialism with its attendant appearance of newly independent nations, the rise of robust Third World churches and the Church’s ejection from its role in contemporary culture have created tremendous pressure to reflect anew on the nature of the Church. Radmacher’s call to rethink

¹⁷ Guder, 254-55. See also Richard McBrien, “Church” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 108-110; Roger L. Omanson “The Church” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 231-33; Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 453-56. Chafer offers a broad description of the local church that is useful in MC thinking when he writes, “A church existed wherever a group of believers were met together in the bonds of fellowship This meeting of Christians answered the fundamental meaning of the name *church* [emphasis original], by which they were identified.” Lewis S. Chafer, “Volume IV: Ecclesiology-Eschatology,” *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 145. He adds, “In its simplest conception, the local church is no more than the assembly of professed believers in one locality,” 146. Radmacher agrees, Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church: A Biblical and Historical Study*, Revised Edition (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1996), 138-42. Guder adds, “The basic form of Christian witness is a company of followers of Jesus called by God’s Spirit and joined together as God’s people in a particular place,” 233.

¹⁸ Guder, 79.

the nature of the church, although sounded in a different cultural context, still rings true: “Thus, scarcely any concept of Christian doctrine of the present time stands so greatly in need of clarification from the ground up as that of the church.”¹⁹

D. EMERGENT CHURCHES ARE ATTRACTIVE

The Emerging church is but a variation of the AC paradigm. Its programming and culture look different but it has the same objective: to attract outsiders into the life of the congregation. “Many emergent churches *seem* to be new forms of attractational churches that have little sense of their neighborhoods or the missional nature of the church” [emphasis mine].²⁰ “Even much of the thinking about the so-called emerging church *leaves the prevailing assumptions of church and mission intact* and simply focuses on the issue of theology and spirituality in a postmodern setting” [emphasis mine].²¹ For all its novelty the Emerging church is not a missional movement. As Roxburgh and Boren explain, “[b]eing Missional is more than being post-modern attractational.”²²

E. ASSUMPTION: A CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTENDANCE AND DISCIPLESHIP

The last assumption in the AC paradigm that I’d like to mention concerns the matter of spiritual maturation and discipleship. It is an assumption that is rarely, if ever, examined. The AC paradigm assumes a causal relationship between spiritual maturation—discipleship—and attendance. Such causality does not exist.²³

¹⁹ Radmacher, 12. Erickson concurs in saying, “at no point in the history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention that other doctrines have received.” Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 1037.

²⁰ Roxburgh and Boren, 54.

²¹ Hirsch, 17.

²² Roxburgh and Boren, 33-34.

²³ For a brief survey of the research that displays the fallacy in this assumption see Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal* (South Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Association, 2007).

F. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE ATTRACTIVE CHURCH PARADIGM

The AC paradigm rests on several baseless assumptions. It assumes that the congregation's primary purpose is to preserve itself and to increase its size. It assumes that unbelievers know they should attend a congregation and would if they found one appealing to them. It adopts the cultural assumption about the definition of church as being a place where certain things happen. Finally, it assumes that there is a causal relationship between participation in congregational activities and growth into spiritual maturity.

III. THE MISSIONAL CHURCH PARADIGM

The MC paradigm is an archetype, *a new way of thinking* about the Church and the congregation. There is a growing body of literature devoted to the paradigm. It has been implemented in a variety of cultural contexts.²⁴ In spite of this growing body of literature, numerous field reports documenting its effectiveness, the emergence of MC networks, training and seminars, and an internet presence, the MC paradigm remains largely unknown.

Defining the MC paradigm is a bit of a challenge as a widely accepted definition has yet to emerge.²⁵ This challenge is compounded by the fact that the MC paradigm often proves elusive to those who have been schooled in the AC paradigm and its underlying foundation—the Church Growth School of Thought. In this section I will describe the MC paradigm rather than offer a definition. A description makes the paradigm easier to grasp and has the added advantage of illuminating the subtle

²⁴ Guder's bibliography lists 196 resources in the scholarly literature. Not all represent missional thinking but all intersect the MC paradigm. Guder, 269-80.

²⁵ Hirsch, e.g., offers a definition, 285. Roxburgh and Boren assume the postmodern position to argue that modernity's desire for a definition or a paradigm cannot be satisfied. Ironically, the illustration that begins their argument demonstrates that they are in fact proposing a paradigm shift, 27-45. Cole's work needs to be treated carefully as his concern is to develop and implement principles that give birth to a worldwide movement of organic churches. Still, it is clear that he employs missional motifs in his thinking.

ways in which the paradigm is distinct from the AC paradigm.²⁶ The following chart highlights the fact that the two paradigms are incompatible.²⁷ The analysis will examine four distinctions between them: a different theological provenance, a different purpose, a different set of processes and methods, and a different standard of appraisal.²⁸

	Attractional	Missional
Provenance	Ecclesiology	Christology
Purpose	Increase attendance	Produce self-replicating congregations
Process	Draw unbelievers to the church	Take the church to unbelievers <i>in situ</i>
Method	Stage attractional events and “outreach”	Send, proclaim, nurture

²⁶The MC paradigm is not a set of techniques to be incorporated into an Attractional congregation. This makes it difficult for some to understand. A useful litmus test is one’s response to the observation that Scripture does not direct us to build the congregation, nor is there any promise that Jesus will build *your* congregation. Shock, surprise, and disorientation are reactions of one who has adopted the AC paradigm without examining its presuppositions.

²⁷Attractional congregations can *transition* to the Missional paradigm. See Mark Stibbe and Andrew Williams, *Breakout: One Church’s Amazing Story of Growth Through Missional Shaped Communities* (Crownhill, Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2010). It may be possible for Attractional congregations to launch Missional groups, but as the two paradigms are immiscible, the groups will eventually become autonomous congregations that share staff and perhaps other resources. It has yet to be demonstrated that a single congregation can be both attractional and missional.

²⁸Those immersed in Church Growth thought often struggle to understand the Missional paradigm because of their conditioning and because both paradigms use the same words, but each paradigm assigns different meanings to those terms. The Church Growth Movement conditions us to see congregational activity as the way to increase attendance. The attendant pragmatism compromises their ability to understand the Missional paradigm; they tend to view it as a way to tweak a few programs, fine-tune mission statements, and perhaps increase “outreach” activity—all in the service of expanding the congregation. Roxburgh and Boren face this problem in their training seminars. They state, “The challenge we face is that our questions about missional church are primarily about how to fix what we have already been doing. We know how to do attractional church... But a missional imagination cannot be squeezed into such paradigms,” 48-49.

	Attractional	Missional
Pastor	Attract and retain new people to church	Train believers for mission
Appraisal	What will produce larger audiences?	What produces new believers?
Product	Consumers moving between churches	New congregations with new believers
Christian life	Jesus an element in a fulfilled life	Organized around Jesus' mission
Net results	Few added to the kingdom	New believers added regularly

Chart 1: A Comparison of the Attractional and Missional Paradigms

A. DIFFERENT THEOLOGICAL PROVENANCE

Missional ecclesiology places the Church's identity in the *missio Dei*—the Triune God sending Himself in Christ and the Holy Spirit to redeem creation. The Church does not *have* a mission or *do* missionary work; it *is* God's mission to the world. The MC paradigm organizes the congregation's activity in two broad categories: proclamation of the gospel and nurture of new congregations. The Church's purpose is the production of self-replicating congregations by proclamation of the gospel, and the nurture of disciples who are sent to produce additional self-replicating congregations.

Most theologians place mission within ecclesiology, if they treat it at all.²⁹ Mission is seen as one ministry among many.

²⁹ E.g., Erickson reduces mission to evangelism, which he then defines as one of four church functions, 1061-1069. The section titled "The Heart of the Ministry of the Church: The Gospel" is a lengthy definition of *ton euangelion* that makes no reference to mission, 1069-76. Chafer, surprisingly, favorably quotes Scofield to the effect that the church's mission is "to build itself up until the body is complete" and that evangelism is a personal responsibility. "There is no trace of any corporate responsibility attaching to 'the church.'" Chafer, Vol. 4, 149. Geisler reduces mission to evangelism, listing it fourth among the purposes of the congregation. Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 94-95. His section, "Some Conclusions About the

In contrast, the MC paradigm begins with Theology Proper.³⁰ “Over the last forty or so years, there has been a massive shift in the way we view missions. Some have articulated this shift as being from a church-centered one to a God-centered one.”³¹

This ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission. We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the results of God’s initiative rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation.³²

MC thought begins with God’s redemptive initiative to extend grace in the Old Testament covenants and prophetic promises. In the New Testament He is the *sending* God. The Father sends the Son;³³ Father and Son send the Spirit;³⁴ the Son sends the Church;³⁵ and the Spirit empowers the Church in mission.³⁶ “As God sent the Son into the world, so we are at core a sent or simply a *missionary* people” [emphasis original].³⁷ Mission is not a product of the Church; the Church is a product

Universal Church,” offers no mention of the missional nature of the Church. Geisler, 50-57.

³⁰ Hirsch sees Christology as the provenance of missional thinking, 142-144. See also Roxburgh and Boren, 69-70; Cole, *Organic Church*, xxvii-xxviii; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 118; Halter and Smay, 20.

³¹ Hirsch, 129.

³² Guder, 4. Hirsch places the provenance within Christology, 142-44. His pithy statement is memorable: “Christology determines missiology, and missiology determines ecclesiology,” 143. Cole concurs, “Alan Hirsch has challenged how we typically order our thinking about Jesus and the church. We generally place missiology as a subheading of ecclesiology. With this pattern, mission becomes just a part of all that the church is about. I believe that Hirsch rightly orders the thinking process in another way.” Neil Cole, *Church 3.0*, 58.

³³ The Gospel of John is laden with references to the Father sending the Son: John 3:34; 4:34; 5:23-24, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16-18, 28-29, 33; 8:16-18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44-45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21-25.

³⁴ In John 16:7 it is the Son who sends the Spirit. In John 14:26 and 16:26 it is the Father who sends the Spirit.

³⁵ John 17:18; 20:21.

³⁶ Acts 1:6-8.

³⁷ Hirsch, 129.

of mission. “We engage first in incarnational mission, and the church, so to speak, comes out the back of it.”³⁸ Because the Church’s existence is grounded in the command of the sending God, the *missio Dei*, mission is the essence of its identity.³⁹

This theological provenance insists that the congregation align its identity with the Head of the Church. The Lord Jesus modeled missional identity as a divine dispatch; it was at the core of His self-understanding.⁴⁰ The congregation must see itself in the same way. Jesus identified Himself as the “sent one”⁴¹ who dispatched the Church into the same mission.⁴² As Radmacher presciently noted, the congregation is God’s agent in the world.

The church is in the world in the form of local churches, which are physical organizations with physical relationships and definite physical responsibilities. The local church is God’s agency in the world, transacting God’s business... That these local churches hold a place of prime importance in the mind of God and are the means through which God’s program is to be accomplished can be clearly shown by a careful study of the New Testament revelation.⁴³

B. DIFFERENT PURPOSE

This suggests a different purpose for congregational activity. The AC impulse is *to draw* in order to increase attendance. The MC impulse is *to send*. “A genuine missional impulse is a

³⁸ Ibid., 144. Speaking of what happens when believers take the church to the community, Cole concludes, “When the moths are drawn to the light and the person of peace brings several to Christ, a church is born.” Cole, *Organic Church*, 185.

³⁹ Hirsch, 128; Guder, 82.

⁴⁰ John 10:36; 17:3. Jesus linked his identity as the Son to the Father’s sending. Paul (Rom 8:31) and John (1 John 4:9-10, 14) were mindful of the link between the Son’s atonement and the Father’s sending him (John 3:17).

⁴¹ John 10:36; 17:3.

⁴² John 20:21.

⁴³ Radmacher, 317. Radmacher was not arguing in favor of the MC paradigm but he correctly identifies the Church’s role as the agent of God’s redemptive initiative.

sending rather than an *attractional* one” [emphasis original].⁴⁴ Its purpose is to produce self-replicating congregations.

