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THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ELECTION RECONSIDERED: ELECTION TO SERVICE, NOT TO EVERLASTING LIFE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Because of the strong influence of Calvinism in Evangelicalism today, the doctrine of election has been widely understood to concern one's eternal destiny. Those whom God elected will spend eternity with the Lord. Those whom God did not elect will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

While some find this doctrine to be disturbing, since humans seemingly have nothing at all to do with where they will spend eternity, others find this doctrine liberating. After all, many feel that if their eternal destiny has been predetermined by God and they can do nothing to change that, then they can relax and rest in whatever God decided.

There have always been people who questioned the Calvinist understanding of election *on philosophical grounds*. How could God be good if He created beings with no opportunity to escape an eternity of eternal torment? Indeed, if we believe that only a small percentage of humanity will avoid eternal condemnation, as Calvinism teaches, then the goodness and fairness of God is even more in question. But this is a philosophical or theological approach, not a Biblical one.

If the Scriptures teach that God elected some to everlasting life and either bypassed most or elected them to eternal torment, then we should embrace that as true even if we neither like it nor understand it. What God says is true. We don't make it true by liking or understanding it.

In this article we will consider the Biblical doctrine of election. My thesis is that election is not about eternal destiny, but about service and eternal reward. God has chosen a nation, a city, a Person, and many individuals to serve and glorify Him both now and in the life to come.

II. THE CALVINIST VIEW

The U in TULIP stands for *unconditional election*. What the Calvinist means by this is that God chose to save a small portion of humanity. The rest he did not choose to save.

In the updated and expanded edition of *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, and Documented*, Steele, Thomas, and Quinn define unconditional election as follows:

The doctrine of election declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam's race to be the objects of His undeserved favor. These, and these only, He purposed to save...His eternal choice of particular sinners for salvation was not based upon any foreseen act or response on the part of those selected, but was based solely on His own good pleasure and sovereign will.¹

They then go on to discuss those not elected:

Those who were not chosen for salvation were passed by and left to their own evil and choices. It is not within the creature's jurisdiction to call into question the justice of the Creator for not choosing everyone for salvation. It is enough to know that the Judge of the earth has done right.²

As they are clear to point out, God's choice of a small portion of humanity and not of the vast majority had nothing to do with those chosen (e.g., foreseen faith, works, character, etc.). That is what is meant by *unconditional*.

¹David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, and Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1963, 2004), 27.

²*Ibid.*, 27-28.

R. C. Sproul speaks of the unconditional nature of election in this way:

When we say that election is unconditional we mean the original decree of God by which he chooses some people to be saved is not dependent upon some future condition in us that God foresees. There is nothing in us that God could foresee that would induce him to choose us. The only thing he would foresee in the lives of fallen creatures left to themselves would be sin. God chooses us simply according to the good pleasure of his will.³

In this view one's eternal destiny is predetermined before he is even born. Whether he goes to the kingdom or the lake of fire has nothing to do with him. It is based solely on God's choice. If he is one of the chosen few, then he will be in the kingdom no matter what. If he is not, then he will not be in the kingdom no matter what. There is no free will in this matter. It is a bit misleading of Steele, Thomas, and Quinn to say, "Those who were not chosen for salvation were passed by and left to their own evil *and choices*" (emphasis added). The non-elect according to Calvinism have no choices to make. Calvinists believe in the bondage of the will.

Some non-Calvinists suggest that such a view of election is capricious and arbitrary. Yet Calvinists suggest that while it has nothing to do with the one chosen, the choice is still not arbitrary. Here is how Sproul explains it:

It was not a blind draw because God is not blind. Yet we must still insist that it was nothing that he foreknew, foresaw, or foreloved in us that was the decisive reason for his choice.⁴

In the Calvinist view, the elect will eventually be born again and once they are, they are secure forever. However, Calvinists also say that the ones who are *truly elect* will prove it by persevering in faith and works until death. Steele, Thomas, and Quinn put it this way:

³R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 156.

⁴Ibid.

Insufficient emphasis is given to God's requirement that *we must persevere to the end* in a life that seeks after holiness.

We are convinced that there will be many who think that heaven is certain and will realize too late that their sense of security in Christ was actually a false hope. While they acknowledged Christ as their savior, their lives did not reflect a genuine relationship with Him, and consequently they were still dead in their sins. There was no perseverance, no running of the race to the end, only a mere profession made years earlier.

One could almost speak of the six points of Calvinism, the *fifth* point being the *preservation* of the saints and the *sixth* point being the *perseverance* of the saints.⁵

Thus no Calvinist knows if He is elect (or if Christ died for him, since the U and L in TULIP are inextricably linked). Calvinists must look to their imperfect works to have some degree of confidence that they will indeed persevere to the end and hence prove to be one of the elect. Of course, if they are not elect, then they will not be able to persevere, no matter how hard they try. But if they are elect, then they will fight to the end and they will then be allowed to enter into the kingdom of God.

III. OTHER VIEWS OF ELECTION UNTO EVERLASTING LIFE

A. FORESEEN FAITH

Jacobus Arminius didn't agree with the Calvinist view of election. He felt it was a fatalistic view that totally eliminated any human response to the gospel. Thus he proposed a different understanding of election.

Concerning predestination and election Arminius wrote:

VII. This doctrine is repugnant to the Nature of God, but particularly to those Attributes of his

⁵ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 148-49.

nature by which he performs and manages all things, his wisdom, justice, and goodness.

VIII. Such a doctrine of Predestination is contrary to the nature of man, in regard to his having been created after the Divine image in the knowledge of God and in righteousness, in regard to his having been created with freedom of will, and in regard to his having been created with a disposition and aptitude for the enjoyment of life eternal.

IX. This Predestination is diametrically opposed to the Act of Creation.

X. This doctrine is at open hostility with the Nature of Eternal Life, and the titles by which it is signally distinguished in the Scriptures.⁶

A leading Arminian view is that God looked ahead to see which people He wanted to choose. He chose based on something in the people chosen. Some Arminians might say that He saw in advance that we would freely come to faith in Christ. Other Arminians might say that He saw in advance that we would turn from our sins, commit our lives to Christ, and follow Him. In any case, He foresaw something in us that caused Him to choose us.⁷ R. C. Sproul says:

The vast majority of Christians who reject the Reformed view of predestination adopt what is sometimes called the prescient or foreknowledge (pre-science, prior knowledge) view of predestination. Briefly stated, this view teaches that from all eternity God knew how we would live. He knew in advance whether we would receive Christ or reject Christ. He knew our free choices before we ever made them. God' choice of

⁶ Cited by Danilo Carvalho (http://dufreire.wordpress.com/2008/04/25/jacobus-arminius%E2%80%99-contribution-christian-understanding-of-salvation-in-light-of-christian-holiness/#_ftn17). Accessed September 8, 2012. Taken from J. Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, volume I. Pages 619-39 cover all twenty of the points Carvalho discusses.

⁷ See Kevin Jackson's article, "An Explanation of Simple Foreknowledge" at <http://evangelicalarminians.org/?q=node/1285>. Accessed September 8, 2012.

our eternal destiny then was made on the basis of what he knew we would choose. He chooses us because he knows in advance that we would choose him. The elect, then, are those who God knows will choose Christ freely.⁸

In Arminianism a person chosen might not make it into the kingdom. Choosing just means that you will be born again and that you have a chance to keep it.

According to Arminianism, Christ died for all and hence all have a chance. If they respond properly, they will be someone that God foresaw would respond, and they will have been chosen.

B. CORPORATE ELECTION

Some Arminians and some who call themselves neither Calvinists nor Arminians hold to what is called *corporate election*. It is based in great part on Eph 1:4: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

The Society for Evangelical Arminians says:

Election in Christ is primarily corporate, i.e., an election of a people (Eph 1:4-5, 7, 9). The elect are called “the body of Christ” (4:12), “my church” (Mt 16:18), “a people belonging to God” (1 Pe 2:9), and the “bride” of Christ (Rev 19:7). Therefore, election is corporate and embraces individual persons only as they identify and associate themselves with the body of Christ, the true church.⁹

Jesus is chosen. Then, whoever comes to faith in Jesus becomes chosen because they are a part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

This view rejects the idea of individual election for eternal life. Instead, Jesus is chosen as the King and all who believe in Him become part of the body that will be in the kingdom of the King.

⁸ Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 129.

⁹ See <http://evangelicalarminians.org/A-Concise-Summary-of-the-Corporate-View-of-Election-and-Predestination>. Accessed November 8, 2012.

C. ELECTION CONDITIONED ON UNKNOWN FACTORS

According to modified Calvinism, God chose some and not others, but His choice was not arbitrary. Nor did He choose based on who would believe, since hypothetically everyone would believe if God kept turning up the heat.

Harlan Betz posits a view of election that is somewhere between Calvinism and Arminianism. He describes it in this way:

God elects a man without regard to that man's merit! In fact, man cannot merit God's saving grace! Election is an act of God's grace (Eph. 1:4-6). Believing is a response to God's grace. The Bible teaches both God's sovereignty in choosing and man's responsibility in believing. The Bible places foreknowledge before predestination (Rom. 8:28-30). God desires for all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). God is not desirous that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Whosoever believes in Jesus has eternal life (John 3:16)! Men who go to Hell, go there because they are sinners who rejected God's grace.¹⁰

In this view, God chose based on knowing the people in advance. His sovereign choice was not inconsistent with man's ability and responsibility to believe in Jesus for everlasting life. God's choice does have some free will aspect to it since God takes our free-will into account when choosing.

IV. THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF ELECTION: ELECTION IS TO MINISTRY

The doctrine of election, even minus limited atonement, didn't make too much sense to me when I was taught it in seminary. But most of my professors taught that this was a mystery which we could not fully understand. All are able to believe in Jesus, I was taught (contrary to the strict Calvinist understanding of election), since Christ died for all (DTS taught unlimited atonement). However, only the elect will believe. It is not that God forces the elect to believe, or keeps the non-elect from believing,

¹⁰ See "Calvinism vs. Biblicism vs. Arminianism" at http://www.lostpines-biblechurch.com/docs/Calvinism_Biblicism_Arminianism.pdf. Accessed November 8, 2012.

it is simply that all who freely believe happen to be the elect and all who freely reject Christ happen to be the non-elect.

That eliminated some concerns I had. But it still didn't make a lot of sense. I remember thinking something like, *Well, this makes the most sense of anything I've heard till now. However, I keep studying and will remain open. Possibly there is a better explanation of what this doctrine of election is.*

Over the past 10 to 15 years I've been studying the Biblical references to God's choosing and electing people. What I have found is far different from what I was taught.

When we study the Biblical words for election and choosing (*eklektos, eklegomai, eklogē, hairtizō, haireomai, procheririzō, proskaleō, suneklektos*), what we find is radically different than what is commonly taught about election. When the Bible teaches about God choosing individuals, a nation, and even a city, it speaks of divine choice *for ministry*, not for eternal destiny. The Biblical doctrine of election is not about who will spend eternity with the Lord and who will not. It is about ministries that people are chosen to do for the Lord.

A. GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, ISRAEL

The Old and New Testaments both make it clear that the Jews are God's *chosen people* and *the elect* (Deut 7:6; 14:2; 1 Kgs 3:8; Pss 33:12; 106:5; Isa 43:10; 45:4; 65:9, 22; Matt 24:22, 31; Mark 13:20; Luke 18:7; Rom 9:11; 11:28; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 2:4). They were chosen to be the line through which Messiah came. Israel was chosen to serve God in its practices and in its worship. Indeed, God has not given up on Israel. By the end of the Tribulation, Israel will cry out to the Lord Jesus and will be delivered. During the Millennium, and then on the new earth, Israel will serve God forever in its practices and praise.

Due to the bias toward the Calvinist understanding of who *the elect* are, many of the references to Israel as *the elect* in the NT are misunderstood. If the NT follows and is built upon the OT, then it should not be surprising that both testaments refer to Israel as God's chosen, His elect.

B. JESUS, GOD'S CHOSEN MESSIAH AND SAVIOR

Jesus Himself is *the chosen one, the elect*. He was chosen by God the Father to be the chief cornerstone (1 Pet 2:4, 6), to be

the Messiah (Isa 42:1-4; 49:7; Matt 12:18; Luke 9:35; 23:35; John 1:34), and to die on the cross for our sins (Matt 12:18; 1 Pet 2:4).

C. TWELVE MEN CHOSEN AS CHRIST'S APOSTLES

Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples and apostles (Luke 6:13; John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19; Acts 1:2). When one of those, Judas, betrayed Jesus, his place was taken by another man chosen by God, Matthias (Acts 1:24, "show which of these two *You have chosen*," *eklegomai*, italics added).

D. SAUL CHOSEN AS APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

Saul of Tarsus was later chosen by God to be an apostle as well, specifically the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15 [*eklogē*]; 13:2 [*prokaleō*]; 22:14-15 [*procheirizō*]).

E. PETER CHOSEN TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO CORNELIUS

Peter was chosen by God to be the one to take the gospel to Cornelius and his household, the first group of Gentile converts (Acts 15:7 [*eklegomai*]).

F. GOD'S CHOSEN DELIVERER, MOSES

God chose Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (Num 16:5-6 [*bhr*]).

G. GOD'S CHOSEN PRIESTLY LINE, LEVI

God chose (*bhr*) Aaron and the tribe of Levi to be the priestly line (Num 17:5; 1 Sam 2:28; 2 Chron 29:11). God chose (*bhr*) that priests from the tribe of Levi would minister before Him in the temple and would be paid by the tithes of the people (Deut 18:5-8; 21:5; 1 Chron 15:2).

H. MEN CHOSEN TO BE IN MESSIAH'S LINE

Specifically God chose (*bhr*) Abraham (Neh 9:7), Isaac, Jacob (Ps 135:4; Isa 41:8; Ezek 20:5), and Judah (1 Chron 28:4; Ps 78:67) to be in the line of Messiah.

I. DAVID CHOSEN TO REPLACE SAUL AS KING

He chose (*bhr*) David to replace King Saul and to be in the line of Messiah (2 Sam 6:21; 1 Kings 8:16; 1 Chron 28:4; 2 Chron 6:6; Ps 89:3).

J. GOD CHOSE SOLOMON TO SUCCEED DAVID AS KING

God chose (*bhr*) Solomon over David's other sons to be king (1 Chron 29:1).

K. GOD CHOSE MARY AND JOSEPH

God's choosing went right down to Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:30, 42-45, 48), and Joseph, the husband of Mary (Matt 1:20).¹¹

L. GOD'S CHOSEN CITY, JERUSALEM

Over and over again God reminds His people that Jerusalem was and will forever be God's chosen city (e.g., Deut 15:20; 16:2, 15; 1 Kings 8:44; 11:13; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:27; 2 Chron 6:6, 34; 12:13; 33:7; Neh 1:9; Ps 132:13; Zech 3:2).

M. CHOSEN SOJOURNERS

In his first epistle Peter wrote to Jewish believers scattered around the Roman Empire. He called them *elect* (or *chosen*) *sojourners*. Though many versions translate 1 Pet 1:2 as "elect according to foreknowledge," the word *elect* (*eklektos*) actually occurs in v 1 immediately before *sojourners*.

V. ELECTION IS NEVER CONCERNING ONE'S ETERNAL DESTINY

Admittedly, it is hard to prove a negative. However, there simply is not a single verse in the OT or NT that speaks of anyone being chosen or elected to everlasting life, to justification, to salvation from eternal condemnation, or any synonymous idea.

The verse most often cited to prove election unto everlasting life, Acts 13:48, does indeed mention everlasting life. But it

¹¹ N.B. No word which we translate *choosing* or *election* is used of Mary or Joseph. Yet the *concept* of their choosing is evident in the texts cited.

doesn't mention election, choosing, or any synonym for election or choosing.

That simple fact is often overlooked. The verse in question is Acts 13:48. It reads, "As many as had been appointed to everlasting life believed" (NKJV, ESV, NASB; NIV reads "appointed for everlasting life"). The participle (*tetagmenoi*) translated *as many as had been appointed* is from the verb *tassō*. There is no dispute on the fact that there is not a single other verse in the entire Bible where this word refers to any sort of election, let alone divine election to everlasting life. That alone should cause us to wonder if Calvinists have made something of this verse it is not. If *tassō* refers to election here,¹² it is the only place it does.¹³

Acts 13:48 is not the first time in the passage that everlasting life is mentioned. To understand v 48, one must first consider v 46. It reads, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles." The Jews in Pisidian Antioch "were filled with envy" and "they opposed the things spoken by Paul" in their synagogue. Note how Paul explains this: "you...judge yourselves unworthy of

¹² NIDNTT says: "Several words are used in the NT to express appointment. The following are dealt with in this article: *kathistēmi*, *horizō*, *paristēmi*, *procheirizō*, *tassō*, *tithēmi*, *prothesmia*, *cheirotoneō*, and *lanthano*" (1:471). The article on *tassō* is written by Calvinist J. I. Packer. He says that *tassō* "denotes God's appointment of 'the powers that be' (Rom. 13:1), of a career of service for Paul (Acts 22:10), and of individual persons to attain eternal life through believing the gospel (Acts 13:48)" (1:476). That explanation of Acts 13:48 seems out of place with the explanation given of Rom 13:1 and Acts 22:10, and it fails to take into account that a middle passive participle is used in Acts 13:48.

In addition, Packer sounds like he is saying that faith in the gospel is the way in which one is regenerated. Yet most Calvinists say that regeneration precedes faith. See, for example, Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 72. Sproul says, "A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: 'Regeneration precedes faith.'" A bit later [p. 73 top] he adds, "We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order that we might believe."

¹³ The reason this was translated in this way in the first place is likely the influence of Calvinist thought. There is a bit of circular reasoning that occurs here. People posit that the Calvinist doctrine of election is true because of Acts 13:48. Yet they know that Acts 13:48 is talking about election to everlasting life because the Calvinist doctrine of divine election is a proven fact. If the Calvinist doctrine of election is not a given, then it is hard to see how anyone would find proof of such a doctrine in Acts 13:46-48. Indeed, the opposite is clearly suggested.

everlasting life.” Paul does not say, *You show that God did not elect you to everlasting life.*

Clearly vv 46 and 48 are antithetically parallel. Verse 46 is Paul’s words to the unbelieving Jews in Pisidian Antioch. Verse 48 is Luke’s words concerning the believing Gentiles (and possibly Jews) there. The former group did not receive everlasting life because it judged itself unworthy of it. The latter group did receive everlasting life.

Why did the latter group believe? Clearly in some sense the latter people judged themselves worthy of everlasting life, unlike the Jews who rejected the promise of life.

But what then does *tetagmenoi* mean here? One of the major views is that it refers to unconditional election. If so, this would be the only place in the Bible which speaks of election *to everlasting life.*

Henry Alford suggested that understanding is forced:

48. [**tetagmenoi**] The meaning of this word must be determined by the context. The Jews had *judged themselves unworthy of eternal life* [v 46]; the Gentiles, **as many as were disposed to eternal life** [v 48], believed. *By whom* so disposed is not *here* declared; nor need the word be in this place further particularized. *We know that it is God who worketh in us the will to believe* and that the preparation of the heart is of Him; but to find *in this text* pre-ordination to life asserted is to force both the word and the context to a meaning which they do not contain.¹⁴

BDAG says the verb *tassō* means “to bring about an order of things by arranging, *arrange, put in place*” and “to give instructions as to what must be done, *order, fix, determine, appoint.*”¹⁵ It lists Acts 13:48 under the first meaning, under a second sub-heading entitled, “of a person put into a specific position, used with a preposition.”¹⁶ It suggest that *tassō* in Acts 13:48 means “*belong to, be classed among those possessing.*”¹⁷

¹⁴ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, Vol. II: The Acts of the Apostles, The Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians, fifth edition (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1865), 153, italics and bold his.

¹⁵ BDAG, 991 (meanings 1 and 2 of 2).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Tassō is only used eight times in the NT. The closest other use is the same exact participle except that it is feminine and not masculine. In Rom 13:1 *tetagemenai* occurs and means “put in place by.”¹⁸ However, in that context God is specifically mentioned as the one putting the governing authorities in place (*hupo tou Theou tetagemenai eisin*).

Comparing Rom 13:1 and Acts 13:48 might imply that God is not the one who put them in place since the text does not say *tetagemenoi hypou tou Theou*. However, even if He is, as Alford points out, that does not in this context suggest that “pre-ordination to life” is meant.¹⁹

In 1 Cor 16:15 Paul speaks of those who “have devoted [*etaxan*, from *tassō*] themselves to the ministry of the saints.”

The whole phrase means that these Gentiles, unlike the unbelieving Jews in v 46, positioned (or *disposed* or *devoted*) themselves toward everlasting life. Here is how I would paraphrase the sense of the word in question: *as many as inclined themselves toward everlasting life believed*. They were open. Then they believed.

Those who were closed did not believe, for they judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life (v 46).

Of course, it is true that there are a number of vague references in the epistles which merely refer to *the elect*, with no hint as to what that means. No explanation is given as to what the persons so designated were chosen to do or to be.

These verses are often used by Calvinists as proofs of election unto everlasting life. Yet the only way such verses could even be implied to be saying that is if there are other verses that clearly establish that there is such a thing as election unto everlasting life.

If the rest of the Scriptures show that election is to ministry, then we would understand vague references to *the elect* as either references to Israel or as references to believers in the church age. Either way, the issue would be divine choice for ministry for either group.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ In his commentary on Acts (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale Series [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980], 231.), I. Howard Marshall suggests that *tetagemenoi* might mean “that the Gentiles believed in virtue of the fact that God’s plan of salvation included them.”

VI. ELECT ANGELS?

Paul speaks of *elect angels* in 1 Tim 5:21. There is no doubt that he is talking about unfallen angels here. However, in what sense are the unfallen angels *elect*? Paul does not say. Evidently Timothy knew what Paul meant.

Possibly Paul means that some angels *were chosen to aid Timothy as he led the church in Ephesus* (cf. Dan 10:10-14; 12:1; Heb 1:14).

John Calvin speculated that *eklektos* in 1 Tim 1 5:21 means *excellent* (1-2 Timothy & Titus, p. 93). One use of *eklektos*, seen in Rom 16:13 and possibly 1 Tim 5:21, does not mean *election* or *choosing*, but something like *choice* or *excellent* (like our expressions choice meats, choice hotels, choice homes, etc.). BDAG suggests that in Rom 16:13 *eklektos* means “the outstanding Christian” (p. 306). This might explain other uses as well (e.g., 2 John 1, 13).

VII. MAKE YOUR ELECTION SURE? (2 PETER 1:10-11)

Peter urges his believing readers to “make your calling and election sure” in 2 Pet 1:10. There is a hint in v 11 as to what this calling and election is to. It is to an *everlasting kingdom*. In other words, believers are invited (called) to rule with Christ forever and those who add to their faith the character qualities Peter mentions (2 Pet 1:5-8) will indeed be elected or chosen to do so.

In his commentary on Second Peter, Zane Hodges comments on election in 2 Pet 1:10 as follows:

This text does not mean that Christians are to confirm their call and election to eternal salvation. Such an idea is completely foreign to this passage. Peter has just finished addressing his readers as believers (v 1) whom God has richly endowed (vv 3-4). If the word *election* (*eklogē* = selection, choosing) referred to being chosen before time (as in Eph 1:4), it is surprising that the phrase is not reversed: “your election and calling” (cf. Rom 8:30).

Here is one of the many verbal allusions in the Petrine epistles to the teaching Peter had heard from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: “many are called, but few are chosen [*eklektoi*]” (Matt 20:16; 22:14).

All Christians have been given *a royal summons* by God Himself, inviting them to the glorious privilege of co-reigning with Christ in the life to come (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-27; 3:21). But not all Christians will be *chosen* to co-reign (cf. Rom 8:17b; 2 Tim 2:12).

Peter, therefore, wishes his readership to produce in their lifestyle appropriate verification that they are royal people, destined for high honor in the coming kingdom of God.²⁰

Calvinists believe that this text is speaking of making one’s election *unto everlasting life* sure. For example, Sproul, after quoting 2 Pet 1:10-11 writes:

Here we see the mandate to make our election sure. To do so requires diligence. We have a pastoral concern here. Peter links assurance with freedom from stumbling...

Not only is it important that we gain authentic assurance but it is important that we gain it early in our Christian experience...

I never know for sure whether another person I meet is elect or not. I cannot see into other people’s souls. As human beings our view of others is restricted to outward appearances. We cannot see into the heart. The only person who can know for sure if you are elect or not is you.²¹

One wonders how any Calvinist could be sure, as Sproul suggests is possible, if the basis of certainty is our works. Indeed, Sproul goes on to say:

To have assurance we must make a sober analysis of our lives. It is not much use to compare ourselves with others. We will always

²⁰Zane C. Hodges, “The Second Epistle of Peter” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 2:1174.

²¹Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 168-69.

be able to find others who are more advanced in their sanctification than we are. We may also be able to find others who are less advanced. No two people are exactly at the same point in their spiritual growth.