The goal of our missional life is not to grow churches. The goal of church is to grow missionaries. The goal of the gospel is not to get people to church. The result of the gospel is that people find each other and gather because of the deep meaning of a common experience.⁴⁵

In the MC paradigm congregational life organizes around the task of extending God’s work by producing new congregations. No thought is given to enlarging any given congregation—a sharp contrast with the AC impulse.⁴⁶

C. DIFFERENT PROCESSES AND METHODS

Distinct purposes entail different processes and methods. The AC process is to draw crowds. The method is to stage attractive events.⁴⁷ The pastor’s two-fold task is to superintend a slate of events that attract people⁴⁸ and retain their loyalty.⁴⁹ The result is a stream of consumers cycling through the congregation, producing transfer growth but negligible increase in the number of new believers. The final product is a congregation filled with consumers who will eventually take their business elsewhere.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Hirsch, 129.

⁴⁵ Halter and Smay, 168.

⁴⁶ Guder, 82.

⁴⁷ Methods range from professional quality music and vocals; a renowned preacher who draws large audiences; special productions on holidays and various other methods that share one thing in common—they will draw a crowd.

⁴⁸ Today “good preaching” is employed as an attractional event. People frequent that congregation whose pastor employs the consumer’s preferred preaching style. They will quickly abandon the congregation should there be a significant change in the pulpit.

⁴⁹ Guder states, “where religious affiliation is a matter of choice, religious organizations must compete for members,” 84. Smaller church pastors who see their members funneled off to larger churches can testify to this painful fact.

⁵⁰ Cole tartly observes, “What we draw them *with* is what we draw them to” [emphasis original]. Cole, *Organic Church*, 95. When the congregation’s offering falls short of the consumer’s expectation, as it inevitably will, people will cycle out to another congregation that has a fresh and attractive offering.

The MC paradigm mindfully rejects this *in toto*. Rather, it seeks self-replication by taking the church to unbelievers. Its methods fall into three broad categories: sending, proclaiming, and nurturing.

Sending is the continual dispatch of missionaries who will carry the gospel to a society's unreached nooks and crannies.⁵¹ *Proclaiming* involves every believer in declaring the gospel in word and deed. It hinges on the genuine identification with and affinity for the unbelievers and requires a "real and abiding presence among the group" one is attempting to evangelize.⁵²

MC literature frequently refers to "incarnational ministry" as the key method for carrying the gospel into new places in order to establish new self-replicating congregations. "Incarnational ministry essentially means taking the church to the people rather than bringing people to the church."⁵³

Nurturing depends upon the creation of missional communities (congregations) that facilitate spiritual growth in its members. They are communities of missional activity that cultivate disciples who go out to replicate the congregation by the same process and methods.

D. DIFFERENT MEANS OF APPRAISAL

Missional congregations continually ask, "What are the ways we need to change in order to engage the people in our community who no longer consider church a part of their lives?"⁵⁴ The appraisal—the measure of success, if you will—is whether new congregations are sprouting up *in situ* as the Holy Spirit moves new believers to seek others who share the same new life.⁵⁵ This is a significantly different measure of success than that

⁵¹ Apostolic ministry, in the sense that believers are dispatched as God's agents to deliver his message (the gospel) is a key to Missional thought. Hirsch speaks of the "apostolic environment," 149-77; Cole identifies the "apostolic mission" as an essential component of the organic congregation's DNA, 115. Roxburgh and Boren speak of the "missional vocation" by which we are sent to represent the reign of God, 77-109, as the "apostle to the world," 110-41.

⁵² Hirsch, 133.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁴ Roxburgh and Boren, 20.

⁵⁵ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 168.

employed in the AC paradigm which asks, “Are we attracting and sustaining increasing numbers?”

E. RESULTS OF THE MISSIONAL CHURCH PARADIGM

The pragmatist who will ask, “Does it work?” rather than “Is it true?” should be satisfied by the field reports. They reveal that the MC paradigm produces congregations in which every person is trained, mobilized, and active in taking the gospel to the unsaved.⁵⁶ It is common to read of the rapid, spontaneous creation of multiple new congregations, each uniquely suited to its micro-culture.⁵⁷ They point to the Church in China, which operated on missional principles during the Cultural Revolution, as an example of a missional movement that flourished without benefit of foreign missionaries, seminaries, scholars, professional clergy, or denominational networks.⁵⁸ Pastors, church planters, and denominational executives who feel called to make a dramatic difference in their culture and society should consider these results and contemplate implementing the MC paradigm going forward.

F. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE MISSIONAL CHURCH PARADIGM

The MC paradigm differs from the AC paradigm in a variety of important ways. It connects the local congregation directly to the *missio Dei* rather than treating mission as a sub-category of ecclesiology and as one ministry (among many) of the congregation. It suggests a significantly different purpose for the congregation: the creation of self-replicating congregations.

⁵⁶ Stibbe and Williams throughout their book weave reports of hundreds of new leaders and thousands of believers sent out to the community, hundreds of new groups and major growth through evangelism.

⁵⁷ Cole details the growth of the organic church movement, which started with one church in Long Beach, CA. In six years more than eight hundred self-replicating churches in thirty-two states and twenty-three countries and ninety-nine church networks had been established. Cole, *Organic Church*, 26-29. In 2006 a representative sample of fifty-three organic churches launched fifty-two new churches—almost a 100% rate of reproduction. They also report growth by conversion slightly higher than 25%—significantly higher than AC paradigm churches in America. Cole, *Church 3.0*, 72.

⁵⁸ Philip Yancey, “Discreet and Dynamic: Why, with No Apparent Resources, Chinese Churches Thrive,” *Christianity Today*, July 2004, 72. Cited in Hirsch, 19.

This requires processes and methods different than those used by an attractional congregation. Where the AC paradigm measures success by attendance and income, the MC paradigm measures the number of people in mission and the number of self-replicating congregations produced.

Clearly, the two are incompatible.

IV. MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Can missional ecclesiology be inferred from the Book of Acts? If so, the reader will be furnished with a fresh perspective on Acts and the epistolary literature. The following analysis will introduce additional missional vocabulary to insure that the MC paradigm is represented fairly.

A. ACTS 1:1-8

The opening verses of Acts are an important test of whether motifs important to the MC paradigm are present in Scripture. The presence of missional motifs in this critical ecclesiological text would afford a measure of confidence in the MC paradigm. In fact several missional motifs are present in Acts 1:1-8.

Sending is one of those motifs. Acts 1:1-8 links the apostolic commission (1:8) to “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach” (1:1) [emphasis mine]. Their being sent would be a continuation of Jesus’ work. The added historical note in 1:4-5 strengthens the link by reminding the reader of Jesus’ words in Luke 24:47-49. This section neatly ties the apostolic commission to the body of Jesus’ work as recorded in the Book of Luke. The point is that they would be sent out to continue the Lord’s work.⁵⁹

In this way the apostolic commission—their being sent—advances an important New Testament theme: God is a sending

⁵⁹Darrell F. Bock, *Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 34. Walter Liefeld, *Interpreting the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 24, 51-53. Longnecker labels Acts 1:1-4 the “resumptive preface” to stress the continuative nature of Christ’s commission. Richard N. Longnecker, *The Acts of the Apostles, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 252.

God. The Father sends Jesus and the Spirit; Jesus sends His disciples; and the Spirit empowers their witness in the world.⁶⁰

The implication of Luke's words is that his second volume will be an account of what Jesus *continued* to do and teach after his ascension—no longer in visible presence on the earth but by his Spirit and in his followers.⁶¹

The Church's existence derives from the redemptive initiative of the self-sending God. The Church is sent as his agent to continue His redemptive initiative. At its core the Church is not a voluntary group that conducts mission; it is God's mission to the world. Mission is not activity; it is identity.⁶² The sending motif is essential to missional ecclesiology and the *sine qua non* of the MC paradigm.

The expansive nature of the mission is evident: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."⁶³ The task is ethnic and geographic in scope.⁶⁴ The mission is to take the message across boundaries: geographic, political, cultural, linguistic and racial. The Lord sends the Church to continually seek new venues for the message.

This leads to a second important missional motif: the *apostolic impulse*.⁶⁵ This term does not point to Christ's gift to the Church,⁶⁶ a return of the apostolic office, or to apostolic succession. Hirsch is careful to note that missional use of the term does not imply that the apostolic office is available today. The original apostles were unique in their role and calling.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Bock, 7.

⁶¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts (New International Commentary on the New Testament)*, Rev Sub ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 30.

⁶² Bock, 67.

⁶³ Acts 1:8. English Bible quotes are from the English Standard Version.

⁶⁴ Bock, 64-66. The first boundary crossed was linguistic. Acts 2:5-11 describes people from "every nation under heaven" hearing their own language spoken. Nor did the apostles cross that barrier alone; they were accompanied by "all [who were] together in one place" as per Acts 2:1. Geographical, political, racial, and social barriers to be crossed later are seen in the countries and peoples identified in Acts 2:9-11.

⁶⁵ See note 51. "Apostolic impulse" is my term.

⁶⁶ Ephesians 4:11.

⁶⁷ Hirsch, 152.

Terms like *apostolic environment*,⁶⁸ *apostolic mission*,⁶⁹ or *apostolic impulse* relate to the Church carrying God's redemptive initiative forward into new territory.⁷⁰ Jesus' apostles carried God's message to foreign cultures and foreign lands at the direction of the Holy Spirit. In a similar sense God's agents today serve an apostolic function by taking the message to previously unreached people, cultures, and societies.⁷¹

Apostolic means sent as a representative with a message. We are here for a purpose. We have been given a prime directive to fulfill: make disciples of all the nations. This part of us also comes from who our God is. Jesus is an apostle. He is the Chief Cornerstone of the apostolic foundation. Before He left this planet, He said to His disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21).⁷²

The Book of Acts shows the apostolic impulse at work in those who did not hold the apostolic office. Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8) and his cohorts scattered from Jerusalem preaching the word in Samaria.⁷³ It was only after word of the gospel's effect in a new venue reached Jerusalem that Peter and John went out.⁷⁴ Then, in obedience to the Spirit, Philip carried the gospel across another barrier when he spoke with the Ethiopian eunuch.⁷⁵ This part of Philip's story ends with the note that he travelled the road from Azotus to Caesarea

⁶⁸ Ibid., 149-77.

⁶⁹ Cole, 114-18.

⁷⁰ Hirsch's broad treatment of the apostolic servant includes three primary aspects: pioneering new ground for the gospel (155), insuring the integration of life and theology (155-57) and creating an environment for other new ministries to emerge (157-59).

⁷¹ Hirsch, 150-53. Cole describes a moment of insight when he crossed the attractional threshold into missional activity. He had planned to start a coffeehouse ministry that would attract people to a place where they could encounter the gospel. The Lord led him to scrap those plans and instead go to the coffeehouses the unsaved already frequented. It was at this turning point that the apostolic impulse was triggered. Rather than trying to draw people from one coffeehouse to another to convert them to Jesus, they would carry the message of Jesus to the unbeliever. Cole, 24.

⁷² Cole, *Organic Church*, 115.

⁷³ Acts 8:4-8.

⁷⁴ Acts 8:14.

⁷⁵ Acts 8:26-39.

preaching the gospel at every town along the way.⁷⁶ Although Philip was not an apostle, the apostolic impulse is evident in his service.

B. COMMUNITAS

Communitas, like *sending* and the *apostolic impulse*, is an important motif in missional ecclesiology. It is an impulse that drives people to instinctively seek one another to make sense of experiences that challenge the values and assumptions that once formed the foundations of their lives. *Communitas* emerges when people are disoriented, confused, or in grave danger. It produces a new network of intimate relationships based on powerful, shared experiences. It results in a new community that organizes itself to make sense of the experience and create a new way of life.

Communitas... happens in situations where individuals are driven to find each other through a common experience of ordeal, humbling, transition and marginalization. It involves intense feelings of social togetherness and belonging brought about by having to rely on each other in order to survive [emphasis original].⁷⁷

Communities that emerge from the *communitas* dynamic are different than Bible study or fellowship groups that gather to fulfill the wish for fellowship or the desire for spiritual growth.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Acts 8:40.

⁷⁷ Hirsch, 221. He employs *communitas* to distinguish what happens when a particular group of people is drawn together by their common experience of grace and organizes to do something about that experience. This is different than community. An attractional church cannot create *communitas* because its members are primarily concerned with comfort and fulfillment and its leaders assiduously avoid exposing its members to experiences of disorientation and confusion. Guder prefers “missional communities,” 142-82; Stibbe and Williams refer to “mission-shaped communities,” 52-53, 63-67; and Cole identifies the unit as a Life Transformation Group, 27-28.

⁷⁸ Hirsch’s lament captures the distinction between a small group and a community based in *communitas*. “For many of our critics Christian community has become little more than a quiet and reflective soul-space (as in Alt Worship circles) or a spiritual buzz (as in charismatic circles) for people trying to recuperate from an overly busy, consumerist lifestyle. But is this really what the church was meant to be about? Is this our grand purpose—to be a sort of refuge for recovering work addicts and experience junkies? A

Those needs may be met but a *communitas*-based group moves beyond to carry the new way of life to those outside the group's boundaries. It produces a group moving to bring a common vision into existence.

Communitas is seen throughout the Book of Acts. Significantly, it appears in the beginning, in Acts 1:14, where we find the believers of "one accord" in prayer. The word "one accord" (Gr. *homothymadon*) refers to a group acting as one. This was not a gathering of individuals each seeking his own interest. They had shared experiences that had turned their world upside down: enjoying a burgeoning messianic hope that had been temporarily dashed with Jesus' crucifixion, rejoicing in His stunning victory over the grave, and experiencing forty days of illumination that opened their understanding of the Scriptures. Everything they once hoped for was taken from them. It was replaced by a glorious reality beyond their imaginations. The *communitas* dynamic led them to forge a new way of life.

The nascent church is showing some of *its most fundamental characteristics*: gathered, seeking the Lord's will with one mind in prayer and assembled to carry out God's mission [emphasis mine].⁷⁹

Communitas is evident elsewhere in Acts. We see it when the believers gathered spontaneously to share the Lord's fellowship, to insure that none suffered want, and to rejoice over shared meals with "glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:42-46).⁸⁰ The financial sacrifice indicated in 2:45 far exceeded almsgiving. The spontaneous sale of possessions to care for others reveals intense feelings of togetherness and belonging that far exceed anything that would be expected in a group comprised of voluntary associations. This unparalleled generosity is a manifestation of *communitas*. The outward impulse of *communitas* is suggested by the fact that the believers found "favor with

sort of spiritual hospital or entertainment center?" Hirsch, 222. Roxburgh and Boren describe the moment of illumination when Boren realized that a monolithic small group strategy would be insufficient to actually reach unchurched people. Roxburgh and Boren, 84-85.

⁷⁹ Bock, 78.

⁸⁰ Hirsch, 221.

all the people” (Acts 2:47). There must have been an outward impulse to enfold others in the new way of life.⁸¹ The result is the daily addition of new believers.

We see *communitas* manifested in Acts 4:32-37: “Now the full number of those who believed were of *one heart and soul*, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common” [emphasis mine]. Their generosity was a spontaneous response to the Holy Spirit. Peter’s rebuke to Ananias indicates the apostles did not impose this duty; it was strictly voluntary.⁸²

C. SELF-REPLICATION

Self-replication is another important motif in missional ecclesiology and may well be the single most important feature of the MC paradigm. Missional congregations are assessed by whether they are producing additional missional congregations. Cole’s organic church paradigm insists that congregations be self-propagating, naturally starting additional self-perpetuating congregations that naturally produce other self-sustaining and self-propagating congregations.⁸³ Halter and Smay make this a financial priority among the churches in their network. “In Adullam, we prioritize putting money and time into developing leaders who can create new communities... Remember, whatever you give leadership to will grow.”⁸⁴ Hirsch uses the Biblical metaphor of sowing seeds to illuminate the fact that every congregation has within itself the ability to reproduce.⁸⁵

An example of this motif may be found in the church at Antioch in Syria. Those who fled Jerusalem when persecution broke out after Stephen’s martyrdom found themselves in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:19). Upon their arrival in Antioch they began “preaching the Lord Jesus” (11:20) with remarkable results. The magnitude of the response drew the

⁸¹ This is different than the attitude of the typical small group found in many American churches. These groups are intensely inward focused on their own needs. They become uncomfortable and even resentful when pressured to expand the group.

⁸² Acts 5:3-4.

⁸³ Cole, *Church 3.0*, 73-91.

⁸⁴ Halter and Smay, 175.

⁸⁵ Hirsch, 139. He uses the felicitous comparison of the missional impulse that reproduces self-propagating congregations to a sneeze, 130.

attention of the apostles in Jerusalem (11:22). They dispatched Barnabas whose work produced many more being added to the Lord (11:24). This resulted in the creation of more congregations, including Antioch. Thus, the Jerusalem church became self-replicating without having first planned to do so.

The congregation in Antioch, a “second generation” or “daughter” church, in turn replicated itself. In Acts 13:1-3 we see the congregation sending Saul and Barnabas. At Antioch in Pisidia they ignited a powerful wave of proclamation by the people that swept through the region. Many Jews and Gentile converts embraced Paul’s message with faith (15:16-41).⁸⁶ The self-replicating impulse emerges when these new believers proclaimed the message, spontaneously, throughout the community. The following Sabbath a vast crowd gathered to hear Paul (15:44). In time the message spread throughout the whole region (15:49), presumably resulting in additional self-replicating congregations.

This impulse to self-replicate can be seen throughout Acts. Word of Paul’s message preceded his arrival in Thessalonica.⁸⁷ Upon his arrival in Ephesus he discovers that the message about Jesus, albeit absent the declaration that the Spirit had come, has already been borne by unnamed witnesses.⁸⁸ The gospel established a beachhead in Rome, likely due to the presence of believers residing there rather than as a result of a dedicated mission or a coordinated evangelistic enterprise.⁸⁹ It is possible that Priscilla and Aquila, having been converted under Paul’s ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), returned to Rome bearing the gospel to establish a congregation in their home.⁹⁰

The power of self-replicating congregations to carry the work forward spontaneously and without oversight is suggested

⁸⁶ Note that these were urged to “continue in the grace of God” (15:44), an indication that they believed and were born again.

⁸⁷ The Jews complaint that Paul had “turned the world upside down” indicates that news of his message preceded his arrival in Thessalonica, Acts 17:6. Bock, 552. Verse 13 indicates that news of Paul’s work in Berea made its way back to Thessalonica. News of the gospel’s advance throughout the region travelled readily.

⁸⁸ Bock, 599.

⁸⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans 1-8, Vol. 1, International Critical Commentary Series* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 17.

⁹⁰ Romans 16:3-5.

in Rom 15:23. Writing from Corinth Paul tells the believers in Rome he will come to them after delivering the collection to Jerusalem because “I no longer have any room for work in these regions.” Why was he confident that his mission in those regions was complete? Newbigin answers the question.

What, exactly, has he done? Certainly not converted all the people of these regions. Certainly not solved their social and economic problems. He has, in his own words, “fully preached the gospel” and left behind communities of men and women who believe the gospel and live by it. So his work as a missionary is done. It is striking, for a modern reader, that he does not agonize about all the multitudes in those regions who have not yet heard the gospel or who have not accepted it... The point here is that he has completed his missionary task in the creation of believing communities in all the regions through which he has passed.⁹¹

In his absence these congregations—God’s sent people—would follow the apostolic impulse to produce self-replicating communities.

V. CONCLUSION

As American culture continues to unwind through its transition into postmodernity, the Church will be forced to find new ways to relate to an increasingly fractured and paganized society. The MC paradigm is one promising alternative for the future.

This paper has described the Missional paradigm by identifying important ways that it differs from the Attractional model. It has also shown that several motifs of missional ecclesiology—sending, apostolic impulse, *communitas*, and self-replication—are evident in the Book of Acts. The purpose was not to prove the MC paradigm correct and the AC paradigm false. Rather, a more modest aim was to offer some Biblical justification for the MC paradigm from the Book of Acts in hopes of motivating others to examine the MC paradigm.

⁹¹ Newbigin, 121.

The MC paradigm merits further treatment. A comprehensive theological treatment based on rigorous Biblical exegesis is lacking in the literature. Perhaps another more qualified than this author will take up that task.

DISPENSATIONALISM AND FREE GRACE: INTIMATELY LINKED

PART 2

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the first installment of this series, I demonstrated that many of the proponents of Lordship Salvation have advanced the argument that normative Dispensationalism and Free Grace go hand-in-hand. Among these are Drs. John MacArthur¹ and John Gerstner, though many others have also made this claim. I agree with this assertion.

To establish this connection, I showed where MacArthur and Gerstner have drawn a correlation between Dispensationalism and Free Grace in their works on soteriology, and did a brief survey of the writings of A. W. Pink both before and after his change from Dispensationalism to Covenant Theology, showing that his soteriology was greatly impacted by the change. In other words, in the first installment of this series, I demonstrated *that* a non-Dispensational approach to interpretation leads to Lordship Salvation.

In this article, I will attempt to show *how* this occurs by interacting with specific methods of interpretation used by proponents of Lordship Salvation as they are applied to various

¹On one hand, MacArthur states that the link between Dispensationalism and Free Grace is imagined, but on the other he argues later that they are very much linked. I believe that the distinction is that he does not want people to associate all forms of Dispensationalism with Free Grace. Nevertheless, I believe that he would agree that Classical or Revised Dispensationalism in the mold of Chafer or Ryrie (which I have labeled normative Dispensationalism) is the root of Free Grace theology.

Biblical passages. In the last installment of the series, I will attempt to demonstrate how and why Dispensationalism has led so many to Free Grace theology.

Three major distinctions of Covenant Theology most often drive the soteriology of Lordship Salvation. These are kingdom-now millennial views (including already/not yet views), a soteriological view of history, and the application of the Law to Christians. All of these are the fruit of non-literal interpretation and each point will be examined below.

II. HERMENEUTICAL DIFFERENCES

While both sides of the debate over Dispensationalism agree that Dispensationalism and consistent literal interpretation necessarily go together, some have sought to cast doubt on the motivation of Dispensationalists' insistence on consistent literal interpretation. For example, in both *A Primer on Dispensationalism*,² and *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*,³ Gerstner makes the claim that theology drives Dispensationalism to consistent literal interpretation⁴ rather than the other way around. This is a strange assertion because it is so unlikely that an interpreter would come up with a theology independent of the Word that just happened to be the same as the literal interpretation.

²"It is very difficult to say which is the cart and which is the horse in this case. Is it the literalistic tendency that produces this divided Scripture, or is it the belief in a divided Scripture that drives the Dispensationalist to ultra-literalism at some point? I think it is the latter, though that is not easy to prove" John Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1982), 5.

³"Many on both sides think that this minor 'hermeneutical' difference [between literal interpretation of prophecy and non-literal interpretation of prophecy] is a more foundational difference than the theological. We profoundly disagree for we believe that the Dispensational literal hermeneutic is driven by an a priori commitment to Dispensational theological distinctives." John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), 86-87.

⁴Literal interpretation does not mean that figures of speech are not recognized, but that the original intention of the author, and that alone, is sought. Conversely, to stop seeking the original intention of the author is to cease from literal interpretation, even if an allegorical method is not used.

The fact that literal hermeneutics is indeed primary for Dispensationalists is further evidenced in the fact that while Dispensationalists disagree on many theological points, and even on the interpretation of many passages, the commitment to consistent literal interpretation remains. Some of these different approaches as they relate to the Sermon on the Mount are cataloged in John Martin's article, "Dispensational Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount" in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*,⁵ and this list is far from exhaustive. The Sermon on the Mount is only one of many passages where Dispensationalists disagree, yet it is fair to say that all of the views arise out of an attempt at uncovering the Sermon's original intention.

Because Dispensationalism is variously defined, I have attempted to boil down what are the five basic elements of normative Dispensationalism. They are as follows:

1. Literal, historical, grammatical interpretation should be applied to *all* portions of Scripture.
2. The church and Israel are distinct peoples in God's program for the ages.
3. The Lord Jesus Christ will return bodily to earth and reign on David's throne in Jerusalem for one thousand years.
4. The underlying purpose of God's dealings with the world is His glory, not merely the salvation of man, thus the Scripture goes far beyond evangelism.
5. The Christian is free from the Law in its entirety for both justification (Gal 2:16) and sanctification (Gal 5:18).⁶

Each of these points is fundamental to normative Dispensationalism, but the first point is primary among them because all of the other points flow from consistent literal interpretation.