We must ask if we see any real change in our behavior, any real outward evidence of grace. This is a precarious process because we can lie to ourselves. It is a difficult task to perform, but by no means impossible.²²

Introspection and doubts about eternal destiny are so prevalent in Calvinist circles that some Calvinists warn about it. Steele, Thomas, and Quinn say:

Another odd pitfall that characterizes some Calvinists is chronic introspection. Now, I do not mean normal self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5). I mean the sort that goes too far. This sort seems to glory in introspection with the proper results. What do I mean? True self-examination should lead to renewed faith and love and obedience. False introspection leads to more introspection, and actually less faith. It produces more doubt, not faith. For example, some worry that they might not be among the elect. But this does not lead them to put faith in Christ. If that is the result, then it is not true self-examination.²³

The issue in 2 Pet 1:10-11 is not mere kingdom entrance, but *rich* entrance. The idea of a rich entrance fits perfectly with the idea that Peter is referring to being called or invited to rule with Christ. Those who heed the call will be chosen to rule, that is, to have the rich entrance. Those who do not, will get into the kingdom, but will not rule (cf. 1 Thess 5:10).

VIII. CHOSEN FOR DELIVERANCE FROM THE TRIBULATION

Not all references to divine election refer to selection for ministry.

²² Ibid., 170-71.

²³ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 195.

In 2 Thess 2:13 Paul says, “God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth...” The word salvation (*sōtēria*) occurs three times in First and Second Thessalonians. In its two other uses it clearly refer to deliverance from the Tribulation via the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess 5:8, 9 as compared with 5:3, “and they shall not escape”).

This probably explains 1 Thess 1:4 as well: “knowing, beloved brethren your election by God.” They were elected to salvation *from the Tribulation*.

IX. APPLICATION

Everyone and everything God chose or elected is part of the Biblical doctrine of election. It is a major error to think that the Biblical doctrine of election is about God choosing who would be born again and who would not. It is not.

There is not a shred of incontrovertible evidence that shows that God chose or elected anyone to have everlasting life. While there are some verses that I cannot yet explain to my own satisfaction (e.g., Rom 8:33; 11:5; Col 3:12; Titus 1:1), the number is small and shrinking all the time. And none of them says or implies that God chose someone *for everlasting life*.

The more I have studied the words *choose* and *elect*, the more I’ve found that they refer to selection for a certain job or task.

To be clear, I am not predisposed to one position or another. What God says is true and just and good. If the Bible clearly taught that God only elected certain people to everlasting life and passed others by, I would be fine with that even if I couldn’t get my mind around it now. Indeed, that is what I believed for a decade or more from the start of my seminary training until years after I received my doctorate.

God is God and can do what He wants. Who are we to question what He does? But since He never says He elects some but not others to everlasting life, to create and perpetuate such a doctrine ends up actually contradicting what God has said.

Of course, if God did that, then the moment we believed in Jesus for everlasting life, we would know that we are elect. That was actually my view until I came to see that the whole doctrine of election to everlasting life is mistaken.

The Reformed doctrine of election is linked to the Reformed doctrine of perseverance (the P in Calvinism's TULIP), which says that only those who persevere to the end of their lives will get into the kingdom. All other believers will be sent to hell since their faith was *merely intellectual* and was not *heart faith*. Thus the Reformed doctrine of election is sadly tied to the Reformed idea that no one can be sure of his eternal destiny till he dies. No true Calvinist will say he is sure he is born again since none can be sure he will persevere.

While the Calvinists I have met are very well intentioned, they follow an unbiblical, man-made theology that is logical, but wrong.

Practically speaking, if you believe in a Calvinistic election to everlasting life, you will be beset daily with fears about going to hell, for you cannot and will not know where you are going until you die, or until you are set free from this insidious teaching.

The English branch of the Reformation is called Puritanism. Nearly to a man, the great Puritan leaders, when they were facing death, lamented that they were probably not regenerate. The reason was simple. They did not see enough evidence in their lives to prove to them that they were elect. They believed that the only proof of election is perseverance. And the only sure proof of perseverance is perfection, which no one has (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). Hence Puritan teachers were trapped by their own teachings. As long as they stayed busy they could hold their fears somewhat in check. But once they were on death's door, those fears assaulted them terribly.

Though I've met many who say they have found great comfort in the idea that God elects some and not others to everlasting life, I do see not the evidence in what they tell me about their beliefs. They report that they are not sure that they are elect. They *hope* they are elect. They *think* that their works may show that they are elect. But they admit that they might not be elect, and if so, then they will go to hell no matter what they believe and no matter what they do. Thus while they report finding solace in the Reformed doctrine of election, I believe they actually find distress there.

A proper understanding of divine election makes assurance of our eternal destiny possible. That in itself is a terrific

application, for assurance of everlasting life is arguably crucial to living a God-honoring life.

In addition, we can know that God chose Israel and that He has not forgotten His promise. We can and should rejoice that one day soon Israel will be a believing nation and will experience God's blessings forever.

We can know that we have been chosen for salvation from the Tribulation. If the Lord returns in our lifetimes as we suspect, then we will not only not experience the Tribulation wrath, we will not experience death either. The soon return of our Lord is our blessed hope, and it is tied with our election to the Rapture.

Knowing that God chooses us to serve Him should provide an additional motivation to get to work. He did not choose us to sit on the sidelines and watch the angels serve God forever. He chose us to serve Him now and forever.

There is only one city on earth that God chose. That should cause us to have a special love for Jerusalem. Indeed, Revelation 21 is very clear that on the new earth the lead city will be the New Jerusalem. Likely even Church-Age believers will have a dwelling there (as well as a dwelling in whatever nation they will live).

Finally and most importantly, we can and should rejoice because we know the Chosen One. The Lord Jesus is the One God chose. And the Lord Jesus fulfilled His ministry. He lived a sinless life and He died on the cross, taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). His triumphant cry, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), is directly related to the Biblical doctrine of election. He was chosen to go to the cross for us and He did. The finished work of Christ is the finished work of the Chosen One.

X. CONCLUSION

God elects both people and places for service. As far as I can tell, he does not elect anyone to everlasting life. Our eternal destiny is not a matter of God's choice, or even our choice. It is simply a matter of who ends up in the Book of Life (Rev 20:15). All who believe in Jesus for His promise of life are in the Book and have everlasting life. All who die never having believed in Jesus are not, and never will be, in the Book (assuming they

lived beyond the age of accountability and with full mental faculties).

Just as the L in TULIP, Limited Atonement, is not true, neither is the U in TULIP, unconditional election, true. Calvinists say the five points hang together. And if they do, then the fact that the L is not true should give us a clue that the U is not true either.

Rejoice in your assurance of everlasting life based on God's promise, not based on some supposed doctrine of election to everlasting life that cannot be found in Scripture.

THAT I MAY ATTAIN TO WHOSE RESURRECTION? PHILIPPIANS 3:11

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I. INTRODUCTION

Philippians 3:10-11 reads, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” At first glance, these words may seem to suggest that Paul worried he might not be resurrected (in the first resurrection). One could ask, “Did Paul worry that, if he did not strive sufficiently, he would go to the lake of fire?” There are three possible answers to this question (view 2 being common among Reformed interpreters):

1. Yes, Paul feared ending in the lake of fire.
2. Although Paul knew that it is impossible for him or for any Christian to end up in the lake of fire, in deep humility, he worked diligently, so that he might escape it.
3. No, Paul knew that it would be impossible for him to end up in the lake of fire.

Twenty-eight years have passed since 1984, but double-speak is alive and well in Christendom. Those advocating views 1 and 2 fundamentally misunderstand that eternal life is a gift that neither requires works to receive nor to keep. Let us consider the three answers given to the initial question.

II. PAUL FEARED ENDING UP IN THE LAKE OF FIRE

Helmut Koester spoke of “the element of uncertainty concerning one’s own participation in the resurrection (*ei pōs*) [if somehow].”¹

Morna Hooker broadens the use of *I* from Paul to Christians in general (not to the Philippians in particular). Writing from an Arminian standpoint, she suggests that, “...it is necessary to go on ‘being conformed’ to Christ’s obedience and death if they [Christians] are to attain the resurrection.”

The introductory “if somehow” in v. 11 seems to introduce an element of doubt, but Paul can hardly be dubious about whether those who are in Christ [at the time of death] will share his resurrection. The phrase is intended, rather, to remind the Philippians that Christians have not yet arrived at their final destination. Christ’s resurrection has already occurred, but their [Christians] own lies in the future, and *it is necessary to go on “being conformed” to Christ’s obedience and death if they [Christians] are to attain the resurrection.* The fact that their [Christians] righteousness is “from God” does not absolve them [Christians] from moral endeavor, for the goal still lies ahead— a theme Paul elaborates on in vv. 12-16.²

Similarly, George Turner thought that Paul feared not attaining to the first resurrection, that is, he feared facing the second death:

Therefore he [Paul] believed in the general resurrection of the last day. If Paul expected to participate in the general resurrection, why was he eager to “attain unto the resurrection of the dead,” as if to imply that he might not thus attain? Here he means [attaining] to the resurrection of the just. The Apocalypse states that there is a

¹ Helmut Koester, “The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment (Philippians III),” *NTS* 8 (1962): 323.

² Morna D. Hooker, “Philippians,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 11:529. Italics mine.

first resurrection: “blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection, over such the second death has no power” (Rev. 20:6). In other words, Paul wanted to be among the saints and the first-fruits of the resurrection. Only then would salvation be final. Full salvation can be experienced in this life, but final salvation only after the resurrection.³

Ernest Scott also claims that Paul strove to attain to the resurrection of the body. He (as an Arminian) imagined that Paul could (as a believer) live in the resurrection power of Christ, but end up unredeemed:

The one object which he now set before himself was “to attain, if possible, to the full resurrection.” He uses a compound word (*exanastasin*) to denote not merely the inward resurrection of which every Christian is conscious even in this life, but the ultimate rising from the dead. Here on earth, as he says in Rom. 8:23, “We...groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” For this Paul must continue to strive, so as to make certain that he will attain.⁴

Karl Barth had no concept that Paul even possessed probationary Christian life—let alone eternal life. He viewed martyrdom as Paul’s only way to (1) attain to resurrection and life or (2) attain to certainty (in this life) that he would be resurrected and live eternally:⁵

³ George A. Turner, “Philippians,” in *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 473.

⁴ Ernest F. Scott, “The Epistle to the Philippians,” in *Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1955), 11:87.

⁵ Whether Barth means (1) or (2) is not entirely clear. The final statement of the citation (“So, and only so—by assenting to his killing—are we on the way to life.”) suggests (1). However, another statement (“But precisely in its [life] being taken away from him—by his inclusion in the fellowship of his sufferings, by his entry into the form of his death—he is undeniably also given the hope of his own resurrection.”) seems to suggest (2). I suspect that Barth means (2), because he is not noted for saying that Christianity is to no avail, unless one dies as a martyr. See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1962; Richmond, VA: Knox, 1962), 104f.

In the hope that so—i.e. as *symmorphizomenos tō thanatō autou* (by entering into the form of his [Christ’s] death, v. 10)—**I may be on the way to the resurrection of the dead**... But precisely in its [life] being taken from him—by his inclusion in the fellowship of his *sufferings*, by his entry into the form of his *death*—he is undeniably also *given* the hope of his own resurrection. ‘If we are dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also *live* with him’ (Rom. 6:8)—*synzēsomen!* That is the hope! And therefore here *katantēsō*... So, and only so—by *assenting* to his killing—are we on the way to life.⁶

Carolyn Osiek also denies that Paul knows he will be resurrected,

“He hopes, but does not know for certain, that he will be able to endure to the end (see Otto 1995). The uncertainty expressed in the statement is not about [the fact of] the future resurrection but about his own fidelity [and, therefore, whether or not he will participate in it].”⁷

The foregoing writers all think that Paul worried that he might not participate in the first resurrection, because unfaithfulness would forfeit his standing as a believer. The next group offers a typical Reformed answer. It is not *Yes* or *No*, but *Yes-No*.

III. PAUL KNEW HE WOULD NOT GO TO THE LAKE OF FIRE, YET WORKED DILIGENTLY TO ESCAPE IT

This answer attributes false humility to Paul. If a natural-born American citizen were to say, “I hope someday to become an American citizen,” no one would call that humility. Rather than humility, it would evidence confusion. In John 11:25-27 Jesus promises resurrection and everlasting life to every believer. Any doubt by Paul that he would not participate in believer resurrection would evidence disbelief, not humility. Those who call

⁶ *Ibid.*, 104f.

⁷ Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, V. P. Furnish, gen. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 95.

Paul's supposed denial (of the certainty of his participation in the first resurrection) humility fundamentally misunderstand and disbelieve the message of life.⁸

I-Jin Loh and Eugene Nida offer a *Yes-No* answer

The expression "if in some way" appears to suggest some doubt in the apostle's mind, but in reality what he expresses here is his sense of expectation and hope with humility. TEV [Today's English Version] accordingly renders the expression as *in the hope that* (Gpd [Goodspeed] "in the hope of"; JB [Jerusalem Bible] "that is the way I can hope to"; NAB [New American Bible] "thus I hope that"; Phps [Phillips] "so that I may somehow").⁹

The *Yes* part finds expression in "appears to suggest some doubt," while "in reality" introduces a supposed tension between Paul's "sense of expectation and hope" with his "humility."

Marvin Vincent says, "His words here are an expression of humility and self-distrust, not of doubt."¹⁰ To characterize unbelief as humility, not as doubt, is an exercise in sophistry.

Gerald Hawthorne agrees with Vincent, "...it would appear that Paul uses such an unexpected hypothetical construction simply because of humility on his part, a humility that recognizes that salvation is the gift of God from start to finish and that as a consequence he dare not presume on this divine mercy (Caird)."¹¹

Likewise, Jacobus Muller denies that Paul "express[es] uncertainty," but requires that the apostle "watch and pray continually," concerning this "matter of certainty" and "object of hope." Muller engages in doublespeak.

The last expression "if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead"

⁸ Saying that some presently disbelieve the message does not assert that they had never believed it.

⁹ I-Jin Loh and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translators Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, *Helps for Translators*, vol. 19 (Stuttgart, GER: United Bible Societies, 1977), 106.

¹⁰ Marvin R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, ICC (New York: Scribner, 1897), 106.

¹¹ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC, D. A. Hubbard and G. W. Barker, gen. eds. (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 146.

does not express uncertainty but rather humble expectation and modest self confidence. Even the apostle—and together with him all who have attained the righteousness of God through faith—must watch and pray continually... By speaking of the resurrection “from the dead,” Paul does not refer to the general resurrection of all the dead but definitely to the resurrection in glory in which only believers will share... To faith this truth is not only a possession of the present but always also still an expectation of the future. It is a matter of certainty but at the same time also an object of hope [as in “hope so”].¹²

William Hendricksen asserts that Paul expects to be resurrected (because he expects to persevere), but warns the Philippians, so they will persevere (and be resurrected). Note his final sentence.

When Paul...writes, “If only I may attain,” he is not expressing distrust in the power or love of God nor doubt as to his own salvation. Paul often rejoices in assurance of salvation (Rom. 6:5, 8; 7:25; 8:16, 17, 35-39). In this assurance he was strengthened as the years went by (I Tim. 1:15-17; II Tim. 1:12; 4:7, 8).¹³ But he wrote it in the spirit of *deep humility* and commendable distrust *in self*. The words also imply *earnest striving*. They show us Paul, the Idealist, who applies to himself the rule that he imposes on others (Phil. 2:12, 13).¹⁴

Those who answer the question (*Did Paul fear going to the lake of fire?*) with *Yes-No* as well as those replying *Yes* give evidence of being fundamentally confused. By contrast, this article will argue for the third position: Paul raises no doubts concerning his own resurrection.

¹² Jacobus J. Muller, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, NICNT, N. B. Stonehouse, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 117f.

¹³ Clearly, Hendricksen in one way or another would reject the proposition that assurance is of the essence of believing Jesus for His promise of everlasting life.

¹⁴ William Hendricksen, *Exposition of Philippians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 170. One cannot trust his understanding of any passage he cites here.

IV. PAUL KNEW HIS ETERNAL DESTINY, BUT WAS UNSURE OF HOW HE WOULD DEPART THIS LIFE

Peter O'Brien offers a good characterization of this view:

...while a number of earlier scholars thought that the expression reflected Paul's 'humble admission of his own frailty and unworthiness' in reaching this final destiny, more recently it has been claimed that while the goal of the resurrection is certain, the way or route by which the apostle will reach it is unclear. On this view the element of uncertainty lies with *pōs* (= 'somehow, in some way'): he might reach the resurrection through [1] martyrdom (or [2] by some other kind of death), or [3] he might be alive at the coming of Christ¹⁵ (cf. Phil 1:20-26). 'The resurrection is certain; the intervening events are uncertain.'¹⁶

Those advocating this view focus on the three ways Paul might depart this life (as a martyr, not as a martyr, or as one living at the time of the rapture). It is true that Philippians 1:20 speaks of Paul desiring that "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." This view certainly has precedent within the book.

However, the word *attain* (*katantaō*) suggests a goal toward which Paul strove. The date of the rapture was out of his control (not a goal to which Paul could strive). Martyrdom was also something Paul was prepared to accept, but his efforts to defend himself and to use his Roman citizenship are not consonant with striving for martyrdom.

¹⁵ It is not likely that O'Brien distinguishes between the rapture and the second advent, but any Dispensationalist holding this view would interpret his words "the coming of Christ" as a reference to the pre-tribulational rapture. That would be the only coming for which Paul could have hoped to be on planet earth.

¹⁶ Peter O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC, ed. I. H. Marshall and W. W. Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, ENG: Paternoster, 1991), 412f. The secondary citation of J. A. Moyer, *The Message of Philippians*, BST, 170, who holds this view, quotes him accurately. Cf. also R. P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, NCB, ed 135; I. H. Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (London: Epworth, 1969; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 120; F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, GNC, ed. W. Ward Gasque (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

The word *katantaō* (*attain*) is the biggest obstacle to the view. The lack of a goal to which Paul sought to attain is fatal to it.

V. PAUL WAS SURE OF HIS ETERNAL DESTINY BUT UNSURE ABOUT HIS REWARDS

R. E. Neighbour proposed that the out-resurrection is a reward, a special resurrection for the most faithful Christians. He argued,

What then did Paul have in view when he wrote *of attaining unto the OUT-RESURRECTION OUT OF THE DEAD ONES?*

...Paul meant that *out of the saints who partake of the resurrection out of the dead, there will be some who will attain to a special "placing;" this placing he called the "OUT-RESURRECTION out of the dead."*

This *OUT-RESURRECTION* was a grouping together of certain ones from among the raised believers, a grouping made possible by virtue of their having known Christ, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable to His death.

The Apostle, himself, tells us plainly what he means by the *OUT-RESURRECTION*. In one breath he says, "If by any means I may attain unto the out-resurrection out of the dead;" in his next breath he says, "Not as though I have already attained...but I press forward"—toward what? It was toward "the prize of the up-calling." Therefore, we conclude that the *out-resurrection and the PRIZE of the up-calling are one and the same thing.*¹⁷

Another way of expressing this is that it looks at those with the highest rewards at the Bema. This view has found favor within grace circles. He emphasizes the unusual word for resurrection in Phil 3:11, *exanastasis*, rendering it the *out-resurrection*.

¹⁷R. E. Neighbour, *If by any Means...* (Elyria, OH: Gems of Gold, 1935; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle, 1985), 57f.

Neighbour sees this as a reward experienced after the resurrection of believers (in which all believers will participate). Although he correctly observes that Paul aims here at attaining both intimacy with Christ and reward, his approach to *exanastasis* focuses on *ek* (from), while *anastasis* (resurrection) seems an afterthought.

Neighbour clarifies his view, “The Word does not teach that resurrection out of the dead ones is a reward, but that reward [the out-resurrection] will be meted out after the saints are raised.”¹⁸ His view of the out-resurrection is that the entire Church is raptured, then at the Bema, the most highly rewarded believers are separated out of all resurrected saints.

That is an unlikely rendering of the compound word, *ex-anastasis*. If, by analogy, one rendered the *ex* in *exodus tōn huiōn Israēl* (departure of the sons of Israel) in Heb 11:22 similarly, it would be “departure out of the sons of Israel.” However, the passage does not distinguish one group of Israelites from another group of Israelites. Neighbour did not realize that the *ek* (from) in *ek-anastasis* modifies *tōn nekrōn* (“the corpses”), not *anastasis*. Thus, it is properly, resurrection from among the corpses. Neighbour’s approach to this word is not supported by the lexicons, because it is an instance of special pleading.

Those who hold Neighbour’s view tend to note that this exact construction does not appear elsewhere in the NT. Actually, Scripture combines *anastasis* (resurrection), *ek* (from), and *nekrōn* (corpses) in three ways:¹⁹ the first, *anastasis + nekrōn*, omits *ek* ²⁰ the second is *anastasis + ek + nekrōn*,²¹ and the third is *exanastasis + nekrōn* (Phil 3:11). If every other passage phrased resurrection from the dead one way (with Phil 3:11 being the sole exception), Neighbour might have a little credibility. Instead, there is no stock phrase: the NT combines the words in three distinct ways without changing the meaning.

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹ Many assume that the phrase means “resurrection from death,” but that would use a singular form of *thanatos* (death). Instead, Jesus rose, unlike the many corpses that remained, awaiting their resurrection: *resurrection from the dead (ones)*.

²⁰ Matthew 22:31; Acts 4:2; 17:32; 23:6; 24:15, 21; 26:23; Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:12f, 21, 42; Heb 6:2; 11:35.

²¹ Luke 20:35 and 1 Pet 1:3.

In the final analysis, though, this paper argues for a view that (like Neighbour’s) focuses on rewardability. Neighbour properly perceives that Paul sought the highest of rewards here. Let us consider the third view.

VI. PAUL WAS SURE OF HIS ETERNAL DESTINY, BUT UNSURE OF HIS CONFORMITY TO CHRIST’S RESURRECTION IN THIS LIFE

Philippians 3:10 mentions Christ’s resurrection before His crucifixion, which reverses chronological order. This unexpected sequence has caused scholars to note the chiasmic structure of Phil 3:10-11.²²

The following adapts Gordon Fee’s chiasmic presentation of Phil 3:10-11, while emphasizing His/Him:²³

so that I may know A both the power of B and participation in B’ being conformed to A’ if I might attain [conformity to	Him: His resurrection His sufferings His death His] resurrection from the dead.
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The chiasm A, B, B’, A’ explains what “so that I may know **Him**” means. It means knowing the power of His resurrection (A), if Paul attains conformity to **His** resurrection (A’). It also means participation in **His** sufferings (B) through Paul being conformed to **His** death (B’). Under this approach, Paul desires

²² Cf. Loh and Nida, *Translators Handbook*, 103f; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNTT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 329; and John Banker, *A Semantic and Structural Analysis of Philippians* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1996), 135. Although Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon*, 94, uses the term *inclusion*, rather than *chiasm*, she recognizes a chiasm: “...verses 10-11 form an inclusion in which the two outer terms are ‘the resurrection’ and the inner ones are ‘suffering’ and ‘death,’ so that when the two verses are taken together as the conclusion of the very long sentence that began at the beginning of verse 8, the order in this concluding part of the sentence is really resurrection-suffering-death-resurrection.”

²³ Fee, *Philippians*, 329. Fee does not interpret v 11 as this paper does, but his presentation of the chiasm suggests the format used in this article.

that both his life and his death would conform to the standard set by Christ.

This is not a new thought in Philippians. Consider Phil 1:19-20 where Paul desires not to be ashamed in anything, but to magnify Christ in his body whether by life or by death.

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 3:10-11 restates 1:19-20. Paul wishes to know Him, that is, to be conformed in life to Christ's resurrection and to be conformed to Christ's death. Paul's greatest hope is that his life might possibly attain the highest level of conformity to Christ's resurrection. (Romans 6:3 refers to Christ's resurrection power for Christians to walk in newness of life in the here and now.) May our prayer also be that we be conformed to Christ's resurrection—to walk in newness of life.

Some earlier writers have also presented the view that Paul hoped to attain to conformity to Christ's resurrection in his life. Dwight Pentecost says,

Now he wants to attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Paul is not doubting here the fact of the resurrection of the body. The resurrection of the body does not depend on one's service here or one's sanctification while in the body. The resurrection is the final victory and triumph over Satan because of the cross of Christ. Paul has quite a different thought in view when he says, "I want to attain unto the resurrection." We may read it in this way, "I want to realize in my daily walk what it is to have been resurrected with Christ."

Paul taught this same truth in Romans 6:4, 5: "We are [have been] buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his

death [and we most certainly have], we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection.”²⁴

Gene Getz also holds this view:

The apostle concluded this paragraph by saying: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:10, 11).

These words of Paul have been interpreted in various ways. But one thing is sure: he was not talking about uncertainty regarding his salvation. If he were, he was contradicting everything he ever wrote about his eternal hope and expectation—even in the opening paragraphs of this very Epistle to the Philippians...