⁵ Stanley Toussaint and Charles Dyer, editors (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986) 35-48.

⁶ For points 1-4 see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 45-48. For point 5, see *The Ryrie Study Bible: New Testament New American Standard Version*, (Chicago: Moody, 1977), notes on Romans 7, 273-74. See also Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace: A Study of New Testament Concepts as They Relate to the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1991).

It is commonly taken as axiomatic that conservative proponents of Covenant Theology only adopt a method of non-literal interpretation in passages related to yet-unfulfilled prophecy. This is simply not true as can be seen in the fact that so often the debate between methods of interpretation between Dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists focus on passages that are not prophetic. Some obvious examples are the Sermon on the Mount,⁷ Romans 6-8 (see below), the warning passages in Hebrews,⁸ and the non-prophetic portions of the Old Testament. If the only divergence is prophecy, why would passages such as these be the focus of discussion rather than it being limited to books and passages like Daniel 2 and 9, the Olivet Discourse, and Revelation?

The fact is, because of the analogy of faith (Scripture interprets Scripture), Bible interpretation is systematic. The theology that arises from our interpretation of one passage necessarily effects our interpretation of other related passages unless we are willing to abandon that theology. The doctrine that arises from non-literal interpretation in eschatological passages produces a domino effect where, in order to maintain the theology that arises from non-literal interpretation of these passages, non-literal interpretation is adopted in many other passages as well. By the time the dominoes stop falling, the vast majority of the Bible is impacted and very little is taken in a way that is consistent with authorial intent.

If Covenant Theology has an impact on interpretation in so much of the Bible, it should be an area of concern, then, that even among many Dispensationalist pastors and teachers, their bookshelves are filled primarily with exegetical and theological works from non-Dispensational scholars. The mistake is made of assuming that as long as they are not dealing with eschatology, the non-Dispensational approach is acceptable. The result has been that even many Dispensationalists adopt non-Dispensational interpretations of many passages and

⁷ Even among Dispensationalists that interpret the Sermon as a description of ethics during the Kingdom dispensation, this is not properly considered a prophetic sermon, but a manifesto.

⁸ Compare Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Haysville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1992) pp. 433-66, and Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968).

carry away a theology that is inconsistent with a consistently literal approach to Bible interpretation.

John MacArthur is only one example of a Dispensationalist that has been affected in this way by non-Dispensational scholars. This effect can be seen most clearly in his soteriological work, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, where, in his discussion of the Synoptic Gospels, he quotes from thirty-nine non-Dispensationalists and only one Dispensationalist in defense of his position. The effect of this dependence upon non-Dispensationalists can be seen in his open rejection of normative Dispensationalism in both *The Gospel According to Jesus* and *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, especially (out of our five essentials listed above) the principles of the believer's freedom from the Mosaic Law for both justification and sanctification⁹ and Dispensationalism's doxological view of history.¹⁰ MacArthur's adoption of the corresponding principles of Covenant Theology is clearly the foundation for his soteriology.

III. MILLENNIAL VIEWS

Because the impact of the various millennial views upon soteriology has been discussed at length by Free Grace scholars, and because space is limited, this topic will only be dealt with briefly.¹¹

While every major aspect of Covenant Theology has a significant impact on soteriology, nothing has more of an impact than removing the Judgment Seat of Christ from the equation—a byproduct of kingdom-now millennial views. Dave Anderson wrote in *Free Grace Soteriology*,

Free Grace is an outflow of Dispensationalism.
Only Dispensationalism has a judgment seat for
believers some time before the thousand year

⁹ See John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1993, 2000), 105-138.

¹⁰ See John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, 1994), 31-33, 96-97.

¹¹ For further study, the reader is encouraged to read: Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, Zane Hodges *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, Redención Viva, 1981), and G. H. Lang, *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks*, Reprint Edition (Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle Publishing Co., 1984).

reign of Christ (in Jerusalem on earth) and a judgment seat for unbelievers after this one thousand year reign.¹²

The Judgment Seat of Christ is a watershed doctrine in soteriology.

There are clearly passages in the NT—lots of them—that speak of a judgment of believers according to works. One unambiguous example is 2 Cor 5:10, “For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” But there are also many passages that simply talk about rewards in the kingdom according to works without mentioning a judgment. The Beatitudes in Matt 5:3-12 is one such passage. For the Dispensationalist, these passages present no problem because we understand that there is a judgment for believers to determine reward which is not to be confused with a general judgment of all men to determine eternal destiny.

When the Millennial Kingdom is removed from the equation—and the Judgment Seat of Christ with it—the non-Dispensationalist is presented with a difficult problem. Passages discussing kingdom inheritance (which is according to works) are equated with passages about the new birth (which is by grace through faith and apart from works). Furthermore, the judgments of unbelievers and believers are joined into one event, one judgment, to determine eternal destiny.¹³ If justification and eternal life are a free gift through faith alone apart from works, how can so many passages speak as if kingdom

¹² David R. Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology* (NP: Xulon Press, 2010), viii.

¹³ For example, the Sheep and the Goats judgment in Matt 25:31-46 is distinct from the Great White Throne Judgment. The sheep and goats are separated before any works are mentioned and then judged separately according to works. The non-Dispensationalist sees this as a description of the one judgment where all men will appear to determine eternal destiny. With this basis, the view that works are necessary to escape everlasting punishment cannot be avoided. For contrasting views regarding this judgment, see (the Dispensational view) Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980) pp. 288-92, and (the non-Dispensational view) David Hill, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 1981) pp. 330-32.

inheritance (which, in their mind is the same thing¹⁴) is according to works? And how can believers be judged by their works alongside unbelievers to determine eternal destiny?

Proponents of various forms of Lordship Salvation seek to solve this problem by denying the dichotomy set forth in Rom 4:1-5 and 11:6, and reintroducing commitment to good works as either an open condition for finally escaping eternal condemnation or as the necessary outcome of new birth.¹⁵

One aspect that is less often discussed is regarding the Biblical description of the righteous life of Israel in the kingdom. For example Zeph 3:11-13 says:

“In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.”

Under Covenant Theology, the Church and Israel are equated and the kingdom is said (at least to some degree) to be now. If this is the case, the certain expectation is that all believers must meet this (practically) righteous description.¹⁶ The fact

¹⁴ See Edmund K. Neufeld, “The Gospel in the Gospels: Answering the Question ‘What Must I do to be Saved?’ from the Synoptics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 2008), 272. “The first eight beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) attract our reader, because each gives a condition and a reward, and the reward generally sounds like eternal life.” Matthew 5:5, for example, presents the reward for the meek, “*autoi klēronomēsousin tēn gēn*,” meaning literally, “they will inherit the land.” The Dispensationalist understands that this has to do with possessing the land promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:17-21) in the kingdom. If there is no literal land to possess, as the amillennialists believe, it is understandable that they believe that this “generally sounds like eternal life.” The Dispensational premillennialist does not confuse the two and has no problem here.

¹⁵ This latter view also makes works a condition for spending eternity with God.

¹⁶ See, for example, John Gill’s exposition of Zeph 3:13 in *Exposition of the Entire Bible* available online at: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/>

that this is observably removed from reality has simply led to Covenant Theologians denying the possibility that someone may be born again and not fit this description, thus, Lordship Salvation is again the conclusion.

IV. SOTERIOLOGICAL VIEW OF HISTORY

Related to the various kingdom-now views is Covenant Theology's soteriological view of history. One prevalent theme that ties the entire Bible together is the hope of a future kingdom ruled by Messiah along with the glory of the Lord that will be both revealed and shared with men during His righteous reign. Because the Millennial Kingdom is either greatly minimized or eliminated altogether in the various non-Dispensational views, an enormous vacuum is left. Scholars have attempted to fill this void by placing the redemption of the elect in the forefront and reading much of the Bible through that perspective. In that regard, the departure from literal interpretation of passages related to the kingdom is the root of the soteriological view of history.

It might also be said, however, that Covenant theology's soteriological view of history has its roots in the Reformed view of election and reprobation, especially in supralapsarianism.¹⁷ This is best illustrated by William Perkins who synthesized the theologies of Theodore Beza and the Heidelberg Theologians¹⁸ (the innovators of Covenant Theology) in his chart of history entitled *A Golden Chaine*.¹⁹ This work was enormously popular and had a profound impact on Puritan theology.

Perkins saw human history as a means of working out election and reprobation. In *A Golden Chaine*, every major Biblical event along with the lives of both the elect and the reprobate

commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/zephaniah-3-13.html (last accessed October 10th, 2011).

¹⁷ Supralapsarianism is the view that election and reprobation precede the Fall in the logical order of the Divine decrees. In other words, according to supralapsarianism, sin was introduced as a means to accomplish election and reprobation.

¹⁸ See R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, 1997), 51-66.

¹⁹ This chart is available online at <http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html?mainframe=/calvinism/perkins.html> (last accessed July 1, 2011).

are mapped from eternity past to eternity future. And each event is seen as a step in the outworking of God's decreed will concerning election and reprobation. In this perspective, all of history is seen as divinely designed toward those particular goals. While supralapsarianism has become a less common position, the soteriological view of history that resulted from it has remained as popular as ever. A soteriological view of history brings with it an almost exclusively soteriological view of the Bible's contents because everything else is seen as almost superfluous.

For example, in Piper's *The Justification of God*, he bases his exegesis of Rom 9:1-23 upon the assumption that Israel's position as recipients of God's kingdom program is not the subject of discussion. His comments on Rom 9:2 demonstrate this: "Paul is not moved to constant grief (9:2) because corporate Israel has forfeited her non-salvific 'theocratic privileges' while another people (the Church or the remnant) has taken over this 'historical role.'"²⁰ The implication is that it is ridiculous to think Paul would be so upset about this, but if we have a proper appreciation for the importance of the kingdom in God's program for the ages (see Rom 8:17-18), and especially the centrality of the kingdom in God's program for Israel, this notion is not so ridiculous. By forfeiting their kingdom inheritance, this disobedient generation is forfeiting its purpose and glory.

A doxological view of God's dealing with man in history, as opposed to a soteriological view, is to some degree the direct result of recognizing the intended audience of the Biblical books. If indeed the only book of the New Testament that was written to unbelievers is the Gospel of John, why would we assume an evangelical purpose for the other books? Is this not a complete dismissal of authorial intent?

In Edmund K. Neufeld's June 2008 *JETS* article, "The Gospel in the Gospels: Answering the Question 'What Must I Do to be Saved?' from the Synoptics," the error of Covenant Theology's soteriological view of history is on display.

Neufeld states that he "will not contend with the common view that the Synoptic Gospels address believers, in Matthew's

²⁰ *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 64-65.

case Jewish believers.”²¹ Nevertheless he proceeds to “examine Matthew, Mark, and Luke, reading each Gospel in turn through the eyes of its own hypothetical reader” each of which is “a late first-century Gentile unbeliever.”²² This seems to be an admission that his interpretation is dependent upon superimposing an audience that was never intended onto the books in question.

The impact of this error cannot be overstated. Throughout the article, Neufeld openly and repeatedly states that works are a condition for receiving eternal life.²³ In fact, this seems to be the main point of the article, as the following thesis paragraph shows:

...we have understood saving *faith* to emerge from God’s call and merit-less human choice, so we should understand saving *obedience* rising from that same dynamic of God’s grace and merit-less human response. Perhaps the crucial distinction is not between faith and works, but between grace and merit. By saying “faith not works,” we intend “grace not merit,” but these are not parallel distinctions. The Synoptics undermine “faith not works,” but they support “grace not merit.”²⁴

The intended audience and purpose of any book are inseparably linked. If Matthew was writing to Jewish believers who already possessed eternal life in the Johannine since, why would he write to them as if they were unbelieving Gentiles

²¹ Neufeld, 271.

²² *Ibid.*, 270.

²³ “Matthew 8:1–25:30... has not altered the offer of life *to those who hear the golden rule and obey it, to those who leave all to follow Jesus. Active obedience to Jesus and his teaching continues to be the narrow gate to life*” (p. 277, emphasis added). “Our reader also finds God working graciously in these chapters [Matt 8:1–25:30], but generally not in a way that overturns *the emphasis on active obedience being rewarded with salvation*” (p. 277, fn 26, emphasis added). “Following Jesus requires surpassing loyalty than that to family and to life itself, and Jesus’ words make these conditions essential for receiving eternal life” (p. 288), and “The Third Gospel usually speaks of *receiving eternal life in terms of some active obedience*. This includes being merciful, being more loyal to Jesus than any other in the face of opposition, even to losing one’s life, and living obediently to Jesus” (p. 290, emphasis added).

²⁴ Neufeld, 268 (emphasis in original).

who did not already possess this gift? To create a hypothetical reader that is different in every significant way from the intended audience is to skew the intention of the author. What Neufeld has done is simply ignore the intended audience and impose an evangelistic purpose onto the text.²⁵

Neufeld's plain admission of this method and resulting works salvation is helpful because it brings out into the open a method—rooted in Covenant Theology's soteriological view of history—that is commonplace among proponents of Lordship Salvation.

Is this a fault of Neufeld's exegesis alone, or is it the natural result of Covenant Theology? I think it is the latter. Covenant Theology unites all of Scripture around the doctrine of soteriology. This naturally results in the Synoptic Gospels playing a central role in the development of their soteriology because soteriology is seen as almost the single purpose of Christ's first advent. If we limit the Synoptics' application to people who are already secure believers, recognizing also Dispensational distinctions that are at play, soteriology ceases to be relevant to their main purpose. Covenant Theology (which unites all Scripture around soteriology) simply doesn't know what to do with a non-soteriological purpose because, in their view, nothing else is really very important.²⁶ In Neufeld,

²⁵ I would like to point out that I do not believe Neufeld wants to intentionally misrepresent the theology of the Synoptic writers. In fact, his article reads like an honest attempt to understand the Synoptics by a writer that is uncomfortable with trying to maintain the contradictory views of justification by faith alone and justification by works and has essentially chosen the latter. It must be instead that he fails to recognize that intended audience and authorial intent are inseparably related. This seems to me to be the primary exegetical pitfall of proponents of Lordship Salvation. Because they see the purpose of history as soteriological, all passages must fit into that box, no matter the context.

²⁶ I would like to point out that this also seems to be the root of the confusion about what Dispensationalists have taught regarding the justification of Old Testament Saints. While the Dispensationalist is discussing their salvation in reference to theocratic privilege, physical and material blessing, possession of the land, etc., the Covenant Theologian naturally assumes salvation from the penalty of sins is in view. Dispensationalists have never taught that in the Old Testament justification before God in an eternal sense was by anything other than faith alone, but Dispensationalists have made many statements that sound that way to Covenant Theologians who are applying the hermeneutics of Covenant Theology to their words. We are simply speaking different languages. See, for example, Gerstner's discussion of this problem in *Wrongly Dividing*, pp. 149-69.

as in others, changing each Synoptic Gospel's audience in order to change their purpose seems to be as much about restoring relevance (and even a primary place) to the Synoptics as it is about defending a prior commitment to works salvation.

MacArthur also applies this non-literal method of interpretation as can be plainly seen in his discussion of the purpose of the Gospels:

There is no more glorious truth in the Bible than the words of Luke 19:10: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." That verse sums up the work of Christ on earth (...) Unfortunately traditional Dispensationalism tends to miss that simple point. Some Dispensationalists teach that "the gospel of the kingdom" Jesus proclaimed (Matt 4:23) is distinct from "the gospel of the grace of God." (...) That may fit neatly into a particular Dispensational scheme, but Scripture does not support it. We must not forget that Jesus came to seek and save the lost, not merely to announce an earthly kingdom.²⁷

This quote misrepresents the Dispensational position. Dispensationalists also agree that Jesus proclaimed the way to eternal life—the Fourth Gospel is dedicated primarily to this purpose. The difference is that we recognize that Jesus spoke about other things too, whereas MacArthur would force an evangelistic purpose onto all of Jesus' words, no matter the context.²⁸ Would MacArthur, a premillennialist, have us believe that Jesus did not offer an earthly kingdom at all? His words here and the way he uses passages where Jesus offers the kingdom to Israel suggest that he would.

John Piper also reveals this perspective in his discussion of what it takes to obtain what he calls "final salvation." After quoting Acts 3:19; 1 Cor 16:22; Mark 8:34-35; Matt 10:37; Luke 14:33, and many other passages, he goes on to say:

²⁷ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 96.

²⁸ It should be noted that ironically even in Luke 19:10, Jesus is not discussing an evangelistic intent. It should be understood that this passage refers instead to bringing wayward believers back into obedience to the Shepherd.

These are just some of the conditions that the New Testament says we must meet in order to inherit final salvation. We must believe on Jesus and receive him and turn from our sin and obey him and humble ourselves like little children and love him more than we love our family, our possession, or our own life. This is what it means to be converted to Christ. This alone is the way of life everlasting.²⁹

This comment shows that he is interpreting all of these passages as being about how to obtain eternal life. He does this even though all of these books were written to believers and none of these passages mention faith, eternal life, justification, or eternal condemnation.

Piper's use here of Acts 3:19 is especially telling because the passage is discussing the conditions for bringing in the "times of refreshing" and "times of restoration" which were foretold by the Old Testament prophets (see 3:22-24), clearly a reference to the kingdom.³⁰ Piper, being a premillennialist, should not have missed this.³¹

Though Biblical writers can (and sometimes do) discuss the way to eternal life in books written to believers, even this is done as a reminder and as laying a foundation for other doctrines.³² Because the audience of every book in the New Testament other than the Gospel of John is an audience of

²⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1996) 65-66. Piper is a premillennialist and has a strong focus on the glory of God in his writings, nevertheless, he is consistent in interpreting the Bible through a lens of individual salvation from the penalty of sins.

³⁰ While the LXX does not use the words *anapsuxis*, "refreshing" or *apokatastasis* "restoration," a related word (*apokathistēmi*) does appear in Acts 1:6 regarding the kingdom and the concept is clearly present referring to the kingdom in Isa 48:6-8; Ezekiel 37, and many other passages in the Prophets. As McClain states: "Reflecting now upon the total content of Acts 3, it is hard to imagine how words could have made any plainer the historical reality of this reoffer of the King and His Kingdom to the nation of Israel." McClain, Alva J., *The Greatness of the Kingdom: And Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974) p. 406. See also the whole context of his discussion of Acts 3 in pp. 403-406.

³¹ MacArthur also makes this significant oversight. *Apostles*, pp. 33, 196.

³² A good example is the discussion on justification in Romans 1-4 setting up the discussions on sanctification in chaps. 5-8, Dispensationalism in chaps. 9-11, and liberation in chaps. 12-16.

believers, we should not assume that every serious discussion in the Bible is about the eternal destiny of its readers, but that is exactly what non-Dispensationalists often do. The Covenant Theologian and the “leaky Dispensationalist” (MacArthur) find their justification for this assumption in their soteriological view of history and, in MacArthur’s case, the over-application of Luke 19:10. Non-soteriological passages thus form the foundation of the soteriology of Lordship Salvation proponents, and this necessarily results in confusion regarding the condition for spending eternity with God.

V. THE MOSAIC LAW

The intermingling of law and grace that is common (though not universal³³) among those who reject normative Dispensationalism is the result of the continuity principle of Covenant Theology (which Progressive Dispensationalism has also adopted). While Daniel Fuller disagrees with the Dispensationalist position, he sums up the Dispensationalist’s argument on this point well:

Dispensationalism is convinced that covenant theology is unable to keep law and grace separate because it insists on maintaining a continuity between God’s dealings with Israel and with the Church. It argues that covenant theology, in insisting upon this continuity, must mix the law, which characterizes God’s dealings with Israel, with the message of grace and the gospel, which is a unique characteristic of God’s dealings with the Church.³⁴

³³ For example, Luther endeavored to maintain a clear distinction between law and grace. Martin Luther’s work *Christian Liberty* (Philadelphia: Luther Publication Society, 1903) is considered a classic work in drawing this distinction. In it he wrote: “a Christian man needs no work, no law, for his salvation; for by faith he is free from all law, and in perfect freedom does gratuitously all that he does,” p. 33.

³⁴ Fuller, Daniel P., *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 6. I would only want to amend this by stating that while the Law was exclusively for Israel, grace is not exclusively for the Church, but for all people of every age who believe.

By prioritizing continuity above literal interpretation, Covenant theologians deny the distinction between the Church and Israel and seek to give primary application to every portion of the Bible, often including the Mosaic Law. This principle of Covenant Theology³⁵ is best illustrated by Arthur Pink in *The Law and the Saint*.

It is a superficial and erroneous conclusion that supposes the Old and New Testaments are antagonistic. The Old Testament is full of grace: the New Testament is full of Law. The revelation of the New Testament to the Old is like that of the oak tree to the acorn. It has been often said, and said truly, “The New is in the Old contained, the Old is by the New explained”! And surely this *must be* so. The Bible as a whole, and in its parts, is not merely for Israel or the Church, but is a written revelation from God to and for *the whole human race*.³⁶

This quote is illustrative of the main theme of his book and of Covenant Theology’s application of the Law to today.

Though MacArthur claims a form of Dispensationalism, he has largely adopted Covenant Theology’s position on the application of the Law today, especially as it relates to sanctification. MacArthur does state the Christian’s freedom from the Law,³⁷

³⁵ It should be noted that Progressive Dispensationalism maintains this theme of continuity as well and also places the Christian under the Law. For example, Turner states, “Matthew portrays the church as a Jewish community whose mission is to summon all the nations to obey Jesus, the ultimate Torah teacher who fulfills Moses and the prophets. Matthew’s Jewish church is distinct from Israel only because of its messianic faith, and the church today is redemptively continuous with these Jewish roots.” Turner, David L., “Matthew Among the Dispensationalists” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* vol. 53, no. 4 (Dec 2010) p. 714. And “[Recognizing the Church’s Jewish roots] equips the church to fulfill its role as the vehicle through which Torah, as fulfilled through the instruction and example of Jesus, is extended to all the nations of the earth.” p. 715.

³⁶ Pink, Arthur, *The Law and the Saint* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pink/law.pdf>. Last accessed October 12, 2011. Emphasis in original. While I would agree that the Old and New Testaments are not antagonistic, this does not lead to Pink’s conclusion that the Law is applicable today.

³⁷ MacArthur, *Apostles*, 59, 120.

but he limits this to the freedom from the Law's penalties,³⁸ and often removes the emphasis on freedom from the Law in Paul's writings. For example, he treats Rom 7:1-4 as if Paul is discussing freedom from sin, rather than freedom from the Law,³⁹ and places almost no emphasis on freedom from the Law in his extended discussion on Romans 6-8. In his discussion on Romans 7, he skips vv 5-11 entirely and never mentions the fact that the Law actually arouses indwelling sin (one of the necessary reasons why we are freed from it, and the main point of Romans 7. See Rom 7:5, 9-11). As a result, Rom 7:14-24 is not seen as an abnormal experience for a Christian—one Christians experience when trying to live under the Law—but as, "the state of every true believer."⁴⁰

This may seem like a small matter soteriologically. It is about sanctification after all. But Dispensationalism recognizes that the freedom from sin described in Romans 6-8; Gal 2:19-5:23; and elsewhere *is conditioned upon the Christian realizing his freedom from the Law* (see esp. Rom 6:14; 7:5-6; and Gal 2:19-21). And when that condition is removed or minimized, the freedom from sin it describes can be manipulated into a discussion of what it means to be a true Christian. This is precisely what MacArthur and many other Lordship Salvation proponents do.

By applying the Law to Christians for sanctification, the passages in the Bible that discuss freedom from the Law in regards to sanctification are twisted into being discussions about proof of justification. This can be most clearly seen in

³⁸ Ibid., 119. As McClain adeptly observes, "To emasculate the law of God of its divine penalties and still call it 'law' is a serious misnomer. It can only confuse the minds of men and finally bring all law, whether human or divine, into contempt or indifference. Moreover, eventually such a procedure tends to empty the cross of Christ of its deepest meaning. The law loses its absolute holiness, sin loses its awful demerit and Calvary loses its moral glory." *Law and Grace*, 11-12.