The most logical explanation seems to be that Paul was talking about his new life’s goals; that is, to become like Christ in every aspect, even before he died, including Christ’s resurrection life. This[,] Paul acknowledged in the next paragraph was an impossible goal, for only through Christ’s return will Christians be totally transformed into Christ’s likeness (3:20-21). But...Paul did not allow this reality to deter him from the continuous process of coming to know Christ more deeply and profoundly in all aspects of his earthly life—His suffering, His death, and even His resurrection.²⁵

VII. CONCLUSION

For Paul, the centerpiece of living life to the fullest and becoming rewardable was Jesus’ cross and resurrection. Christ’s death and resurrection give direction and enablement to one’s life, which (in turn) brings about rewardability.

²⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Joy of Living: A Study of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 141. Brackets in original.

²⁵ Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Christian: Studies in Philippians* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1983), 136.

so that I may know

A both the power of

B and participation in

B' being conformed to

A' if I might attain [conformity to **His**] resurrection
from the dead.

Him:

His resurrection

His sufferings

His death

His resurrection
from the dead.

Verse 11 is simple, if we remember that Paul hoped somehow in life to attain *to the standard of Christ's resurrection*. Paul's own resurrection was already guaranteed, not requiring any striving on his part. May we, knowing that our resurrection is guaranteed, aim to attain to the standard of Christ's resurrection in living our lives.

THE BRITISH ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSIES¹

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But I see the corrupting Design is of late, grown
so high, that what seemed these Thirty Four
Years suppressed, now threatneth as a torrent
to overthrow the Gospel.

—Richard Baxter,
'Defence of Christ' (sig. A3v)²

I. INTRODUCTION

With an indignant cry of frustration, the eminent Presbyterian leader, Richard Baxter (1615-1691), announced to the theological world his surprise at what he believed to be the return of a controversy which he and his colleagues had attempted to quell some three decades prior. Baxter's frustration was aroused by the 1690 re-publication of a collection of sermons written by Tobias Crisp (1600-1643), a London theologian who had been branded an antinomian during the first outbreak of the controversy. This particular publication, entitled *Christ alone exalted*, included previously unpublished sermons which had been collected by his son, Samuel, along with a letter signed by twelve

¹Editor's Note: This article does an outstanding job explaining the history and theology of the British antinomian controversies. The author is not in this article advocating a theological position. He is merely reporting what happened.

²In order to remain as true to the original authors as possible, all quotations conform to their original spelling, including capitalization. Two observations should be made on this point. 1. At this point in history, the 'v' was not used regularly. Often, as in many of the quotations in this paper, a 'u' served the same function. 2. Spelling of words was not uniform, so many quotations will have the same word spelled differently. These have not been noted as mistakes since they were part of the accepted practice of the day.

leaders of London dissent intended to certify the authenticity of the new sermons included in this publication. In reality, this letter of certification was received more like a commendatory letter and launched the first volley in what would become a bitter fight over this strain of antinomianism. Significantly, that letter also signaled—to Baxter’s pronounced horror—that the antinomianism which he had attempted to marginalize in the first half of the century had made headway into the prominent leadership of London dissent.³ Even at that point of the nascent second controversy—as modern scholarship has chosen to name this late-eruption—the juxtaposition of the core aspects of this debate with those from the earlier debates appears much more stark than most modern scholarship has admitted.

II. THE ORIGINAL CONTROVERSY

That being said, Baxter’s fears were completely understandable. The controversy which had raged since at least the 1630s and which had been quieted in the mid-1650s had, at times, become quite heated. As David Como has ably shown, the vast majority of those labeled *antinomians* during that original British controversy had been closely identified with the Puritan movement. As such, those theologians posed an imminent and internal threat to the very existence of the godly congregations in Laudian England. Thus, a clear line of demarcation proved essential in order to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the more mainstream Puritans and thereby, hopefully, avoid further persecution. This at least partly explains the polemical aspect of the debate which somewhat devolved into egregious attempts to dismiss opponents simply through branding. With the fall of the Laudian regime and the development of the unique milieu which was the English Civil Wars—complete with the accompanying *de facto* freedom of religion and the realization that ‘every ignorant, empty braine (which usually hath the highest esteem of it selfe) hath the liberty of the Presse, whereby...the number of bookes is grown so great that they begin with many to grow

³ For a discussion of the polemical issues involved in the antinomian controversy, see Cooper, *Fear and Polemic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

contemptible⁴—the free grace theologies which were collectively labeled antinomian spread quickly and with surprising ferocity.

At that point, the politically expedient move of the 1630s became a theological necessity in the minds of the Puritan leaders, if not in reality. Invigorated by the dangers of the original Protestant antinomian controversy (involving Martin Luther and Johannes Agricola); the ever-present horrors of the Münster uprising which had antinomian undertones; and even the perceived anarchist threat of the concurrent, colonial antinomian controversy centered on the teachings of Anne Hutchinson; the mainstream Puritans were galvanized in their response to these doctrines which, at least in their minds, inevitably led to radical licentiousness. But, it must be noted, those doctrines labeled *antinomian* in the first half of the seventeenth century were varied, ranging from the spiritualist teachings of John Traske (c. 1585-1636) and John Everard (1584?-1640/1) to the imputed righteousness view exemplified by the teachings of John Eaton (1574/5-1630/1) and covering a host of variations in between. Consequently, the term *antinomian* became a useful catchall for any teaching which did not align with the then-characteristic Puritan view of pietistic preparationism. Despite its usefulness as a polemical weapon, the term did largely identify a single fundamental tenet which united the various antinomian views, namely, an emphasis (or over-emphasis) on justification by faith alone, or *solafideism*, to the expense of cooperation from the believer.

Motivated by fears—both real and imagined, but almost always exaggerated—of a heretical coup, the response from those representing orthodoxy in that first controversy had been swift and heavy-handed, if only in words. Combined with numerous other animated repudiations of these teachings, the footnotes in that quintessential argument against toleration, the catalog of heresies entitled *A testimony to the trueth of Jesus Christ* (1648), forcefully condemned the collected teachings of any who appeared to hold to that “grossest Blasphemy,”⁵ that “most dangerous Doctrine.”⁶ Following the publication of that catalog,

⁴ Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification* (London: printed for Francis Tyton, 1649), sig. a2v.

⁵ Baillie, *Dissuasive* (London: printed for Samuel Gellibrand, 1645).

⁶ Bedford, Field and Stephens, *Examination* (London: Printed by John Field for Philemon Stephens, and are to be sold at his shop at the sign of the

Richard Baxter entered the foray of the controversy—joining the likes of Thomas Gataker (1574-1654), Thomas Bakewell (b. 1618/19), and Samuel Rutherford (1600?-1661)—with the first edition of his *Aphorismes of justification* (1649), a work intended to encourage Baxter’s congregation at Kidderminster in their understanding of “the most fundamentall, undoubted, and practicall Truths”⁷ and, thereby, to undermine the very “frame and fabrick of *Antinomianisme*.”⁸ At that point, however, the actual identification of those teachings labeled antinomian remained very much in dispute.

A. JUSTIFICATION: THE FOCAL POINT OF THE DEBATE

Around the advent of the first controversy, the future Bishop of Norwich and religious controversialist, Richard Montagu (bap. 1575, d. 1641), observed not only that “Faith without Charity doth not iustifie” but also that this maxim could be heard “in euery Protestants mouth.”⁹ While this observation may have appeared true at first glance, the spread of the free grace theologies called its veracity into question. Indeed, the usual view of justification, exemplified by Montagu’s observation and heard regularly throughout the English theological landscape, could be summarized by the simple Latin phrase *fides solum iustificat, non autem fides sola* (faith alone justifies, but not faith which is alone). Thus, the theological landscape pre-conditioned the English theologians to focus on the personal acts of charity which accompanied saving faith. Importantly, most theologians held that the law functioned to identify those acts of charity. Thus, anyone who was perceived to downplay the role of works of charity could be seen as heterodox, at best.

For the most part, the original antinomian controversy divided the English Protestant theological landscape in two: those who emphasized a monergistic view of salvation, the antinomians, and those who emphasized a more-synergistic view.

gilded Lyon in Pauls Church-yard., 1647), sig. Bv.

⁷ Baxter, *Aphorismes* [1649], sig. a9v-r. It should be noted that this work was written in response to John Owen. This served to include Owen in the group of those labeled ‘antinomian’ even without being direct with the charge.

⁸ *Ibid.*, app. 164.

⁹ Montagu, *Gagg for the New Gospell?* (London: printed by Thomas Snodham for Matthew Lownes and William Barret, 1624), 145.

Of course, any dichotomous rendering necessarily results in an oversimplification. Certainly, Edward Fisher (*fl.* 1626-1648) illustrated well the potential poles of the spectrum with his characters: *Nomista*, the Legalist, who remains “ignorant of Christ and his Righteousnes, and therefore establisheth his own” by being “a zealous professour of Religion,”¹⁰ and *Antinomista*, the Antinomian, who “glorif[ies] and rejoyc[es] in free grace, and justification by faith alone,” who “can talke like believers, and yet do[es] not walke like believers, who is ‘not obedient to the Law of Christ.’”¹¹

In the end, the actual debate comprising the first controversy took a predictable course. In general, those branded as *antinomian* focused intensively on the imputed nature of Christ’s righteousness, seeking to minimize the role of the law in the life of the believer. To varying degrees, then, these theologians proclaimed “true Christian Liberty...to such as truly beleeeue.” “[T]his Libertie,” according to Traske, “is a freedome from the Law, from Sinne, and so from Hell, and all feare of condemnation...[being] diuorced from the flesh, and so free from it...”¹² Similarly, Eaton and Crisp could agree with Saltmarsh when he argued that “[th]e *Spirit of Christ* sets a *beleever* as *free* from *Hell*, the *Law*, and *bondage* here on *Earth*, as if he were in *Heaven*; nor wants he any thing to *make* him *so*, but to make him *beleeeve* that he is *so*...”¹³

This view did not preclude the use of the law in the church age, particularly for the unconverted but even for the believer. Even the spiritualist Traske allowed that the “Morall Law...serues still to conuince all men, of sinne, and to bring them to Christ, for perfect obedience, and full satisfaction.”¹⁴ John Eaton, in his work *The Discovery of the most dangerous dead faith* (1641), went to great lengths to note the importance of the law in teaching, identifying, and convicting of sin. He even argued

¹⁰ Fisher and Hamilton, *Marrow of Modern Divinity* (London: printed by R. Leybourn, for Giles Calvert, at the Black Spread-Eagle, at the West end of Pauls, 1646), sig. 7v.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, sig. Ar.

¹² Traske, *Treatise of Libertie* (London: Printed by W. Stansby, for N. Butter, and are to be sold at his shop, at the signe of the pyde Bull, neere S. Austens gate, 1620), 6-7.

¹³ Saltmarsh, *Free grace* (London: Printed for Giles Calvert, 1646), 140.

¹⁴ Traske, *Treatise of Libertie*, 18.

that the law aided in the “deeper fight of this evil of sin.”¹⁵ For his part, Crisp claimed that, for the believer, “the law continues for a rule, and to point out the wrath due for transgressions.”¹⁶ Indeed, Crisp even saw the law serving as a sort of preparation for salvation, “to hunt men into Christ.”¹⁷

These concessions to the continued use of the law did nothing to assuage the orthodox opposition who balked at any minimization of the law, having seen the radical licentiousness (real or imagined) which necessarily followed on that short and very slippery slope. The fight, then, required controverting almost every point of the antinomian doctrine of justification. Thus, Rutherford argued that “Christ, and his Apostles, presse the morall Law upon the *Gentiles*,”¹⁸ demonstrating not only its continued use in the conversion of sinners but also its continued authority over the believers as well, since the Law-giver was one and the same. In that view, “*the Law is yet to be preached, as tying us to personall obedience...*”¹⁹ Henry Burton concurred, averring that the law “remains as a perepetualle rule of a holy life to all God’s people to the end of the world.” This defense of the continued use of the law had the potential, as J. Wayne Baker has noted, to equate “the moral law with the gospel.”²⁰ When dissected, however, these statements sounded remarkably like the concessions to the law made by the so-called antinomians.

B. THE CORE OF THE DISAGREEMENT

While the differing views of the law served as a convenient line of demarcation between these two loosely-defined groups, that issue was merely the symptom rather than the root of the problem. Numerous differences between the two sides—beyond

¹⁵ Eaton, *Discovery* (London: printed by J. Hart; and sold by John Lewis; at the French Church, in Grey Eggle Street; at a Meeting in Peter’s Yard; at the French Chapel, in Hermitage Street; and by Stephen Dixon at Barton, in Leicestershire, 1747), 37.

¹⁶ Crisp, *Christ alone exalted* (London: printed for and sold by G. Keith, 1755), 590.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 590.

¹⁸ Rutherford, *Survey of the spirituall antichrist* (London: Printed by J.D. & R.I. for Andrew Croke, and are to be sold at his shop at the Green-Dragon in Pauls Church-yard, 1648), 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰ Baker, ‘Sola Fide, Sola Gratia: The Battle for Luther in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985), 119.

their respective views of the law—could be enumerated, and, indeed, were. The 1644 anonymous *Declaration against the Antinomians* identified seven “chief Tenents” held by the antinomians:

- I. That God doth never inflict punishment upon the Elect for their sins.
- II. That God is never angry with his children.
- III. That God sees no sin in those that are his.
- IV. That such as are elected, are at all times beloved of God; in what condition soever they be, be they never so great sinners, yea, in the very act of sinne it self.
- V. That sanctification of life in duties of Piety, is nothing at all esteemed of God.
- VI. That the godly finde no difficulties in the way to Heaven, but live in much pleasure and delight in this world.
- VII. That those who belong to God, are able in this world presently to distinguish betwixt Gods people and the wicked.

In his *Confession of his Faith* (1654), Baxter identified forty tenets of the antinomian teaching with which he disagreed and an astounding one hundred errors made by the antinomians. All of those teachings could indeed be found among the collected writings of those charged with this particular heresy—especially given the fact that much of the antinomian writings could be aptly described as, using J. I. Packer’s words, “rhapsodic and incoherent.”²¹ By the end of the first controversy, an end which was precipitated by the 1655 publication of Baxter’s *Aphorismes of Justification*, however, Baxter focused his opposition to antinomianism on two main themes: the idea of the strict imputation of Christ’s passive and active righteousness and eternal justification.²² By narrowing the focus, Baxter helped identify the core of the debate—even though he did so with an uncanny aversion to succinctness.

As can be seen from Baxter’s focus, the title given to both the controversy itself and the participants in the controversy did not fit precisely. The real point of contention between the two sides stemmed less from their view of the law—though clearly

²¹ Packer, *The Redemption & Restoration of Man* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 202.

²² Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification* (Hague: printed by Abraham Brown, 1655), 31-37, 43-47.

disagreement on that issue did exist—and more from their view of justification and their definition of justification by faith. Ultimately, the disagreement rested on two specific issues which loosely related to Baxter’s own narrow focus: the understanding of the conditionality of the covenant (whether or not faith was required as a condition of the covenant) and the *ordo salutis* (the order of salvation).

C. THE CONDITIONALITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

The antinomians—almost to a person—held to an unconditional new covenant. On this issue, Tobias Crisp provided one of the clearest statements of the typical antinomian view:

I say, *the New Covenant* is without any conditions whatsoever on mans part. Man is tied to no condition, that he must performe, that if he doe not perform, the Covenant is made voide by him.²³

John Saltmarsh forcefully agreed with Crisp, claiming that “[t] he Gospel hath in it no moral condition of any thing to be done of us.”²⁴ Even Traske, who focused extensively on the need for faith to be present in a believer in order to be free from the law, noted that the believer has moved from “conditionall Promises” to “free Promises.”²⁵ Or, according to Eaton, the benefits of the covenant are realized by the believer “objectively and passively...being no agents and doers in this businesse, but meere patients.”²⁶ Thus, the view that, in some form or another, God justified believers without human conditions comprised a common aspect of the teachings of those labeled antinomian. After all, the requirement of human conditions for participation in the covenant would render the reception of Christ “a bargain and sale” rather than a gift.²⁷

This stance on the unconditional nature of the new covenant influenced the view of faith in the antinomian teaching. By definition, faith, inasmuch as it could be said to be *of the*

²³ Crisp, *Christ alone exalted*, 159.

²⁴ Saltmarsh, *Free grace*, 207.

²⁵ Traske, *Treatise of Libertie*, 14.

²⁶ Eaton, *The Honie-combe of Free Justification* (London: printed by R.B. at the charge of Robert Lancaster, 1642), 25.

²⁷ Crisp, *Christ alone exalted* (London: 1643), 64.

believer, could not be a condition of an unconditional covenant. This understanding naturally led to the view of the imputation of Christ's passive and active righteousness which caused Baxter such consternation. Any fulfillments of the old covenant or conditions for entry into the new covenant had to have been completed by Christ and imputed to the believer. Thus, Eaton could argue that "the perfect holinesse and righteousnes...of the humane nature of Christ wherein he performed perfect obedience, both active and passive in fulfilling the whole law of God, is the formall cause of our Justification."²⁸

The response from the opposition, rooted as it was in the prevalent preparationist teaching of the day, took exception to the idea that the new covenant required nothing, including faith, of its participants. These exceptions were bolstered by the relatively recent shift in the theological understanding of a covenant—"a mutual agreement between two or more persons to do or refrain from doing certain acts"²⁹—being distinct from a testament—"a formal declaration of will".³⁰ In this view, the new covenant was indeed a mutual agreement with requirements for all parties involved. At the least, the human participant in the new covenant needed to fulfill the requirement of faith. In fact, at its core, Christ's salvific work on the cross and at the resurrection could be found in His purchasing a new covenant with relaxed requirements. To use Baxter's words, the new covenant which Christ purchased required simply the "sincerity only of our faith and obedience"³¹ rather than the perfect obedience required by the old covenant. Likewise, Edward Norrice (1584-1659) relied on the conditional aspect of the gospel as a weapon against John Traske and his like-minded theologians to highlight the necessity of human fulfillment of the conditional aspect

²⁸ Eaton, *The Honie-combe of Free Justification*, 262-63. It should be noted that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and, even more explicitly, the *Savoy Declaration of Faith* both supported this antinomian view of imputed passive and active righteousness. See Art. XI.

²⁹ *OED online*, 'covenant, n.', accessed Nov. 16 2010.

³⁰ Weir, *The Origins of Federal Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 52, 58. Note the shift in English translations from the use of the term *testament* to *covenant* as a translation of the Hebrew ברית (*barit*) and the Greek διαθήκη (*diathēkē*).

³¹ Baxter, *Apology* (London: printed by A.M. for Thomas Underhill...and Francis Tyton, 1654), 45. See Arnold, 'The Reformed Theology of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)', DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2009 [2010], 182-84.

of the covenant.³² Stephen Lobb also highlighted the necessity of human faith as a condition of participating in the covenant of grace. Despite Baxter's acquiescence to some form of imputed active righteousness, this side of the controversy constantly held that all the necessary conditional aspects of the covenant had to be fulfilled by the human participant.³³ Thus, the strict imputation of Christ's active righteousness could not be true.

In his rejoinder against the antinomian view of the unconditional covenant, Samuel Rutherford provided a glimpse of the type of pedantic arguments that could stem from this discussion. Rutherford ceded ground to Tobias Crisp, allowing that faith and good works, indeed, "are not the meritorious, the efficient cause or way, nor the formall covenant-condition" by which a person participates in the new covenant.³⁴ However, in almost the same stroke of the pen, he argued that good works were indeed "conditions without which wee cannot bee saved".³⁵ The difference, for Rutherford, could be found in the definition of *condition*. A condition could either be seen as a formal cause or as a coincidental occurrence. The latter applied to good works and faith regarding the covenant, while the former did not. However, Crisp, et al., would have nothing of this argument, denying any human condition which could be seen as necessary in order for the covenant to be fulfilled. Those necessary conditions simply served to make salvation achievable by works rather than by free grace.

D. THE ORDO SALUTIS

The fact that the antinomian controversy largely hinged on the conditionality of the new covenant had natural repercussions for the respective understandings of the *ordo salutis*. If faith could not be seen as a condition of the covenant, as the so-called antinomians argued, justification must occur without faith. Or, in other words, justification must precede faith in the *ordo*. Indeed, the antinomians recognized this logical necessity,

³² Norris, *A treatise* (London: Printed [by Augustine Mathewes] for Robert Milbourne at the Vnicorne neere Fleet bridge, 1636).

³³ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (London: printed by Robert White for Nevill Simmons...1675), I.ii.87.

³⁴ Rutherford, *Survey of the spirituall antichrist*, 39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

and, for the most part, owned it as their doctrine. Thus, Crisp confidently averred that “Christ doth justifie a person before he doth believe.”³⁶ Likewise, Saltmarsh, quoting the controversialist and Church of England clergyman, Thomas Rogers (d. 1616), noted that all works, including faith, “done before Justification please not God.”³⁷

This view of the *ordo* allowed Crisp to defend the idea that God justified the elect from eternity past. Justification for all the elect, he argued, occurred at once. Thus, “the elect child in the womb,” just like “those now in glory,” “had their first purity in the womb.”³⁸ David Como has documented a similar vein in the teachings of Richard Rothwell who claimed that “all the elect...are justified, sanctified and in the womb.”³⁹

Logic also dictated the theology of those who opposed the antinomians. Stephen Lobb voiced this viewpoint well when he argued that:

Faith, and *this union* [with Christ] is in *order of nature antecedent* to an *actual imputation of Christs Righteousness*, and consequently, *before our actual Justification in the sight of God.*⁴⁰

On this issue, Lobb alertly cited John Owen in support, claiming that Owen argued that justification requires faith “as *antecedent* to our actual Justification in God’s sight.”⁴¹ In his typical manner, Baxter complicated the issue by delineating between pardon and justification, holding that the former immediately follows faith and begins the process resulting in the latter.⁴² For the matter at hand, the complexities of Baxter’s view need not be parsed. The relevant issue is the fact that, according to him, pardon preceded justification and both were precipitated by faith. Baxter provided some final clarity for this controversy when, in his *Confession* [sic], he explicitly noted

³⁶ Crisp, *Christ alone exalted*, 168.

³⁷ Saltmarsh, *Free grace*, 209.

³⁸ Crisp, *Christ alone exalted*, 553.

³⁹ Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 205, citing Bodleian Tanner MS 72, fol. 129r.

⁴⁰ Lobb, *The Glory of free grace* (London: printed by T. S. for B. Alsop, at the Angel and Bible against the stocks-market, 1680), 75.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, app. xviii.

⁴² Baxter, *Universal Redemption* (London: printed for John Salusbury, 1694), 32.

that “conversion and believing” necessarily came before justification.⁴³ These noteworthy publications neither served as the climax of this controversy nor as the final blow. However, the opponents of antinomianism did appear to gain the upper hand in the printed debate around this time with the onslaught of publications ending in the mid 1650s.⁴⁴ At that point, Baxter evidently considered the controversy to be settled.

Clearly, the issues on the table moved far beyond the mere discussion of the continued use of the law, as the name of the controversy suggests. Although the differing sides reached no agreement, the disputed views of the conditionality of the covenant and the *ordo salutis* took a backseat to other, more pressing matters, such as the soon to be passed *Act of Uniformity* (1662). As has been seen even from the publication date of some of the works quoted above, the controversy never completely ceased.

III. THE SECOND ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY

After the Glorious Revolution and the accession of William and Mary seemingly ended the threat of Popery, the godly, who had largely spent the intervening years focused on more pressing matters, could once again return to in-house doctrinal disputes. Within a year, antinomianism (and charges of such) arose from the ashes of the Restoration Church. With the controversy having subsided at least for a time, however, Baxter’s frustration at the seemingly sudden re-ignition seems quite understandable. The re-publication of Tobias Crisp’s collection of sermons marked the beginning of what has been labeled the second antinomian controversy. While some of the same issues did return in the last decade of the seventeenth century, the controversy was hardly identical. In fact, for the most part the

⁴³ Baxter, *Confession of Faith* (London: printed by R.W. for Tho. Underhil, and Fra. Tyton, and are to be sold at the Anchor and Bible in Pauls Churchyard, and at the three Daggers in Fleetstreet, 1655), 289.

⁴⁴ ESTC lists 59 works with ‘antinomian’ in the title from 1640-1659, 4 such works from 1660-1679, and 24 from 1680-1700, demonstrating in some way the high points of these controversies. Of course, these statistics must be viewed in the appropriate context. The ebb and flow of official censorship and freedom of the press certainly played a role in determining these numbers.

entire focus shifted from the conditionality of the new covenant and the *ordo salutis* to the related question of the actual number of divine meta-covenants.⁴⁵ This discussion subsumed those of the previous controversy and allowed for much more minute distinctions to take center-stage.

A. THE NUMBER OF COVENANTS

At this point in English theology, the understanding of the covenants as organizing systematic principles remained inchoate with both two-covenant and three-covenant systems receiving ample support during the first half of the seventeenth century.⁴⁶ Despite the differing views on this issue between the participants of the first antinomian controversy, the number of covenants largely did not become a point of contention during that edition of the debate. Richard Baxter did wholeheartedly adopt a three-covenant system at least by 1658, on the heels of that first controversy. In this system, Baxter identified the *Covenant of Nature or Innocence*, between God and “*Mankind in Adam*,”⁴⁷ the *Covenant of Mediation*, between God the Father and the Incarnate Son,⁴⁸ and the *Covenant of Grace*, enacted

⁴⁵ This term refers to the organizing covenants as defined by the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most theologians of this era identify two or three meta-covenants, variously labeled the *Covenant of Works or Nature*, the *Covenant of Redemption* and the *Covenant of Grace*.

⁴⁶ The best work on the development of the covenant systems remains David Weir’s *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought*. Also see the discussions of this issue in Rolston, “Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970); Lillback, “Ursinus’ Development of the Covenant of Creation: a Debt to Melancthon or Calvin?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981); Arnold, “The Reformed Theology of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)”, DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2009 [i.e., 2010], 132-45.

⁴⁷ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (London: printed by Robert White for Nevill Simmons...1675), second part, sect. II.16.

⁴⁸ Baxter, “A Defence of Christ, and Free Grace: Against the Subverters, Commonly Called, Antinomians or Libertines; who Ignorantly Blaspheme Christ on Pretence of extolling Him.” in *The Scripture Gospel defended, and Christ, grace, and free justification vindicated against the libertines... in two books: the first, a breviat of fifty controversies about justification...the second upon the sudden reviving of antinomianism...and the re-printing of Dr. Crisp’s sermons with additions* Re-paginated addition (London: printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1690), 10.

between God and humanity.⁴⁹ Baxter's view of the three-covenant system became the key point of disparity for the controversy at the end of the century.

In his response to the "sudden reviving of antinomianism... and the re-printing of Dr. Crisp's sermons,"⁵⁰ Baxter based his attack against Crisp on his view of the covenants. Specifically, Baxter cited his understanding of a "Law peculiar to the Mediator" as the "*Covenant between the Father and the Son*,"⁵¹ the same covenant which he elsewhere labeled the *Covenant of Mediation*. This particular covenant placed specific conditions on Christ, namely:

That he should perfectly obey the Law of Innocency so far as it was fitted to his case, and overcome the Tempter...[t]hat he should perfectly keep the Law of *Moses*, so far as it agreed to him...[and t]hat he should perfectly do all that was proper to the Redeemer, in being a Sacrifice for sin, clearing and publishing the New Covenant...his promised reward being the success of his undertaking, the saving of his Church and his Glory, in the glorifying of God the Father...⁵²

Significantly, this covenant only involved the First and Second Persons of the Trinity, and, even more importantly, the conditional aspects of the covenant applied only to Christ. In other words, Christ's fulfillment of the stated conditions only served to qualify Christ as the Mediator. In fact, Baxter clarified this stance only a few pages later:

Christ's *Perfect Obedience* to the Law of Innocency, exempteth us from the necessity of perfect obedience to it and from all duty of obeying it as the condition of life: But he did not *Repent and Believe* in obedience to his *own Law of Grace*, to exempt us from the necessity of

⁴⁹ At times, Baxter combined the first covenant with the third, labeling this covenant 'the Law of Nature and Grace.' Baxter, *Confession of Faith*, 129.

⁵⁰ Baxter, *Scripture Gospel Defended* (London: printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1690), title page.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Repenting and Believing, which we must do our selves by his grace, or perish.⁵³

Baxter used the term Law of Grace as a synonym for the third covenant, the covenant which was made between God and humanity. That covenant, too, was conditional.

When Baxter died in 1691, the *de facto* leadership of his party passed to Daniel Williams (c. 1643-1716) and, to a lesser extent, Samuel Clark (1626-1701). For the most part, these Baxterians followed the covenant outline established by Baxter and continued to use that outline as a tool for opposing the new Crispians, as these antinomians were often called. Williams explicated their position well when he noted that the *Covenant of Grace* promised blessings “to lower Degrees of Duty” “than the Covenant of Works had.”⁵⁴ That lesser degree of duty, required by the third covenant, provided a convenient role in the Baxterian system for humanity to meet the condition of faith.⁵⁵ Significantly, Baxter did not allow for this view of faith as a qualifying condition for participation in the third covenant to be equated with the instrumental view of faith common among his Reformed counterparts.⁵⁶ Rather, the third covenant required sincere obedience. The Baxterians understood (and accepted) that this view of the conditional aspect of the covenant practically left justification in an incomplete or imperfect state because the believer must be “first Righteous and then pardon’d, and not on the contrary, first pardon’d, and then Righteous.”⁵⁷

The opposition to the Baxterians came largely from Isaac Chauncy (1632-1712), the Independent theologian who succeeded (one pastor removed) the eminent John Owen (1616-1683) as pastor of the Bury Street Independent congregation. Chauncy did not miss the importance of the three-covenant view to the Baxterian system of justification. Accordingly, Chauncy became

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁴ Williams, *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated* (London: printed for John Dunton, 1692), sig. A5v.

⁵⁵ Clark, *Scripture Justification* (London: printed by S. Bridge, for Tho. Parkhurst, 1698), 19.

⁵⁶ Baxter, *Of Justification* (London: printed by R.W. for Nevil Simmons ... and are to be sold by him...and by Nathaniel Elkins, 1658), 162. For the Reformed view, cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, *Second London Confession*, and *Savoy Declaration*, Art. XI.

⁵⁷ Clark, *Scripture Justification*, 18-19.

a staunch defender of a two-covenant system, arguing that it maintained the appropriate roles of grace and faith in justification. On this, Chauncy joined several well-known theologians such as Samuel Petto and even the Westminster Assembly which, in Art. VII of their confession, described two covenants: “a covenant of works...upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” and “a second, commonly called the covenant of grace.”⁵⁸ Chauncy and the other defenders of Crispianism firmly rooted their defense in a federal view of those covenants. Thus, Adam represented all of humanity in the first covenant while Christ represented the elect in the second.

Some of these Crispians, such as the Particular Baptist leader, Benjamin Keach (1640-1704),⁵⁹ recognized the danger of making the second covenant completely unconditional, namely that an unconditional covenant between God the Father and the federal head of the elect would undermine the conditional aspect of the first covenant. To say it Biblically, it would destroy the law rather than fulfill it. Thus, Keach, along with Chauncy, argued for a “twofold, or a mixt Covenant [of grace]”⁶⁰ which allowed Christ to fulfill the conditional aspects of the *Covenant of Grace*—part of which included active obedience to the first covenant, leaving the second covenant conditional for Him but unconditional for the elect. To complicate matters, these theologians engaged in a detailed, semantic discussion of types of conditions—federal conditions, those which procured the result, and conditions of connexion, or necessary incidentals (such as

⁵⁸Notably, Chauncy’s predecessor, John Owen, held to a three-covenant system, splitting the *Covenant of Grace* into a *Covenant of Redemption* and a *Covenant of Grace*. See Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (London: printed for R. Boulter, 1677), 268. Cf. Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant* (London: printed for Eliz. Calvert...1674).

⁵⁹It should be noted that many of the theologians who defended Crisp did not accept all of his theology as their own. Such was the case with Keach who argued that he would ‘rather erre on their side, who strive to exalt wholly the Free Grace of God [i.e. Crisp], than on theirs, who seek to darken it and magnifie the Power of the Creature’. Keach, *Marrow of True Justification* (London: printed for Dorman Newman...1692), sig. A2r-Bv. Other theologians who were branded as Crispians included the Particular Baptists Hanserd Knollys (1599?-1691) and Thomas Edwards (d. 1699) as well as the Congregationalists Nathaniel Mather (1630-1697) and George Cokayn (bap. 1620, d. 1691).

⁶⁰Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace* (London: printed by S. Bridge and sold by Mary Fabian...Joseph Collier...and William Marshall, 1698), 172.

creation, because nothing could happen for a person who was not created). This discussion bore striking similarities to the views Rutherford expressed earlier in the century. In the end, the Crispians focused their polemics on Christ's absolute procurement of covenantal blessing for the elect rather than on the role of faith in that procurement. In other words, the Crispians moved away from a discussion of justification *sola fide* to a discussion of justification *solus Christus*.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE END OF THE HAPPY UNION AND OTHER ADVERSE EFFECTS

Obviously, the discussion surrounding the doctrine of justification and the covenants during the second antinomian controversy focused on rather minute points of theology. Throughout, the discussion became heated with the brandings of *antinomian* and *neonomian* being some of the least offensive of the common labels launched at opponents. Finally, in 1694, this heated disagreement—which largely fell along proto-denominational lines of Congregationalists and Presbyterians—resulted in the dissolution of the so-called Happy Union and the end of those groups' joint lectures at Pinners' Hall. That divorce, however, was merely the final by-product. The real dispute, as has been seen, came from an utter difference in the definitions of justification by faith proposed by the respective parties over the course of six decades and two different, albeit related, controversies. The modern identification of these two disputes as mere repetitions of the same controversy—although supported by Baxter's noted surprise—ignores the changes in the doctrine of justification, the differences in the understanding of the role of faith in justification, and the shifts in the views of the covenants which made that justification possible. In other words, the antinomian controversies were far more complex and the ramifications for the doctrine of justification far more important than their polemical name may imply.

THE GOSPEL AND WATER BAPTISM: ANOTHER LOOK AT ACTS 2:38, WITH A NEW AFTERWORD¹

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I. PROLOGUE

Is the demand for baptism (i.e., immersion in water) a part of the gospel? Should every evangelistic sermon and every gospel tract, in order to be Biblical, include a demand for baptism? Should the unbeliever hear in clear and forceful terms that unless he is baptized he cannot be saved, cannot receive eternal life, cannot have the forgiveness of sins? There are many who believe that baptism is essential for salvation and is of the essence of the gospel. Many of these same people point to Acts 2:38, 22:16, and 1 Pet 3:21 (along with other verses) to support their belief.

Many who maintain that baptism is part of the gospel are sincere, thoughtful, Bible-loving, Bible-believing people. In fact, other than their demand for baptism, many of these same people could be considered fundamentalists. I know this for a fact because for years I was taught, and believed, and even preached that baptism was necessary for salvation. I was a minister in a denomination that proclaimed this position.

I no longer hold this position and I have left that denomination in which I proclaimed this false gospel. However, I bear no ill will toward any members of my former denomination. I left it long enough ago that I can now look back and evaluate my experience with them with objectivity, love, and humor. Nor do

¹ Editor's Note: The author, a former Churches of Christ minister, wrote his master's thesis on the gospel and water baptism. This article was originally published in *JOTGES* (Spring 1990). He has added several pages at the end as an afterword, and we have changed a long footnote into an appendix.

I have feelings of superiority in my present church. I remember all too well ministers of other churches who failed to answer squarely my questions regarding Acts 2:38, 22:16, and 1 Pet 3:21. They would cite Ephesians 2 or Romans 4 to prove that salvation was by grace through faith alone. However, when I asked them about those passages which seemed to teach that baptism was necessary, I was told that they were “problem passages” and that they were “unclear” and that one did not build a theology on passages of that nature. I eventually came to see that the problem was that they did not know what to do with these verses. To dismiss them, sometimes in a cavalier manner, was their way of ignoring a crack in their theological system. (Denial is an oft-used method when applying the Word of God to our lives and theology—despite our denials to the contrary.)

Over the years I have come to see that Acts 2:38, 22:16, and 1 Pet 3:21 can be understood at face value while, at the same time, maintaining with integrity the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. Therefore, it is my hope that over a period of time I will be able to write a number of articles dealing with each of these “problem passages,” thus sharing with the reader the fruit of my study and encouraging him or her to hold fast with confidence the gospel of grace through faith alone.

II. INTRODUCTION

Much heat has been generated by theological discussions and debates over whether or not Acts 2:38 and its demand for baptism is part of the gospel. One humorous example of this heat is the account (probably apocryphal) of a youngster who was heard to say, “Give me an axe and two .38s and I’ll whip any Baptist preacher in the world.”² Another example, not so humorous, is

² Bob L. Ross, *Campbellism—Its History and Heresies* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1976), 85. Ross has written two books about the Churches of Christ and their position on baptism. The one quoted here is the larger and more comprehensive of the two. The other book, entitled *Acts 2:38 and Baptismal Regeneration* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1976), limits itself more to a refutation of the position of the Churches of Christ on Acts 2:38. Both books are not above sarcasm and are, in my opinion, inadequate treatments of the arguments of the Churches of Christ. In fact, Ross does not give anywhere near enough space to the two strongest passages in favor of the Churches of Christ position, i.e., Acts 22:16 and 1 Pet 3:21. In other words, Ross is guilty of an old debater’s method of attack: Hit the

of a preacher who, commenting upon the motives of those who disagreed with what he thought was the obvious interpretation of this verse, wrote, “One has to *want* to misunderstand that verse in order to do so” (italics in the original).³ While many more examples could be cited, these are sufficient to indicate the intensity of emotion which discussions and debates over this verse and the subject of baptism can produce. These examples also remind us of the importance of stating accurately, evaluating fairly, and discussing politely the various interpretations of Acts 2:38.

The purpose, then, of this article is to explore the relationship between the demand for baptism and the promise of the remission of sins in Acts 2:38 in order to answer a larger theological question: Is baptism necessary in order to receive the remission of sins? In order to find the best possible answer to this emotional question, we will state and evaluate the various options found within the commentary tradition.

Acts 2:38 reads as follows:

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 gift of the Holy Spirit.”

III. THE SACRAMENTARIAN INTERPRETATION

A. DEFINITION

The first view to be considered might be called the sacramentarian interpretation.⁴ This interpretation holds that baptism

weakest points in your opponent’s argument and hope that others ignore your opponent’s strongest points. Debaters win debates, but it is to be questioned whether or not they find truth.

³Mark Lewis, “The Necessity of Baptism for Salvation,” *Firm Foundation* (May 3, 1983): 6.

⁴Some in the Churches of Christ may, understandably, object to this designation because they do not see baptism as a sacrament, but rather as a command to be obeyed by a believing individual. J. W. Roberts, a Churches of Christ Greek scholar (Ph.D. in Greek at the University of Texas) and Professor of New Testament at Abilene Christian University has objected to the understanding that baptism is a sacrament. He comments: “But is there

is necessary *in order to* receive the remission of sins and that the phrase “remission of sins” is a synonym for salvation and receiving eternal life. This view would interpret Acts 2:38 in a straightforward manner: “Repent and be baptized in order to (receive) the remission of sins.”⁵ In other words, unless a person is baptized he *cannot* be saved.

no choice between baptism as a sacrament and baptism as an empty symbol? Is there no choice between the understanding of baptism as a sacrament in which the validity is in the act performed in the name of Jesus without regard to whether the recipient is an infant or a hypocrite (that is, without regard to faith and penitence of the baptized) and an understanding of baptism as an act of faith of a penitent obeying a command which the Lord in his own name has made a condition of pardon? The preaching of the Restoration Movement has been as strongly against any magical or ‘sacramental’ efficacy in baptism as anyone else. They have repudiated the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration and infant baptism.

It is quite another thing to insist on the Bible teaching that baptism to a penitent believer is for (in order to) the remission of sins. This is the form the proposition usually takes in public discussions. The New Covenant sees baptism as an act of faith (Gal 3:26-27; Col 2:12f.); it is part of that ‘obedience of faith’ unto which the gospel was proclaimed (Rom 16:26); it is connected with faith as a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16) and with repentance as a condition of pardon or remission (Acts 2:38). It is precisely in this respect that the Campbells and Scott in the early Restoration Movement saw their declaration of baptism for remission of sins upon a confession of faith in Christ as a ‘restoration’ of the primitive practice following the centuries of ‘sacramentalism’ in Roman and Protestant theology.” See J. W. Roberts, (“Baptism for Remission of Sins—A Critique,” *Restoration Quarterly* 1 [1957]: 226ff. For a similar viewpoint, yet one held by a Baptist, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 7, 13, and his *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966), 20-21.

The designation “Sacramentarian Interpretation” is mine. If any object to it they may substitute whatever term they wish to describe this position (provided they avoid such tendentious appellations as “The Only True, Correct, and Biblical Interpretation”).

⁵ Alexander Campbell published a translation of the Bible entitled *The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ, Commonly Styled the New Testament*, which was shortened to *The Living Oracles* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1954). To this translation Campbell also wrote prefaces, various emendations, and an appendix, all of which are quite interesting. In other words, this translation had Campbell’s “seal of approval.” Therefore, it is of interest to note its translation of Acts 2:38, “And Peter said to them, Reform, and be each of you immersed in the name of Jesus Christ, in order to the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

B. DEFENDERS

With varying degrees of dogmatism, those denominations which are historically related to Alexander Campbell and his efforts to reform the Church (called “the Restoration Movement”) hold this position. These denominations are, in alphabetical order, the Christian Church, the Churches of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ.⁶ Of these three, the most vocal in their defense have been the Churches of Christ.⁷ It should be noted that the Mormons,⁸ the Christadelphians,⁹ and the Roman Catholic Church¹⁰ largely agree with this interpretation.

⁶Of the many works dealing with the history of the Restoration Movement, some of the best are James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Co., 1962); Louis Cochran and Bess White Cochran, *Captives of the Word* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1969); J. W. Shepherd, *The Church, the Falling Away, and the Restoration* (Nashville: gospel Advocate Co., 1964); and Earl West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3 vols. (Nashville: gospel Advocate Co., 1965).

⁷For example, see the large volume of recorded debates by Churches of Christ preachers and scholars, a sample of which might include *Hardeman-Bogard Debate* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1938); *The Nashville Debate on Baptism* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1951); *Smith-Bogard Debate: The Plan of Salvation* (Dallas: gospel Broadcast, 1953); *Warren-Ballard Debate* (Longview, TX: Telegram Book Co., 1953).

⁸It is most interesting to note that two associates of Alexander Campbell left him. One of them, Sidney Rigdon, left to join the Mormons (Murch, *Christians Only*, 120). For more information about the activities of Rigdon after he espoused Mormonism and about his high status and influence in that movement, cf. John Ahmanson’s *Secret History: A Translation of “Vor Tids Muhamed,”* translated by Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984).

⁹It is also interesting to note that the second of the two associates who left Campbell, Dr. John Thomas, formed the Christadelphians (Murch, *Christians Only*, 120). Thus two cults were formed by Campbell’s followers. We, of course, must avoid the trap of guilt by association. Many of the doctrines of both the Mormons and the Christadelphians are strongly denounced by members of the Churches of Christ.

¹⁰Francois Amiot, in the Roman Catholic *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), edited by Xavier Leon-Dufour, writes: “But faith in Christ does not only mean that the mind accepts the messianic message; it involves a total conversion, a complete abandonment to Christ, who transforms the whole of a man’s life. It normally leads to a request for baptism, which is its sacrament and in the reception of which it finds its perfection. Paul never separates the two, and when he speaks of justification by faith it is only in contrast with the alleged justification by the works of the Law, to which the Judaizers appealed. He always takes it for granted that the profession of faith is crowned by the reception of baptism (Gal 3:26f.). By faith a man responds to the divine call that has become clear to him through the preaching of the apostles (Rom 10:14f.), and this response is, moreover,

C. DEFENSE

This position, as I have noted, has been held with varying degrees of dogmatism. Some, like the Churches of Christ, would hold that the demand for baptism as a condition for salvation is absolute and has no exceptions (i.e., unless a person is baptized he *cannot* be saved). However, others are a little less dogmatic and would see Acts 2:38 as expressing the “normal” manner in which people are saved and are also willing to admit the possibility that a person could be saved without baptism. An example of this less dogmatic position would be, surprisingly, Alexander Campbell himself.¹¹

Be that as it may, I will record here the defense of the more absolute and dogmatic position (i.e., the position that says that

the work of grace (Eph 2:8). At baptism the Spirit takes possession of the believer, incorporates him into the body of the Church and gives him the certainty that he has entered the Kingdom of God.

“It is quite clear that the sacrament does not act in any magic way. The total conversion that it calls for must be the start of a new life in a spirit of unshakable faithfulness,” (“Baptism,” *Dictionary*, 42-43).

¹¹ In his famous reply to the “Lunenburg Letter,” Campbell responded to a lady who wrote him asking if the unimmersed were Christian. In part, he replied: “Who is a Christian? I answer, Everyone that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will...I cannot...make any one duty the standard of Christian state or character, not even immersion into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and in my heart regard all that have been sprinkled in infancy without their own knowledge and consent, as aliens from Christ and the well-groomed hope of heaven.

“Should I find a paedo-baptist more intelligent in the Christian Scriptures, more spiritually-minded and more devoted to the Lord than a Baptist, or one immersed on a profession of the ancient faith, I would not hesitate a moment in giving the preference of my heart to him that loved most. Did I act otherwise, I would be a pure sectarian, a Pharisee among Christians. Still I will be asked, How do I know that anyone love my Master but by his obedience to His commandments? I answer, In no way. But mark, I do not substitute obedience to one commandment, for universal or even general obedience. And should I see a sectarian Baptist or a paedo-baptist more spiritually-minded, more generally conformed to the requisitions of the Messiah, than the one who precisely acquiesces with me in the theory or practice of immersion as I teach, doubtless the former rather than the latter, would have my cordial approbation and love as a Christian. So I judge, and so I feel. It is the image of Christ the Christian looks for and loves; and this does not consist in being exact in a few items, but in general devotion to the whole truth as far as known,” (*Millennial Harbinger*, September, 1837). For further analysis of this letter see Glenn Paden, “The Lunenburg Letter,” *Restoration Quarterly* 1 (1958): 13-18.

if a person is not baptized he *cannot* be saved). The defense of this interpretation can be summarized in four points.

First, this interpretation has in its favor the *prima facie* reading of the text. In other words, they take the passage at face value. In fact, it is argued, that if theological issues were not involved one would naturally come to this interpretation.¹² Also, the force of the *prima facie* reading is strengthened upon consideration of many of the proposed alternatives which fail to give a convincing assurance of their validity (i.e., some of the proposed alternatives give evidence of a special pleading and use lexical and grammatical subtleties in the hope of finding anything that will support a meaning other than the *prima facie* reading of the text).¹³

Second, this interpretation harmonizes easily with other passages, also taken *prima facie*, which connect baptism with the remission of sins and salvation. Two especially strong passages that are consistent with this interpretation are Acts 22:16 (“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”) and 1 Pet 3:21 (“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism [not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God], through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”). Thus this interpretation provides theological consistency on the subject of the necessity of baptism for salvation.

Third, this interpretation gives a stated purpose of the demand for baptism. Baptism is for (in order to receive) the remission of sins. Some of the other interpretations of this verse leave the demand for baptism unexplained. In fact, other than Acts 2:38 and 22:16 and 1 Pet 3:21 is there any verse in the NT which *clearly* states the purpose of water baptism? Would God leave such an important command and act unexplained in all of the NT?

Fourth, this interpretation places an emphasis on Acts 2:38 that, according to the defenders of this position, fits the

¹² Roberts, “Baptism,” *Reformation Quarterly* 1(1957): 233.

¹³ This should become evident as we discuss the various alternatives stated in this article. This is the reason why it was so difficult for me to leave the Churches of Christ: I could see clearly my position, but to refer to Greek and other grammatical niceties which are not reflected in any well-known translation was to leave me unable to judge whether what I was being told was the truth or not.

uniqueness of the occasion in Acts 2. Acts 2 records the beginning of the Church Age and contains the *first* recorded evangelistic sermon after the death and resurrection of Christ. For the *first* time in this dispensation, people ask what they must do in light of the fact that the Messiah was crucified. They are told to repent and be baptized in order to be saved (cf. also Acts 2:40). Because of the uniqueness of Acts 2 (i.e., its place in the dispensational scheme of the history of salvation) the quest for a proof-text for the terms of salvation should start here rather than in Ephesians 2 or Romans 4. Acts 2 is, as one Churches of Christ author describes it, “the hub of the Bible.”¹⁴

D. DEFICIENCIES

Obviously, this interpretation is highly debated and a number of objections have been made stating what are believed to be its deficiencies. We will cite only a few of these objections.

First, the most popular objection to the sacramentarian interpretation is theological: If correct, this interpretation would make salvation the result of faith and works. Ephesians 2:8-9 and Rom 4:4-5 and 11:6 are quite clear that salvation is by faith and *not* works. According to this objection, the sacramentarian interpretation makes baptism a means by which a man actively participates in receiving salvation, i.e., he does something: He works to get salvation.