³⁹ MacArthur, *Apostles*, 117.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 134. It is odd that someone who claims that "Those who think they are Christians but are enslaved to sin are sadly deceived" (ibid., 120) can at the same time say that Rom 7:23 ("But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members") describes "every true believer." This seems like a description of slavery to sin to me. Ironically, Lordship Salvation and binding the Christian to the Law inevitably lead to this kind of acceptance of sin.

that in MacArthur's *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, a book about soteriology. In that book Romans 6-8, which comes *after* the issue of justification is considered settled (see 5:1) and is entirely about sanctification, receives two whole chapters (chaps. 7-8) which is more attention than any other Biblical passage. Once again, non-soteriological passages form the basis for the soteriology of Lordship Salvation. This is no less true in passages discussing freedom from the Law as it is in passages discussing the Millennial Kingdom or other non-soteriological issues. Recognizing the Christian's freedom from the Law for justification and sanctification is vital to both literal interpretation and right soteriology.

VI. CONCLUSION

All conservative Bible interpreters believe in literal interpretation, but only the Dispensationalist applies this consistently. But because Bible interpretation is systematic, non-literal interpretation in one area necessarily affects other areas as well. Each of the four theological points of Dispensationalism listed above (points 2-5) is a means to protect the first point, consistent literal interpretation. When any of those points are abandoned or minimized,⁴¹ the interpreter necessarily steps away from literal interpretation and consistent literal interpretation is the only way to maintain a Biblical soteriology.

Denying a literal Millennial Kingdom confuses the Judgment Seat of Christ with the Great White Throne Judgment and brings in a final judgment for believers according to works to determine eternal destiny. Having a soteriological view of history rather than a doxological one leads to interpreting non-soteriological passages soteriologically and confuses the conditions for spending eternity with God. Finally, placing the Christian under the Law removes realizing Christian freedom as a condition for a holy walk and thus makes a holy walk the necessary outcome of new birth. These are just some of the

⁴¹ While this article did not separately address the impact of denying the distinction between the Church and Israel, maintaining this distinction is necessary for maintaining the points of Dispensationalism that were addressed here.

areas where departing from Dispensationalism results in confusion about the message of life.

In the final installment of this series, I will attempt to show how the rise of Dispensationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries resulted in a revival of grace, demonstrate the clarity of Scripture regarding the message of life revealed by consistent literal interpretation, and offer some practical applications to pastors and teachers on how to communicate these truths to others.

CORRECTION REGARDING THE VIEW OF ARDEL B. CANEDAY CONCERNING 1 CORINTHIANS 9:23-27

EDITOR

In the Spring 2011 issue of *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* I reviewed an article by Dr. Ardel Caneday on 1 Cor 9:23-27.¹ Afterwards it was called to my attention that I misrepresented Caneday in a quote I gave.

The misrepresentation occurred when I was discussing what I thought was a contradiction in Caneday's article. I said, "Caneday contradicts himself as to whether Paul was or was not expressing concern in 1 Cor 9:23-27 that he might be eternally condemned." I then gave an example, but my example was in error.

Here is what I wrote, "For example, [Caneday says that] 'Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test in the Day of Judgment and the possibility of his being cast into perdition [i.e., the lake of fire]' (p. 6; see also pp. 25-26)."

There are actually two errors in my quote.

THE FIRST ERROR: PRESENTING SOMEONE ELSE'S VIEW AS CANEDAY'S VIEW

The words I quote are Caneday summarizing the view of Shank and Marshall, who are Arminians, not Caneday's stating his own view. Caneday is a Calvinist.

After discussing what he calls "The Loss of Salvation View" (pp. 5-6), the view of Shank and Marshall, he then explains a group of views he calls "Extra-Salvation Loss Views" (pp. 3-20). He begins that section with these words:

The idea that Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test in the Day of

¹ Available free online at www.faithalone.org. Click on Journals & Newsletters, then Journal, then 2011, then Spring.

Judgment and the possibility of his being cast into perdition [i.e., the lake of fire] prompts many to shudder at the prospect and leads them to theological ingenuity. The result is a variety of innovative explanations of 1 Corinthians 9:27 that contend that, while Paul fears a loss, his fear does not entail loss of salvation but rather loss of an extra-salvation reward, a reward that is in addition to his salvation which is secure (p. 6).

The words *The idea that* refer back to the first view he was discussing. I do not think that I caught that in my reading of the article. But I should have since he had just finished discussing that view. Thus when Caneday writes, “Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test in the Day of Judgment and the possibility of his being cast into perdition [i.e., the lake of fire],” he is summarizing the Arminian view.

Possibly the reason I thought Caneday was stating his own view to introduce the second view is because there are similar statements by Caneday—or at least statements that appear to me to say essentially the same thing—about his own view later in the article (see pp. 26-29). However, Caneday has assured me that he does not agree with the statement that “Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test in the Day of Judgment and the possibility of his being cast into perdition [i.e., the lake of fire].”

I apologize heartily for this error. It really is a major error. As to whether Caneday’s own view is similar to the quotation I cited, I strongly urge the reader to take the time to read Caneday’s article, which is, of course, what every writer wants. Give him a fair reading. His article is available free online.²

THE SECOND ERROR: LEAVING IMPORTANT WORDS OUT OF THE CITATION

The second error is related to the first, though some explanation is needed.

² Available online at http://www.preciousheart.net/ti/2007/020_07_Caneday_1_Cor_9_23-27.pdf.

In my review article I only gave part of the sentence Caneday wrote. Let me lay out both the portion I quoted and the entire sentence in the original:

What I quoted:

Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test in the Day of Judgment and the possibility of his being cast into perdition [i.e., the lake of fire]' (p. 6; see also pp. 25-26).

The full quote, with the words left out underlined:

The idea that Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test in the Day of Judgment and the possibility of his being cast into perdition [i.e., the lake of fire] prompts many to shudder at the prospect and leads them to theological ingenuity.

I leave it to the reader to determine whether the quote I gave accurately summarizes the view that Caneday is discussing. In my opinion, it does. However, since I failed to grasp that the words *the idea that* mean that Caneday is summarizing the view he just finished discussing, I felt they were extraneous, as were the words at the end of the sentence.

It is my practice to put ellipses (...) in places where I leave out material in the middle of a quotation. If I give a complete quotation of part of a sentence, I typically do not put ellipses at the start and/or end of the portion cited. For example, I might write, "Paul said that salvation is 'the gift of God' (Eph 2:8-9)." I would not write, "Paul said that salvation is '...the gift of God...' (Eph 2:8-9)." This is a matter of style.

However, I never intentionally leave out material that alters the meaning of a sentence. That I left out material here which did alter the meaning is very unfortunate. I am very sorry for both errors, and have told Caneday that. He was very gracious in accepting my apology.

CONCLUSION

In light of the errors I made, I have added a footnote and an appendix in the online version of my article, explaining the errors I made. It is now available on our website under the Journal section (though normally we wait a year before putting up articles).

I apologize to our readers and to Dr. Caneday for these two errors. James 3:1 comes to mind, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” I always feel a great sense of responsibility as I write. I realize I will give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ for what I have written and said. I have to work hard to overcome my perfectionism to release anything I write. When something like this happens (fortunately not too often), it makes me redouble my efforts at being accurate both in interpreting God’s Word and in interpreting what others write about God’s Word.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Benefit of the Doubt: Encouragement for the Questioning Christian. By Charles R. Swindoll. Plano, TX: Insight for Living Publishing House, 2011. 72 pp. Paper, Np.

Having recently read Grant Richison's book, *Certainty—A Place to Stand* (see review in this issue), I was intrigued when I heard about this new book by Chuck Swindoll. What would he say about the relationship between doubt and belief?

Swindoll's basic desire for this small book is to encourage the believer who struggles with doubts. I certainly commend him for that. In our postmodern age many young people struggle with believing *anything*. They are brainwashed into believing that truth is relative and that what is true for one person may not be true for another.

Swindoll seems to fear that if believers view doubt as unbelief, then they will depart from the faith. Thus the way he encourages church people who doubt is not by pointing to the proofs of our faith (evidential or philosophical apologetics), but by encouraging them to accept their doubts as normal and even healthy.

Four questions are posed on the back cover: "Is God real? Does God care? Does God hear my prayers? Can doubt and faith coexist?"

The first three of those questions are different than the fourth. Within the book Swindoll (and two authors who contributed short chapters) suggests that born-again people often doubt whether God cares, hears our prayers, and is even real.

The fourth question is not about God at all. It is about us. And it is not something we might doubt about God. It is a question as to whether when we doubt something, do we simultaneously believe it, or not?

Postmodern Evangelicals answer the fourth question affirmatively. Yes, they say, doubt and belief can and do coexist. They are not speaking about doubt about one proposition while believing a different one. They are speaking about doubting

and believing the same proposition. For example, is it possible to doubt that God exists and yet believe that God exists?

Swindoll's answer to the fourth question is yes as well. However, it should be noted that he never specifically says that doubt and faith *in the same proposition* can coexist. He merely implies that. Here is what he says: "Is it possible for faith and doubt to coexist? One desperate parent in the New Testament would answer that question with a resounding yes!" (p. 1, exclamation mark his). He is referring to the father who said, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). What that means is not explained by Swindoll. He merely quotes Mark 9:20-24 and then moves on to a new section.

The father believed that Jesus could heal his son, which is the issue at hand in the context (see Mark 9:23). But there was something he did not believe. Probably he did not yet believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Thus he could be saying, "Lord, I believe you can heal my son, but help me since I do not yet believe that You are the Messiah." However what he clearly is not saying is "Lord, I believe you can heal my son, but I also do not believe that you can heal my son." Yet that is what Swindoll implies he was saying.

Whereas Richison criticizes the position taken by Taylor in his book *The Myth of Certainty* (see review of Taylor in *JOTGES* Spring 1995, pp. 78-79), Swindoll praises Taylor's position and book several times within this short book (pp. 3-5, 19-20). Taylor refers to people within Christianity who doubt as "reflective Christians." Swindoll likes this designation (pp. 4-6).

Citing Taylor, Swindoll says that "a non-reflective person asks, 'What could be worse than unanswered questions?'" (p. 4). I struggled when I first read that. Isn't that what a *reflective, thoughtful person* asks? The thoughtful person wants answers to his questions. But no, according to Taylor and Swindoll "the reflective person considers *unquestioned answers* his or her struggle" (p. 4, italics his).

Actually we should call the latter person *a skeptic*, not a reflective person. I've met theologians who question anything and everything in the faith, including the very existence of God (see below). That is not, in my estimation, being a reflective believer. That is being a skeptical unbeliever.

Now we certainly shouldn't simply affirm that we believe the fundamentals because they are widely accepted within Christianity as orthodox. If we do not believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, for example, then we don't believe it. We cannot *choose* to believe it. We are dishonest if we affirm something we do not believe. It is fine to look into the evidence and question whether the evidence proves that Jesus indeed rose from the dead. But during that time of questioning, one is *an unbeliever* in the resurrection of Jesus, not a believer. Isn't that precisely what the Lord told Thomas, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27)?

Yet Swindoll and Taylor are suggesting that the skeptic is a believer, and more than that, he is doing what all believers should do, doubt what God has said.

Swindoll tells of flying home after having preached his father's funeral and talking with his sister, Lucy. She asked, "Babe, do you believe every single thing you said today?" I was surprised to read the answer Chuck gave his sister, "'No,' I said almost under my breath. 'There are things that the jury's still out on in my mind'" (p. 10).

He did not explain precisely what things he preached at his father's funeral that he did not believe. Whatever they were, I was surprised that he would say anything that he did not believe to be true.

In a chapter by Bryce Klabunde entitled, "Does Doubting Mean I'm Not Saved?" this highly postmodern statement appears: "Every believer wonders sometimes whether or not God is real" (p. 55). That is a bizarre statement. Klabunde goes on to assert that every Christian also wonders sometimes "whether or not...the Bible is true" (p. 55).

I strongly recommend this eye-opening book for every pastor, Bible teacher, and church leader. I suggest it be read in conjunction with Richison's book, *Certainty—A Place to Stand*.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

Not Sure: A Pastor's Journey from Faith to Doubt. By John Suk. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011. 211 pp. Paperback, \$18.00.

I found reading this book to be a sad experience. Here a Calvinist pastor of the Christian Reformed Church feels it beneficial to Christianity and the world to write a book promoting doubt and uncertainty as preferable to faith and certainty. The man urges our churches to give doctrine a greatly reduced role (p. 179) than it has had until now. (After speaking of the historic Reformed confessions he says, "Doctrinal emptiness and worshipful awe suit us better" [p. 195]. He then cites Brian McLaren and our need for *generous orthodoxy*.)