However, in all fairness, it should be said that this objection has received a strong counter-objection. *The Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, a work of Roman Catholic scholars, points out that faith is contrasted with works of Law, not obedience.¹⁵ Also, some Churches of Christ writers point out that because baptism is a once-for-all, non-repeatable act and is related to the free gift of salvation, baptism is, therefore, not to be considered a “work.”¹⁶ In this there may even be some support from Evangelicals who, while rejecting the position that baptism is necessary for salvation, would admit that it is not a work, at least on the basis that the passive voice (“let every one of you *be*

¹⁴ In fact, this is the title of James D. Bales’s exposition of Acts 2. Cf. *The Hub of the Bible* (Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1960). Bales, a Ph.D. from UCLA, was Professor of Christian Doctrine at Harding University, Searcy, Arkansas (a Churches of Christ school).

¹⁵ Cf. footnote 10.

¹⁶ See Appendix 1.

baptized") indicates that the one being baptized is not "doing" anything.¹⁷

Second, this interpretation contradicts the gospel of John's teaching on the means of receiving eternal life.¹⁸ This gospel, based upon the purpose statement of John 20:30-31, nowhere makes baptism a condition for receiving eternal life. In fact, if baptism is necessary for receiving eternal life, the gospel of John, a self-designated "gospel tract" (John 20:31), with its sole emphasis on faith, is both incomplete and, to that extent, misleading.

Third, this interpretation makes the "gift of the Holy Spirit" something that is given *after* baptism. However, it is clear that Cornelius received the gift of the Holy Spirit *before* his baptism (Acts 10:44-48; cf. especially 10:45 where the identical phrase "the gift of the Holy Spirit" used in Acts 2:38 occurs). Also Acts 19:2 indicates Paul's assumption that the Spirit was given at the moment of faith. Efforts by Churches of Christ writers to explain away this difficulty have not been successful.¹⁹

In summary, while this view appears to be grammatically strong, it is theologically weak.

¹⁷ An example of this is a Dallas Theological Seminary professor who readily admitted to me that baptism was not a work because it was related to salvation (however, not in the same cause and effect relationship that the Churches of Christ taught).

¹⁸ The only place in John where baptism might be considered as having some bearing upon salvation is Jesus' reference to water in His conversation with Nicodemus: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). For an excellent refutation of this view and a statement of the various options possible, cf. James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975): 1:243-48; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 215-19; Zane C. Hodges, "Water and Spirit—John 3:5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (July-Sept, 1978), 206-20. The strength of the position that water baptism is indeed meant in John 3:5 primarily rests upon the assumption that the mention of water refers to water baptism. This assumption is gratuitous.

¹⁹ Cf., for example, the already cited work of James D. Bales, *The Case of Cornelius*. Bales tries to argue that the gift of the Holy Spirit which Cornelius received was not the same gift of the Holy Spirit promised in Acts 2:38. This fails to seriously grapple with the fact that the same phrase is used in both Acts 2 and 10. The same author, the same speaker, in the same book, in the same kind of context, the same phrase—with two different meanings? This is most unlikely.

IV. THE CAUSAL *EIS* INTERPRETATION

A. DEFINITION

This interpretation understands the preposition *eis* (“for”) in Acts 2:38 to be causal, indicating the reason or *cause* antecedent to the act of baptism, rather than telic, indicating purpose or result. Accordingly, Acts 2:38 should be translated: “Repent and be baptized...*because* of the remission of sins.” Thus salvation occurred before, not at, the moment of baptism.

B. DEFENDERS

This interpretation has the support of such outstanding evangelical scholars, past and present, as W. A. Criswell, Julius R. Mantey, A. T. Robertson, Charles C. Ryrie, and Kenneth S. Wuest.²⁰ Also, the eminent British grammarian, Nigel Turner, admits that in some contexts, such as Acts 2:38, a causal usage is possible if demanded by one’s theology.²¹

C. DEFENSE

This position has been supported basically for two reasons. First, this interpretation is able to maintain an evangelical theology, since it holds that salvation is by faith alone—not faith plus baptism.

Second, this interpretation has been defended by comparing parallel passages where a causal usage is possible. These passages are Matt 3:11; 10:41; 12:41; Rom 1:16; 4:20; 11:32. To use just one of these parallels, Matt 12:41 states that the people of Nineveh repented *because of (eis)* Jonah’s preaching. To say that

²⁰ W. A. Criswell, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1978), 96; H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 103-104; also Ralph Marcus, “The Causal Use of *Eis* in the New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Studies* 70 (1951): 45-48; and “On Causal *Eis* Again,” *Journal of Biblical Studies* 70 (1951): 309-11; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 389; also his *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 3:34-36; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961), 24; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 3:76-77.

²¹ Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1963), 3:266.

they repented “for,” or “in order to,” the preaching of Jonah is impossible. They heard his message and then repented. Other parallels have been found in extra-biblical Greek by Mantey.²² Some support comes from the overlap between *eis* and *en* (“in,” “by”) and since *en* has some causal force it is possible that *eis* has some too.

D. DEFICIENCIES

Despite the respected and scholarly defenders of this position, the weaknesses of this position have limited its acceptance.

First, although it is “commentary counting” and, therefore, no sure proof of truth, this interpretation has found limited support from other Greek scholars.²³ Neither Liddell-Scott nor BAGD lists any causal usage for *eis* in their respective Greek lexicons. Furthermore, BAGD cites Acts 2:38 under the category of “purpose.” A causal *eis* is not a normal usage and may indicate special pleading.²⁴

Second, the reasons the causal *eis* sounds plausible is because, as J. W. Roberts has pointed out,

... it has long been noted, even by ancient writers,
that there is little difference between causal and

²² Cf. footnote 20.

²³ Roberts observes that the following do not accept this position: “Thayer (p. 94); AG (p. 240); Zorell, F. *Lexicon Graecum Novi Testamenti* (Paris, P. Lethuilleus, 1931); Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (N.Y., Scribner’s, 1885), p. 126f.; Albrecht Oepke in *Theologisches Woerterbuch*, Vol. I. p. 537; Grundmann on sin in *Theologisches Woerterbuch*, Vol. I, p. 308.” See his “Baptism,” 227.

Also Roberts notes: “One finds *eis* listed for this passage as purpose (final or telic) in the following works: Winer, *N. T. Grammar* (p. 397); Vincent, M. R., *Word Studies in the N.T.* (p. 280); R. J. Knowling, *Expositor’s Greek New Testament*; E. DeWitt Burton, *International Critical Commentary on Galatians*; C. F. D. Moule, *Idiom Book of N. T. Greek* (p. 70); F. F. Bruce’s new commentary on *Acts* (75-77), etc.” (“Baptism,” 228.)

²⁴ It is interesting to note that the only translation I found which adopted the causal usage was Kenneth S. Wuest’s *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961): 276. Wuest translates Acts 2:38 as follows: “And Peter said to them, Have a change of mind, that change of mind being accompanied by abhorrence of and sorrow for your deed, and let each one of you be baptized upon the ground of your confession of belief in the sum total of all that Jesus Christ is in His glorious Person, this baptismal testimony being in relation to the fact that your sins have been put away, and you shall receive the gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit.”

telic statements especially in statements about the past. If one said, "I went to town because of a suit (of clothes)," he would naturally be understood to mean not because he already had a suit, but in order to buy one. This is a loose use of causal expressions, but it is common. It follows that if a causal *eis* is established, it must be a clear-cut case of retrospective action in order to parallel the argument on Acts 2:38. Further, it ought to be obvious that if such a clear example is found (which has not been found), that it does not follow that Acts 2:38 is another such example. Certainly purpose is the natural sense of the construction where two imperatives with a conjunction follow the question. It is quite certain that if there were no doctrinal issue involved a causal meaning would never be suspected.²⁵

Third, in regard to the other passages in the Scriptures which have been cited for support of this position, Roberts makes this forceful objection:

All the samples of the so-called causal uses will bear closer scrutiny... In Romans 11:32 *sunekleisen eis* ("shut up together into") is the regular idiom for handing over or shutting something to or *into* something: a pregnant use with the idea of giving over so that nothing escapes (Sanday, ICC); compare 2 Mac 5:5; Luke 5:6; Gal 3:22f... Nor does the causal sense of Rom 4:20 ("He wavered not in unbelief *eis* the promise of God") commend itself. The promise was not the cause of Abraham's unwavering; he did not waver "at" the promise; he believed it in all its staggering implications... The more common explanation of Matt 3:11 "I baptize unto (*eis*) repentance" is that the baptism of John bound those receiving it to a life of continued repentance. It is adopted by Lenski; the RSV says "for forgiveness"; Allen (ICC) says, "It symbolized both a present and a future state of repentance." This is the natural meaning; why seek for another? Matt 12:41 reads "They repented at (*eis*) the preaching of

²⁵ Roberts, "Baptism," 233-34.

Jonah.” “Because Jonah preached” misses the point. Thayer is undoubtedly right in holding that it indicates the direction towards which their repentance looked. Compare Acts 20:21: “repentance toward (*eis*) God; faith toward (*eis*) Jesus Christ.” Thus Blass-DeBrunner says it has the sense of *epi* or *pros* and cites Herodotus (3.52): *pros touto to kērugma* of the attitude of subjects “towards the proclamation of a king.”²⁶

Also, parallels in non-biblical Greek which have been used to support the idea of a causal *eis* have been likewise debated.²⁷

Fourth, the phrase “for the remission of sins” is found five times in the NT (Matt 26:28; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38). Matthew 26:28 has our Lord saying concerning the Lord’s Supper: “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (NKJV). Since no one would argue for a causal usage in Matt 26:28 no one should argue for it in Acts 2:38 either.²⁸

In summary, the causal *eis* interpretation is theologically strong, but lexically weak. The causal usage is, in the words of M. J. Harris in his grammatical supplement to *NIDNTT*, “unlikely.”²⁹

V. THE SYNTACTICAL BREAK INTERPRETATION

A. DEFINITION

The syntactical break interpretation³⁰ holds to the normal meaning of *eis* (“for”) as indicating purpose, but understands

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁷ Cf. Marcus, “On Causal *Eis*,” 309-11; and “The Elusive Causal *Eis*,” *Journal of Biblical Studies* 71 (1952): 43-44.

²⁸ J. C. Davis, “Another Look at the Relationship between Baptism and Forgiveness of Sins in Acts 2:38,” *Restoration Quarterly* 24 (1981): 80-81.

²⁹ M. J. Harris, “Appendix,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 3:1187.

³⁰ Again, this is my designation of the position. I never found anyone who held this position give it a name. I hope that is acceptable; if not, then anyone can give it a more suitable, objective title!

the phrase “for the remission of sins” to be connected with the command for repentance and not directly related to the command to be baptized, which is seen as a parenthetical comment. Thus, this interpretation would translate Acts 2:38 as follows: “Repent (and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ) for the remission of sins.”

B. DEFENDERS

While this interpretation has been held at least as early as 1860,³¹ more recent defenders include Aubrey Malphurs, Bob L. Ross, Frank Stagg, Ned Stonehouse, and Stanley Toussaint.³²

C. DEFENSE

The syntactical break interpretation rests on two major arguments, one grammatical and the other theological.

The grammatical argument is subtle, especially for those who read only the various English translations, and points to a difference in number in the two Greek verbs *metanoēsate* (“repent” which is a second person plural) and *baptisthētō* (“be baptized” which is a third person singular) and the plural found in the phrase “for the remission of your sins.” Toussaint states clearly his defense of this position:

A third view takes the clause **and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ** as a parenthetical...The verb makes a distinction between singular and plural verbs and nouns. The verb “repent” is plural and so is the pronoun “your” in the clause **so that your sins may be forgiven** (lit., “unto the remission of your sins,” *eis aphasin tōn harmartiōn hymōn*). Therefore, the verb “repent” must go with the purpose of forgiveness of sins. On the other hand

³¹ Roberts cites A. P. Williams as holding this position in a work entitled *Campbellism Exposed*, written in 1860 (“Acts 2:38—A Study in Syntax,” *Gospel Advocate* [July 22, 1984], p. 704).

³² Aubrey M. Malphurs, “The Soteriology of the Churches of Christ” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981), 167-69; Ross, *Acts 2:38, 45-49*; Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), 63; Ned Stonehouse, “The Gift of the Holy Spirit,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 13 (1949-1951), 1-15; Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Press, 1983), 359.

the imperative “be baptized” is singular, setting it off from the rest of the sentence.³³

The *theological* argument is based on the relationship between repentance and remission of sins found elsewhere in the writings of Luke. In Luke 3:3 and 24:47, and in Acts 3:19 and 5:31, repentance and the remission of sins are directly linked and baptism is either not mentioned or subordinated. In Acts 10:43 the remission of sins is linked directly to faith alone. This is used to argue that baptism is not directly related to the remission of sins. In fact, in light of Luke 3:3 (“a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”), it could be argued that baptism is the outward symbol of repentance, but that it is repentance and not the outward symbol that brings remission of sins.

D. DEFICIENCIES

This position is impressive. However, a number of serious objections have been raised which we need to consider.

First, the defenders of this position have not demonstrated that a comparable syntactical break exists elsewhere in the writings of Luke, nor have they tried to demonstrate it from any parallels from non-biblical Greek sources. While this does not negate the possibility of such a break existing in Acts 2:38, it does raise the issue of whether or not there is here a special pleading using niceties of Greek grammar.

Second, this interpretation leaves the purpose of baptism unexpressed in the passage. According to this interpretation, one never learns from reading Acts 2:38 why one is to be baptized. Actually, it would be more natural to extend the parenthesis (if there is one here) to read: “Repent (and be baptized...for the remission of sins) and you shall receive...”

Third, it is more natural to connect the prepositional phrase “for the remission of sins” to the nearest antecedent or to both verbs (they are connected with *kai*, “repent *and* be baptized”) rather than to connect it to the first verb only.

Fourth, this interpretation reflects some misunderstanding about Greek grammar. This position rests upon a difference in number between the two verbs and the prepositional phrase. This is something that the standard Greek grammars do not

³³Toussaint, “Acts,” 359.

address. While the grammars do discuss the agreement of subject and verb, they do not discuss the idea of agreement between verb and prepositional phrases. In other words, the argument that a syntactical break occurs here which makes for a parenthetical statement is very hard to support. In fact, there is evidence that a change in number in the verbs, as in Acts 2:38, strengthens the demand for baptism and in no way affects its natural relationship with the phrase “for the remission of sins.”³⁴

Fifth, the theological argument for this interpretation is very interesting and not without merit. Baptism can, in the light of the passages cited for support of this position, be understood as expressing ceremonially the repentance which by itself brings forgiveness (cf. Luke 3:3). However, while this *may* explain Acts 2:38, it may be questioned whether this approach gives us a method for dealing with the more difficult passages of Acts 22:16 and 1 Pet 3:21. These verses are not easily dismissed as speaking merely of the importance of the symbolic value of baptism. These two passages, however, must await further articles in this Journal.

In summary, this view is grammatically weak, but theologically possible. However, for an excellent presentation of the theological support of this position see Robert N. Wilkin’s article “Repentance and Salvation—Part 4.”³⁵

³⁴ Cf. Carroll D. Osborn, “The Third Person Imperative in Acts 2:38,” *Restoration Quarterly* 26 (1983), 81-84. Osborn’s work is based on Judy Glaze’s excellent work, “The Septuagintal Use of the Third Person Imperative” (Master’s thesis, Harding Graduate School of Religion, Memphis, n.d.), 24, 33.

³⁵ Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation—Part 4: New Testament Repentance: Repentance in the Gospels and Acts,” *JOTGES* (Spring 1990), 16-18. Editor’s note: I have subsequently rejected the syntactical break view and accepted Tanton’s view.

VI. THE CONVERSION-INITIATION INTERPRETATION

A. DEFINITION

We now come to the view called “conversion-initiation.”³⁶ In essence, this position holds that a person becomes a Christian (i.e., receives the Holy Spirit) by a complicated process composed of three elements: faith, water baptism, and the reception of the Spirit. However, the reception of the Spirit may come before or after water baptism. While faith and the reception of the Spirit work an inner transformation called conversion, water baptism works at an objective and ritualistic level called initiation. This position would not change the translation of Acts 2:38, but would refrain from using this verse as an *automatic* formula for every conversion.

B. DEFENDERS

Several contemporary scholars hold this position, including F. F. Bruce, James D. G. Dunn, and Richard N. Longnecker.³⁷ Others, who have not designated their interpretation of Acts 2:38 as “conversion-initiation” but who have a view compatible with it are G. R. Beasley-Murray, Richard Averbeck, Ian Howard Marshall, and even John Calvin.³⁸ I should also include here, as my personal belief, that the less dogmatic sacramentarian position of Alexander Campbell would also fit here fairly easily.

³⁶ This designation is made by James D. G. Dunn in his book *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

³⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 185-87; Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*; Richard N. Longnecker, “Acts,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 9:336.

³⁸ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*; Richard Averbeck, “The Focus of Baptism,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (Fall, 1981): 265-301; Ian Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 5:80-81; John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 1:78-82.

C. DEFENSE

This position is basically a theological one composed of three points.

First, according to this position, there is no set theological sequence (i.e., no simple cause and effect order) within the “conversion-initiation” experience of the NT. Acts itself shows that the gift of the Holy Spirit is sometimes contrasted with water baptism (Acts 1:5; 11:16), sometimes unconnected (Acts 2:4; 8:16f.; 18:25), sometimes in natural sequence (Acts 2:38; 19:5), sometimes in a different order (Acts 9:17f.; 10:44-48).³⁹ The ambiguity which is seen in Acts should be taken seriously since it shows that God exercises His freedom. Life is more complicated than formulations of doctrine, but the Lord is able to look after the exigencies of life outside the range of the formulas.⁴⁰

Second, the “conversion-initiation” interpretation basically consists of three elements: faith, water baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Faith is the “efficacious” element and the reception of the Spirit is the climax. Water baptism is important for faith as “the necessary step of commitment, without which they could not be said to have truly ‘believed.’”⁴¹ But, the Spirit is given in response to faith, not baptism. Dunn goes to great length to make this clear:

Luke never mentions water-baptism by itself as the condition of or means to receiving forgiveness; he mentions it only in connection with some other attitude (repentance—Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38) or act (calling on his name—Acts 22:16). But whereas water-baptism is never spoken of as the sole prerequisite to receiving forgiveness, Luke on a number of occasions speaks of repentance or faith as the sole prerequisite (Luke 5:20; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; cf. 4:4; 9:35, 42; 11:21; 13:48; 14:1; 16:31; 17:12, 34). In other words, water-baptism is neither the sole preliminary nor in itself an essential preliminary to receiving forgiveness...The view which regards 2:38 as proof that water baptism is the vehicle of the Spirit is one which has no foundation except

³⁹ Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 90.

⁴⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 301-302.

⁴¹ Dunn, *Baptism*, 96-97.

in the theology of later centuries. Baptism may be a necessary expression of faith, but God gives the Spirit directly to faith, as the case histories of the 120 and Cornelius make abundantly clear. The highly critical audience in 11:15-18 were not at all concerned with the issue of Cornelius's water-baptism. Only one baptism is mentioned—Spirit-baptism; God had baptized them, and that was all that mattered.

If Luke is to be our guide, therefore, water-baptism can properly be described as the vehicle of faith: but *not* as the vehicle of the Spirit. It enables man to approach God, and represents what God has done for men and still does in men, but otherwise it is not the channel of God's grace or the means of his giving the Spirit, as Acts 8 makes clear.⁴² (Emphasis is Dunn's).

Third, regardless of how complicated and irregular the process of "conversion-initiation" may be in Acts, those who hold this view often agree that Acts 2:38 states the normal and expected order for salvation. Dunn states:

Luke probably intends Acts 2:38 to establish the pattern and norm for Christian conversion initiation in his presentation of Christianity's beginnings... Furthermore, it is the only verse in Acts which directly relates to one another the three most important elements in conversion-initiation: repentance, water-baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit—repentance and faith being the opposite sides of the same coin... Those who repent and are baptized will receive the gift of the Spirit. It should be noted that no possibility of delay is envisaged here. As with the command and promise of 16:31, the act of obedience to the command receives the promised result.⁴³

Longenecker, in his commentary on Acts, also agrees that Acts 2:38 sets the pattern:

...enough has been said here to suggest that we should understand Peter's preaching at

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 90-91.

Pentecost as being theologically normative for the relation in Acts between conversion, water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the situations having to do with the Samaritan converts, Cornelius, and the twelve whom Paul met at Ephesus (which is something of a case all to itself) to be more historically conditioned and circumstantially understood.⁴⁴

Thus Acts 2:38 is considered the norm for salvation in Acts in that it mentions the three elements of “conversion-initiation,” but Acts 2:38 should not be understood as stating the exact, always-followed order for salvation. The exceptions are many and striking.

D. DEFICIENCIES

While I like the fact that the “conversion-initiation” interpretation attempts to be evangelical and tries to account for all of Luke’s soteriology instead of simply finding a solution to Acts 2:38 alone, there is something in this position which is very frustrating: It is too ambiguous. In fact, there is so much ambiguity in it that both Alexander Campbell and a modern Evangelical could hold this position—as long as no one pressed the implications of the statements too much or asked for too precise a definition of the terms used.

For example, it is claimed that Acts 2:38 is the theological “norm” for Lucan theology. But then numerous examples are cited which are contrary to this “norm.” To me this raises the question of whether Acts 2:38 is indeed the norm, or, if the statements about it need to be more carefully and clearly modified than they are at present.

Another example is the role of water baptism. Dunn says that the reception of the Spirit is in response to faith, not water baptism. However, to believe and to be baptized are

...interchangeable ways of describing the act of faith; baptism was the necessary expression of commitment, without which they could not have truly “believed.”...Water-baptism is therefore to be regarded as the occasion on which the initiate called upon the Lord for mercy, and the means

⁴⁴Longenecker, “Acts,” 336.

by which he committed himself to the one who was named over him. Properly administered water-baptism must have been the climax and act of faith, the expression of repentance, and the vehicle of commitment.⁴⁵

Although I know that Dunn and the others would reject it, I still feel that this statement could be acceptable to many sacramentarians and used to prove the necessity of baptism. Dunn appears to say that C (the reception of the Holy Spirit) comes because of A (faith), but A is not truly A unless it is accompanied by B (baptism). This raises the question: how does this argument avoid the logical deduction that B is as necessary as A in order to receive C?

This position is certainly in need of better articulation. Until it becomes clearer it will, I believe, be rejected by the vast majority of Bible students.

VII. THE ULTRA-DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION

A. DEFINITION

The ultra-dispensational interpretation understands Acts 2:38 in a straightforward manner (much like the sacramentarian view) but believes that Acts 2:38 applies only to Israel and to a special situation which is no longer applicable. In other words, Acts 2:38 is not for today.

⁴⁵Dunn, *Baptism*, 96-97. There is no doubt that this is why Beasley-Murray (*Baptism*, 393-94), states that "...there ought to be a greater endeavour to make baptism integral to *the gospel*... Baptism is...a proper subject for exposition in the enquirers' class, along with instruction as to the nature of the Church, of worship, of Christian obligation in the Church and to the world, etc. Peter's response, however, to the cry of his conscience-stricken hearers on the Day of Pentecost was not, 'Repent and believe,' but 'Repent and *be baptized*!' (Acts 2:38). Naturally faith was presumed in repentance, but Peter's answer told the Jews how to become Christians: faith and repentance are to be expressed in baptism, and so they are to come to the Lord. Baptism is here a part of the proclamation of Christ. In an Apostolic sermon it comes as its logical conclusion... Baptism and conversion are thus inseparables; the one demands the other, for neither is complete without the other... Finally, there should be an endeavour to make baptism integral to *Church* membership."

B. DEFENDERS

This interpretation has been held by Charles F. Baker, E. W. Bullinger, Harry Bultema, A. E. Knoch, Cornelius Stam, and Charles H. Welch.⁴⁶

C. DEFENSE

The defense of this position is basically theological. It teaches that the concept of the Church *as the Body of Christ* (Jew and Gentile in one body with full equality) was revealed only to Paul during his prison ministry (Eph 3:1-9), after the Book of Acts was written. Therefore, the whole of Acts is not directly applicable to us today any more than the OT is directly applicable. Acts 2 concerns Israel and the judgment coming upon her for her rejection of her Messiah-King (Acts 2:39-40).

Also, this position makes a distinction between the forgiveness of sins and the doctrine of justification by faith. A. E. Knoch explains:

Repentance and baptism lead to a probationary pardon, which may be withdrawn. This pardon is extended by Christ as the King. Its operation is illustrated by the parable of the ten thousand talent debtor (see Matt 18:27-34) whose debt was remitted, but who refused to remit the smaller sum which his fellow slave owed to him. Hence the remission of his debt was canceled. So it is with Israel in this chronicle. Many of those who, in the beginning, received the pardon of their sins, refused to share their pardon with the other nations, objecting to proselytes like Cornelius, raising a riot on the supposition that an alien had entered the sanctuary, seeking to kill Paul even though he brought alms to Jerusalem. They finally fall away (Heb 6:6; 10:27) where there is

⁴⁶ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981); E. W. Bullinger, *How to Enjoy the Bible* (London: The Lamp Press, n.d.); Harry Bultema, *The Bible and Baptism: A Re-Examination* (Muskegon, MI: privately published, 1952); A. F. Knoch, *On Baptism* (Los Angeles: Concordant Publishing Concern, n.d.); and *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament* (Saugus, CA: Concordant Publishing Concern, 1968); Cornelius Stam, *Acts Dispensationally Considered* (Chicago: Berean Bible Society, 1954); Charles H. Welch, *An Alphabetical Analysis* (Surrey, England: Berean Publications Trust, 1955), 1:102-109.

no longer any room for repentance, but a fearful prospect of judgment. This pardon, however, is in sharp contrast to our justification, or acquittal, from which there can be no fall, as it places us beyond the sphere of judgment. Conciliation (Rom 5:11) is immeasurably beyond any pardon, as it places us in the unclouded favor of God's grace.

The promise was to Israel, both in the land and in the dispersion (Dan 9:27). Those "afar" were Jews in the lands where God had driven them, and not Gentiles or the church.⁴⁷

D. DEFICIENCIES

As a Dispensationalist, I find this position attractive. However, the idea that Acts 2 is not the birth of the Church and is unrelated to this dispensation is a serious deficiency. This view has been so thoroughly refuted in Charles C. Ryrie's excellent book *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965) that we need not restate the arguments here.

While the idea that forgiveness is different from justification has merit (and will be considered in our next interpretation), the claim that the Church was not in existence in Acts 2 and, therefore, Acts 2 is not applicable today, is by itself enough to make us look for a better interpretation.

VII. THE TRANSITIONAL INTERPRETATION

A. DEFINITION

This "transitional interpretation"⁴⁸ holds that those who heard Peter's message in Acts 2 and believed it were regenerated at the moment of their faith, whether that occurred before or after their repentance. However, in order to receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter's audience had to repent and be baptized. This condition is applied in Acts

⁴⁷ Knoch, *Concordant Commentary*, 181.

⁴⁸ Again, this is my designation of this view. This position was never designated by anyone who held it.

only to Palestinian Jews exposed to the baptizing ministry of John and of Jesus. It is not applicable to Gentiles at all as the case of Cornelius's conversion shows. Cornelius received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith, along with regeneration and justification.

B. DEFENDERS

This view has not had a wide hearing and, therefore, its advocates are few. However, this position is held by Zane C. Hodges and Craig Glickman.⁴⁹ Those who held a position which is somewhat compatible with it include Arno C. Gaebelein and Harry A. Ironside.⁵⁰

C. DEFENSE

The defense for this position is intricate since each of its points builds on the one before it. Broadly speaking, the support for this view is both grammatical and theological.

The grammatical support for this interpretation comes from the *prima facie* reading of the text. In this it agrees with the sacramentarian view. The normal force of both the words and the grammar all point to understanding Acts 2:38 as saying that one must both repent and be baptized in order to receive the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. All efforts at lexical and grammatical subtleties are rejected.

However, the burden of support for this position is theological.

First, this interpretation affirms its belief in the evangelical position that John's doctrine of regeneration and Paul's doctrine of justification are both by faith alone. In this, it disagrees with the sacramentarian interpretation. Hodges notes:

It should be kept in mind that the key word in the Johannine doctrine of eternal salvation is "life," specifically, "eternal life." For Paul the

⁴⁹ Steven Craig Glickman, unpublished class notes in 903 Soteriology and Evangelism (Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall, 1982); Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981) reprinted in Zane C. Hodges, *The Free Grace Primer* (Denton: Grace Evangelical Society, 2011); and unpublished class notes for 227 Acts (Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall, 1984).

⁵⁰ Arno Clemens Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Our Hope, 1912); Harry A. Ironside, *Baptism* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, fourth edition, 1989).

key word is “justification.” Neither writer ever associates his basic idea with anything other than faith. For John, baptism plays no role in the acquisition of “life.” For Paul it plays no role in “justification.” But the further statement may be made that there is no New Testament writer who associates baptism with either of these issues. The importance of this cannot be overstated.⁵¹

This observation allows the transitional interpretation to take Acts 2:38 at *prima facie* understanding and yet remain evangelical. Acts 2:38 is not telling anyone how to be eternally saved, justified, regenerated, or how to avoid the lake of fire.

Second, this interpretation holds that some of Peter’s hearers did believe and were, therefore, justified before Acts 2:38 was spoken. The question of Acts 2:37 (“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?’”) implies that faith was already present. Again, Hodges writes:

Peter concludes his address with the assertion that “God has made this Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (2:36). His hearers then reply, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37). But such a reaction presumes their acceptance of Peter’s claim that they have crucified the one who is Lord and Christ. If this is what they now believe, then they were already regenerated on Johannine terms, since John wrote: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1; cf. John 20:31).⁵²

Third, this interpretation holds that Acts 2:38 as well as the rest of Acts 2 is unique and is not directly applicable to us today. This uniqueness is seen in three ways.

(1) Acts 2:38 is unique in regard to its situation. On this point Hodges writes in detail:

The requirement of baptism in Acts 2:38 has its full relevance in connection with the guilt of that generation of Jews. Note 2:40 “Save yourselves

⁵¹ Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 100; Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer*, 296.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 101; *Ibid.*, 297.

from this untoward generation.” By the crucifixion of Christ this generation had become the most guilty in all the history of Israel (cf. Matt 23:33-36). When one of these Jews on the day of Pentecost was baptized, he was, in effect, breaking with his generation. He was declaring his death to his past life and relationship, and professing a new relationship to the name of Jesus Christ.

Note the threads of truth: an evil generation—baptism and repentance—baptism with the Holy Spirit; all these recall the ministry of John the Baptist to Israel (cf. Luke 3:3-18; Matt 3:5-12). That this requirement of baptism before the reception of the Spirit is somehow linked with the Jewish responsibility because of John’s ministry to that generation is implied in Acts 19. There is no evidence that anyone not actually, or potentially, reached by the ministry of John receives the Spirit this way (except Samaritans). It is then a condition laid down for the generation to whom John ministered, and, of course, his greater Successor our Lord Himself. If we do not belong to that generation of Jews we have no real biblical ground for supposing that the Spirit is only bestowed after baptism. If we are Gentiles we clearly come under Acts 10 and Romans 8:9!

...In Acts 2:38, forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit are *both* viewed as benefits to be bestowed subsequent to the realization that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (2:27). That realization in itself would be regenerating (cf. 1 John 5:1)—it was inherent in “repentance,” but baptism must precede the other two experiences. Forgiveness would restore harmonious relations between the baptized person and God and would put him in a category where God could bestow the gift of the Spirit upon him. (The gift was only being granted to the forgiven.) The sequence of events is clearly transitional in God’s dealings and is not normative today (Acts 10; Rom 8:9).

It is directly related to the special guilt of Peter's audience.⁵³

(2) Acts 2:38 is unique in regard to the matter of forgiveness. The other interpretations considered in this article assume that forgiveness is roughly the same thing as justification. It is not. Again, a detailed distinction is made by Hodges:

The final destiny of the soul is based upon his possession (or not) of eternal life (cf. Rev 20:15). Forgiveness of sins is not the determinative issue. This matter is virtually passed over in the Gospel of John in favor of the subject of "life." The reader of John could get no very clear idea of how his sins could be forgiven, but he would certainly know how to obtain eternal life. Indeed a man may die with unforgiven sins and yet go to heaven (cf. 1 Cor 11:30-32).

Forgiveness is not a legal, but a personal matter. A judge is concerned with carrying out the law, not with personal injury. So in the day of judgment men are judged according to their works—their legal claims to anything from God are searched out—and the final determination of destiny is made from the contents of the book of life. Men go to hell unforgiven, but men do not go to hell *because* they are unforgiven. (Judgment has been committed to the Lord Jesus because He is the Son of Man. He will sit on the Great White Throne *not* as an angry, offended person, but as the unbiased Executor of God's laws.)

Forgiveness, then, is not directly related to eternal judgment. Forgiveness removes the barrier of sin, its estrangement and distance, between man and God. It enables fellowship and communion. Since it is a personal thing, God determines in every age and circumstance what the conditions of forgiveness, the conditions of fellowship, are to be. Under the law a sacrifice might be a means of forgiveness (cf. e.g., Lev 4:10, 26, 31, 35). On the day of *Pentecost* for the Jewish crowd to whom Peter spoke, it was

⁵³ Hodges, "Acts," 15-16.

baptism (which, of course, is a specific kind of confession).

Two kinds of forgiveness in the NT must be clearly distinguished. The first of these may be called positional, i.e., it is ours in Christ (Eph 1:7; 4:28 [Grk.]; Col 1:14). Because it is involved with our being “seated in heavenly places” in Christ, it necessarily involves an instantaneous and perfect relationship with God which cannot be disturbed. Thus it covers all sins, past, present, and future. But the other kind of forgiveness is practical and experiential, and in the nature of the case can only deal with sins as they occur. Thus, at conversion, on a practical level we are forgiven for all the sins of our past and, as we confess our sins, these too are forgiven (1 John 1:9). This is to say that, at conversion, we begin communion with God and we sustain it by acknowledging the failures that can, and do, disrupt it. If a man were converted, yet unforgiven, he would be a person possessing eternal life but unable to enjoy communion with God (Paul is for three days like this...). What is involved in Acts 2:38 is an experience of regeneration (at the point where faith occurs...) with real communion begun only when baptism is submitted to.⁵⁴

(3) Acts 2:38 is unique in regard to the Holy Spirit when compared with the rest of the book of Acts. Concerning the offer of the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38, Hodges makes four points:

(a) There was a time when no believer had—or could have as yet—the Holy Spirit (cf. John 7:38-39).

(b) On the day of Pentecost the Spirit did not become the immediate possession of every believer. Baptism had to precede the giving of the Spirit...

(c) In Samaria, Samaritans receive the promised Spirit through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands, that the Jewish-Samaritan

⁵⁴Ibid., 14.

schism might be prevented from injuring the unity of the Church.

(d) In the house of Cornelius the Spirit is received upon the exercise of faith and before baptism. No pure Gentile, according to Scripture, has ever been required to receive baptism before receiving the Spirit.

From Rom 8:9 it may be inferred that the transitional requirement of baptism had vanished and the Apostle equates possession of the Spirit with the mere fact of being a Christian. Eph 1:13 and, by inference, Acts 19:2 concur.⁵⁵

Therefore, in regard to the gift of the Holy Spirit three observations follow: (1) although the OT saint was regenerated, he did not permanently possess the Spirit (John 7:37-39); (2) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is a sign that one has entered the Church Age, was given to the Jews in Acts 2 upon their baptism; and (3) as one goes through the Book of Acts it becomes apparent that regeneration, forgiveness, and the reception of the Holy Spirit occur, normatively, at the moment of faith (Acts 10:44-48). "No Gentile exceptions are noted by Luke in the remainder of Acts, so that in Cornelius Luke no doubt sees normative Gentile experience."⁵⁶

The unique manner in which the gift of the Holy Spirit is given in Acts 2 could be compared to the empowerment of the Spirit which came to our Lord at His baptism. On this analogy, S. Craig Glickman offers this insight:

Furthermore, the church was born on the day of Pentecost, a unique event and *perhaps* the gift of the Spirit to this body following baptism served also to make correspondence with the head of the body, Jesus Christ, who did not receive the special empowerment of the Spirit until after baptism, but thereafter his body always possessed it, as is the case with his body the church. It received the Spirit after baptism on its inauguration but (shortly) thereafter to be in the body was to possess the Spirit! (Rom 8:9).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁷ Glickman, "Soteriology," 148.

D. DEFICIENCIES

Because this view has not been widely circulated, it has not been widely criticized. One work was found by a Churches of Christ debater which criticized this interpretation.⁵⁸ However, its objections are of marginal worth because the polemical tone did not allow the transitional interpretation to be understood accurately. However, the chief objection (besides the objection that the view may be too complex) is found in the assumption that in Acts 2:37 some actually believed in Christ. This boils down, naturally, to the nature of faith and repentance (a subject beyond the scope of this paper).⁵⁹ As a result of this article perhaps someone who accurately understands this interpretation will write a paper that surfaces more numerous and difficult objections. However, unless and until insurmountable problems arise, this interpretation is the one that I hold.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to state and evaluate the major interpretations of Acts 2:38. Every position has problems, but the goal is to find the position that has the fewest major objections and solves the greatest number of problems. I hope that my article will help the reader to see a refutation of the argument that the gospel contains a demand for baptism. The Scriptures state that Satan blinds the eyes of the unbeliever so that he will not see the gospel clearly (2 Cor 4:4). Let us not do Satan's work for him by further confusing the unbeliever with an unclear gospel of faith plus water baptism.

⁵⁸ Jerry Moffitt, *Is Baptism Essential to Salvation?* (Austin, TX: Jerry Moffitt, 1979).

⁵⁹ See the chapter on "Repentance" in Zane C Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas and Grand Rapids: Redención Viva and Zondervan Puhushing House, 1989), 143-63. Cf. also Robert N. Wilkin's series on repentance in *JOTGES*, vols. 1 and following.

IX. AFTERWORD: TWENTY-TWO YEARS LATER

I am thankful to GES for publishing my original article on Acts 2:38 and for having an opportunity to discuss my further reflections some two decades later. I have been amazed and gratified at the interest and compliments my article has generated (only once I was denounced as a heretic and apostate). Further, I could hardly contain my joy when I found that the article was cited by Joseph Fitzmyer in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* on Acts. All of this was something I had not anticipated. I am indeed thankful.

In the intervening years, I have read and thought much about this subject. To be candid, I do not believe that the discussion about Acts 2:38 had advanced much beyond what it was 22 years ago. Nothing that I have read has, in my opinion, strengthened the argument for any of the positions outlined in my article. Nor has anything I have read broken new ground. When I was informed about the possibility of reprinting the original article, I thought about updating the bibliography and perhaps recasting a sentence here and there for better clarity, but, as I felt that would have limited value, I opted instead to write about my current thoughts about this subject.

First, I commend all who, in their writings on Acts 2:38, endeavor to maintain the purity of the gospel of God's grace by rejecting a salvation of faith and works. It is my studied opinion that a false gospel of faith and works inevitably marginalizes or ignores the work of Christ on His cross—much like modern theological liberalism or ancient Pelagianism—and is, to be candid, no Biblical gospel at all.

As an example, I refer to the late Foy Wallace, a popular though controversial preacher and writer in the Churches of Christ, who wrote a book entitled *The Certified Gospel*. In the sermon with the same title as the book, Wallace has only one sentence referring to the cross: "The cross declares God's infinite hatred of sin, and God's infinite love for the sinner."⁶⁰ While few would deny the truth of that statement, Wallace hardly explains why the cross was necessary, nor why it is so

⁶⁰ Foy Wallace, *The Certified Gospel* (Port Arthur, TX: O. C. Lambert and Sons, 1937. Cf. pages 1-5. All discussion of the Atonement needs to explain the "must" of Matt 16:21. Why "must" Christ die?

central to the New Testament, nor does his brief sentence reflect its importance in Paul's preaching, nor the God-ward aspect of the cross. Unfortunately, most of the sermon was about certain sins that Wallace wanted to denounce (evolution, modernism, denominationalism, and faith-only preaching) and to express what he thought was the true Church. The climax was, of course, "the plan of salvation" (i.e., faith, repentance, baptism, with the emphasis upon the later). A false gospel marginalizes or ignores the cross. It is more concerned with man's works than Christ's work in atonement.⁶¹

In a recent exchange with a Churches of Christ minister, the topic of Adam and Christ in Romans 5 came up. The Churches of Christ minister denied that Adam's sin affected anyone. When I replied that if Adam's sin is not imputed to us, then, logically, neither could Christ's righteousness be imputed to the believer. To this he responded most emphatically: "That is correct. I don't need the righteousness of Christ; all I need is God's forgiveness."⁶² A false gospel of faith and works marginalizes or ignores the work of Christ on His cross.

Thus, all efforts to explain Acts 2:38 in such a way as to maintain the purity of the gospel of grace by rejecting the idea of salvation occurs either because of, or, at the time of, one's baptism, is to be highly commended. A gospel that does not require Christ's cross is heresy.

Second, I am more convinced than ever that all efforts to separate baptism from the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38 by appeals to the grammar are not very promising. I still believe that the "causal *eis*" position is an unnatural way to understand the grammar and the "syntactical break" alternative is too subtle. Further, both have the appearance of a special pleading, of building a case on exceptions. However, of these two, the

⁶¹This is also seen in Alexander Campbell's *The Christian System* (Reprint, Nashville: gospel Advocate, 1964) his only effort to produce something like a systematic theology. His chapter entitled, "Sacrifice for Sin" is about nine full pages; some 53 pages in the section "Remission of Sins" contains a running argument on the necessity of baptism for regeneration. If the amount of space given to a subject is an indication of importance, baptism is more important than Christ's sacrifice.

⁶²I remember hearing a Churches of Christ preacher, in an evangelistic service, preach the gospel without any mention of the cross. His gospel only consisted of the commands to believe, repent, confess, be baptized and be faithful unto death. This contradicts the gospel as outlined in 1 Cor 15:3ff.

“syntactical break” comes closer, in my opinion, to the true solution, but not on the basis of the grammar.

Third, I believe that the best way to explain Acts 2:38 is on the basis of Luke’s theology. Grammatically, Acts 2:38 reads as if there are two conditions (repentance and baptism) to the forgiveness of sins. But when Acts 2:38 is seen in the light of Luke’s theology (and that of the New Testament) it becomes clear that, while baptism is emphasized (even in Acts 2:38⁶³), it is repentance that leads to the forgiveness of sins.

Beginning with 3:3, Luke states that John the Baptist preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” The phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” links up with its nearest antecedent, repentance. Thus John’s baptism was the expression of the repentance that brought about the forgiveness of sins. This phrase, even by itself, helps us to see how Acts 2:38 is to be understood. Baptism is the commanded manner to express the repentance that brings forgiveness.

The second reference is 24:47. Here, in Luke’s version of the Great Commission, we have “repentance and⁶⁴ the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Here repentance is linked directly to forgiveness of sins without any mention of baptism, implying, I think, baptism’s subordinate role.

In Acts 3:19, Peter gives his second evangelistic sermon saying, “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out...” While some Churches of Christ writers have attempted to make this passage a parallel to Acts 2:38,⁶⁵ making “turn again” a synonym for “be baptized,” it is best to understand “turn again” as emphasizing the command to repent. This would be consistent with our proposed interpretation of 2:38.

Acts 5:31 also emphasizes repentance: “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Again, baptism is absent, leaving repentance in relationship to the forgiveness of sins.

Finally, in Acts 10:43, faith, instead of repentance, is stated as the condition of forgiveness: “To him all the prophets bear

⁶³ The shift in number from the plural “repent” to the singular “be baptized” emphasizes the specific demand for baptism. It seems odd to emphasize baptism and then put it into a parenthetical phrase.

⁶⁴ Some Gk texts had “and” (*kai*) and others “for” (*eis*, as in Acts 2:38).

⁶⁵ Cf. Campbell, *The Christian System*, p. 169

witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

In all of these passages, repentance (or faith) is emphasized and is the only condition mentioned. This should indicate the correct way in interpret 2:38, that while both repentance and baptism are commanded, the emphasis is on repentance.

While one is not saved because of baptism, or at the moment of baptism, it is still a crucial part in the conversion experience of the believer. It is the Biblically commanded mode of expressing one’s saving faith in the Savior. We should not ignore baptism (to do this is sin, as it is commanded), or minimize it, as is sometimes done to the Lord’s Supper (the only aspect of public worship that is treated at length in the New Testament and, with baptism, is a symbolic and tactile expression of the gospel).

Fourth, and briefly, I believe that the conversion experience of a believer should be understood somewhat along these lines:

(1) The *sine qua non* of a Christian is having the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 especially, and Acts 19:2 by inference, makes this clear. The possession of the Holy Spirit, not baptism, is the point of demarcation between saved and unsaved in this dispensation. A person can be baptized and yet remain an unbeliever; one cannot receive the Holy Spirit and remain in unbelief.

(2) The Holy Spirit moves one to faith. Of course, this touches the subject of whether regeneration precedes faith or happens at faith (a discussion of which need not detain us here as either work well in this model, even if I personally prefer the former).

(3) Faith is expressed in baptism. This is the import of Luke 3:3 and Acts 2:38. As in the Old Testament, circumcision was a sign and seal of “the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised” (Rom 4:11), so is the role of baptism in the New Testament.

(4) Baptism is a symbol of union with Christ (Rom 6:3-6) and public commitment (1 Pet 3:21 where I prefer “pledge” over “appeal” as the translation of the haplogomena).

Alexander Campbell, and those who followed him, reacted strongly to the excesses of the revivalism of the early 1800’s which replaced the command to be baptized. But as usually is the case, one extreme produces another. The Churches of Christ are correct in seeing that baptism was the commanded

expression of repentance, but went into error in making it essential for salvation.

X. APPENDIX: IS BAPTISM A WORK?

There are a number of attempts to answer the objection that baptism is a work. One approach is to deny that the Bible teaches the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Dr. Thomas B. Warren, in his debate with L. S. Ballard, states, as one of his arguments that a salvation by faith without works is a salvation by a dead faith, according to James 2. Also, he points out that the only time the Scriptures use the phrase “justification by faith alone” is in James 2 where it is plainly stated that one is not justified by faith alone (*Warren-Ballard Debate*).

A second approach is to argue that faith, when cited alone, is often used as a figure of speech (metonymy) which puts a part for the whole. In this view, the Bible teaches that repentance (Acts 11:18), confession (1 John 2:23), and baptism (1 Pet 3:21) are also necessary. It is useless to point to a passage and say “It does not mention baptism here, therefore, it isn’t necessary,” since passages can be found that do not mention faith. All of the conditions are necessary, but not all are found in a single verse. (This is a second argument that Warren used in his debate with Ballard; cf. *Warren-Ballard Debate*.)

A third approach is to admit that baptism is a work, but an allowable type of work, i.e., one which is not forbidden by Paul in Eph 2:9. Tom Montgomery attempts to support this position as follows: “The New Testament mentions at least four kinds of works. There are (1) works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21), (2) works of the law (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:20), (3) works of merit (Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8-9), and (4) works resulting from faith (Jas 2:14-26).

Baptism does not merit our salvation. Please note that (1) Naaman did not merit his cleansing from leprosy by dipping in the water of the Jordan seven times (2 Kings 5:1-14), (2) Saul did not merit his cleansing from sin by being baptized (Acts 22:16), and (3) we are not attempting to merit our salvation by being baptized in response to our Lord’s statement in Mark 16:16. But it

is clearly inconsistent to call Jesus ‘Lord’ and refuse to do what he said (Luke 6:46).

Baptism is a work. However, it is a work (or deed) that God requires as an outgrowth of our faith... A faith that will not produce these deeds (works) required by our Lord is a dead faith (James 2:26) and a dead faith cannot save any one (James 2:14).⁶⁶

A fourth approach is based upon an effort to define the concept of “works.” Alexander Campbell argues: “We do not, however, place baptism among good works. Good works have our brethren, and neither God nor ourselves, for their object. They directly and immediately terminate upon man; while, in the reflex influence, they glorify God and beautify ourselves.” (Alexander Campbell, *Gospel Advocate* [April 7, 1983]: 198.)

A fifth and (for our purposes) final counter-objection pressed by a writer for the Churches of Christ is that used by Bales: Baptism is not a work because it is performed only once. He writes:

If baptism is an act of obedience performed by the Christian, a good work which the Christian does, why is not the act repeated from time to time? What good works are there which are bound on the Christian which should not be performed more than once if the individual has the opportunity and ability to do good work? Why, among all the works that a Christian is to do, is baptism the only one that is done once for all? Observance of the Lord’s Supper is a privilege and a responsibility of the Christian. Does anyone maintain that it should be done *once for all*? That we should not partake of it but once in a lifetime, even though we have opportunity to partake of it more than once?

Does not the fact that baptism is once for all—when it is done scripturally—indicate that it is not in the category of works which a Christian should perform?”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Tom Montgomery, “Is Baptism a Work?” *Gospel Advocate* [May 18, 1982]: 243.

⁶⁷ James D. Bales, *The Case of Cornelius* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1964), 50.

BOOK REVIEWS

Devotions on the Greek New Testament: 52 Reflections to Inspire & Instruct. Edited by J. Scott Duvall and Verlyn D. Verbrugge. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 154 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

Thirty-one different authors present fifty-two different devotions based on the Greek text of the NT. The articles are arranged in canonical order. There are ten articles based on passages in the Synoptic Gospels, five from John's Gospel, three from Acts, twenty-four from Paul's epistles, two from Hebrews, one from James, two from Peter's epistles, one from 1 John, one from Jude, and three from Revelation.

The exegesis in this book is remarkably free from doctrinal dogmatism. Rarely did I find the author of a devotion basing his interpretation on what his tradition tells us must be true. Instead, authors cite evidence from the text itself for their views.

Seven of the articles stood out to me as especially helpful.