The author grew up with a modern mindset (p. 59). He believed things because he found the evidence compelling. But then by means of higher education (see pp. 78-82) he adopted a postmodern mindset and in the process came to doubt just about everything he held true, including Christianity.

This would make a great text for apologetics. The students, with the help of the professor, could counter the arguments Suk uses to undermine the authority of Scripture. To give but one example, Suk came to doubt the reality of the Genesis account of Noah's flood because he became aware of "earlier" flood accounts that were fanciful. Interesting Josh McDowell in his book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* does just the opposite. McDowell shows that there are over one hundred accounts of the flood in various people groups and though there are variations, the fact that so many people groups report one event actually proves, not disproves, that a universal flood actually happened.

Suffering in the world leads the author to doubt that God really has the world in His hands (p. 71). Clearly Suk has lost faith in the fact that the Lord promised to come again and establish His righteous kingdom (and that before then we live in a fallen world that isn't the kingdom). Indeed, in the last two sentences of the book he writes, "So, even as I wrestle with the historic confessions, with the way the church deals with issues like homosexuality and evolution, even with the mystery of evil in the world, with the likelihood that Jesus will come back now, after two thousand years, when he said he was coming

back soon, I try to set my heart at rest. For God is ‘greater than our hearts’ even when we doubt” (p. 207).

After reading this book, or while reading it, one should read Richison’s book *Certainty—A Place to Stand* (see review in this issue) in which he shows the flaws in postmodernity and defends the concept of certainty based on what God has said.

I recommend this book, but only for well grounded believers.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

Certainty—A Place to Stand: Critique of the Emergent Church of Postevangelicals. By Grant Richison. Pickering, Ontario: Castle Quay Books, 2010. 320 pp. Paper, \$27.95.

Rarely have I read a book that moved me as much as this one. The title itself is moving: *Certainty—A Place to Stand*. In our postmodern culture nothing is certain, especially in the emergent church movement. Not only is certainty of our eternal security denied, but so is certainty about the resurrection of Jesus, the existence of God, and even our own existence.

The first five chapters deal with the problem of uncertainty in our culture and in many churches today. Chapters six through ten cover the propositions of Scripture as the source of certainty. Chapter eleven is a bit of a review, discussing the identity that many Evangelicals have today and the identity that Evangelicals should have. The final chapter deals with how we reach postmoderns.

JOTGES readers should find encouragement in Richison’s suggestion that to reject certainty is a perversion of belief (p. 71), that the idea of faith as a “personal encounter” as opposed to persuasion of the truth of Scripture is spiritually dangerous (pp. 69-70): “Spirituality without propositions from the Word will produce Christian living without mooring. Everyone will do what is right in their own eyes” (p. 70), that subjectively interpreting Scripture in light of what it means “to me,” as opposed to what the author intended it to mean, changes the Bible from God’s Word to our word (p. 65), that mysticism is a way for those who have rejected propositional revelation to find a different path to spirituality and to meaning and purpose in

life (p. 107), that it is a perversion of the gospel to say that “people become Christians by association with the church [the postevangelical view] rather than by the proclamation of the church” (p. 93), and that the ideas of degrees of faith actually destroys the Christian faith (p. 259, though see p. 19 where he makes the contradictory statement that “certainty admits degrees” and pp. 257-58 where he speaks of three types of certainty, philosophical certainty, confidence as certainty, and moral certainty, and only the third of these is actually certain, though fortunately “this kind of certainty is the certainty of Scripture,” p. 258).

Richison is not writing to deal with the issue of what one must believe in order to be born again. However, he does touch on this issue from time to time and *JOTGES* readers will likely wish he had been clearer in his answer. Here are some of the ways he explains what we must believe to be born again: “trust Christ as Savior” (p. 259, unexplained as to what this means), “trust in the sufficiency of Christ’s work on the cross to save” (p. 248), believe “that Jesus died on the cross in the place of our sins and that by faith in his work we have the forgiveness of sins” (p. 299), believe that “Jesus is the only answer for eternal salvation” (p. 306), believe that “forensic justification [is] by faith alone” (p. 277), and believe that “salvation by works is not good news...because then salvation would depend on us, not Christ” (p. 158). Nowhere do we find a clear statement that says that one who believes in Jesus has everlasting life that can never be lost, is eternally secure, is justified once and for all, or anything like that. The author fails to discuss what John Piper calls *what we believe in Jesus for*. However, since I am not looking for Richison to even address this issue, let alone address it clearly, I am not particularly bothered by this lack. Indeed, the fact that he doesn’t promote Lordship Salvation is quite encouraging.

I close with a summary by Richison of what he is saying: “Postmoderns are changing the doctrinal content of evangelicalism because they are caught up in culture; culture dominates their doctrine. Evangelicals are gradually losing their identity by losing commitment to truths of Scripture. The badge of identification is no longer biblical belief but ‘spiritual experiences.’ This anti-truth mentality is a desire for assimilation

and accommodation to culture. They do not want to be viewed as people at odds with the prevailing ideas of society. The question at hand is, Do we allow culture to set the agenda, or does the Word of God set it?" (p. 279).

Amen.

I strongly recommend this book.

Robert N. Wikin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

The Chronological Study Bible: New King James Version. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2008. 1696 pp. Hardcover, \$44.99.

Fans of the New King James Version will be pleased with this new and innovative study Bible from Thomas Nelson. Students of the Word have often sought to understand when events occurred as they unfolded within the Scriptures. How do the various prophecies of Isaiah fit with the events unfolding within 2 Chronicles? Which passages from Jeremiah fit with King Jehoiachin's exile and release? As the events within Acts unfolded, when and where did Paul write each of his epistles? Answering these questions, even with the use of previous study Bibles, often required a good memory, a set of charts, and a willingness to do a little digging. Not anymore.

Thomas Nelson has attempted to structure (as much as possible) a study Bible according to when each passage of Scripture took place in history. Passages are listed as they occurred, with some books (Genesis, Exodus, 1 Corinthians, etc.) appearing intact while others (Psalms, Ezekiel, all four Gospels) are interspersed amongst each other, often out of numerical order (ex. chapter 21 of Ezekiel appears between chapters 23 and 24). This functions very effectively from a historical perspective, especially when reading 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles (as well as most of the OT Prophets). For instance, by reading pages 608 to 619 the reader will have interacted with passages from 2 Chronicles, 2 Kings, Isaiah, and Micah! Helpful time tables appear throughout, giving the reader a birds eye view of the events as they unfold.

Printed on durable color paper with an easy-to-read Times New Roman 11-point font, the hardcover edition appears very strong. Every page contains visually appealing artwork and watermarks. Several full-color maps, twelve pages for notes, a glossary, cultural and historical topics listing, a healthy 200-page concordance, and other tools are included.

While the Scripture organization is obviously convenient for reading through the events as they occurred chronologically, the reader must remember that in order to quickly find a particular passage, he will have to refer back to an index, rather inconveniently located at the back of the Bible. After having to use this several times I was reminded of what it felt like to be a beginning Bible student with no real understanding of how the books of the Bible fit together! Another drawback with reading chronologically is that, as several books are cut into pieces, you lose each author's original intent in providing a coherent message. This may not appear particularly noticeable when reading 2 Samuel mixed up with 1 Chronicles and Psalms, but it is extremely noticeable when reading the Gospels. Care should be taken when providing this book to an unbeliever, since confusion will likely abound as passages originally intended for unbelievers (e.g., The Gospel of John, cf. 20:31) are lumped together with messages intended for believers (Synoptic Gospels). Also worth mentioning is the fact that the articles relating to prophetic passages reveal a decidedly preterist viewpoint.

Still, I found this study Bible very interesting and a healthy addition to my Bible reading plan. The pages and illustrations are alluring, and the approach to understanding the Bible chronologically makes it a nice addition to any theological library.

Shawn Leach

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Refuting Compromise: A Biblical and Scientific Refutation of "Progressive Creationism" (Billions of Years), As Popularized by Astronomer Hugh Ross. By Jonathan Sarfati. Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004. 411 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

Genesis 1 states that God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days. In recent years the length of the days has been a source of much discussion. Many Evangelical scholars and scientists understand the days in Genesis 1 to be long periods of time which would allow for an old earth. Sarfati has written an excellent defense for the days in Genesis referring to 24 hour days. He is primarily refuting Hugh Ross' view of "Progressive Creationism." Progressive Creationism is Creation, but it contends that creation took place over vast periods of time. Sarfati demonstrates that the days in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 are best understood as normal 24 hour days. Showing that the word *day* can be used to refer to ages is not evidence that it is being used for ages in this specific context. 1. When the word *day* (*yom*) occurs with an ordinal (first, second, third etc.), it refers to 24 hours in the OT in the vast majority of cases. 2. The addition of "and there was evening and there was morning" further argues for 24 hour days. An evening and a morning only refer to 24 hours in the rest of the OT.

Sarfati (with a Ph.D. in Chemistry) with additional difficulties with Progressive Creationism. It requires death before sin in Genesis 3. Romans 5:12 most naturally says that death was a result of sin. If however, God used long periods of time to create all things then death occurred before sin.

The order of creation is another problem. In Genesis the land came first but according to the Big Bang theory the sun and stars were first. In Genesis plants came before animals but in the Big Bang marine organisms were prior to plants. In Genesis birds came before reptiles but according to the Big Bang reptiles came before birds. In Genesis whales came before land mammals but in the Big Bang land mammals were before whales. In Genesis man came before death and disease but in the Big Bang death and disease were before man.

This of course leads to the most controversial part of this discussion which is the age of the earth. If the days in Genesis are most naturally understood as 24 hour days, then our

universe is young and not old. Sarfati deals with the Big Bang and Astronomy, the old age arguments from the Bible and astronomy and presents evidence for a young earth. The chapter dealing with the Big Bang is very technical but the Big Bang theory is not without its problems and the finiteness of the universe can be adequately demonstrated using the cosmological argument.

Sarfati did a particularly good job of showing that the Biblical chronologies do not have gaps. The reviewer felt that Luke 3:36 was evidence for gaps in the chronologies of Genesis. Luke 3:36 adds the name Cainan but this name does not occur in Genesis 11:12. In Luke 3:36 Cainan is the son of Arphaxad but in Genesis 11:12, Salah is the son of Arphaxad. This gives rise to the idea that that father can mean grandfather or distant relative. The extra Cainan is found only in manuscripts of the LXX that were written long after Luke's Gospel. The oldest LXX manuscripts do not have the extra Cainan. The earliest known extant copy of Luke (P-75) does not have the extra Cainan in it. Josephus used the LXX as his source but did not mention the extra Cainan. Julius Africanus (180-250) omitted the extra Cainan as well in his chronology based again on the LXX. Sarfati has a convincing theory of how the copy error most likely occurred as well.

How one will receive this book depends on how convinced one is of the evidence for an old earth and uniformitarianism. This is perhaps the most complete defense of the traditional view of the days in Genesis in print. I fully recommend it to anyone studying this issue.

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A Cultish Side of Calvinism. By Micah Coate. NP: Innovo Publishing, 2011. 330 pp. Paperback, \$19.95.

This book has an all-star lineup of endorsers including well-known Evangelicals Tim LaHaye, Earl Radmacher, Paige Patterson, and Jerry Vines. In addition to Radmacher, several other Free Grace leaders endorse the book: Charlie Bing, Dave Anderson, Fred Chay, Gordon Olson, and George Bryson.

The weaknesses of this book (which are outweighed by its strengths) are: a lack of logical organization and progression, the extreme length of each chapter (there are only four chapters in a 300+ page book), too much reliance on the critiques of Calvinism by other authors (for example, he cites Vance on 40 pages, Geisler on 29 pages, Bryson on 26 pages, and Hunt on 20 pages), and a failure to point out how modern Calvinism departs from Calvin on many points, such as the nature of saving faith, unlimited atonement, and assurance being of the essence of saving faith. Most disappointingly, though it can clearly be deduced that Coate believes in Free Grace, he fails to clearly present the message of everlasting life anywhere in the book.