The article on Luke 2:4-5 concerns Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem for the census. The author, Verbrugge (who is also the co-editor), points out that not only was the woman not required to go, "engaged people in the ancient world were never seen together without their parents" (p. 33). One of the two options he considered is that Joseph took Mary with him *because she was pregnant* and he knew that Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem (p. 34). Verbrugge prefers a second option. He believes that Joseph took her with him, *although she was pregnant*, because she "was no longer welcome to live with her parents" (p. 34). Either way, he sees the point that God ensured that Joseph took Mary so that the Messiah would indeed be born in Bethlehem.

Deppe discusses John 1:50-51 and the difference between *you*, singular, and *you*, plural (pp. 43-45). He also comments on John 3:7 in this regard.

There is a good discussion of Rom 5:1 (pp. 61-63), 1 Cor 3:17 (pp. 67-69), and 1 Tim 6:17-19 (pp. 109-111).

I found the exegesis of 2 Cor 5:16-17 (pp. 75-76) by Linda Belleview and of 2 Tim 3:16 (pp. 114-16) by C. Marvin Pate to be outstanding.

What I liked about Belleview's article is that even though I disagreed with her translation of 2 Cor 5:17, she was clear that the context in v 16 must not be neglected in our consideration of v 17. Rather than seeing the issue in v 17 being some test of whether someone is truly born again or not, she explains that "a better way of looking at things 'has come' (*gegonen*)...Someone in Christ is now to be assessed in a completely new light. New creation in Christ is the ultimate leveler..." (p. 76).

Pate suggests that Paul had in mind the importance of teaching all of God's Word and not merely some of it: "This spiritual principle will deliver us both from obsessing over one biblical author or over one biblical topic (such as eschatology or divine election), and will enable us to cover systematically every major portion of the Bible, even in an expository fashion. In so doing we will build up God's people in holiness and in maturity" (p. 116).

I found no clear Free Grace statements. Nor did I find any clear Lordship Salvation statements. The editors evidently desired to make this a work that anyone of a conservative theological bent could use.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who has had at least one year of Greek, including Bible college and seminary students, pastors, missionaries, and parachurch workers. The book shows the practical value of knowing Koine Greek and it should serve to motivate readers to keep up (or improve) their proficiency in Greek since it can indeed be very helpful in exegesis and in teaching and preaching.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Corinth, Texas

Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness. By Kathryn Greene-McCreight. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006. 176 pp. Paper, \$18.99.

My interest in *Darkness Is My Only Companion* was piqued both by the title (from the Good News translation of the final verse of the “darkest” Psalm, number 88), and by the subtitle, which seemed to hint at a biblical response to the concept of mental illness. As for the subtitle, I should have read more carefully; the author does not really subject mental illness to *biblical* scrutiny: she assumes the diagnosis of bipolar disorder, and details her own descent into its madness: depression, mania, suicidal thinking, with its repeated hospitalizations, electroconvulsive (shock) therapy, and the gamut of psychotropic medication. She does write as a *Christian* minister and professor (hence the subtitle) responding to her own experience, certainly a valid approach.

As for the title, the reader should not expect an exegetical treatment of the lament psalms. While translations of Ps 88:18 divide over whether darkness is itself the companion, or is instead the sphere where the companion flees to escape the painful laments of the psalmist, the verse does make a fitting title for the horror the author describes. Still, she does not exactly equate the sufferings of the psalmist with the agony of mental illness. In other words, this is not so much a book about mental illness in the Scriptures, as to how the Psalms and other biblical and practical resources can serve the Christian afflicted with mental illness. Broadly speaking (as detailed below), she has produced a resource helpful both for pastoral and personal use. Weighted with much challenging perception, the book plunges deeply into theological, philosophical, and practical territory, and so can serve in bringing Scripture to bear on the psychological and psychiatric realities encountered in North American pastoral ministry.

In reading the description of her own agonies, I was reminded of Qohelet’s scruple to experience folly with eyes wide open (Eccl 2:3). Drawing from her journals, Greene-McCreight convincingly leads the reader into the darkness she experienced. Some creative application of Scripture marks the way, including of Ps 41:9: “Even my best friend, whom I trusted, who broke bread with me, has lifted up *her* heel and turned against me”

(emphasis added). The author suggests that in her madness she turns away from her Savior. In addition to psalms, she notes hymns and songs that offered encouragement (e.g., “In the Deep Midwinter”), many of whose authors suffered similar psychiatric disturbances. She pauses to illumine the current terminology and pharmacology of treatment, a helpful “crash course” for the pastor or other reader interested in helping the mentally ill. (Note: the author writes from a later perspective of having gained a measure of mental stability through improved medication.)

The book takes a theological approach, but is not primarily biblical. The author shows a broad orthodoxy: she hopes for an eschatological resolution to unanswered questions, she believes in the physical resurrection of the body, she does cite Rom 5:8 (“God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”) as an indicator that mental illness does not separate the believer from God. On themes familiar to grace-oriented readers, she tiptoes to the edge of rewards theology, and raises briefly—but does not answer—the question of whether eternal life is experienced in the present. She questions “the religious significance of feelings, especially for the Christian religion, in the economy of salvation” (p. 93), an objective view of faith shared by many Free Grace people. Still, this is not an Evangelical book. Suicide may raise the question of the “final call about the woman’s soul” (p. 99). This despite a kind of security: “a baptized Christian is still a Christian” (p. 98). This sacerdotal perspective (“I have been grafted into Christ’s identity by my baptism,” p. 115) is really no surprise, given the author’s vocation (an Episcopal priest).

Even though not expositional, her wrestling with theological and philosophical topics poses a good challenge for a biblically-oriented reader. She believes the patient should be allowed to view her mental illness as punishment for sin; otherwise the mentally ill may despair that there is no point to the suffering—God indeed has abandoned her to the darkness (p. 111; see also the very telling internal dispute with her doctors, page 108). Mental illnesses are not to be “equated with demon possession [or] vice versa. But they do have spiritual fallout” (p. 107). Her own turning point came after she sought healing, at first somewhat skeptically, through prayer (p. 130, 133). She believes the

soul can be perfectly secure while the brain and mind rage in unbelief and deadness toward God (p. 97, 101). The distinctions between soul, mind, brain, spirit, and body (chap. 8) are best viewed from a Christian, and not a psychiatric, perspective.

In summary, *Darkness Is My Only Companion* is a challenging book worth the price, if only for the practical sections on helping the mentally ill. This is an articulate guidebook to one person's descent into mental illness and her eventual hope of stability. For my part, however, I must admit to the gnawing question whether the message of Free Grace could have made any difference in her experience. Could truths such as the absolute certainty of the gift of eternal life or the rich eternal rewards promised the believer who faithfully endures the onslaughts of life have been additional encouragement to a soul so tormented? While the current writer has not wandered so deeply as she into the darkness, I have personally found the light of Christ's eternal promises a deep comfort in all the dim regions I have visited. I continue to believe that grace has something to say even to those who suffer the pangs of debilitating mental illness. May our message continue to prosper!

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Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings.

By Joseph Dillow. [USA]: NP, 2012. 1094 pp. Paper, \$36.95.

This massive work is a much expanded and revised version of Dillow's earlier best-selling book *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. Though that first version had over 600 pages and was quite pricey, it has sold over 25,000 copies.

At the recent FGA Conference, Dr. Fred Chay said of *Final Destiny* that while Free Grace people will not agree with everything that is in this book, they will find it an excellent work, well worth reading and studying. I agree.

Whether intentional or not, this book has the same number of chapters as the Bible has books, i.e. sixty-six. Those chapters are divided into three volumes. Volume one is on *salvation* (pp. 1-417 = Chaps. 1-28), by which Dillow means not simply or even primarily regeneration, but instead ruling with Christ in the

life to come (see esp. pp. 148-59). The second volume covers the vital theme of *assurance* (pp. 418-738 = Chaps. 29-47). Here the author is considering assurance of everlasting life. There are many new and outstanding elements in this section. Volume three concerns *destiny* (pp. 739-1028 = Chaps. 48-66). Here Dillow is discussing parables and themes related to ruling with Christ. In this section he discusses “the outer darkness” (pp. 758-779), the parables of the ten virgins (pp. 789-807), the talents and the minas (pp. 808-14), the judgment of the sheep and the goats (pp. 815-25), four chapters on Gehenna (pp. 826-99), three chapters on treasures in heaven (pp. 929-62), and rewards and merit (pp. 977-89).

Final Destiny has many outstanding features, including: approximately 2,000 verses of Scripture mentioned or discussed in the book (see the 12 page, four columns per page, Scripture index), excellent extended discussion of hundreds of *problem passages*, and a nice explanation throughout about why neither Calvinism nor Arminianism correctly handles passages dealing with assurance, rewards, and self-examination. Here are some quotes I will be citing often: “assurance is faith and faith is assurance” (p. 425), “the whole quest for assurance based on self-examination is doomed...” (p. 462), “degrees of intimacy [with God] will naturally carry over into eternity future” (p. 932), “obviously something is amiss with a doctrine that cannot account for many contradictions to its main tenet, the impossibility of perseverance in carnality” (p. 521), “anathema...means to be subject to some type of temporal judgment including severance from fellowship with Christ” (p. 909, italics his), “two of the most important needs of man are for security and significance” (p. 1014), and “when believers do not animate their faith with works, James does not say their faith is nonexistent; he says it is useless” (p. 416).

There are a few things with which *JOTGES* readers may not agree. First, Dillow suggests that “repentance is a necessary precursor to saving faith” (p. 51). He says that one must admit his sinfulness and guilt (p. 51) and “must have a desire for moral change” (p. 52, favorably quoting a missionary friend in Romania). “There must be an acknowledgement of sin and a desire to be different” (p. 53). “A nonbeliever must admit his sin to God, acknowledge he is wrong, and be willing to seek

a new way of life” (p. 54). In my estimation this goes against everything else in *Final Destiny*. How much desire to be different is enough? How much desire for moral change must one have in order to be born again? How much willingness must be there to seek a new way of life? (Dillow mentions the Gospel of John in this chapter [pp. 33-34], but does not mention that the words *repent* and *repentance* are not found even once. Thus he also does not discuss what possible significance there is to that absence in the lone evangelistic book in the Bible.)

Second, Dillow repeatedly suggests that entering the kingdom is *not* something every believer will do, but is a reward that only faithful believers will receive (e.g., pp. 241-64). This impacts the author’s understanding of the sermon on the mount, the rich young ruler’s interaction with Jesus, and many other texts as well. While such a view is certainly not inconsistent with the Free Grace view, it seems to run headlong into 1 Thess 5:10 and the concept of *kingdom* found in Daniel and in much of the OT and NT. The kingdom is not limited to the Millennium in the Bible. It includes the new earth as well (cf. 2 Pet 1:11 which refers to a rich entrance to the *eternal kingdom*).

Third, Dillow presents Gehenna as primarily referring to temporal judgment. While this is possible, in this reviewer’s estimation, he has not yet proved the case.

That being said, this is an amazing work. It is a resource which should be on the desk of all Free Grace pastors and educators, as well as laypeople who are serious students of the Word, which should be all of us. (It is probably too deep, however, for brand-new believers.) I highly recommend it. It is well worth reading.

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Truthspeak: The True Meaning of Five Key Christian Words Distorted Through Religious Newspeak. By Michael D. Halsey. Milwaukee, WI: Grace Gospel Press, 2010. 106 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

In *Truthspeak*, Michael D. Halsey aims to rescue the Biblical meaning of certain theological terms from widespread misunderstanding. As he describes the purpose of the book: “I want to show you that five important words in Christianity...have been ripped from their biblical meanings, and been dressed so that biblically alien concepts have been loaded into them...” (p. 11). The terms he addresses are *grace*, *finished*, *repentance*, *believe*, and *justified*.

Halsey correctly identifies what these words popularly, but erroneously, have come to mean. And he effectively shows how, more often than not, they have been redefined to smuggle in works as a requirement for eternal salvation. But the book surprisingly fails in its main intent. Halsey fails to establish his definitions through Biblical exegesis. Rather, he simply *asserts* that his definitions are Biblical, and sometimes quotes an authority as proof.

For instance, Halsey begins with the word *grace*, and laments that it so early came to be confused with works. “How did they miss it?” Halsey wonders about the Church Fathers, who, practically to a man, mixed grace and works: “Their misunderstanding came because, although they read the word *grace*, they didn’t understand that word with its Bible definition. The content they put into *grace* was not a biblical one...” (p. 21). Halsey tells us that the true Biblical definition of the term is *unmerited favor* or *undeserved favor*, and quotes Lewis Sperry Chafer to that effect (without providing a reference). But Halsey never actually bothers to defend his definitions via a grammatical-historical exegesis of the relevant Biblical texts. This is troubling, given the fact that he paints people in the darkest Orwellian terms for ignoring a term’s Biblical meaning.

This defect is compounded by a polemical style that is quick to lay blame on his opponents (often dubiously), but reluctant to calmly explain the edifying truth. For instance, his treatment of *grace* would have benefited by helping his readers distinguish between the different senses of

salvation, explaining how most of these do not refer to eternal salvation from hell, but salvation from tribulation and wrath in the here and now.

Even more crucially, Halsey could have distinguished between eternal salvation, the life of discipleship, and the race for rewards. This would have helped his readers understand why grace and works must never be mixed where eternal salvation is concerned, but ought to be mixed where the life of discipleship and rewards are concerned. Had he done so, instead of just blaming the Apostolic Fathers for missing the true understanding of grace, he could have explained why and how they missed it. They confused the condition for receiving the gift of eternal life with the condition for enjoying abiding fellowship with God, and so confused the unconditional grace of eternal salvation with the conditional grace needed for salvation from tribulation in this life. Whereas the former is a gift, the latter takes much striving, faithfulness, and humble responsiveness to the prodding of the Spirit (Phil 2:12; Jas 2:14-17; Gal 5:16-26, 6:6-10).

Similar distinctions would have improved the chapter on *justification*, which, like the chapter on grace, contained no effort to define the term exegetically, and failed to properly answer the apparent confusion of Church Fathers like Clement, who vacillated on the question of whether justification was by works or by faith. A proper Biblical perspective would have responded by distinguishing between justification before God, which comes only by faith in Christ's promise apart from works (Rom 3:28), and justification (or vindication) before men, which, as Paul and James both remind us (Rom 4:2; Jas 2:21), depends on our works.

Although I am deeply sympathetic to the aims of *Truthspeak*, and agree that, given current theological nomenclature, this kind of apologetic is sorely needed, I cannot recommend this book. It seems hastily written, treats Church history in a cursory manner, and most puzzling of all (given the author's stated intent, and his position as a Professor of Biblical Exposition), it fails to Biblically define the terms it addresses. A second edition would benefit from a curtailed use of the Orwellian motif, careful exegesis of

the relevant texts, and a more constructive application of Free Grace theology to the faults he identifies in others.

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Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven.

By Saint Innocent of Alaska. Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2006. 48 pp. Paper, \$6.95.

St. Innocent of Alaska (1797-1879) was a Russian Orthodox bishop and missionary to Alaska. This short work was written as a catechetical tool for the natives who lived on the Aleutian Islands. It is now often given by Orthodox Christians to Evangelicals as an introduction to Orthodox soteriology.

Innocent's presentation of the Orthodox doctrine of salvation can be commended for properly recognizing that our ultimate destiny lies not in self-satisfaction, aggrandizement, or material prosperity, but in being with God forever in eternity:

People were not created merely to live here on earth like animals that disappear after their death, but to live with God and in God, and to live not for a hundred or a thousand years, but to live eternally (p. 5).

In particular, our ultimate purpose in life is to glorify God: "you exist in this world solely in order, with all your actions, with all your life and with your whole being, to glorify His holy and great Name" (p. 21).

Innocent also exhibits a healthy recognition of humanity's sinful condition. He holds back no punches in describing the depth of our fallenness:

When the Lord is pleased to reveal to you the state of your soul, then you begin to see clearly and to feel acutely that with all your virtues your heart is corrupt and perverted, your soul is defiled and you yourself are only a slave of sin and the passions which have completely mastered you and do not allow you to draw near God. You also begin to see that there is nothing truly good in

you, and even if you have some good works they are all mixed with sin and are not the fruit of true love, but are the product of various passions and circumstances... (p. 23).

In fact, such is the depth of our sin, that even our best works are, if examined carefully, not very good at all:

In fact, if we examine our good works more attentively and even our greatest virtues, will many of them prove to deserve to be called Christian virtues? For example, how often do we give alms or material help to our brethren from vainglory or self-love like the Pharisees... (p. 35).

Given this sin problem, Innocent touches briefly upon an important reason for the incarnation, explaining that our sins incurred a debt so great that only Christ's death could serve as payment for them: "By His passion (suffering) and death Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the debts which we had to pay to God and which we should never have been able to pay" (p. 9).

Lastly, it is notable that Innocent appears to be aware of the dangers of legalism. Thus, he warns against thinking that our works give us some claim on God's grace and mercy:

And if a person is pure in heart and chaste in body, then the Holy Spirit enters into him and possesses his heart and soul (if only the person does not trust in his own good works and boast of them, or consider that he has a right to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to receive them as a due reward) (p. 35).

One could gladly agree to all of these insights, though I wish that Innocent had proved them by a careful exegesis of Scripture.

Nevertheless, despite these beliefs, Innocent surprisingly fails to draw the obvious conclusion about how to receive eternal life. One would have thought that he would dismiss any scheme of salvation by works. After all, how could a "slave of sin," with "nothing truly good in [him]," whose good works are "not very good at all," and whose sin debts were so great that God Himself had to pay them, think that he could be saved by his own labors? And yet that is precisely what Innocent concludes. Although

Innocent says that salvation *ultimately* depends on God giving us His mercy, because God only gives His mercy to the one who strives for it, our salvation *fundamentally* depends on our own efforts. Our works may not save us in and of themselves, but we cannot be saved without them.

This skews Innocent's understanding of the purpose for the incarnation. He does not think that Christ came to make a propitiation for sin so that we might be given the gift of everlasting life through faith apart from works. Rather, he thinks the incarnation makes possible what was once impossible. Though we couldn't save ourselves through works before, now, with Christ's help, we can. As Innocent says: "by the Grace and merits of Jesus Christ we can now go into the Kingdom of Heaven and receive support and help along the way" (p. 10). Christ leads the way, and gives us strength for the journey. But successfully completing the journey is up to us: "Christian, your salvation or perdition depends on your own will!" (p. 16). Everything depends on whether or not we synergistically cooperate with God's grace. One could say that while works are not *sufficient* for our salvation (only God's grace is sufficient), they are nevertheless *necessary*. Hence, throughout the *Indication*, Innocent repeatedly emphasizes that our salvation depends on works:

We can only say that those who believe in Jesus Christ and follow His commandments will, after their death, live with the Angels, the Righteous, and the Saints in heaven, and will see God face to face (p. 10).

The Kingdom of Heaven is a reward, and the very greatest reward; and where is a reward given free and for nothing? So, if it is necessary to labor and struggle to get an earthly and temporal reward, how much more must it be necessary in order to get a heavenly and eternal reward? (p. 28).

...work and labor for your salvation while it is yet day, for the night will come, and then no one can work (p. 45).

But when the doors of the heavenly Kingdom are closed to you, that is, if you die without

repentance and good works, then however much you may want and however much you may try to enter, you will not be admitted (p. 48).

Indeed, Innocent shows that he is so committed to works salvation that he even takes the story of the thief on the cross as proof that one cannot be saved without at least some suffering and effort:

Jesus Christ took into paradise even a robber, who repented only when he was actually dying. But was it without suffering and without affliction that the robber entered paradise? No! He was hung on a cross... the Lord can show us the same great and unspeakable mercies; He can regard our last sufferings as a purification and as a kind of struggle on the way to the heavenly Kingdom, especially when, like the robber, we at the same time offer repentance for our sins and receive with faith the last sacraments (p. 45).

The *Indication* goes on to explain that laboring for salvation means following Jesus, and following Jesus means obeying Him in all things, especially by undertaking a path of suffering. And despite everything Innocent says about our sinfulness, and about our lack of works, he insists that the way into the Kingdom of Heaven requires flawless obedience:

To follow Christ means also to *obey the word* of Jesus Christ. Therefore we must listen to, believe *and fulfill all* that Jesus Christ as said in the Gospel and through His Apostles, *and we must do all this* without philosophizing and in simplicity of heart (p. 27, italics added).

Without such obedience, we are damned: “So, brethren, if you wish to be in the Kingdom of Heaven, you must go the way Jesus Christ went; otherwise you will be lost, and lost forever” (p. 30).

However much light it may shed on Orthodox theology, Innocent’s *Indication* is a poor guide to the gospel. One could say that Innocent may have helpful sanctification advice, but fatal justification advice. That is to say, a Free Grace believer will immediately recognize the core error of Innocent’s theology. Much of what he says is true...if he were speaking about how to be progressively sanctified in this life, and how to earn rewards in the life to

come. But since Innocent believes that one must work in order to be eternally saved, he preaches a false gospel of works salvation.

One wonders whether Innocent ever carefully studied either John's doctrine of everlasting life, or Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone. For both John and Paul are quite clear that everlasting life is the believer's present possession, given freely by faith in Christ, apart from works (John 3:16, 36, 5:24, 10:28, 11:25-26; Rom 3:20; Eph 2:8-9). Rewards, by contrast, are earned by our faithful works, and bestowed in the future (Matt 16:27; Luke 14:14; Rev 22:12).

Moreover, Free Grace believers will have little trouble discerning that the bishop's confusion arises because he fails to distinguish between basic Biblical categories, such as between (i) eternal life and eternal rewards, (ii) the Great White Throne Judgment and the Judgment Seat of Christ, (iii) justification and sanctification, and (iv) eternal salvation and temporal salvation. Since Innocent fails to make these distinctions, he wrongly takes all of the NT commands calling us to sanctification, fellowship with God, and heavenly rewards, as conditions for receiving eternal life.

It is of the utmost importance that the Free Grace message be preached to Orthodox believers, especially in those areas of the world that were formerly under Communist rule, and which are now reportedly returning to the Orthodox Church in great numbers. These souls desperately need to hear the gospel message, and it is helpful to become informed about their assumptions concerning salvation. To that end, this booklet is very helpful. I recommend it as a library reference.

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God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?

By John C. Lennox. Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011. 96 pp. Paper, \$5.95.

In 2010, Stephen Hawking, the famed Cambridge physicist and cultural icon, published a book (co-authored with Leonard Mlodinow) entitled *The Grand Design*, in which he purported to explain the origin of the universe without recourse to a divine creator, claiming, in effect, that the universe created itself. In

reply, John C. Lennox, professor of Mathematics at Oxford, and lecturer at the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics, has written *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* With doctoral degrees from Cambridge, Oxford, and Wales, Lennox has proven to be an effective apologist against the so-called “New Atheists,” and this book is no exception.

In *God and Stephen Hawking*, Lennox begins by warning his readers to always distinguish between a scientist’s professional findings, and the amateurish philosophical pronouncements they sometimes make under the guise of scientific authority (Hawking’s book being a vivid example of the latter). And so, Lennox does not take issue with Hawking’s *science* per se, so much as the *philosophical conclusions* he erroneously deduces from it, beginning with Hawking’s astounding claim that philosophy is *dead*:

Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. It has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly in physics. As a result scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge (p. 18).

This pronouncement is astounding if only because Hawking seems unaware that claiming that philosophy is dead is itself a philosophical statement. It is, as Lennox writes, “a classic example of logical incoherence” (p. 18).

For any scientist, let alone a science superstar, to disparage philosophy on the one hand, and then at once to adopt a self-contradictory philosophical stance on the other, is not the wisest thing to do—especially at the beginning of a book that is designed to be convincing (p. 19).

And so on it goes through the rest of the book. Lennox repeatedly takes Hawking to task for making philosophically dubious claims. Of particular interest are the critiques Lennox presents in the second and third chapters, which address the explanatory limits of physical laws, and the existence of a ‘multiverse.’

So, in Chap. 2, Lennox exposes the logical errors that underlie, and ultimately undercut, Hawking’s atheistic conclusion. The major thrust of Hawking’s argument is this: “Because there is a law of gravity, the universe can and will create itself out

of nothing” (p. 29). Gravity allegedly makes it unnecessary to postulate God’s existence as the ultimate cause of the universe. But Lennox replies that this conclusion involves several logical problems. Contrary to his claim to explain the existence of the universe “out of nothing,” Hawking seems to assume the existence of a great many things, including (i) the law of gravity, (ii) gravity itself (presumably), and (iii) the universe, thereby invoking as explanatory causes the very things that demand explanation. As Lennox summarizes the problems:

He says the universe comes from a nothing that turns out to be a something (self-contradiction number one), and then he says the universe creates itself (self-contradiction number two). But that is not all. His notion that a law of nature (gravity) explains the existence of the universe is also self-contradictory, since a law of nature, by definition, surely depends for its own existence on the prior existence of the nature it purports to describe (p. 31).

The mistake of appealing to *laws* to explain the existence of *things* is further compounded by Hawking ensuing claim that:

M-theory predicts that a great many universes were created out of nothing. Their creation does not require the intervention of some supernatural being or god. Rather, these multiple universes arise naturally from physical law (p. 36).

Things apparently come into existence because of *laws*. But as Lennox retorts, Hawking’s appeal to the causal power of laws involves the category mistake of confusing two different kinds of entities: laws and personal agents. While laws may *describe* natural phenomena, *they do not bring them into existence*. Laws as such are without causal powers (p. 41). For instance, physical laws may explain how a jet engine *functions*, but they cannot *create* a jet engine. That requires personal agency, a *someone* to bring the *something* into existence. Understanding natural laws may explain how the universe *functions*, but they do not explain where it came from.

In Chap. 3, Lennox continues the discussion by addressing Hawking’s appeal to ‘multiverse’ theory. In recent years, physicists have increasingly come to marvel at how the life-sustaining

nature of our universe depends on certain physical constants which, if only slightly altered, would make life impossible. The precision with which the constants are set have led Christians to point to such “fine-tuning” as evidence of design, implying the existence of a Designer. In reply, atheists have sought to explain away such fine-tuning by invoking the existence of a ‘multiverse.’

The basic idea is this: while one finely-tuned universe is extremely unlikely, it is *not* as unlikely given an infinite number of alternative universes. Consider an analogy. If you flipped a coin just once, it would be highly unlikely for it to land on its edge, rather than on either face. But if you flipped it a trillion times, chances are it would land on its edge at least once. Just so, however unlikely a single life-bearing universe may be, given an infinite number of possible and actual universes, it is not unlikely at all. In fact, given an infinite number of universes, one would *expect* one or more to be life-sustaining. Hence, if our universe is just one among many billions of universes existing in the multiverse, the phenomenon of fine-tuning can be explained without the need for a Designer.

In reply, Lennox suggests the multiverse hypothesis is not only dubious science, but more importantly, it only pushes the question of origins back by one step. Rather than ask where this universe came from, proponents of the multiverse must now explain where the multiverse came from. After all, physical laws are no more capable of creating a multiverse than they are a universe.

Lennox addresses a number of other issues, ranging from the inadequacy of Hawking’s concept of God, to the perils of anti-realism in science, and includes defenses of the existence of miracles and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book is easily read in one sitting, and, despite its brevity, does a fine job of answering Hawking’s claims. *God and Stephen Hawking* can be recommended to anyone interested in the scientific evidence for the existence of God, the rationality of

Christian belief, and the ongoing apologetic dialogue with the 'New Atheists.'

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Majestic Destiny: Kingdom Hope Is Rising. By Curtis H. Tucker. Redmond, OR: Last Chapter Publishing, 2011. 292 pp. Paper, \$15.99.

The title and subtitle are intriguing, though a bit vague. Is this book about what eternity will be like? About the Millennium? About the Rapture? The title and subtitle leave the reader wondering.

The eighteen chapter titles give some hints. Chapter 6, for example, is called "Made to Rule." Chapter 9 is "Kingdom Within Grasp." Chapter 12 is entitled, "Worth Everything." Chapter 17 is "Living Motivated."

Tucker says that eternal salvation is a free gift received by grace though faith in Christ, apart from works (e.g., pp. 7, 21, 24, 27, 46). Yet in multiple places (e.g., Chaps. 9 and 12) he indicates that one must give up everything and work hard in order to get into the kingdom. All through the book the author indicates that kingdom participation and entrance requires perseverance in good works (e.g., pp. 29, 49, 133, 146-48, 174). In reality, that is what the entire book is all about. And yet the book is written from a Free Grace perspective.

If you find that confusing, you probably are not aware of the view that all believers have everlasting life, but only persevering believers will get into the kingdom, with the kingdom defined as the Millennium only (not the Millennium followed by the rest of the eternal kingdom which will shift to the new earth). Tucker holds to the view that entering the kingdom is a reward.

Some readers may be bothered by the fact that there is not a single Scripture cited in the text of the book, and only a handful of Scriptural quotations are given. All of the Scripture citations are found in endnotes.

Clearly the book is written for people who already agree with the Free Grace position. Someone who did not already accept the

Free Grace view would not likely find much Biblical evidence to lead him to change his mind.

There are many examples of famous passages in which the author's interpretation is radically different from both the interpretations of most Lordship Salvation and Free Grace advocates. For the sake of space, I will simply mention a few.

The Parable of the Sower and the Four Soils is typically understood by Lordship Salvationists as teaching that only the good soil is born again. Soils 1-3 represent three types of unbelievers. Zane Hodges, myself, and many other Free Grace writers have suggested that the first soil represents unbelievers and that soils 2-4 represent three types of believers. Tucker suggests that the parable is not about who is born again and who is not. The issue, he says, is not about having everlasting life or going to heaven. The issue is about making it into the kingdom: "To not be saved [in Luke 8:12] is to miss the kingdom. This parable, like the rest here, is not about going to heaven, as many have taught and believed; it is about the messianic kingdom" (p. 166).

He interprets the parables of Matthew 13 in the same way. Take for example, the Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matt 13:44). There a man finds a hidden treasure, hides it, sells all he has, and buys the field in which he has hidden the treasure. The Lordship Salvation explanation is that we must give up everything to be born again. That is, we essentially buy our own salvation. Most Free Grace writers suggest that the Lord Jesus is the Man in the parable. He buys the kingdom by laying down His life for us. That is, He gave up everything that He might buy the kingdom. Tucker, however, says that *we* are the ones who buy the kingdom in the sense that we buy the right to enter it and participate in it (p. 173). He doesn't say where believers who fail to buy the kingdom will be during the Millennium, only that they won't be in it.

He takes the same approach with the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matt 13:45-46). He says, "The glorious kingdom is worth every sacrifice necessary to obtain it" (p. 174).

This is also the way that Tucker understands the Sermon on the Mount (pp. 146-54). Matthew 5:20 is teaching that "The condition for entrance into the kingdom, then, is a practical 'righteousness [that] surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees'"

(p. 147). Entering by the narrow way is not entering the kingdom by believing in Jesus Christ. It is entering the kingdom by living a godly life (pp. 146-54). (Remember, of course, that for Tucker entering the kingdom is not the same as being born again.) The broad way that leads to destruction is a path that born-again people may well be on if they are not living godly lives “according to this newfound freedom and motivation” (pp. 153-54). Believers must realize that merely “living a moral or religious life will prove insufficient for [entering] the kingdom” (p. 154). Rather, “good works done the right way are essential for greatness in the kingdom” (p. 153). Of course, in Tucker’s view the only Church-Age people who will enter “the kingdom” (i.e. the Millennium) are those who will be great in it.

I have spoken with several people who have read this book and told me that they really liked it. I have not pressed them on what they liked about it or what they thought he was saying. Recently, however, I did engage one friend who read and enjoyed it. When I asked, I found he had not understood that Tucker was saying that unfaithful believers will miss the Millennium. He was surprised and not a little bothered by that.

Another friend, who is very enthusiastic about this book and who agrees with Tucker’s view, suggested to me that at least half of the people in the Free Grace movement agree with Tucker’s view that unfaithful believers will miss the Millennium. That has not been what I have found in talking with people. I would put the percentage of Free Grace people I’ve spoken with who hold to that idea to be less than twenty percent. That view may be gaining in popularity due to books like this as well as the revised edition of Jody Dillow’s very popular book, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (now called *Final Destiny*, see review on pp. 95-97 in this issue). However, I wonder.

In my view 1 Thess 5:9-10 is a show stopper for the idea that unfaithful believers miss the Millennium. In the most famous Rapture section in the Bible (1 Thess 4:13–5:11), Paul calls for believers to be watchful and not to be morally asleep (e.g., 1 Thess 5:6-8). Then he says that “God did not appoint us to wrath [i.e., the Tribulation], but to obtain salvation [i.e., deliverance from the Tribulation via Rapture] through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us that whether we wake [lit. watch] or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Thess 5:9-10).

Even believers who are morally asleep at the time of death or the Rapture *will live together with Him forever, starting with the Rapture*. No believers will miss the kingdom.

In addition, the idea that the word *kingdom* is limited in the NT to the Millennium is something that I have not observed. In my estimation *the kingdom* refers to the fifth and final kingdom of Daniel, the kingdom of the Son of Man, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus (e.g., Dan 2:44, “it [the fifth kingdom] shall stand forever”; Dan 7:27, “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom”). In Daniel there are not six kingdoms. The Lord Jesus only has one kingdom. His kingdom begins with the Millennium and “shall stand forever” since it is “an everlasting kingdom.” The Millennium is not some separate kingdom. It is the first thousand years of the eternal kingdom, as Peter himself plainly says in 2 Pet 1:10-11.

Though I do not agree with Tucker’s viewpoint, I rejoice that he advocates the Free Grace position, and I appreciate his irenic tone. We certainly do not all need to be in lock step on every issue in order to have fellowship with one another.

I recommend this book for well-grounded Free Grace believers. I would not give it to someone whom I was trying to win over to the Free Grace view. Nor would I give it to a newcomer to Free Grace theology. However, for those well versed in these issues, this book is worth having in your personal library.

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A Critique of the Crossless Gospel. By Daniel J. Lash
Rome City, IN: Weston Street Bible Church, 2011), 44 pp, free.

In his booklet, *A Critique of the Crossless Gospel*, Daniel Lash addresses what he considers to be some important errors involving GES and the writings of Bob Wilkin in particular. While I found myself agreeing that Lash had identified some serious errors, I could not fathom why anyone familiar with either GES or Wilkin could mistake them for proponents of those same errors. Indeed, readers will quickly discover that Lash doesn’t substantially quote Hodges, Wilkin, or any GES-related materials in order to establish his case against them. The only writing

Lash refers to is two fragmentary references from Wilkin's tract *Saving Faith in Focus*, which Lash inexplicably calls a "book" (p. 3). Lash writes as if we should take him at his word that his representations are accurate. With several thousand pages of GES material to choose from, surely Lash could have found ample evidence to establish his case. But he did not.

There are four errors that particularly concern Lash, none of which are representative of GES or Wilkin's thought, and all of which are demonstrably false.

First, Lash is concerned that the "crossless gospel" takes an improper object of saving faith. As he claims, the "major problem with the gospel according to GES" is that "in its final analysis, it is faith in faith." That is to say, for Wilkin, the object of saving faith is not Christ or His promise of eternal life, but "faith in an act of saving faith" (p. 4). Hence, says Lash, assurance becomes a matter of focusing on the quality of one's own faith, rather than on what Christ did:

Assurance under such a gospel presentation would have to be derived from an assurance that one had genuinely believed. Therefore the focus of one's faith, of necessity, becomes the act of faith.

This is wrong, Lash continues, because Biblical assurance is not derived from focusing on something that we have performed; but rather, from focusing upon something Christ has accomplished in our behalf to God the Father's satisfaction (p. 13).

Lash sorely misrepresents the GES view, which has made crystal clear that the object of saving faith is *Christ's promise of everlasting life*.

Of course, part of believing the promise is understanding that God accepts our faith as instrumentally efficacious, apart from works. But recognizing the instrumentality of faith is different from taking it as the object of our belief. As Wilkin has written, there is only one condition for receiving eternal life, and it is not faith in faith: "The only condition of eternal life is faith in Christ" (*Confident in Christ*, 5). If anything, Wilkin and Hodges have been careful to emphasize faith's simplicity (Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, Chap. 2) and its lack of a volitional

element (Wilkin, *Ten Most Misunderstood Words*, p. 20), utterly rejecting the idea that there are degrees or qualities within one's faith. "You can't choose to believe. When the evidence that something is true persuades people, they believe it. When the evidence is insufficient, people don't believe it" (*Ten Most Misunderstood Words*, p. 20). You either believe something is true, or you do not. The "quality" of one's faith is not an issue.

Second, Lash also claims that GES teaches people to put their faith in the wrong object, specifically teaching that we should put our faith in Christ as guarantor of eternal life, *rather than* in Christ as our suffering substitute. As he writes, according to GES, "faith is not in Christ, the suffering substitute; but rather in Christ, the guarantor of eternal life" (p. 5). This is wrong, Lash explains, because the precise opposite is true, the proper object of saving faith is "in Jesus, God's all sufficient substitutionary sacrifice for my sins" (p. 6).

First of all, this complaint contradicts Lash's earlier claim that GES wrongly teaches people to put their faith in faith. Which is it, do they teach faith in faith, or faith in Christ as guarantor of eternal life? But putting this contradiction aside, Lash does raise an important question, namely: is there a difference between believing in Jesus as a sacrifice, and believing in Jesus as the guarantor of eternal life, *such that we must believe one or the other?*

I would suggest that while there is a distinction, these options are not mutually exclusive. Both descriptions of Christ are true. Both are good and salutary to believe. And more importantly, both beliefs may lead to saving faith in Christ. Nowhere do Hodges or Wilkin say that an either/or choice should be made here. So, for instance, it is entirely possible to believe that Jesus is our substitute, and be saved. The important point is whether belief in Jesus' substitutionary death conveys that salvation is by faith apart from works, and can never be lost thereafter. So long as it does, then belief in Christ's substitutionary death can be intrinsically (rather than simply instrumentally) salvific.

Lash makes the mistake of assuming that GES only accepts one formula for explaining the gospel. Although some presentations of the gospel are clearer than others, GES maintains there are many different ways of conveying the same salvific message. As Wilkin has written:

A person can be born again without ever hearing the words *everlasting life, once saved, always saved, or eternal security*. However, a person must believe that concept in order to believe in Jesus for that life which He promises. A person might believe that by faith in Jesus he is saved once and forever. He might believe he is justified and can never be unjustified. A guaranteed everlasting home with God in heaven for the one who simply believes in Jesus would be another way of believing the same concept (*Ten Most Misunderstood Words*, pp. 25-26, italics original.).

Thus, contra Lash, GES and Wilkin accept that it is possible to believe in Christ as our suffering substitute and be saved, so long as that belief includes the idea that what Christ gives us by faith is eternal. A person must not only understand that Jesus made some kind of promise to that effect, but they must also believe the promise itself.

However, Lash correctly implies that it is GES's position that *merely* believing in the *fact* of Jesus' substitution is not sufficient to be saved. But that is a position I would expect Lash to agree with. After all, many Christians believe that Jesus came to die a substitutionary death. But they think He died a substitutionary death *in order to make it possible for us to earn our salvation by works*. Surely, Lash would deny those people have saving faith in Christ, despite their substitutionary beliefs. The key is getting the promise of salvation right. Why? Because no matter how many facts about Jesus' life and mission one may believe, none are salvific in themselves. One must believe Jesus' promise in order to be saved.

Having said that, there are many different legitimate ways of presenting Jesus' gospel promise, and many different reasons for believing that His promise is true. GES is open to them all, and does not posit a false distinction between believing in Jesus' substitutionary death over and against His guarantee of everlasting life.

Third, Lash is critical of a minimalist presentation of the gospel and implies that GES literally does not tell people about the person and work of Christ:

Of course, those who attempt evangelism without mentioning the accomplishments of Christ on the cross never communicate the illuminating power of the gospel. So, their converts have done nothing more than exercise faith in their own faith. Serious seekers who fall for this counterfeit conversion experience will usually spend a life of despair and doubt, never gaining the assurance of salvation (p. 12).

The problem with such a gospel presentation is that there is not in that formula an objective factual basis for faith. There has not been presented in the formula information which communicates what really merits a person's eternal standing with God, that being the merits of Christ crucified (p. 13).

This accusation ignores the fact that nearly everything published by GES carefully exposit the life of Christ: Who He is, what He did for mankind on the cross, as well as all of the other cardinal doctrines of the faith. Even in his (in)famous articles on "How to Lead People to Christ" (credited with originating the "crossless gospel" controversy, see *JOTGES*, Autumn 2000 and reprinted in Spring 2009), Zane Hodges emphatically urged the importance of preaching the cross of Christ: "In the light of what we have just said, should we preach the cross of Christ? The answer to that is emphatically yes." As Hodges went on to explain:

Why should men trust Christ for eternal life? The gospel gives us the wonderful answer. They should do so because Jesus has bought their salvation at the cost of His own precious blood. And God has placed His seal on the work of the cross by raising Jesus from the dead (p. 112-13).

Lash's criticism at this point is entirely without merit.

Fourth, Lash is concerned that the "crossless gospel" has a too narrow view of eternal life. "Crossless Gospel Advocates have a Narrow Definition of Eternal Life" one subtitle reads.

To understand another error of the crossless gospel advocates, one must understand the concept of Jesus' granting of eternal life. This is

important to see if we are to properly understand what part the Lord Jesus plays in the sinner's passing from death unto life (p. 31).

What the crossless gospel advocates fail to understand, Lash claims, is that it is "first and foremost, the capacity for communion with the Father."

As usual, Lash does not provide a shred of proof to back up his accusation. One wonders if he is familiar with Hodges' book *Harmony With God: A Fresh Look at Repentance*, or his commentary on *The Epistles of John*, both of which clearly teach the very position that Lash claims GES does not hold.

In conclusion, I should mention that, despite these criticisms, Lash has a number of positive things to say about GES, calling it a "very helpful organization," led by "much-needed pioneers of free grace theology" who "positively impacted" many for the gospel, including the author himself. "I whole-heartedly agree with the vast majority of what Dr. Bob Wilkin says concerning the dynamics of the New Birth" (p. 3).

This is heartening to know. But it is disheartening to think a former supporter could so seriously misunderstand and misrepresent GES. I hope this review will convince readers that there is no relationship between what Lash calls the *crossless gospel* and GES. I'm afraid I cannot recommend this booklet, except, perhaps, for those interested in the "crossless gospel" controversy.

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Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy. By Eric Metaxas. Nashville, TN. Thomas Nelson, 2010. 608 pp. Hardcover: \$29.99.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (4 February 1906–9 April 1945) was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian, anti-Nazi resistent, and founding member of the Confessing Church. His view of Christianity's role in the secular world has become very influential. Bonhoeffer became known for his resistance against the Nazi dictatorship, strongly opposing Hitler's euthanasia

programs, and the genocide against the Jews. He was also involved in plans by members of the *Abwehr* (the German Military Intelligence Office) to assassinate Adolf Hitler. He was arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and executed by hanging in April 1945, 23 days before the Nazis' surrender.

Some of Bonhoeffer's broad appeal can be explained by his great enemy. Since 1944, both liberal and Biblical Christians have counted Hitler as the greatest of modern evils. Since Bonhoeffer stood against Nazism, he naturally has commonality across the theological spectrum. Yet his popularity draws from another important source as well. Bonhoeffer, like most people, changed fairly dramatically over the course of his short life. Metaxas does a very nice job tracing this change, though his emphasis on Bonhoeffer's growing orthodox gained the author few friends among the more liberal theologians.

The book, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* became a New York Times #1 bestseller, and was named "Book of the Year" by the ECPA. *Bonhoeffer* also won the 2011 John C. Pollock Award for Biography awarded by Beeson Divinity School and a 2011 Christopher Award in the Non-fiction category. Called a "biography of uncommon power," *Bonhoeffer* appeared on numerous 2010 "Best of the Year" lists and was featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, *The New Republic*, *Harper's*, *Kirkus* (starred review), *NPR*, *FoxNews*, C-SPAN's *Book TV*, *Christianity Today*, *The Weekly Standard*, and *First Things*.

In 2011, Metaxas was the 17th recipient of the Canterbury Medal awarded by the Becket Fund for Religious Freedom, an award based on *Bonhoeffer* and Eric's earlier book *Amazing Grace* the story of William Wilberforce.

Not all reviews were so positive. As mentioned above, liberal thinkers were rather displeased with Metaxas' work, feeling that Bonhoeffer's thought was redacted to reflect a more Biblical worldview than the one Dietrich truly possessed. I think their claims have some merit, especially since the influence of Karl Barth and Berlin's Higher Critic circles were underdeveloped in the book. That said, the progress of Bonhoeffer appears to be fairly depicted by Metaxas. It appears undeniable that he moved more and more toward Scriptural orthodoxy, away from the liberalism of Berlin and the neo-orthodoxy of Barth.

Finally, those who see the perseverance of the saints as an iffy proposition dependent on human work did not appreciate Metaxas' attempts to trace Dietrich's move toward the doctrine of eternal security.

Pride and Leadership: One of the early themes in Dietrich's writing and speaking concerned the evil of pride. On Wednesday, February 1, 1933 Dietrich gave a speech on German radio. The Nazis had just won control of the government and may have pulled the plug before Bonhoeffer was finished (or the preacher may have merely gone too long.) Regardless, before the airtime was over he spoke about the evil of pride in leaders:

The difference between real leadership and the false leadership of The Leader [is] this: real leadership derives its authority from God, the source of all goodness. But the authority of a Furher [is] submitted to nothing. It is self-derived and autocratic...A true leader must know the limitations of his authority (p. 141).

Later, Bonhoeffer broke from the German church, which had become thoroughly "Nazified," joining a group called "The Confessing Church." He even started his own seminary on the Baltic coast. There, he was able to develop leadership according to a Biblical model.

Philosophy & Theology: In one Metaxas' best passages, he summarizes *Act & Being*, Dietrich's postdoctoral thesis (a requirement then to enter the ranks of university lecturers).

In *Act and Being (Akt und Sein)*, he used philosophical language to show that theology is not merely another branch of philosophy, but something else entirely. For him, philosophy was man's search for meaning apart from God. It was a type of Barth's "religion," in which man himself tried to reach heaven or truth or God. But theology begins and ends with faith in Christ, who reveals himself to man; apart from such revelation, there could be no such thing as truth. Thus the philosopher—and the theologian who operates on a philosopher's assumptions—chases his own tail and gazes at his own navel. He cannot break out of that cycle, but God, via revelation, can break in (p. 89).

Dietrich's change: When Dietrich came to America in 1930, his experiences changed him. He became increasingly disgusted with the dry liberalism that masqueraded as “progressive” thought, was horrified at racism in the US, and was deeply moved by vibrant “negro” churches in Harlem. The preaching and Bible study at Abyssinian Baptist particularly impressed him. Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy had made German theologians open to the idea of Scripture as real revelation. Of course, the Bible says that conversion comes by hearing God’s Word and in Harlem Bonhoeffer clearly heard God’s Scripture. A few years later, he wrote a letter to a friend (Elizabeth Zinn) that described the change manifested in him during 1930:

Something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible...I had often preached. I had seen a great deal of the Church, and talked and preached about it—but I had not yet become a Christian... Since then, everything has changed (p. 123).

Church & state: Dietrich was one of the earliest to understand that National Socialism was a direct threat to the Lord’s church. He recognized that church and state issues were going to become critical under the zeitgeist of Nazism. He commented about the dangers of the *Gleichaltung* (synchronization of society) and the wedding of state church with Hitler:

Bonhoeffer’s three conclusions—that the church must question the state, help the state’s victims, and work against the state, if necessary—were too much for almost everyone. But for him they were inescapable. In time, he would do all three (p. 155).

After [Pastor Martin] Niemöller had been imprisoned for eight years in concentration camps as the personal prisoner of Adolf Hitler, he penned these famous words:

First they came for the Socialists [Communists], and I did not speak out—because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists [businesses & bankers], and I did not speak out—because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

And then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me (p. 192).

Relevancy: Bonhoeffer had some particularly piercing thoughts on relevancy. Having spent time serving in slums and palaces, he was experienced enough to comment and insightful enough to offer this timeless idea about the Bible's relevancy (excerpted from a letter to his friend Hildebrandt):

Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its relevancy is axiomatic...Do not defend God's Word, but testify to it...Trust to the Word. It is a ship loaded to the very limits of its capacity (p. 272)!

Cheap grace: Bonhoeffer and Metaxas are each passionate about something they call "cheap grace." The problems lie not in what each man says, but in where they place their thoughts theologically. Their calls to an accountable Christian walk are laudable; however, they often confuse following and believing. Determined to make God's grace precious, they rather foolishly forget that for humans it is free.

Metaxas wrote:

The obedient Christian life, the call of the disciple...came with a cost, which explained why so many were afraid to open their eyes to it in the first place. It was the antithesis of the "cheap grace" that required nothing more than easy mental assent, which he wrote about in *Discipleship* (p. 279).

Bonhoeffer's pugnacious dedication to "costly grace" led him to some colossal blunders. For example,

On April 24 [1936], Bonhoeffer delivered a lecture titled "The Question of the Boundaries of the Church and the Church Union" [Church Union = the Confessing Church, as opposed to Hitler's

Nationalized Socialist Church]...Someplace in this beautiful [speech], planted like a time bomb, was a single sentence. It would soon explode and effectively obliterate every sentence around it and cause a firestorm of controversy... The controversial sentence was this: "Whoever knowingly separates himself from the Confessing Church in Germany separates himself from salvation [that is, justification]" (p. 286).

Obviously, Bonhoeffer had joined the Roman Catholics and every other world religion in making salvation something earned or kept by behavior. That is not to say that all of Dietrich's comments were so explosively off-base.

I consider this the best book I read in 2010. After hearing Metaxas at the Trinity Christian Academy annual banquet, I became an even bigger fan of book and author.

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