One statement in the opening paragraph of the first chapter raised a red flag, “As we examine Calvinism, we must develop a standard by which it is appraised in order to determine with some accuracy whether or not it measures up to what I call *historical Christian orthodoxy according to sound biblical exposition*” (p. 23, italics his). I was struck by the two measures of orthodoxy Coate applies: history and Scripture. Why does he include *historical Christian orthodoxy*? Calvinism is more orthodox historically than Free Grace. Isn’t the only measure of Biblical orthodoxy Scripture itself?

The strengths of this work are its striking title, good footnotes and bibliography, excellent points made about each of the five points (in Chap. 2), and the evidence he cites that Calvin’s leadership in Geneva was cultish. The book also draws a strong connection between the exegetical practices of Calvinism and those of cults like Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses in the section “Its Twisting of Scripture” (pp. 211-25). Coate begins the section with a quote from Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes that says: “The fact is, the cults are notorious Scripture-twisters. When dealing with the cults, one must keep in mind that they are always built not upon what the Bible teaches but upon what the founders or leaders of the respective cults say the Bible teaches” (Geisler, Norman L., and Ron Rhodes. *Correcting the Cults: Expert Responses to Their Scripture Twisting*. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997], p. 18. Quoted on p. 211). Coate then effectively shows that this is exactly what the Calvinists also do, giving examples from the *Reformation Study Bible* and other popular Calvinist sources.

I found the section “Calvinism’s Misrepresentation of God” (pp. 293-300) to be particularly hard-hitting and effective. In it he wrote, “When I encounter or read about people who are anti-God, I often find that their view of God is Calvinistically distorted” (pp. 293-94), and after quoting a popular rock star’s (James Keenan’s) cursing of Jesus, where he called Jesus a liar for claiming He would die for him, goes on to say, “I find it very ironic that Christians abhor these lyrics while seeming not to care that Sproul, White, Piper, and other leading Calvinists not only preach the same message (sparing the curse words) but also cloak it in scriptural quasi-truths presented as ‘pure biblical Christianity.’ That a Christian with any admiration for Calvinism might think James Keenan’s lyrics are wrong is inconsistent” (pp. 294-95).

When reading this I remembered attending a debate at the University of North Texas where a prominent atheist professor debated an apologist from a local church concerning the existence of God. The atheist professor stated that his hostility was not toward the idea of God in general, but toward the God of Calvinism. He spent the entire debate arguing, not against God’s existence *per se*, but against various Calvinistic doctrines. The trend in atheistic apologetics is to argue against God from a moral standpoint rather than a scientific one, and these arguments are often aimed at Calvinism’s distorted view of God rather than the God of the Bible. Restoring a Biblical view of God will largely do away with these arguments.

While it is unlikely that this book would shake up a 5-point Calvinist, it could help someone confronted by Calvinism to see its cultish side, and it could spur Free Grace believers to be diligent in addressing the errors of Calvinism.

I recommend this book.

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Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream. By David Platt. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010. 230 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

“A New York Times Bestseller” proclaims a banner at the top of the book. Here is a book that is hard to categorize. Imagine a cross between *The Gospel According to Jesus* and *The Hiding Place* or between *Crazy Love* and *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.

Platt is a Southern Baptist who is the Pastor of a mega church in Birmingham, Alabama. While he clearly holds to Lordship Salvation, he does not harp on it. Indeed, I would imagine that a Free Grace person who read this book without paying careful attention to the details might come away thinking that the author has a Free Grace understanding of the message of life.

Unlike MacArthur or Chang, Platt rarely mentions Scripture in his book. I found a total of only 40 references to Scripture in the text, which is less than one Bible reference every 5 pages. And of those 40, most (28) were only references to book and chapter (e.g., “In Acts 9...,” p. 52). Only a dozen times in the text of the entire book does he mention book, chapter, and verse. That is about once every twenty pages. In this regard the book is clearly trying to reach people who would not be attracted to a book that mentions lots of Bible.

It should be noted that Platt does give quotes in the text without mentioning where the quotes come from. Only by going to endnotes at the end of the book can one discover where these texts are from in Scripture. He also has statements he makes in the text which are followed by an endnote number which is linked to texts which he believes supports his point. There are about a hundred Scripture citations in the endnotes, but only about one in a hundred readers will take the time to look at the endnotes to find out where these quotes came from. Of course, even if you add in all those references, the number still falls to less than one reference to Scripture per page of text, which is a far cry from someone like MacArthur who has scores of Scripture references per page in *The Gospel According to Jesus* (and in most of his books).

I would imagine that MacArthur and Chang, while being sympathetic to the message of this book, would not approve of the sparse references to the Scripture and the total lack of

exegesis of Scripture. Not once in the entire book is a text of Scripture actually explained.

Like Schuler, this book hangs together on a string of anecdotes that illustrate the point Platt is trying to make. The anecdotes are compelling and well written, but if one examines them in greater detail, he begins to wonder if they actually prove the author's point.

For example, Platt tells of his experience on a short term mission trip to teach the Bible to 20 underground house church leaders in Asia (pp. 4-5, 23-26). He was evidently prepared to present a message to them each day for ten days. However, after he finished his message on day one, they pressed him to continue explaining the OT. He spent eight hours with them the first day (p. 23). For the next eight days he taught them the OT off the cuff for eight to twelve hours a day. On the tenth day they asked him to teach them the NT. So he took eleven hours and taught them the NT.

Why tell this story? Clearly a major reason was to show that these people were hungry for the Bible. They didn't have music or a nice meeting place. They didn't even have a prepared speaker. But they ate up the teaching. This is, of course, truly heartening, especially if they received good Bible teaching.

A secondary purpose seems to be to show that the author practices what he preaches. He is out there giving of himself, pouring his life into others. He laid down his life for close to two weeks to help these people.

But how profitable is off the cuff surveying of the OT and NT? Wouldn't better preparation and advanced planning have led to a much more profitable learning experience? And if the teaching was coming from a Lordship Salvation perspective as it clearly was, then it could be argued that this teaching was actually harmful to the listeners, rather than helpful. Thus the Free Grace listener is actually saddened by the story and motivated to make sure that the true message of life is getting out to people who are hungry for what God has to say.

Platt's Lordship Salvation views are evident, especially at the beginning of the book. He speaks of the need of total devotion and unconditional surrender (pp. 8, 37-39) and of the need to follow Jesus (p. 10). He speaks glowingly of Bonhoeffer, calling his book *The Cost of Discipleship* (itself a primer on

Lordship Salvation) “one of the great Christian books of the twentieth century” (p. 14). He suggests that the parable about the field with hidden treasure means that we must buy our “the infinite treasure of knowing and experiencing him” (p. 18). Clearly for Platt eternal life is not a free gift. It is something we buy for ourselves, evidently by the work we do for Christ (pp. 17-18).

It should be noted that the author gives an illustration from his college days in which he gave an evangelistic message in class and a girl in the class raised her hand and asked, “Are you telling me that if I don’t believe in the Jesus you’re talking about, I will go to hell when I die?” (p. 151). He answered yes and evidently gave no caveats about the need for surrender, total devotion, and following Christ (cf. pp. 150-52). I wonder if at that time, before his theological education, he simply called upon people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation that can never be lost. It appears that his subsequent theological education led him to adopt Reformed Lordship Salvation.

The author commendably shows a concern for people who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ and he clearly maintains that if they die without hearing the good news, they will be eternally condemned (pp. 76, 152-54).

The final chapter, entitled “The Radical Experiment,” challenges the reader to a one year experiment. He challenges the reader over the next year to “pray for the entire world; read through the entire Bible; sacrifice your money for a specific purpose; spend your time in another context; [and] commit your life to a multiplying community” (p. 185). He spends about 25 pages giving details about what he wants the reader to do over the next year (pp. 187-212). This is certainly helpful application.

This book is a pleasant read. The author’s concern for those who haven’t heard and his call to serve Christ is commendable. However, his Lordship Salvation theology, combined with the shallowness of the Biblical discussion, makes this a book I can only recommend to those who wish to have a full library of Lordship Salvation books.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

Politics According to the Bible. By Wayne Grudem. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. 624 pp. Cloth, \$39.99.

In this book, Wayne Grudem seeks to answer the question, “what does the Bible say about politics?” More specifically, Grudem is primarily dealing not with basic political philosophies but specific issues in the modern American political scene (his political philosophies come out in their applications to these issues). The book is written from a socially very conservative and fiscally mostly-conservative viewpoint and Grudem is open and explicit about his support of the Republican Party and opposition to the Democratic Party (pp. 572-74).

This book has many strengths. First of all, the book has an attractive cover and an easy to understand title. The book is well organized and it contains a comprehensive table of contents and thorough indexes of Scripture, names, and subjects covered within. This book is quite comprehensive in dealing with all of the hot-button political issues of today. He makes solid arguments for many conservative viewpoints and effectively shows the error of many liberal viewpoints. I especially appreciate his effective coverage of the Protection of Life issue (chapter 6). The book also contains many charts and graphs which are easy to understand and successfully illustrate his points. This is especially true in chapter 10, “The Environment.”

The negatives are that it seems that Grudem has started with a system of politics and worked from there rather than starting with the Bible and working toward a political system. Grudem does quite a bit of proof texting and very little exegesis. Many times the proof texts offered have very little if anything to do with his point. For example, Grudem many times argues that the government should be very intrusive into people’s lives to enforce behavior that is consistent with Christian (and sometimes Jewish—he is inconsistent in his view that Christians are free from the Mosaic Law) morality, even in consensual issues that have no direct impact on others. In these cases, Rom 13:4 is often cited as justification for this view. This verse

is also cited to argue that governments should use taxes to pay for “playgrounds and parks where families can picnic and sports teams can practice and compete” and offer financial incentives to promote marriage (p. 80). This verse seems to be a catch-all proof text used to support any area where Grudem believes in government welfare (he is rather selective in this), any area where he believes in powerful government intrusion (which goes beyond what many Evangelicals would want), and even in his insistence that the Church, at least to some degree, has a social gospel that should cooperate with and influence government.

A substantial portion of the book is arguing for certain political policies from a logical standpoint rather than a biblical one. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and Grudem says in the introduction that he will do this (p. 19), but at times Grudem seeks to give the impression of biblical support for his view by citing only loosely related biblical verses. This greatly weakens his arguments. For example, in his argument that the government should use torture (which he calls inflicting “acute” and “significant” pain [p. 430-31]) as a means to extract information from terrorists, he cites passages about fathers disciplining their children and follows up by saying, “So how can there be moral objection to *all* infliction of pain to attempt to compel a right action?” (p. 430, italics his). It is certainly a stretch to apply passages about a father’s loving discipline of his children for their own good to say that the government should torture people and the argument would have been stronger if this were left out. There are many similar examples in the book.

Despite its shortcomings, however, the strengths far outweigh the weaknesses and I believe this book to be a fantastic tool for the discerning reader. I also hope that this book leads to more discussion about the topic, which it seems to already have done. And finally, I would love to see this prompt someone to do a similar book that is based upon more solid hermeneutics and fuller exegesis. It is unlikely that many people will agree with every point made in the book, and neither do I. So while I would caution the reader to read critically, I do recommend that Christians and concerned citizens get it, read it, interact with it, and use it as a tool to sharpen their own views on

politics, as we are called to take "...every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:6).

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James, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series.

By George M. Stulac. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. 206 pp. Paperback, \$17.00.

Though this book was originally published nearly twenty years ago, it is still being marketed to schools and scholars. I just became aware of it. And I'm glad I did.

Stulac takes the normal Reformed understanding of James. He suggests that James has a "redemptive message," then he adds: "The problem is that James does not seem to fit readily enough our concept of redemption. We describe our redemption as "salvation by grace alone," and James writes so much about works" (p. 11). His understanding of James 2:14-26, for example, is that true faith necessarily results in a life of good works (pp. 107-120).

Despite the Reformed viewpoint, Stulac does make many helpful observations. For example, the footnote on the question, "What good is it?" (2:14, 16) is outstanding. And if one overlooks the fact that by *salvation* Stulac most often means regeneration rather than deliverance from death, his comments are very helpful.

Interestingly when the author comes to the last use of the word *save* in James (Jas 2:19-20), he concludes that *salvation from physical death* is in view (pp. 188-89).

I recommend this commentary. It is worth reading.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas