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# THE NOVELTY OF FREE GRACE THEOLOGY, PART 2: THE DANGERS OF FOLLOWING THE COMMENTARY TRADITIONS

BY KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
*Columbia, SC*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In part one of this two-part series, I argued that in the extant writings of the early Church it is difficult to find any significant support for a Free Grace understanding of the gospel. However, the same could be said for any understanding of the gospel that proclaims justification by faith alone in Christ alone. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers and Church Fathers reflect, among other things, a works-oriented gospel that threatened the loss of salvation, the necessity of water baptism for forgiveness of sins, and a harsh understanding of the offer of forgiveness for believers who commit sin.

But it should be just as evident to anybody who reads these writings that a Lordship understanding of the gospel is also absent. Hence, it is ironic that some Lordship proponents reject a Free Grace understanding of the gospel on the grounds that it does not have the support of the very early Church on its side.

However, Lordship teachers are much more likely to point to the Reformers for support of their views. Beginning with the sixteenth century, it is maintained, Lordship Salvation is clearly taught. This gives relative antiquity to these views. Free Grace, on the other hand, is a “newer-comer” to the theological scene. This casts doubt upon the validity of Free Grace theology.

In this article I will address these issues. In addition, the reasonableness and Scriptural basis for Free Grace theology will be addressed.

## II. THE GOSPEL AND THE REFORMATION

With the coming of the Renaissance and the Reformation, dramatic changes occurred in the church. There was the cry of *Ad fontes*—"back to the sources." As far as the gospel was concerned, this meant going back to the original manuscripts of the NT. Instead of what the Catholic Church taught, there was a search to find theological truths in the inspired Word of God.

Most advocates of Lordship Salvation trace their lineage to the Reformers of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> They argue that Luther and Calvin's teachings support Lordship Salvation. Calvin speaks of a false or temporary faith (*Institutes* 3.2.11). In addition, works at least provide some kind of assurance (3.17.10). Free Grace theology, on the other hand, is not clearly found in extant writings until the Marrow Controversy (late 1600s to early 1700s), Jon Glas and Sandemanism (1725–50), and Darby (1825).

These arguments are by no means certain. Calvin, at least in some places, says that assurance is part of saving faith and not by our works (*Institutes* 3.2.16; 3.14.19). Lane says that Calvin thought that if we find assurance of salvation from our work, we reject the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In addition, Lane says that it was the later followers of Calvin in the 17th century, and not Calvin himself, who taught that believers find assurance by perseverance.<sup>2</sup> Others have come to the same conclusion.<sup>3</sup> If that is the case, Free Grace views and Lordship views arise relatively simultaneously in extant writings.

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur appeals to Luther, Calvin, and the later Westminster Confession and Puritans. See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel according to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, 'Follow Me?'* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 223ff.

<sup>2</sup> A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Charles M. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985); Kendall, R. T. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Zane

It is also interesting that a recent book challenges the notion that Lordship Salvation beliefs are present from the beginning of the Reformation, but Free Grace is not. The writer, who is by no means sympathetic to the Free Grace view, states that many of the teachings of Free Grace theology are present alongside Reformed theology from the very beginning. He simply maintains that Free Grace ideas were the reflection of the minority.<sup>4</sup>

In any case, it is somewhat ironic to argue that Free Grace theology is incorrect because we do not find an expression of it from the beginning of the Reformation. Whether that is true or not, the Reformers themselves would say the test for its veracity is if the Scriptures support it. The battle cry, after all, was “back to the sources.” The battle cry was not what did others say, but what did the Word of God say.

In the late 1970s there was a debate between Zane Hodges and S. Lewis Johnson on the merits of Free Grace theology versus Lordship theology. Both men had respect for each other. It is said that Johnson commented that the problem with Hodges was that Hodges was not a *theologian*. Instead, he was a *Biblicist*. Johnson’s comment sprung from his respect for Hodges as well as Johnson’s practice that he would not adopt a belief unless he found it in the commentary tradition. Johnson felt that Hodges’s views were novel in this regard. But he also knew that Hodges would take this as a compliment. Hodges, on the other hand, felt that if Scriptures refuted the commentary tradition that tradition was to be set aside.<sup>5</sup>

The Reformers would agree with Hodges’s sentiments. But when interpreting the Bible, there are also some reasonable reasons for doing so.

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C. Hodges, “The New Puritanism: Part 1: Carson on Christian Assurance,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Mark Jones, *Antinomianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013). Even though he discusses these issues, Jones does not use the term “Free Grace.”

<sup>5</sup>Hodges himself stated that he found all of his views in the writings of others, except for one part of Romans. No doubt, Johnson held that these other writings expressed too small of a minority of Christian opinion to be taken seriously. As seen in part one of this two-part series, Carson would agree with Johnson. Hodges’s views did not reflect the view of any *significant* interpreter of the Bible [See D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 137.] But ultimately, for Hodges, that was not the issue. As a *Biblicist*, *all* other writings were subject to what he found in the Bible.

### III. THE REASONABLE NATURE OF FREE GRACE THEOLOGY

Whether one is studying the Bible for oneself, or teaching it, the issues surrounding Free Grace theology inevitably come up. One notices, for example, that some people adopt Free Grace theology without even knowing they are doing so. They are not even aware of the theological debates. For those who know the issues, sometimes they find that holding to a Lordship Salvation view contradicts certain passages.

In addition, sometimes problems arise when one holds to the commentary tradition that he or she has been exposed to. There is uneasiness when confronted with certain passages. If one is honest with the text, a “novel” understanding is needed to properly understand the text. Often, this understanding springs from a Free Grace perspective.

#### A. LAY PEOPLE AND FREE GRACE THEOLOGY

It is probably safe to say that the majority of churchgoers today are not familiar with the terms Lordship Salvation and Free Grace theology. It shouldn't be assumed that just because a person attends a church where the pastor holds to a Lordship view that all the people at the church do as well. The same would be true for a church where the pastor holds to a Free Grace view.

When I first went to seminary, I had a long conversation with a relative of mine. At the time, I held to a Lordship view of salvation. My relative went to a church where the pastor did as well. However, even though she did not know the terminology, she held a very strong Free Grace perspective. Whenever the issues of grace, works, and eternal salvation came up, she would quote verses from the Bible such as John 3:16 and the woman at the well. She would insist that she knew she was “going to heaven” because Jesus had promised her that was the case. She had believed in Him. If I asked her about sin in her life she would respond that Jesus' death paid for all of them.

My relative had some very mild learning disabilities. She had never read a commentary. In fact, I do not believe she even knew what one was or that they existed.

This example is not anecdotal. It is my experience that most people in churches have not read a commentary either. You don't have to be involved in ministry very long to find many such people who have believed in Jesus for eternal life apart from works and who know they are going to be a part of God's Kingdom. They know that whatever they do, they are God's children and that Jesus loves them no matter what and that He has paid for all their sins. The very idea, for example, that Jesus only died for some or that they have to look at their lives to see if they "really believed" is completely foreign to them.

Since this is not the result of the commentary tradition, surely this is the result of God's Word. The Holy Spirit reveals the truth of God's grace through that Word to people, even if they are not theologians. These ministries of the Word and Spirit have been operative from the beginning of the Church. As I argued in part one, these ministries existed among people in the first centuries of the Church who were not familiar with writings such as the *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* as well.

We must never underestimate the power of these ministries. How many people, who had no access to commentaries, have received eternal life as a free gift through hearing and believing John 3:16? Only eternity will answer that question.

I read a recent account of the Spirit using God's Word in an unexpected place. I was attending a Sunday school class, in which a certain curriculum was being used. Based upon past experience, I was aware that the curriculum usually leaned towards a Lordship view of salvation. However, on this particular lesson, in the introduction, the author spoke about being in a Bible study. The class was having difficulty interpreting Rom 5:10. The first part of the verse says that the believer has been reconciled to God through the death of Christ. The class understood that. However, the last part of the verse says that those who have been reconciled to God through Christ, "shall be *saved* by His life." They didn't understand how they could be saved by Christ's death, and then saved by His life.

The class was stumped, so they decided to take a week to research the verse as to what it meant. The next week a member of the class said he found the answer in an "amplified" version of the Bible. This version suggested that the word *saved* does not mean salvation from hell, but from the daily deliverance from

the power of sin. They concluded that the verse, in context, was telling believers to live every day in the *assurance* of forgiveness and in the power of the risen Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, understanding that the word “saved” often does not refer to eternal salvation is a part of Free Grace theology. This is also the key to understanding James 2. But since it is held to be “novel,” and not significantly present in the commentary tradition, many reject it. It is thrilling, however, to see people come to an understanding of the verse based simply upon the Bible and the context of the verse.

## B. LORDSHIP SALVATION CONTRADICTS CERTAIN PASSAGES

One of the problems with Lordship Salvation is that, if one holds to it, he or she inevitably comes across passages that contradict what it teaches. When I held a Lordship view, while in seminary, I was given the assignment to write a paper on the meaning of Rom 8:12-17. I had a very difficult time with the assignment. I read that passage and saw Paul was exhorting his readers to live by the Spirit and not the flesh (8:13). This certainly fits the whole context of Romans 6–8. The believer is exhorted to walk by the Spirit.

The passage also says that all Christians are “children” of God (8:16). But Rom 8:14 was the problem. It says that all who are led by the Spirit of God are “sons” of God. I couldn’t understand what Paul was saying. I equated being a son of God with being a believer. But if all believers are sons of God, and all sons of God are led by the Spirit, why does Paul exhort believers to walk by the Spirit? If walking by the Spirit was true of all believers and was automatic, why did Paul struggle with it in 7:15-25? Why did I and every other believer I knew struggle with it? It was clear to me that the passage taught that not all believers automatically walk by the Spirit.

I went to the library and read through about 15 commentaries on the passage. They all equated being a *son of God* with being a *believer* and said that all believers walk by the Spirit. I concluded that must be what the passage was saying, even though it was obvious to me that was not the case. In fact, my

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<sup>6</sup> Batson, Jerry W., “Live in Resurrection Power” *Explore the Bible* (Winter 2013-14), 101.

conclusion contradicted the clear meaning of the passage.<sup>7</sup> I went with what the commentaries told me instead of the text.

It wasn't until later, when I spoke with another believer who explained the passage from a Free Grace perspective, that I understood what the passage was saying. The answer was simple. There is a difference between being a *son* of God and being a *child* of God. This difference was right there in the text (vv 14, 16).

A *son* is a child that has matured. Believers who walk by the Spirit have matured in their walk with the Lord. Like the members of the Sunday school class discussed above, I realized that a *son* is one who, by the power of the Spirit, has victory over sin's power in his daily life. Believers can experience that kind of salvation. Even if every commentary I looked at didn't say it, the context and the Bible did. Here was an understanding of the text that did not contradict what Paul was clearly stating.

There is a beauty in the way God teaches His children. This passage had caused me a great deal of problems. God brought another believer into my life to point out what was obvious. When I saw it, I did not need to confirm it in a commentary. I did not have to search to see if the early Church supported it in any of its extant writings before I could accept it. The text taught it, and that was good enough for me. It was a liberating experience.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes, our understanding of a text does not blatantly contradict the passage. We hold positions because the commentaries say it, or it is what we have been taught. Nevertheless, we are uneasy about our interpretation. We recognize something is amiss. A Free Grace perspective often removes this uneasiness.

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<sup>7</sup> For a full discussion, see my article, Ken Yates, "'Sons of God' and the Road to Grace (Romans 8:12-17)," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 2006), 23-32.

<sup>8</sup> Since then, I have found this understanding in a few commentaries. This points out another weakness of relying on the "commentary tradition." What if a believer is not aware of other options in that tradition because these options are not available to him? Throughout history, the vast majority of believers did not, and do not, have an abundance of such resources at their fingertips.

### C. UNEASINESS AND THE COMMENTARY TRADITION

Probably all Christians have had the experience of holding to a particular meaning of Scripture because that is what they have been told it means. For some, it is because they have read it in commentaries. For others, it is because they have heard it from people they respect. The axiom is generally true that even if something is not true, if it is repeated enough, it becomes the truth. People will often hold to the truth of something in such circumstances even if occasionally something suggests it is not the case.

Even though it does not deal with the Free Grace and Lordship debate, an example of this comes from Matt 18:20. In that verse, Jesus says, “For where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.” For the majority of Christians, there is no need to discuss the meaning of this verse. It means that whenever Christians gather for Bible study, prayer meetings, or Christian fellowship of any kind, Jesus is with us. We don’t need to worry if the group is small. Jesus does not care. He is there.

We know this verse means that because we have heard it over and over again. For some, they have read it in devotional commentaries. They have certainly heard it from pulpits and while attending small meetings of believers. In fact, for the vast majority of Christians, that is the only interpretation of the verse they have heard or read.

Ten years ago, I also knew this was the meaning of the verse. I was even a seminary graduate, and had pastored military chapels around the world. I had heard the meaning of the verse and even had taught it to many small groups. However, occasionally I was a little uneasy about my understanding. Wasn’t Jesus with every *single* believer? Why was there a need for two or three to meet together in order for Jesus to be there? When a believer prays by himself, isn’t Jesus there? These were small details, however, since everybody (including myself) knew the meaning of the verse.

At that time, I heard Earl Radmacher teach on this passage. I didn’t understand the need, since the meaning was so obvious. He pointed out, however, that in the passage Jesus was speaking of church discipline. Part of the process when a believer sins is that, if he does not repent, two or more are to confront him.

For, as the OT states, “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed” (Matt 18:16). Just four verses later, Jesus concludes by saying, “For” when two or three are gathered in His name He is there. The word “for” is the conclusion of the passage. We can only understand v 20 if we understand the context before it.

As Radmacher pointed out, this has nothing to do with small groups getting together for fellowship, prayer meetings, or Bible study. When a church needs to discipline a believer, and it involves the “two or three” witnesses discussed (v 16), Jesus is in the midst. Such discipline is a difficult task, but what the church does, Jesus does. He is with them.

Unbelievably, even though I had been in full-time ministry for 25 years, I had never heard that! No doubt, part of that was due to my laziness in studying God’s Word. However, for me, this was a “novel” understanding of the passage. It went against everything I had ever heard or read. But it was correct. Even though I was embarrassed by my ignorance, I did not need to find this teaching in a commentary in order to accept it. It is what the text taught.

Another example of this principle does involve a Free Grace understanding of a text. It involves a portion of the text, discussed in part one of this series, that Carson uses to take exception to the Free Grace understanding of James 2. In v 19, it says that the demons also believe and shudder.

Here also, the majority of Christians see no need to discuss this verse. Its meaning is allegedly obvious. Lordship Salvation gives us the answer. James is saying that if we claim to be a believer in Jesus but don’t have works we aren’t really saved. We are deceiving ourselves. We are no better than demons, who are spiritually lost. After all, they also believe but they “shudder” before God. They don’t do good works even though they believe too. This is the meaning of James 2. Faith without works is dead because even the demons believe. So, if you claim to have faith but don’t have works, such a claim is false.

Like the previous example, this is all that most Christians have heard. If one goes to the commentaries on James they will almost certainly confirm that this is the meaning of the text. Years ago, I also held to this meaning for these reasons.

If one looks at the text a little closer, however, he or she will develop an uneasiness about this understanding of the verse. Even when I believed this was the meaning of the verse, I had these moments of doubt.

Why would James use demons as an example of people who are not saved because they don't do good works? Hebrews 2 makes it clear that demons cannot be saved regardless of what they believe or do. Christ did not die for them. But also, Jas 2:19 says that what demons believe is that "God is one." That belief is not the gospel. Nobody receives eternal salvation by believing that "God is one." If James is trying to say that people who say they believe the gospel but don't have good works are not saved, he sure uses a strange example. He uses demons, who cannot be eternally saved, and he uses a "gospel" that is not the gospel. In addition, the demons really do believe that God exists. How strange that James would use them to describe people who *don't* really believe what they claim.

It should also be noted that even those not friendly towards Free Grace see the problem with the usual interpretation of Jas 2:19.<sup>9</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these verses, however, the uneasiness of the usual understanding of these verses is taken away if one understands that James is not speaking of eternal salvation. All of James 2, in fact, is speaking of the fact that a faith that does not work is unprofitable for the believer. There will be negative consequences, but the issue of eternal salvation is not one of them.

These examples show the danger of relying solely on what one perceives as the commentary tradition, or relying on what we have been told verses mean. Sometimes such tradition makes it difficult to see what the Scriptures themselves say. When we place such traditions over the Scripture we either contradict the teachings of the text or find an uneasiness over our interpretations. We need to be open to the possibility that our traditions are wrong.

To do otherwise is to exhibit at least a degree of arrogance and to wear cultural blinders. When we speak of our

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<sup>9</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 122-26; Ralph P. Martin, *James*, vol. 48 (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 86-89; Martin Dibelius, *James*, trans. Michael A. Williams (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975), 151-54.

“commentary tradition,” what we probably have in mind is the teachings handed down in our own cultural milieu. For us, this means the teachings that have dominated in the West since the Reformation. Such teachings trump everything else, or at least can be an obstacle to seeing any other meaning. It also is saying that only the tradition that I have been instructed in can be correct. Our tradition trumps the Scriptures.

But one wonders how Christians who have lived in, and who currently live in, other countries understand certain verses. For those who live in those cultures, and have not been exposed to our commentary tradition, and they hear Matt 18:20 read, do they understand that Jesus is speaking of church discipline? For those who have not been exposed to our commentary tradition, or are not culturally burdened by understanding the word *salvation* as only referring to salvation from hell, how would they understand James 2, Rom 5:10, and Rom 8:13ff? Are they more likely to understand it in the same way as the students in the Bible study mentioned above? To discount such understandings, from the start, simply because they don't agree with what *we* have been told or read in our traditions, will probably result in our misunderstanding some texts.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

For many readers of this journal, we have been blessed with an abundance of resources in our study of the Scriptures. We have a plethora of linguistic tools to help us understand the original languages, for example. These resources also include a vast array of commentaries on every book of the Bible as well as books on theology. We have all benefited from these resources. Commentaries, for example, often point out issues or ways of understanding that we had not considered.

But there is a danger in these resources. When the majority of these resources proclaim a certain view, we can subconsciously come to believe that this view is automatically correct. Any view that challenges the majority is suspect.

This majority, whether from an Arminian or Lordship perspective, often holds that works are necessary for one to have the gift of eternal life. Assurance of such a gift is not completely

sure in this life. Since Free Grace theology challenges this majority, it is seen as novel.

Lordship Salvation adherents appeal to church history to bolster the strength of their majority view. However, as seen in part one, the gospel that one finds in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and in later Catholicism is not the gospel proclaimed by Lordship Salvation. These early writers did not say that works are necessary to prove one has eternal life, they said that without works eternal salvation is lost. Lordship Salvation teachers would reject the lack of grace often extended to both believers and unbelievers in these writings. They would also reject that forgiveness of sins and grace are extended through the sacraments.

It is not surprising, then, that a greater appeal is made to the Reformers to support the antiquity of their views. Certainly the followers of Calvin, by the seventeenth century and beyond, had systematized a theology that reflected their understanding of justification.

In fact, some maintain that Luther and Calvin themselves held to a Lordship view. The earliest extant writings of Free Grace theology are not found until the next century in the Marrow Controversy. As discussed above, this is debatable. However, even if that is the case, one must ask if that is a great difference when one considers the entire history of the Church.

Do such observations mean that Free Grace theology does not reflect the teachings of the Bible? Just a little reflection will answer that question in the negative. If antiquity is the standard for truth, Lordship Salvation is clearly to be rejected. Why should a gospel that is not systematized until after 16 centuries of Church history be considered ancient, while Free Grace theology, which arose at the most, a century later, be rejected for being recent? If the writings of antiquity are the standard, the writings of the early church give us the gospel. It is that one must work for eternal life and such life is easily lost. One finds forgiveness through the Church and its sacraments. God's grace and forgiveness are only obtained through great effort.

But the most ancient record of all, the Bible, rejects such an understanding of the gospel. For whatever reasons, the early Church writings often reflect an ignorance of the wonderful grace of Jesus Christ. God's Word shines a light on that grace.

Unfortunately, our commentary tradition can also darken that light. It often tells us that we cannot know we have eternal life. We must attempt to verify that we have that life by our works. Perfect assurance is impossible.

Upon reflection, however, we find that such an understanding of God's grace often contradicts God's Word. When we try to make such a theology align with that Word, there are gnawing questions of uneasiness.

Fortunately, the Spirit of God is at work in our world and lives. We see Him revealing the Biblical view of God's grace to people, and can be confident that even if we don't have their written records, He did the same throughout Church history.

From the beginning of this history, people have heard the same message that Jesus gave the woman at the well. It was the same message Jesus gave Nicodemus in John 3, and Martha in John 11. And what was that message? Eternal life is guaranteed to all who simply believe in Jesus Christ for it. No period of probation. No need to go to the Church to obtain it. No need to evaluate one's work to see if it is true.

The Spirit of God uses God's Word to reveal this grace to hearers. Have the majority of hearers ever understood and believed? No. Have the majority ever taught it or wrote about it in commentaries? No. But, is it novel? No. The Lord, the founder of the Church, proclaimed it.



# OUR EVANGELISM SHOULD BE EXEGETICALLY SOUND<sup>1</sup>

ROBERT N. WILKIN

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
Corinth, TX

## I. INTRODUCTION

**E**vangelism is typically taught in Bible colleges and seminaries by people in the Pastoral Ministries Department, and not by exegetes. While there is nothing wrong with that per se, whoever teaches about evangelism should handle the Word of God correctly.

Unfortunately, many Evangelicals today who teach evangelism do not study the NT to see what it teaches about the subject. The resulting presentations, while containing Bible verses, are not really *derived from Scripture* and hence often are not exegetically sound.

We should utilize sound exegesis in establishing our own evangelistic presentations. It is my contention that we should base our evangelism on the evangelistic ministry of the Lord Jesus as found in John's Gospel, the only evangelistic book in Scripture (John 20:30-31). If we develop our presentations there by means of sound exegesis, we will have evangelistic presentations that are clear and exegetically sound.

In this article, we will also consider key passages in the Synoptics (e.g., Matt 7:21-23; Luke 8:11-15; 13:1-5) and in the epistles (e.g., Rom 10:9-10; Jas 2:14-17), that are sometimes said to teach that commitment, confessing Christ, or perseverance in good works are conditions of the new birth or of "final

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<sup>1</sup>This article was adapted from a paper delivered at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting in November 2007.

salvation.”<sup>2</sup> We will see that there is good reason to question those interpretations.

A word is in order about the words *evangelism* and *evangelistic*. In this article, I am using those terms as synonyms for the saving message. This is the message that must be believed for a person to be regenerated. However, in my opinion, the words actually have a broader meaning than that in the NT. They refer to sharing the entire good news about Jesus, including both sanctification and justification truth, both how to be born again, and how to follow Christ via baptism and discipleship. But here I will use the terms as they are commonly used in Evangelicalism to refer to sharing the saving message only.

## II. WHY EXEGESIS IS NEEDED IN EVANGELISM

According to 2 Tim 3:16-17, all Scripture is profitable. Of course, Paul means that all Scripture is profitable *if it is properly understood and applied*.

This includes every verse of Scripture on every topic that Scripture addresses. It certainly includes passages of Scripture that present the saving message.

However, if any text is misinterpreted, then it is no longer profitable. God’s Word only profits the hearer when it is properly interpreted.

Evangelism is sharing the good news about Jesus Christ. Evangelism is good news if and only if it accurately reflects what the Lord Jesus actually said. Evangelism that misrepresents Him and His teachings is bad news, not good news.

Evangelicals who determine what to share in an evangelistic presentation by carefully and correctly exegeting the Scriptures are following the Berean principle of Acts 17:11: “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” We are to search

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<sup>2</sup>“Final salvation” has become a popular expression today not only for Arminians, who believe everlasting life can be lost and regained and lost again, but also for many Calvinists. By *final salvation* they mean that if someone perseveres in faith and good works until death, then he will receive final salvation on the last day. Actually, salvation (i.e., everlasting life) is *final* the moment one believes in Christ (John 3:16; 5:24).

the Scriptures to see if the various evangelistic presentations that are being suggested to us are indeed exegetically sound.

I came to faith in Christ in college through Campus Crusade for Christ. For two years I shared my newfound faith, but I did so uncritically. My message did change over time due to objections people raised that I couldn't answer from the Bible. But I never stopped to see how the Bible would tell me to evangelize.

I went on staff with Crusade and worked in full time college evangelism for four years. Again, the message I shared became exegetically sounder over time because of continued questions I would receive. But again, I failed to start from the beginning and ask what the Lord Jesus did when He told a person the saving message.

After four years on staff with Crusade, I went to Dallas Theological Seminary, where I majored in NT both in my Th.M. and Ph.D. programs. There, for the first time, I exegetically studied the message of evangelism. I studied what Jesus taught and modified the way I evangelized to fit His message.

While experience is no proof, I can testify that after I studied how the Lord shared the saving message with people, and began sharing the same message using His own words, I found my evangelistic endeavors became more natural, more enjoyable, more fulfilling, and more abundant. Whereas before I only evangelized strangers, I now evangelized friends, acquaintances, family, and strangers as well. It is essentially just as easy for me to talk about the everlasting life that Jesus gives to the one who believes in Him as it is to talk about the Dallas Cowboys and how they are doing.

I've found that exegetically sound evangelism flows naturally from us. However, evangelism that we haven't studied for ourselves comes out as stilted and unnatural.

### **III. EXEGETING THE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY OF THE LORD JESUS**

The first question is where to start. Many Evangelicals start with the Synoptic Gospels and Jesus' calls to discipleship.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988, 1993, 2008), and

That is an exegetically unsound idea. The Synoptics are not evangelistic presentations. They are written to believers to tell them how to follow Christ in discipleship.

Later, I will consider some passages from the Synoptics commonly used in evangelism that I believe illustrate the misuse of Scripture in evangelism. At this time, let's consider some passages in John's Gospel.

The Gospel of John is an evangelistic presentation. John 20:30-31 says that John was writing directly to unbelievers to lead them to faith in Christ for everlasting life. While there are some isolated comments by Jesus that relate to evangelism in the Synoptics, those comments are not full presentations. To be properly understood, they must be understood in light of the fourth Gospel.

It is relatively easy to exegete the evangelistic ministry of Jesus in the fourth Gospel. We simply need to read and analyze the text.

Jesus repeatedly says that the one who believes in Him has everlasting life. He uses various means to illustrate believing in Him:

- eating the bread of life (John 6:35)
- drinking the water of life (John 4:13-14; 6:35)
- receiving Him (John 1:12)
- coming to Him (John 6:35)
- believing the words the Father gave Him to deliver (John 5:24)

The Lord Jesus also uses a number of ways to illustrate the eternity of the life He gives:

- shall never hunger (John 6:35)
- shall never thirst (John 4:13-14; 6:35)
- has been born of God (John 1:13; 3:3, 5)
- shall never perish (John 3:16)
- has everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; etc.)
- shall not come into judgment (John 5:24)
- has passed from death into life (John 5:24)
- shall never die (John 11:26)

Let's briefly look at three passages.

*John 3:16-18.* In one of the most famous verses of Scripture, Jesus guarantees that all who believe in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life. Then, in the next verse, He clarifies what He means. The reason the Father sent Jesus was not to condemn the world (thus *perish* in v 16 is equal to *being eternally condemned* in v 17), but that the world through faith in Him might be saved (thus *everlasting life* in v 16 is equal to *being saved* in v 17). He adds in v 18 that the one who believes in Him is not condemned. That is, he is in a state of non-condemnation. But the one who does not believe in Him is in a state of condemnation right now (“is condemned already”).

Clearly the issue here is life and death. Note that the Lord does not discuss sin here. As the late Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was famous for saying, “In light of Calvary, the issue is no longer a *sin* issue. The issue is now a *Son* issue.”

Dead people need life. They get it by believing in Jesus. And once they get it, they have everlasting life; they will never perish; and they are saved once and for all.

*John 6:35.* After feeding 5,000 men plus likely another 15,000 women and children from one boy’s lunch, Jesus is confronted with a crowd that wants Him to keep the free food coming. They remind Him of the provision of bread that God gave the nation during the wilderness wanderings.

Jesus then launches into a sermon based on Him being the bread of life. “I am the bread of life.” He clearly means that He is the *Source of everlasting life*. One must partake of Him to have life that can never be lost.

“He who comes to me (for the bread of life) will never hunger.” This is a statement of eternal security. If anyone who partook of the bread of life ever needed to partake of it again to keep everlasting life, then this promise by the Lord Jesus would be a lie.

“He who believes in Me (e.g., drinks the living water) shall never thirst.” Here the Lord ties in this discourse with what He told the woman at the well in John 4:10-14. Once again, the promise that the believer will never thirst is a statement of eternal security. If the Lord is telling the truth, once a person simply believes in Him for it, that person has life that can never be lost.

If we follow the context, vv 36-40 emphatically repeat the promise of life that can never be lost for the one who believes in Jesus. So does v 47.

Note again we have no discussion of a sin problem. This is unlike modern evangelistic presentations that tell the unbeliever that he must turn from his sins (plus do other things) to be born again. Instead, the Lord Jesus makes the sole condition believing in Him.

*John 11:25-27.* A comparison of these verses with the purpose statement in John 20:32-31 shows that this is a key passage in John's Gospel. In these verses, Jesus makes not one, but two, "I am" statements.

First He says, "I am the resurrection." He explains what this means in v 25: "He who believes in Me, though he may die (physically), he shall live (physically)." Jesus is not promising *spiritual* life here as most wrongly presuppose. Jesus is promising future resurrection life in the kingdom of God for the one who believes in Him.

Then He says, "I am the life." He explains this in v 26: "He who lives and believes in Me shall never die." Here we have two present articular participles: "the one who lives (*ho zōn*) and believes (*pisteuōn*) in Me."<sup>4</sup> Whatever "he who lives" means influences our understanding of "believes in Me." The two participles have but one article and are joined by *kai* (and). Unlike modern presentations, Jesus does not condition everlasting life on persevering faith. Nor does it depend on continuing to live, physically. While a person must come to faith in Christ while he is alive to be born again, once he believes, he is secure, even if he later dies or stops believing.

If we find a living human who believes in Jesus, we have found someone who "will never die." Since He is discussing everlasting life here ("I am the life"), this is a strong statement of eternal security. Whereas often Jesus emphasizes the present possession of everlasting life, here he does that by denying the opposite.

This sort of evangelistic presentation is radically different than the way most evangelize today.

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<sup>4</sup> Author's own translation.

And notice the ending: “Do you believe this?” He doesn’t ask Martha to pray a prayer or commit herself to follow Him. He simply asks if she believes this. In John’s Gospel to believe *in* (*pisteuō eis*) is the same as believing *that* (*pisteuō hoti*) He is the Christ, as Martha’s response in v 27 shows. She states that she does believe Him, and she says why. It is because she believes that He is “the Christ, the Son of God.” In Johannine thought, for Jesus to be the Christ means that He is the guarantor of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him.

#### IV. WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT EVANGELISM FROM ACTS?

The book of Acts is written to a believer, Theophilus, to tell him about the birth and growth of the Church. It is not a book on how to evangelize. However, in the book Luke does give hints into how the Apostles evangelized.

Both Peter and Paul emphasized OT prophecies about the Messiah’s death and resurrection. We find these emphases in their preaching to Jewish audiences (cf. Acts 2:25-28, 34-35; 13:35; 17:2-3).

The story was spreading among Jews that Jesus had died because He was a sinner and that the story of His resurrection was a hoax being spread by His followers who had stolen the body (cf. Matt 28:13). It was thus vital to prove to these people who respected what we call the OT Scriptures that it was prophesied that the Messiah would both die on a cross for our sins and rise bodily from the dead on the third day. Otherwise, how could they believe that an imposter could grant anyone everlasting life by faith in Him?

Philip the evangelist explained an OT prophecy about Christ (Isaiah 53) as well when speaking with a proselyte, the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:32-33). Luke doesn’t tell us what Philip said to the people in Samaria, other than that “he preached concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). The latter is reminiscent of John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18 and the promise of everlasting life to all who believe in the name of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus.

Like the Lord Jesus, the twelve also preached “the words of this life (i.e., everlasting life)” (Acts 5:20). So did the Apostle to

the Gentiles. Paul called for Jews and Gentiles to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order that they might have everlasting life (Acts 13:46; 16:31).

The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 debated whether Gentiles had to be commanded to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses. There were two groups of people who said these things were necessary. One said they were necessary in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). The other said they were necessary in order to be sanctified (Acts 15:5). The Council concluded that only faith in Christ is required to have everlasting life (and that Gentiles were not to be put under the Law of Moses even for sanctification). Peter summed up what he told Cornelius and his household (Acts 10), saying,

Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they (Acts 15:7-11).

Peter twice mentions believing/faith and he is clearly speaking of faith *in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Peter proclaimed the gospel (Acts 10:36-42). Then he concluded with these words, “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, *whoever believes in Him* will receive the remission of sins” (Acts 10:43, emphasis added). He gives the same words, “whoever believes in Him” (*panta ton pisteuonta eis auton*) as the Lord spoke to Nicodemus in John 3:16.<sup>5</sup>

Cornelius had been told by an angel that Peter “will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). So when he and his household heard that whoever believes in Jesus will receive the remission of sins, they came to

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<sup>5</sup> Both use *pisteuō eis auton* and in each case present articular participles are used, though the construction is slightly different in John 3:16 (*ho pisteuōn eis auton*).

faith in Jesus for everlasting life before Peter could even finish his sermon (Acts 10:44)!

Acts confirms the message of John's Gospel. All who simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have everlasting life.

## V. WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT EVANGELISM FROM THE EPISTLES?

The epistles were all written to believers. They are designed to aid the readers in their walks with Christ. Of course, since continuing to believe the promise of life is vital to the Christian walk, the writers of the epistles do touch on the promise on a number of occasions (though not for the purpose of teaching the readers how to evangelize).

There is no instruction anywhere in the epistles on how to evangelize. However, if John's Gospel shows how the Lord Jesus evangelized,<sup>6</sup> then there is no need for the epistles to give that instruction. What we expect to find in the epistles is a continuation of the message of John 3:16. That is exactly what we find:

*Ephesians 2:8-9.* This was the passage that the Lord used to bring me to faith in Christ. Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." While Paul does not specifically mention the name of Jesus in these verses, it is clear in the context (Christ is mentioned in the three verses leading up to vv 8-9) that he is referring to salvation by grace through faith *in Christ*.

By *salvation* Paul means regeneration (or gaining everlasting life) as v 5 makes clear: "God...made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Ephesians 2:8-9 is essentially a restatement of the message of life found in John's Gospel.

*2 Timothy 1:1.* "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus"

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<sup>6</sup> Even John's Gospel is not designed to teach how to evangelize. Though it clearly shows how the Lord evangelized—and we should follow His example—the actual purpose is to lead unbelievers to faith in Christ (John 20:31). Thus, while we can find how to evangelize in John, that is not its purpose.

(emphasis added). Jesus said in John's Gospel, "I am the life" (John 11:25; 14:6). He said that all who believe in Him have everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47). That is what Paul is referring to when he speaks of "the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." Clearly, this is the promise that believers are to convey to their children, to their friends and extended family, and to all who will listen.

*1 Timothy 1:16.* Here, Paul gives a sort of testimony of how he came to faith in Christ. While he doesn't mention the Damascus road, he does mention what he learned from the Lord Jesus at that time. The extended context is 1 Tim 1:12-16:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to *believe on Him for everlasting life* (emphasis added).

Paul was a pattern, or example, "to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." Like John 3:16, the Apostle Paul says that everlasting life is for those who believe in Jesus for it.

*James 1:17-18.* When James speaks of "every good gift and every perfect gift," he has regeneration in mind. He goes on to say, "He brought us forth (i.e., regenerated us) *by the word of truth...*"

Though James doesn't specifically mention faith or Christ here,<sup>7</sup> it is clear that he is conveying the message of John 3:16.

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<sup>7</sup> He does mention the readers' faith in Christ in Jas 2:1. He also cites Gen 15:6, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness" (Jas 2:23).

He is saying that God regenerated us when we believed the message which the Lord Jesus proclaimed regarding everlasting life.<sup>8</sup>

*1 Peter 1:23.* The Apostle Peter uses similar language to that of James: “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...” Since the Word of God is forever true, so is the new birth that results from believing it. See above for a discussion of Peter’s evangelistic preaching in Acts 10:34-43 and his declaration regarding evangelism in Acts 15:7-11.

*1 John 5:9-13.* The Apostle John repeatedly speaks in these five verses of believing in Christ as the condition for everlasting life. “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself” (v 10). “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (v 11). “He who has the Son has (eternal) life...” (v 12a). “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may (continue to) know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (v 13).

Notice that John speaks of believing “in the Son of God,” that is, “in His Son” (cf. John 3:16; 5:24) and in “the name of the Son of God” (cf. John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18).

False teachers were trying to strip John’s readers, who were mature believers (1 John 2:12-14) of their assurance (cf. 1 John 2:25). John ends the body of his epistle with teaching designed to keep the readers from falling prey to such false teaching.

Many other passages in the epistles proclaim justification by faith alone, apart from works (e.g., Rom 4:4-5; Gal 1:6-9; 2:16; Gal 3:6-14).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, while the epistles do not tell the readers

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<sup>8</sup> James 2:14-26 is often seen as teaching regeneration by faith plus works (or regeneration by faith *that works*). That, however, contradicts Jas 1:17-18 as well as John 6:28-29; Rom 4:4-5; Gal 2:16; and Eph 2:8-9. For a discussion of Jas 2:14-26 see Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2009), 59-72. See also my article, “Another View of Faith and Works in James 2” (available at <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2002ii/wilkin.html>).

<sup>9</sup> Some would include 1 Cor 15:1-11 in this discussion. However, Paul is there discussing present sanctification (1 Cor 15:2, “you are being saved”), not evangelism. He does not mention faith in Christ, regeneration, justification, or everlasting life in that passage.

how to evangelize per se, they make it clear that the message we are to proclaim is the same one that the Lord Jesus proclaimed in John 3:16. Whoever simply believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has everlasting life that can never be lost. The issue is faith in Christ, not the works that people do or will do.

## VI. BUT WHAT ABOUT EVANGELISTIC PASSAGES IN THE SYNOPTICS?

There are no evangelistic passages in the Synoptics. That is, nowhere do we find the Lord sharing the promise of everlasting life by faith in Him in Matthew, Mark, or Luke.

In this section I will briefly touch on some passages that are commonly, but erroneously, considered to be evangelistic presentations in the Synoptic Gospels. Such texts are rather *pre-evangelism*. That is, they are designed to get the listeners/readers to think. But these texts do not explain the promise that whoever believes in Jesus Christ has everlasting life.

*Matthew 7:21-23.* This is often presented as teaching that to be born again one must obey the will of the Father, which means, it is said, a life of obedience. Yet that is not the point of this passage. In fact, it is the opposite of the point.

Note here that the problem is basing one's assurance on his work, rather than on the promise of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Jesus. "The will of the Father" is not a reference to perseverance in good works. Instead, it is *believing in Jesus* as John 6:39-40 and all other uses of this expression in Matthew and the rest of the NT shows.<sup>10</sup>

*Luke 8:5-8, 11-15.* Typically, this is used to show that one must persevere in good works to obtain "final salvation." Only those who persevere make it into the kingdom. Yet this too is the opposite of the point of the parable.

A comparison of vv 5-8 and 11-15 shows that the first soil represents an unbeliever and the latter three soils represent

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<sup>10</sup> See my article, "Is the 'Will of the Father' a Life of Obedience" in *Grace in Focus Magazine* (September/October 2013). Available online at <http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y2013/sep-oct/Is%20the%20will%20of%20the%20father.pdf>. Accessed September 2, 2014.

believers. The Lord specifically says that all of the latter three “sprang up” (Luke 8:6-8). The seed is the saving message. The latter three sprang up; hence the seed germinated.

Thus the Lord is telling us of three different types of born again people: ones who believe and then later fall away; ones who believe to the end but whose fruitfulness is compromised by “cares, riches, and the pleasures of life”; and ones who believe to the end and who are wholehearted in their service for Christ. The challenge here is to the believer to take heed how he hears the Word of God so that he might be completely fruitful (Luke 8:16-18). The challenge is not to the unbeliever to persevere in good works so that he makes it into the kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

If one comes to this parable already knowing the promise of life, then he can see that promise here. But apart from such prior knowledge, this parable serves to cause the reader to wonder what that saving message is.

*Luke 13:1-5.* This is commonly understood as the Lord teaching that one must turn from his sins to have eternal life and to escape eternal condemnation. Yet the context isn't dealing with eternal condemnation. The two illustrations are to premature physical death in this life. When the Lord says, “You will all likewise perish,” He is saying that if His listeners fail to repent, then they too will die prematurely.<sup>12</sup> That is what happened in 66–70 AD when the nation of Israel fell at the hands of the Romans.

*Matthew 16:24-28.* This passage is commonly understood as teaching that to have eternal salvation we must practice lifelong self-denial and following Christ on the way to our own crosses. Yet the Lord is discussing discipleship (v 23), not justification. Peter had just made a great confession of faith in Jesus (Matt 16:16), followed by a great blunder (Matt 16:22). Jesus' words here are in response to the blunder of *a believer*. He is telling

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<sup>11</sup> See my journal article, “How Deep Are Your Spiritual Roots? (Luke 8:11-15),” at <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1999i/J22-99a.htm> for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>12</sup> See Alberto S. Valdés, “The Gospel According to Luke,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary, Volume 1: Matthew–Acts* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 296.

Peter and all of us the price to follow Him, even if it entails suffering for Christ.

Note that v 27 shows that the issue is eternal reward, not kingdom entrance. The Lord has the *Bema*, the Judgment Seat of Christ, in view here.<sup>13</sup>

All of the false understandings of these passages could easily be avoided if we simply used the analogy of faith and allowed the clear teaching of the Lord in John's Gospel to guide our understanding of the saving message. The simple message is that eternal life is given to all who believe in Jesus for it.

## VII. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS THAT ARISE?

All of us who have proclaimed justification by faith alone apart from works have heard the same sorts of questions again and again. Here are some of the questions we face:

- But what if someone commits a big sin?
- But wouldn't this promote ungodliness?
- Why wouldn't someone live like the devil?
- Doesn't Jesus save us *from our sins not in our sins*?
- Don't the apostles warn us that we might not make it?
- Isn't repentance the flip side of faith?
- Isn't repentance a condition for eternal life along with faith?
- Isn't obedience necessary to keep eternal life?
- Isn't obedience necessary to prove we have eternal life?

All of these questions have simple answers. We should point the questioner to the cross, where all of our sins were taken away (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). No longer are our sins a barrier to us gaining eternal life by faith in Jesus.

Of course, there are experiential problems that result from our sins, whether we are believers or unbelievers. The wages of sin is death for the believer and the unbeliever. We can, and should, point this out.

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<sup>13</sup> For more info see <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1993i/Bing.htm> and [www.faithalone.org/magazine/y1992/92march2.html](http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y1992/92march2.html). Accessed September 2, 2014.

We should also point the questioner to the law of sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7-9). Whatever we sow, we will reap in the life to come. The quality of the believer's eternal experience will depend on what he sows in this life. While all believers are eternally secure, our eternal experience will vary.

This also applies to this life. The believer who sows to the Spirit reaps an abundant life here and now. The believer who sows to the flesh reaps a frustrated and pained experience here and now.

But what we must not deny is that failure is possible in the Christian life. God doesn't guarantee that all believers will live holy lives or will persevere in faith and good works.

### **VIII. DON'T TEACH ANYTHING, ESPECIALLY THE SAVING MESSAGE, UNTIL YOU HAVE MADE SURE WHAT YOU'RE TEACHING IS EXEGETICALLY SOUND**

James 3:1 should be a warning to us all on the need to be exegetically sound. The writer says, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

Paul gives us a similar warning in 1 Cor 3:10-15:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

All believers will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ and our works will be evaluated. This includes all we have taught evangelistically and in terms of discipleship. This is a sobering thought.

Teach what Jesus taught and you are not going to be rebuked by Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ for those teachings. Teach contrary to what He taught and rebuke is sure to come.

Whoever teaches evangelism should teach what the Bible teaches and not what is in vogue. If a Ph.D. teaches evangelism, and yet what he is teaching is not exegetically sound, then that is bad. If a high school dropout teaches evangelism, and what he is teaching is exegetically sound, that is good.<sup>14</sup>

It is vital that we all practice sound exegesis in our own evangelistic presentations. Exegesis is not just for sermons, seminary classes, or journal articles.

If we do the necessary exegesis first, we will proclaim what the Lord Jesus proclaimed: that the one who simply believes in Jesus Christ for everlasting life that can never be lost has that life. And if we do, then we can anticipate one day hearing, “Well done, good servant” (Luke 19:17).

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<sup>14</sup> A friend of mine, Lon Gregg, is Spiritual Director at Denver Rescue Mission. He went to Dartmouth, an Ivy League school, on a scholarship. After two years he dropped out. He was taking drugs and began traveling. Lon ended up in Chicago and spent the night in the famed Pacific Garden Mission. The next morning, he was reading the Bible in the library there. A man with a third grade education asked him if he understood what he was reading. Lon admitted he did not. The man pointed him to John 3:16 and led him to faith in Christ. Lon went back to Dartmouth and finished his degree. Then he went to Dallas Theological Seminary and received his Master of Theology degree. The one who led him to Christ had no advanced degrees, but he knew the message of life and conveyed it clearly.

# THE TWO MODES OF HUMANITY, PART 3: OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As stated in part one of this three-part series, most Evangelicals do not believe that there will be children born in the eternal state. In this article, I will consider the objections they raise and will respond to those objections.

The objections to the view from interpreters such as John Walvoord, Craig Blaising, Tony Garland, David L. Turner, Floyd S. Elmore, and Joseph Dillow will be considered. It will be proposed that a lingering influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism may have contributed to some of the objections.

## II. OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

The modern commentary tradition rarely addresses the view of two humanities in the eternal state. When it has been addressed, it has sometimes been misrepresented or simply mentioned, and then dismissed. Rarely has it been accurately represented and seriously engaged.

Among revised dispensational premillennialists, the possibility of two modes of humanity in the eternal state is rarely brought up. For example, in essays in a Festschrift dedicated to J. Dwight Pentecost, neither Donald K. Campbell nor Louis A. Barbieri Jr., address the possibility when writing about the

eternal state.<sup>1</sup> The pattern is usually simply to assert that all humanity will be in glorified bodies in the new heaven and earth. Barbieri reflects this in the following comment:

Though it cannot be dogmatically asserted, it appears that at this time there will be a total remaking of the present world system... Regenerated people in physical bodies who did not follow Satan in his rebellion could not survive such an intense refinement of the earth. Although the Bible does not say what will happen to these people while this process is taking place, it is reasonable to conclude that they will experience a “rapture” into the heavenly city, Jerusalem. In order for these people to enter the heavenly city, they must experience a change from human bodies to glorified bodies...With the completing of these events all mankind will be in one of two places: either eternally separated from God in the lake of fire, or eternally present with God in glorified bodies in the new heaven and the new earth.<sup>2</sup>

Someone as significant as John F. Walvoord, president of Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1986, misrepresented the view in his commentary on Revelation. He wrote:

Larkin introduces the startling point of view that children will be born in the eternal state who, unlike the posterity of Adam and Eve, will be sinless. There is no indication whatsoever in Scripture that resurrected and translated beings have the quality of human sex, much less the capacity to produce offspring.<sup>3</sup>

Larkin did not say, as Walvoord implies, that resurrected and translated beings produced offspring. He said representatives of the Millennial nations do so. Marty Cauley comments on Walvoord’s misrepresentation:

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<sup>1</sup> Donald K. Campbell and Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, edited by Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 327.

This position does not argue that “resurrected and translated” human beings will have offspring. On the contrary, it is acknowledged that resurrected human beings will not be involved sexually or have offspring (Mk 12:25). What is argued, by the advocates of this position, is that some human beings who survive the millennium in flesh and blood bodies will be translated into the eternal state without undergoing death and thus without experiencing the resurrection or receiving glorified bodies. The change they undergo will be the removal of their sin nature, not the removal of their flesh and blood status or sexual ability. Larkin was neither the first nor the last interpreter to suggest this solution.<sup>4</sup>

Craig Blaising, a progressive dispensationalist who served as professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary and is Executive Vice President and Provost of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, presents a fairly accurate summary of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state view without addressing its Scriptural support or specifically citing its adherents.<sup>5</sup> He gives the impression that the view is generally representative of Classical Dispensationalism. He appears to summarily dismiss the view in this quote about the church in the eternal state:

One of the striking differences between progressives and earlier dispensationalists is that progressives do not view the church as an anthropological category in the same class as terms like Israel, Gentile Nations, Jews, and Gentile people. The church is neither a separate race of humanity (in contrast to Jews and Gentiles) nor a competing nation (alongside Israel and Gentile nations), nor is it a group of angelic-like humans destined for the heavens in

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<sup>4</sup> Marty A. Cauley, *The Outer Darkness: Its Interpretation and Implications* (Sylva, NC: Misthological Press, 2012), 645.

<sup>5</sup> Craig A. Blaising, “The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 23-24.

contrast to the rest of redeemed humanity on the earth.<sup>6</sup>

Tony Garland, in a commentary on Revelation, engages the two humanities view.<sup>7</sup> He quotes Seiss, Larkin, Thomas, and others. He summarizes his objections to the view:

The proposal that human beings, in natural bodies, continue to populate the eternal state as separate peoples from the glorified saints seems to raise as many issues as it attempts to solve. Nor does it account for the ultimate unity among the redeemed of eternity in its proposal that flesh and blood *can* inherit the eternal kingdom of God. Neither does it provide additional insight into the purpose of the tree of life in the eternal state because it proposes conditions no different than those in the Garden of Eden for which the mystery of the need for a tree of life during conditions of sinless perfection remains. As intriguing as the view may be to some, it seems to go beyond Scripture and fails to provide significant benefit in an understanding of eternity.<sup>8</sup>

Garland's objections are adequately answered in the definition of the two classes of humanity. One class consists of those who rule and reign (inherit the kingdom), while the other class consists of those in natural and transformed bodies who inhabit the new earth. His objections seem to be simply rooted in a personal preference for the single united humanity view in eternity.

David L. Turner raises the question of the nature of life in the New Jerusalem and in doing so addresses the two humanities view.<sup>9</sup> While discussing the book of Revelation, he comments:

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Vol. 2 (SpiritAndTruth.org, 2007), notes on Rev 21:24 and 22:2. The notes are available on the internet at [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/download/revelation/TestimonyOfJesusChrist\\_vol2.pdf](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/download/revelation/TestimonyOfJesusChrist_vol2.pdf). Accessed 12/11/12..

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 168 (pdf file).

<sup>9</sup> David L. Turner, "The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1–22:5", in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 289.

This matter is particularly challenging because of the mention of such features as the glory of earthly kings being brought into the city (21:24-27) and the evident need for the healing of the nations (22:3)...One possible approach to this question would be that the saved individuals who survive the Tribulation and enter the Millennium in an unglorified state will remain in such a state when the Millennium gives way to the new heaven and earth. If that were the case, however, all things would not have been made new (21:4), and flesh and blood would have inherited the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50).<sup>10</sup>

Again, the simple answer to his objections is found in the definition of the two humanities as being composed of a glorified humanity who inherit the eternal kingdom and a transformed natural humanity rendered incapable of sin who inhabit the new earth. Such a view of eternity could also accurately be described as completely “new.”

Floyd S. Elmore addresses the question of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state in his 1990 Dallas Theological Seminary dissertation, *A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby*. He asserts that, “two people of God as to mode of existence will continue through the millennium. This is a necessity of premillennial interpretation.”<sup>11</sup> Concerning the eternal state, however, he concludes:

With the arrival of the eternal state, two positions are possible concerning the continuation of the two people of God. On the one hand, the eternal distinction between the two modes of life is suggested theologically by the ultimate fulfillment of God’s original creative purpose. This position affirms humanity as originally created to be an *eternal* purpose of God, and not a mere means to the end of having glorified humans in fellowship with God forever on a new

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Floyd S. Elmore, *A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby* (PhD Diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992), 310.

earth. Such an eternal state with two peoples would be dynamic and expanding...On the other hand, the position holding to one people of God in eternity as to mode is suggested theologically by the necessity for the salvation of all who enter that final state. If they are called and justified, they must also be glorified, which implies a transformation of their natural humanity. Such an eternal state would be static, however, having “locked” all who arrive into a mode of existence which precludes propagation of the race. The adoption formula associated with the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Ps 2:7 used in Acts 13:33, Heb 1:5; 5:5) is applied to all “overcomers” who enter the eternal state (Rev 21:3, 7), possibly suggesting that all occupants of the New Jerusalem will be in a resurrected-glorified state...Although the distinction among classes of saints in the eternal heavenly mode is suggested by Scripture, the utility of such distinction is hard to determine. The historical categories of Heb 12:22-24 may be reporting who arrives at the eternal state without intending to infer that those classifications are eternal. This seems reasonable in the light of the omission of such categories from Rev 21:1-7...Although Darby and many dispensationalists give good reasons for two eternal modes of life, one people as to mode in the New Jerusalem on earth seems to this writer to be the most likely alternative. Therefore, the bride of Christ may include all the redeemed and glorified from all dispensations brought together in one sphere of existence upon the inauguration of the eternal state.<sup>12</sup>

Elmore affirms that the two modes of humanity in the eternal state are suggested theologically by the fulfillment of God’s original creative purpose and by Scripture. His objection is based on the theological supposition that all who enter the eternal state must be glorified. This is an inference which is adequately answered by the definition of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state. He states that the utility of such distinction is

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 310-11.

hard to determine. That utility is found in his statement that an eternal state with two peoples would be dynamic and expanding, and an eternal state with one mode would be static. His adoption of the one-mode view appears to be simply a personal preference.

Joseph Dillow adopts the one-mode view in his book *Final Destiny*.<sup>13</sup> His argument rests on the theological inference that 1 Cor 15:50-58 refers to a postmillennial transformation of the living and the resurrection of the dead who died during the millennium. It does not refer to a pre-tribulational rapture. He provides his answers to objections but his view remains an inference and not an explicit teaching of the text. He states in a footnote, “There is no room here for two kinds of bodies in the eternal state, enhanced mortal bodies...and the glorified resurrection bodies mentioned elsewhere.”<sup>14</sup> The two-mode view does not maintain that natural humanity in the eternal state merely have enhanced mortal bodies. Millennial natural humanity has an enhanced mortal body but in the eternal state is rendered immortal and incapable of sin, though still natural and capable of propagation.

Both the one-mode view and two-mode views of humanity in the eternal state are theological inferences from Scriptural texts. Both advance plausible answers to objections and positive arguments. An interpreter’s predisposition concerning the natural and spiritual state may influence which view he finds most attractive.

### III. LINGERING INFLUENCE OF PLATONISM AND NEO-PLATONISM?

A lingering influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism may account for some interpreters’ predisposition to a one-mode view of humanity in the eternal state.<sup>15</sup> Vlach discusses both of these philosophical systems. First, he addresses Platonism:

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2013), 99-119.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>15</sup> A helpful article by Michael J. Vlach, “Platonism’s Influence on Christian Eschatology,” can be found at [http://theologicalstudies.org/files/resources/Platonism\\_and\\_Eschatology\\_article\\_%28PDF%29.pdf](http://theologicalstudies.org/files/resources/Platonism_and_Eschatology_article_%28PDF%29.pdf) (accessed

Platonism is rooted in the ideas of the great ancient Greek philosopher, Plato (427–347 BC). Plato was one of the first philosophers to argue that reality is primarily ideal or abstract. With his “theory of forms,” he asserted that ultimate reality is not found in objects and concepts that we experience on earth. Instead, reality is found in “forms” or “ideas” that transcend our physical world...One result of Platonism was the belief that matter is inferior to the spiritual... This perspective naturally leads to negative perceptions concerning the nature of the physical world and even our human bodies.<sup>16</sup>

Platonism had a direct impact on Neo-Platonism. Vlach comments:

Platonism also influenced its more religious counterpart, Neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism was a complex system for understanding reality that was founded by the Roman philosopher Plotinus (AD 204–270). The Egyptian-born Plotinus carried on some of the main ideas of Plato such as (1) there is an immaterial reality that exists apart from the physical world; (2) a strong distinction exists between an immaterial soul and the physical body; and (3) the immortal soul finds its ultimate fulfillment as it becomes one with an eternal, transcendent realm. According to Plotinus, the lowest level of reality is matter. Thus, matter is viewed very negatively in Neo-Platonism. Plotinus himself held such disgust for physical things that he even despised his own body.<sup>17</sup>

Vlach relates Platonism to Christian eschatology by discussing two broad models of eternal life held by Christians since the time of the early church. Craig Blaising has contributed to

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12/11/12). See also the Appendix “Christoplatonism’s False Assumptions” in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 459-66.

<sup>16</sup> Vlach, “Platonism,” 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

the discussion.<sup>18</sup> The first is the “spiritual vision model” which is influenced by Platonism. In this model, heaven is viewed primarily as a spiritual entity, the realm of spirit as opposed to base matter. Blaising explains, “This is the destiny of the saved, who will exist in that non-earthly, spiritual place as spiritual beings engaged eternally in spiritual activity.”<sup>19</sup> The second is the “new creation model”:

This model is contrary to Platonism and the spiritual vision model and emphasizes the physical, social, political, and geographical aspects of eternal life. It emphasizes a coming new earth, the renewal of life on this new earth, bodily resurrection, and social and political interactions among the redeemed...A new creation model emphasizes the future relevance of matters such as renewal of the world and universe, nations, kings, economics, agriculture, and social-political issues. In sum, a new creation model operates on the belief that life in the future kingdom of God is largely similar to God’s purposes for the creation before the fall of Adam, which certainly involved more than just a spiritual element.<sup>20</sup>

Vlach observes that premillennialists today often stress a new creation approach to the coming earthly millennium, but often drift toward a spiritual vision approach to the eternal state or fail to specifically address the eternal state. They offer “little discussion of the social, political, economic, agricultural, geographical, and other physical dimensions of the eternal state.”<sup>21</sup> In his view, there is significant material from Isaiah 60–66 and Revelation 21–22 for the study of the eternal state and premillennialists should specifically address the continuities and discontinuities between the millennium and the eternal state. Vlach does not bring up the topic of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state but one must wonder how much a

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<sup>18</sup> See Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>20</sup> Vlach, “Platonism,” 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

lingering influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism may affect the neglect or rejection of the view on the part of many modern premillennialists.

Randy Alcorn may have been thus influenced. In the “Will There Be Marriage, Families, and Friendship?” chapter of his book *Heaven* he states:

If human marriage existed on the New Earth, by all means I would expect it to include sex. Sexual relations existed before the Fall and were not the product of sin and the Curse; they were God’s perfect design. Since the lifting of the Curse will normally restore what God originally made, we would expect sex to be part of that. Given what we know about continuity between this life and the next, marriage and sex seem natural carryovers...However, as we’ve seen, Christ made it clear that people in Heaven wouldn’t be married to each other. He wasn’t talking merely about the intermediate Heaven, but “in the resurrection.” He was specifically saying there will be no marriage among resurrected people on the resurrected Earth. This appears to be then an exception to the principle of continuity.<sup>22</sup>

Alcorn goes on to say:

Certainly we should reject all christoplatonic assumptions that sex, which God called “very good,” would be unworthy of Heaven. Rather than viewing marriage and sex as bad things to be replaced by good ones, we should view them as good things somehow transformed or resurrected into better ones.<sup>23</sup>

Alcorn is right that Christ taught that glorified humanity will not enter into marriage. He does not consider the possibility of a second mode of humanity that would not be glorified but enter into a perfect natural state for which marriage and procreation would continue to be a reality. One wonders if he is merely ignorant of that teaching among those that were listed earlier in this series. However, it is also possible that he neglects

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<sup>22</sup> Alcorn, *Heaven*, 338.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

or rejects the view because of a lingering “christoplatonic” influence on himself, despite his critique of it.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

From earliest times mankind has sought for immortality in a natural state. Perhaps this goes back to God’s original intention at the creation of man. The Fall brought death. Will God’s restoration of creation involve an eternal future for a natural, perfected humanity? Many dispensational premillennialists from the 19th Century to the present have taught from Scriptural texts and theological inference that there is an eternal future in the New Jerusalem and the new earth for both a glorified humanity and a natural perfected humanity. There are those who object to this view. Could the objections be more rooted in lingering Platonic and Neo-Platonic influences than upon the clear teaching of Scripture and theological inference?

No matter what an interpreter’s personal conclusion is after considering the Biblical and theological arguments, the view of two modes of humanity in the eternal state is one that should be accurately represented, respectfully engaged, and humbly acknowledged as a possibility. In discussing the matter, George N. H. Peters probably expressed the attitude we should possess when he said, “So far as the ordering of God in the matter is concerned, we are willing cordially to accept of the same, whatever it may be.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1972), 3:538.



# CHRIST DIED FOR ALL: UNLIMITED ATONEMENT ACCORDING TO ROBERT D. PREUS AND ZANE C. HODGES<sup>1</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION

**F**or whom did Christ die? What did His death accomplish? Did He die for some people or for all humanity? And if He died for all, did He make full atonement for all or only for some?

Despite other serious disagreements, most theologians agree that you cannot reconcile belief in the universal benefits of the atonement with the belief that some people will be eternally condemned. They reason that if Christ actually paid for the sins of all mankind, there would be no penalty left for anyone to pay in hell, and all would be saved. However, since some people will go to hell, the benefits of the atonement must be limited in some way, otherwise God would be unjustly asking for a double payment for sin.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this near consensus, there is a minority of theologians who insist that the two beliefs can be reconciled. This

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<sup>1</sup>A version of this paper was delivered at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Calvinist Wayne Grudem acknowledges the double payment objection and concludes that the atonement must be limited to the elect: *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 594. By contrast, Arminian F. Leroy Forlines faces the objection and concludes the atonement was universal but merely provisional: *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2001), 206-207.

article will compare the atonement theologies of Robert D. Preus (1924–1995), representing the Lutheran tradition, and Zane C. Hodges (1932–2008), representing the Free Grace tradition. It will seek to show how each defended the universal benefits of the atonement while avoiding the double payment objection.

## II. JESUS DIED FOR ALL

Robert Preus and Zane Hodges both agreed that the atonement was unlimited in scope. They both agreed that Christ died for all mankind, believers and unbelievers alike, and not only for an elect few.

### A. PREUS ON OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION AND UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

Preus believed the Bible taught a universal atonement where Christ fully paid for the sins of the entire human race: “According to all of Scripture Christ made a full atonement for the sins of all mankind.”<sup>3</sup> This belief is reflected in his explanation of the Lutheran doctrine of “objective justification,” which teaches that God has justified the whole world on the basis of the cross:

The doctrine of objective justification is a lovely teaching drawn from Scripture which tells us that God who has loved us so much that He gave His only Son to be our Savior has for the sake of Christ’s substitutionary atonement declared *the entire world of sinners for whom Christ died* to be righteous (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup>

For Preus, objective justification is part of the atonement, but not identical with it.<sup>5</sup> The atonement is Christ’s work, while objective justification is God the Father’s verdict on Christ’s work.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Preus, “Objective Justification,” in *Doctrine is Life: Essays on Justification and the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Klemet I. Preus (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 147. Since *Doctrine is Life* is a collection of Preus’s previously published essays, I will cite the title of the articles so that interested readers will have an easier time looking up a particular work online.

<sup>4</sup> Preus, “Objective Justification,” 147.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

However, both the work and the verdict have the same subject, namely, “the entire world of sinners.” As Preus approvingly quoted the words of George Stoeckhardt:

Genuine Lutheran theology counts the doctrine of general (objective) justification among the statements and treasures of its faith. Lutherans teach and confess that *through Christ’s death the entire world of sinners* was justified and that through Christ’s resurrection the justification of the sinful world was festively proclaimed (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup>

Preus’s commitment to an unlimited atonement is also evident in an article he wrote about John Quenstedt (1617-1688). According to Quenstedt, “the real object for which Christ made satisfaction is sin, all sins, original and actual, *all sin which ever has or ever will be committed*, even the sins against the Holy Ghost” (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup> Here again, the fact that Christ had *all sins* in view points to the unlimited nature of the atonement, a fact confirmed when Quenstedt wrote: “the redemption of Christ may be considered in respect to the *subjects* involved, namely, *all sinners...*” (emphasis added).<sup>8</sup> And as if to dispel any doubt about for whom Christ died, Quenstedt explained, “The personal object of Christ’s satisfaction *is the entire sinful race*” (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup>

These are Quenstedt’s words, not Preus’s. However, there can be little doubt that Preus fully agreed with Quenstedt that the atonement covers all the sins, of all the sinners, of the entire sinful human race.

## **B. ZANE HODGES ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE ATONEMENT**

Zane Hodges would have agreed with Preus about the universal scope of the atonement. He thought the Biblical evidence was unequivocal: “The Bible is quite straightforward in declaring

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Preus, “The Vicarious Atonement in John Quenstedt,” in *Doctrine is Life*, 61.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 66.

that Christ died for everybody.”<sup>10</sup> Hodges cited the following verses as proof:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin *of the world!*” (John 1:29, emphasis added);

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also *for the whole world* (1 John 2:2, emphasis added);

God was in Christ *reconciling the world* to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19, emphasis added).

Each of these verses shows that Christ made atonement for *the world*. Some theologians have tried to give these verses a narrow interpretation as if they really referred to something like *the world of the elect*, but Hodges thought that was “an obvious example of special pleading” that couldn’t be sustained by NT usage: “No such usage of the term ‘world’ is to be found anywhere in the New Testament.”<sup>11</sup> In his commentary on the Epistles of John, Hodges left no doubt about the Johannine meaning of “the world”:

The contrast here is explicitly between the believers John is addressing and the whole world of mankind which John later says “lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). Johannine thought and terminology leave absolutely no room for any such concept as “the world of the elect.” Christ’s death, therefore, *covers the totality of human sin* from the beginning of creation until the end of history when eternity begins” (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Atonement and Other Writings* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 71. Preus would have agreed with Hodges’s interpretation of these passages. See “The Vicarious Atonement,” 69, and “Justification as Taught by Post-Reformation Lutheran Theologians,” in *Doctrine is Life*, 3.

For Hodges, the conclusion was clear:

The Lord Jesus paid for everyone's sins. Thus the work of the cross is splendid and staggering in its universal scope: No human being has ever lived for whom Christ did not effectively die!<sup>13</sup>

### III. PREUS AND THE DOUBLE IMPUTATION

Robert Preus's beliefs about the atonement's universal *efficacy* are not as clear as his beliefs about its universal *scope*. At times he claimed that all humanity benefited from the atonement, but at other times he claimed that only believers actually benefit from the cross. This section will explore that discrepancy and will seek to resolve it.

#### A. PREUS PROTESTS POTENTIALITY

On the one hand, Preus defended the universal efficacy of the atonement. He strongly denied that the cross was merely *potentially* beneficial for all. For example:

Objective justification has happened, it is the *actual acquittal* of the entire world of sinners for Christ's sake. Neither does the doctrine of objective justification refer to the *mere possibility* of the individual's justification through faith, to a *mere potentiality* which faith completes when one believes in Christ. *Justification is no more a mere potentiality or possibility than Christ's atonement.* The doctrine of objective justification points to the real justification of all sinners for the sake of Christ's atoning work *before we come to faith in Christ* (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup>

Preus was clearly at pains to deny that the atonement was merely potential or provisional. Universal justification is not a "mere possibility" or a "mere potentiality," he said, but just as "actual" as Christ's atonement. For Preus, Christ's atoning work didn't make justification possible for the world, but resulted

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<sup>13</sup> Hodges, *The Atonement*, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Preus, "Objective Justification," 149.

in the “real justification of all sinners” and this justification happened “before we come to faith in Christ.” After all, “The non-imputation of sin—and this is precisely the forgiveness of sin—is inseparably joined with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.”<sup>15</sup> And since this is true of the world, all sinners (believer and unbeliever alike) are actually justified, whether or not they have believed in Christ.

Elsewhere, Preus went on to say that all mankind is reconciled, made righteous in Christ, declared pure and innocent, pardoned, and acquitted.<sup>16</sup> As a result, God is put at peace with the world.<sup>17</sup>

This conviction about the atonement’s universal efficacy is also evident in his belief that the cross fully satisfied God’s wrath:

It is God who *is propitiated* by the sacrifice of Christ. God, who is angry with sin, *is propitiated and made gracious*. This is obviously what the publican in the temple thought when he said, “God be propitiated...to me, the sinner” (Luke 18:13). And this is the main meaning of the concept in both the Old and New Testaments. There have been many who don’t care for a theology which speaks of an angry God being propitiated, of a God who turns away His wrath and forgives. But this is precisely what happens (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

Notice that God is not *potentially* propitiated by the cross, but *is* propitiated, not *potentially* made gracious, but *is* made gracious. Rolf Preus emphasized that his father explicitly rejected the idea put forward by some theologians “that God’s wrath was not really set aside by the atonement of Jesus.”<sup>19</sup> God’s wrath is satisfied for all.

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<sup>15</sup> Preus, “The Justification of a Sinner,” 49.

<sup>16</sup> Preus, “Objective Justification,” 147-49.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> From Robert D. Preus “Lecture Notes on Justification.” Quoted in Rolf Preus, “The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Robert Preus.” Available online: <http://www.christforus.org/Papers/Content/justification-RPreus.html>. Accessed August 14, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Taken together, these statements give the clear impression that Preus believed that the atonement's benefits were actually enjoyed by all mankind, believer and unbeliever alike.

## **B. PREUS EXPLAINS WHY THE BENEFITS ARE CONDITIONAL**

However, Preus made other statements teaching that the cross only actually benefits believers. For example, consider the following:

As the atonement is a past accomplished fact, so is forgiveness which is the result of the atonement, but the application (or we might say, the appropriation or actual having) of the work of Christ and its results occurs as the Spirit of God brings the individual to faith.<sup>20</sup>

And here is a quote from Abraham Calov, whom Preus cites with approval:

Although Christ has acquired for us the remission of sin, justification, and sonship, God just the same does not justify us prior to our faith. Nor do we become God's children in Christ in such a way that justification in the mind of God takes place before we believe.<sup>21</sup>

Both these quotes say the benefits of the atonement are only appropriated by believers.

But how can that be? Isn't this a direct contradiction to what Preus said before? In what sense is forgiveness an accomplished fact for all, if only believers enjoy it? Didn't Preus clearly say the whole world was actually declared just, acquitted, and forgiven by God? What does it mean to be actually declared just and yet not actually enjoy being justified?

The answer to this apparent contradiction is found in Preus's distinction between two different imputations: the imputation of the world's sin to Christ, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. Although Preus claimed that the non-imputation of sin to the world "is inseparably joined with

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<sup>20</sup> Preus, "Justification as Taught," 10.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 131n74.

the imputation of Christ's righteousness,"<sup>22</sup> it seems he actually believes the two imputations are asymmetrical. As Preus explained,

When does the imputation of Christ's righteousness take place? It did not take place when Christ, by dying and suffering, finished His work of atonement and reconciled the world to God. Then and there, when the sins of the world were imputed to Him and He took them, Christ became our righteousness and procured for us remission of sins, justification and eternal life... But the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner takes place when the Holy Spirit brings him to faith through Baptism and the Word of the Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

There is a difference between what Christ has procured in His own Person, as a function of His office, and what the believer receives at the moment of faith:

It is not just the same thing to say, "Christ's righteousness is imputed to us" and to say "Christ is our righteousness." For the imputation did not take place when Christ became our righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is the effect of His office. The imputation is the application of the effect of His office.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, for Preus, justification is a two-stage process with an objective (or positional) side and a subjective (or experiential) side.

On the objective side, the whole world was justified at the cross when its sins were imputed to Christ and satisfied by Him and He procured righteousness in Himself for all sinners. This helps explain what Preus meant when he said the doctrine of objective justification pointed "to the real justification of all sinners for the sake of Christ's atoning work before we come to faith in Christ." He didn't mean that unbelievers have Christ's righteousness automatically imputed to them because of the cross. Instead, he was speaking about the positional truth that

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<sup>22</sup> Preus, "The Justification of a Sinner," 49.

<sup>23</sup> Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Quoting Quenstedt, Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 73.

Jesus Christ became a true propitiation in His own person for the whole world, believers and unbelievers alike.

However, there is a second imputation. On the subjective side, individuals must believe in Christ in order to have His righteousness imputed to them. As Preus made clear, “the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner takes place when the Holy Spirit brings him to faith through Baptism and the Word of the Gospel.”<sup>25</sup> So even though Christ’s procurement of the benefits is actual and objective, the subjective application and enjoyment of those benefits to the believer is potential.<sup>26</sup>

However, while Preus denied “the mere possibility of the individual’s justification through faith” or the “mere potentiality which faith completes when one believes in Christ,”<sup>27</sup> that is exactly what is implied by his distinction between procuring and applying the benefits of the cross. The fact remains that, on Preus’s view, unbelievers do not enjoy the benefits of the cross until they come to faith and there is no individual application of forgiveness apart from faith no matter how actual or objective the atonement was. The forgiveness is procured for all, available to all, and offered to all, but only potentially enjoyed by believers.<sup>28</sup> This lands Preus in the double payment objection.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; “Justification as Taught,” 2. An illustration may help underscore the precise nature of the atonement’s objectivity and universality in Preus’s theology. According to the Lutheran practice of absolution, the priest holds out Christ’s forgiveness as a gift that has already been procured by Christ and is now offered to believers. Forgiveness is not a goal to be achieved by a mixture of faith and works on the part of the recipient. Instead, it is the object of saving faith, offered as an accomplished fact that simply needs to be received, not attained. We don’t believe *in order to be forgiven*, rather, we believe the promise that *we are already forgiven* in Christ. That is why forgiveness occurs prior to faith. It is offered as an accomplished fact before we believe in it. Hence, Lutherans can say that forgiveness “exists before and independently of faith.” As Marquart wrote, “On the one hand forgiveness is the result of faith, and thus comes after faith, and on the other hand it is the object of faith and therefore goes before faith.” See Kurt E. Marquart, “The Reformation Roots of ‘Objective Justification,’” in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, eds. Kurt E. Marquart, John R. Stephenson, and Bjane W. Teigen (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), 117.

<sup>27</sup> Preus, “Objective Justification,” 149.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Preus’s son, Rolf Preus, seems to land in the same self-contradiction in his short work, *Justification: Am I Good Enough for God?* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 2-3, where he makes these two statements: “Objective justification is that doctrine of

### C. PREUS AND THE DOUBLE PAYMENT OBJECTION

Preus was aware of the double payment objection and agreed that since it called God's character into question it counted against the viability of an atonement theory. He quoted John Gerhard to the effect that a just God would not allow for double payment to be made for sin:

The righteousness of God does not permit the same sin to be punished twice; but God has already smitten His beloved Son for our sins (Isa 53:4); therefore He will not punish sins in those who have been reconciled, who share the satisfaction established through Christ.<sup>29</sup>

But how did Preus avoid falling into this problem? On his view, the damned are condemned for the sins that were imputed to Christ, and suffer the wrath Preus claimed had given way to graciousness, and somehow fail to appropriate the forgiveness that was already given (and yet not quite given) to the world. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, on Preus's view, there *is* a double payment for sins, which means God is unjust and which puts Preus's atonement theology in doubt.

Did Zane Hodges manage to avoid falling prey to this objection?

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Scripture that says that when Christ died, he really did take away all the sin of the whole world, and when he rose from the dead, God declared all sinners justified, or forgiven of all their sins. This is objectively true whether or not anyone believes it." Preus immediately contradicts himself on the very next page, when he writes, "Forgiveness of sins cannot be received or enjoyed except through faith. Objective justification is not the teaching that everyone, regardless of faith or unbelief, will be saved." Preus does not explain how all sinners really have their sins taken away and are really forgiven apart from faith, and yet not forgiven except through faith.

<sup>29</sup>Preus, "Lecture Notes," 3. Notice that in the first part of the sentence Gerhard says that Christ was punished for our sins, which we know to be the sins of the whole world, and therefore will not punish sins, but only in those who have been "reconciled."

## IV. HODGES ON THE UNIVERSAL EFFECTS OF THE ATONEMENT

Like Preus, Hodges emphasized the objectivity of the atonement. Unlike Preus, he had a novel way of accounting for the universality of its benefits and for the reality of hell, without falling prey to the double payment objection.

### A. HOW THE ATONEMENT BENEFITS ALL

Hodges taught that the atonement benefited all mankind. The universal benefits of the atonement could be established by three verses, namely John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:19; and 1 John 2:2.

First, John the Baptist announced that Jesus is the Sacrificial Lamb who “takes away” the sins of the world (John 1:29). This is true for believers and unbelievers.<sup>30</sup>

Second, Paul said that, thanks to the cross, God was “not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Cor 5:19). Like Preus, Hodges believed in a double imputation. “At the cross, God imputed the sins of the entire world to Jesus Christ and did not impute them to the world.”<sup>31</sup> So, for Hodges, for sins to be taken away means (in part) that they are imputed to Christ and not imputed to the world. Paul does not say that God was only *potentially* not imputing sin to the world, but that they are not imputed, period. It is a benefit enjoyed by all mankind.<sup>32</sup>

Third, in his discussion of 1 John 2:2, where Jesus is described as “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world,” Hodges commented:

The Apostle flatly states that Jesus *is the propitiation* for the sins of “the whole world.” He *is* that. Not that He *can* be, or *potentially* is, but He simply *is*. Note, too, that this statement

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<sup>30</sup> The exact nature of this “taking away” in Hodges’s theology is not entirely clear, but he seems to have conceived of it in a narrow sense pertaining exclusively to the question of eternal condemnation. For Hodges, the atonement does not take away the temporal consequences or judgment of sin, except in a provisional sense. God still shows temporal wrath upon the sins of believers and unbelievers alike, regardless of the cross. See, for example, Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 40-41.

<sup>31</sup> Hodges, *The Atonement*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

is exactly parallel to the truth that He is the propitiation for *our* sins. In whatever sense He is the propitiation for our sins, He is also the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. “Very simply put, the propitiatory work of our Lord Jesus Christ is *universally* effective. That is true whether anyone believes it or not.”<sup>33</sup>

All of these benefits—taking away sin, non-imputation of sin, and propitiation of sin—are universally shared by believers and non-believers alike. In Lutheran terminology, they are all objective and subjective benefits that occur apart from faith in Christ.

## B. CHRIST IS OUR PROPITIATION

Another area of convergence (if not exact agreement) between Hodges and Preus is in their understanding of how Christ Himself is our propitiation. Preus spoke about Christ procuring justification, forgiveness, and acquittal according to His office. According to Hodges, Jesus did not offer a sacrifice, so much as became a sacrifice: “*In His own Person* Jesus represents God’s complete satisfaction with the work of the cross. God’s approving eye rests *at all times* on His crucified, but risen, sacrificial Lamb.”<sup>34</sup>

The fact that Jesus “is” the propitiation in His own Person means “He is the *eternally effective* propitiation for the sins of all humanity.”<sup>35</sup> As a result, God the Father now “contemplates the Person of His Son as the all-sufficient propitiation for the entire world.”<sup>36</sup>

## C. WHY AREN’T ALL PEOPLE SAVED?

Given these universal benefits, how does Hodges explain why some people will be eternally lost? How can that be if everyone has their sins taken away and not imputed to them?

Like Preus, Hodges believed in two different imputations—one negative and one positive—and he believed these imputations do not occur simultaneously. On the negative side, the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

world does not have sin imputed to it, but on the positive side, only believers have righteousness imputed to them. Only those who believe in Jesus Christ for everlasting life receive that life as a present possession, and become eternally saved (John 3:16). The negative imputation is universal. The positive imputation only applies to the believer.

Hodges thought this two-stage process was implied by Paul's doctrine of a double reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19-20). From God's side, we read that He is *actually* reconciled to the world, but from our side, we are only *potentially* reconciled to God. Negatively, God does not impute sin to anyone. But positively, only believers receive the righteousness of God: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, *that we might* become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). Notice that becoming the righteousness of God is conditional; we *might* become this righteousness. How? As Preus would agree, the condition for having righteousness imputed to us is through faith in Jesus.

So the simple reason why everyone is not saved is that people who do not have sin imputed to them still need to be born again. In order to be saved, one must believe in Jesus Christ for everlasting life (John 3:16).

#### **D. WHY DO THEY SUFFER IN HELL?**

This raises an important question about the nature of hell. If sin is not imputed to the world, why does anyone suffer there? If Hodges believes that there will be people in the lake of fire, wouldn't that involve him in a double-payment of sins?

Hodges's answer to the double payment objection was to question the major assumption behind it. Virtually all theologians assume that hell is the legal penalty for sin and that NT verses that describe the penalties for sin should be understood in a legal sense, as divine judgment upon sin. But Hodges denied these assumptions. Instead, he believed hell was primarily a corruption issue, not a legal issue.

According to Hodges, torment in the lake of fire was a self-imposed consequence born of two factors: living a sinful life and lacking God's own eternal life. Hodges came to this conclusion based on three Biblical considerations.

First, the Biblical testimony was clear that Christ paid for the world's sins. On the cross, Christ fully satisfied God's payment

for sin: “At the cross, Jesus Christ suffered the punishment that God, the Judge of all men, demands for sin. It cannot ever be paid again. No one will ever suffer a judicial punishment for sin, because Jesus paid that.”<sup>37</sup> That was established in previous sections, and set the tone for Hodges’s rethinking of hell in non-legal terms.

Second, Hodges believed that Rev 20:11-15 taught that people go to the lake of fire because of their lack of faith, not because of their sins. Hodges pointed to the fact that there are two sets of books mentioned in that passage. There is a *collection of books* (“and books were opened,” plural) and there is *the Book of Life*. Although the dead are judged according to the deeds written in the books (and presumably found wanting), that is not the reason for their fate. Instead we read that “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). According to Hodges, these people are not in the Book of Life because they had never believed in Jesus for everlasting life. In other words, the issue in Rev 20:15 is not sin, but unbelief.<sup>38</sup> This corresponds to what Jesus told Nicodemus, that “He who believes in Him is not condemned; *but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed* in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).<sup>39</sup> Unbelief means condemnation.

Third, Hodges believed there was a significant distinction between natural consequences and legal retribution that has a direct bearing on our conception of the nature of hell.<sup>40</sup> We all know that the cross was necessary because God’s just judgment required a payment for sin, and for which Christ made full satisfaction. But sin also has natural consequences that are not taken away by the cross. Hodges used the example of a drug dealer who is shot and killed during a drug war. That man died, not because he was sentenced to death by a court in answer to the law’s demand for justice, but because being killed is the

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>38</sup> However, Hodges would say that the degree of one’s torment *does* depend upon the degree of one’s sinfulness. But once again, that is a matter of sowing and reaping corruption, and not a matter of paying the legal penalty for sin.

<sup>39</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, “Benefits of Christ’s Blood: Restricted and Unrestricted?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 2009), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Hodges, *The Atonement*, 36.

likely consequence of a lawless life.<sup>41</sup> What is true for the drug dealer, is true for all sin: they all lead to bad consequences, some worse than others, such as broken marriages, lost jobs, disease and even death. Following Paul, Hodges referred to this as the law of sowing and reaping (cf. Gal 6:7-8) and proposed that NT descriptions of hell should be understood as the ultimate realization of reaping corruption (e.g., Mark 9:45-46).<sup>42</sup> As Hodges explained: “We may think of hell, therefore, as an extension of the law of sowing and reaping. Those who go there reap eternal *corruption*.”<sup>43</sup> This is a different order of condemnation from judicial condemnation. He explained that hell is not a payment for sin in addition to the cross, but “the inevitable consequence of remaining dead in trespasses and sins. This deadness leads first to the death of our physical bodies, and then to the second death, as well. That is, it leads to the lake of fire (Rev 20:14).”<sup>44</sup>

This radically different approach to the nature of hell enabled Hodges to avoid falling into the double payment trap. Since hell is not a payment at all, there is no double payment to object to. And there is nothing about the nature of hell to call either God’s love or justice into question. Instead, Hodges’s understanding of hell reinforces how tragic it is for people to reject the free gift of everlasting life.

## V. CONCLUSION

Although Robert Preus and Zane Hodges came from different theological traditions, there was a remarkable degree of similarity between their theologies of atonement. The topic is far more than could be explored here, but both especially shared a belief that the cross was both universal in scope and in effect. The biggest difference between them lay in their different understandings of the nature of hell. Preus’s atonement theology fell prey to the double payment objection because he conceived of hell as judicial punishment for sin, which was supposed to have been paid for by Christ. But Hodges was able to avoid that problem by conceiving of hell as the natural consequence

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., emphasis his.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 37.

of lacking eternal life. And while Preus's atonement theology called into question whether or not we truly have a gracious God, on Hodges's view, there can be no doubt that God is satisfied with Christ's work on the cross. Now, thanks to the cross, sin is no longer a barrier to spending eternity with the Lord. All that is required from even the worst of sinners is simple faith in Christ's promise of everlasting life and he will have it as a present possession, and will never perish eternally (John 3:16).

# THE SECRET BELIEVER IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN<sup>1</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There has long been widespread teaching that public profession of Christ as savior and lord is a condition that one must meet in order to gain eternal salvation.<sup>2</sup> Many (if not most) who hold this view appeal to Romans 10:9-10 for support while they, at the same time, overlook the Gospel of John. This is unfortunate since the Gospel of John has much to say about this matter. Specifically, John tells us that there are secret believers who have everlasting life. He tells us that, while there are consequences for not confessing Christ publicly, this secrecy has nothing to do with the condition one must meet to gain everlasting life, which is to simply believe in Jesus for it.

The purpose of this work is to attempt to point out and explain what John presents on this matter. It is hoped that the reader will not only embrace what John teaches, but also be led to reevaluate what Paul is saying in Romans 10:9-10 as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: This article is a condensed version of Bob Bryant's Th.M. thesis, written in 1975, while a student at Dallas Theological Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: Even though this thesis was written in 1975, the same conditions exist today. See, for example, Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 210; John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 221-23; Jack Cottrell with Terry A. Chaney, *Romans* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co, 2005), 376; and George Carraway, *Christ is God Over All: Romans 9:5 in the Context of Romans 9-11* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2013), 155.

other passages that might be used to support the “confession for eternal salvation” view.<sup>3</sup>

## II. THE BELIEVERS IN JOHN 2:23-25

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men. And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man (John 2:23-25).

Most commentators assume that the faith of the individuals in this passage falls short of true saving faith.<sup>4</sup> The main reason for this assumption is that Jesus did not “entrust” Himself to them. However, the statement made in v 23—that many believed in His name (*polloi episteusan eis to onoma autou*) is hard to view as anything but a reference to saving faith. The meaning of that statement must be examined along with what John meant when he said that Jesus did not entrust Himself to them. This passage is also relevant because Nicodemus is included in this group and is described as a secret believer later in John (19:38-40).

In John 20:30-31, John stated his reason for writing his Gospel. John recorded the signs of Jesus with the intention that readers would respond with either belief or unbelief, and which would either result in eternal life or eternal death. Hence, John’s main objective is evangelistic. He means to foster belief in Jesus as the Messiah as a result of the signs.

### A. THE EXPRESSION *PISTEUŌ EIS* (BELIEVE IN)

If John uses the phrase *pisteuō eis* as a technical one for saving faith, it can be concluded that those that are described this way are true believers. The meaning of this phrase as used in the Gospel of John is not found in either classical Greek or

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<sup>3</sup> It is not the purpose of this work to explain what Paul means in Rom 10:9-10. This has been well done by Zane Hodges in his commentary on Romans in which he demonstrates that Paul did not say that public confession is a condition for eternal salvation, but rather, it is a condition for salvation from God’s temporal wrath. See Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 298-301.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 184.

the Septuagint. It is a special and new construction designed to specifically express saving faith.<sup>5</sup>

Of the forty-five occurrences of *pisteuō eis* in the NT, thirty-six of them occur in the Gospel of John. This fits well with the fact that John is the evangelistic Gospel in comparison with the Synoptics. John, above all other writers, would need to clearly state and distinguish saving faith in light of the Gospel's purpose (John 20:30-31). He uses this construction to express this.

Dodd points out that the phrase means "personal trust or reliance."<sup>6</sup> It "shows the idea of the movement of the whole being toward Christ, the outgoing of the whole soul toward Him..."<sup>7</sup> Plummer calls it the "strongest belief: motion to and response on the object of faith."<sup>8</sup> Strachan says the phrase is equivalent to the possession of eternal life.<sup>9</sup>

As one considers the uniqueness of *pisteuō eis* as a technical expression for saving faith, especially in John, it would seem the matter would be settled. However, many would say that there are a few exceptions in John, including 2:23. The other verses that some list as possible exceptions to the rule include John 4:39; 7:31; and 8:31. However, a closer look at the context of each of these passages reveals that the phrase means a true faith that results in salvation. Thus, in the Gospel of John *pisteuō eis* is always used as an expression of saving faith. The only possible exception is 2:23. However, if John uses the phrase thirty-six times as a term for saving faith, with only one use where that meaning is in doubt, should not the exegete step back and reevaluate his conception of the passage? To say that 2:23 refers to insufficient faith or only preliminary faith is not justifiable in light of John's predominant use of the phrase.

<sup>5</sup> James Hope Moulton, "Prolegomena," Vol. 1, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 67-68.

<sup>6</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 183.

<sup>7</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 125 (Jul-Sep 1968): 260.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), 66.

<sup>9</sup> R. H. Strachan, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1941), 40.

## B. MANY BELIEVED ON HIS NAME (*POLLOI EPISTEUSAN EIS TO ONOMA AUTOU*)

Some hold that the faith of those in John 2:23 is insufficient because the object was only His name, not His person. “They believed not *on Him*...but *on His name*...without any deeper trust in His Person.”<sup>10</sup> This can easily be proven to be invalid by citing *the only two other times* that John uses the phrase, “to believe in His name.” In John 1:12 and 3:18 the expression clearly means saving faith with Christ as the object:

But as many as received Him, He gave to them authority to become children of God, to those *believing in His name* (John 1:12, emphasis added).

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has already been judged because he has not *believed in the name* of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18, emphasis added).

As Keiser observes, “The use of *name* in these verses symbolizes the person behind the name, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>11</sup> Bernard writes, “to believe ‘in the name’ of Jesus...is to believe ‘in Him’ as the Son of God and the Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Gaebelien agrees, “His name is Jesus—i.e., Savior—given to Him because He saves His people from their sin. To have faith in that name is to have faith in Him as personal Savior from sin.”<sup>13</sup> If believing in His name is an example of saving faith, it is hard to understand how some could come to John 2:23 and find this object of faith insufficient.

## C. BELIEVING BECAUSE OF THE SIGNS (*TA SĒMEIA*) JESUS DID

Some have contended that 2:23 expresses belief in Christ only as a miracle worker, since the people merely beheld the signs He

<sup>10</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1881), 45.

<sup>11</sup> Barry Keiser, “The Progressive Development of *Pisteuō*,” (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1962), 57.

<sup>12</sup> J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Gospel of John* (New York: Arno C. Gaebelien, Inc., 1936), 20.

was doing. Yet, the very term John uses for “signs” leads to the conclusion that this is truly saving faith.

In the NT there are three words that express miracles. Two of them, *dunamis* and *teras*, respectively speak of the power of God or the startling nature of that power.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, *sēmeion* signifies the ethical end and purpose of the miracle,<sup>15</sup> and occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of John, more than any other book.

These signs were not simply displays of the spectacular, but a “careful manifestation of the glory that was an intrinsic part of the person of Christ—a stepping stone, indeed, to a mature and complete trust in Him as Savior.”<sup>16</sup> A “sign” is something full of meaning. It is not an end in itself. The word has no necessary connection with the miraculous.<sup>17</sup> For John, to believe in Christ in response to His “signs” is not to believe in Him as a mere miracle worker.<sup>18</sup>

It should be remembered that in John 20:31, the aim of John’s depiction of Jesus is faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John refers to the “signs” in 20:31 as the decisive thing in establishing faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The one dominating purpose of John in presenting these signs was to bring eyewitnesses and readers to belief in Christ to obtain eternal life.

One cannot exegetically discredit the faith of these believers in 2:23 on the basis of the term *signs*. The object of faith is not the signs but clearly stated to be *His name*. The signs were the efficacious cause of the faith, an essential component of John’s purpose (20:30-31).

#### **D. JESUS DID NOT ENTRUST HIMSELF TO THEM** (*AUTOS DE HO IESOUS OUK EPISTEUEN HEAUTON AUTOIS*)

This phrase is a stumbling block to many who try to interpret this passage. Jesus did not entrust Himself to the believers in v 23, so it is assumed they were not true believers. However, the

<sup>14</sup> Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1865), 341-44.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne, “The Concept of Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 116 (Apr-Jun 1959): 124.

<sup>17</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 686.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, “The Purpose,” 255

terms in v 23 strongly validate genuine saving faith, so we must reevaluate what this phrase means.

In v 23 the expression is *polloi episteusan eis to onoma autou*, “many believed in His name” (cf. John 1:12; 1 John 5:13). *Pisteuō* plus the preposition *eis* forms a technical expression in John (and 1 John) which always refers to saving faith.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, in v 24 the subject of *pisteuō* (without the preposition *eis*) is the Lord Jesus: *Autos de ho Iēsous ouk episteuen heauton autois*: “But Jesus did not commit Himself to them.” John’s point is not that Jesus *did not believe* in them. His point is that He did not commit Himself to them.

All the other transitive uses of *pisteuō* in the NT (beside John 2:24) also refer to an entrustment of something to someone.<sup>20</sup> In every case, God is the one who entrusts. He confers things like special insight, privilege, or responsibility. The person entrusted with those things (e.g., insights) becomes a steward of them, and is held responsible for his entrustment. Entrustment is never used to describe the impartation of eternal life.

John 2:24 means that God incarnate (Christ) does not entrust something to these new believers. The question is, what does He not entrust to them? Could not this entrustment be parallel to that found in the other transitive uses of the verb in the NT, which involved privilege and responsibility? In that case, for Jesus to “entrust Himself” would mean spending time with them and giving them further revelation and commandments from the Father. These revelations and commandments would result in greater privilege and responsibility. When those entrusted would respond in obedience they would thus have greater blessing and a more intimate fellowship with the Lord. This idea is seen elsewhere in John’s Gospel.

In John 14:21 Jesus declares to His disciples (who were already believers) that He would “reveal” Himself to them if they keep His commandments. The verb means to “make known,

<sup>19</sup> All uses of *pisteuō eis* outside of John’s writings refer to saving faith as well (Acts 10:43; Gal 2:16; Phil 1:29; 1 Pet 1:21). Other uses of *pisteuō eis* in John and 1 John include: John 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 6:35, 40, 47; 7:38; 11:25, 26; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 1 John 5:10.

<sup>20</sup> The transitive use of the verb is attested in the NT in Luke 16:11; Rom 3:2; 1 Cor 9:17; Gal 2:7; 1 Thess 2:4; 1 Tim 1:11; and Titus 1:3.

make clear, explain, inform.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the believer who keeps the Lord’s commandments will have a more intimate relationship with Him.<sup>22</sup>

The same idea is found in John 15:14-15. Believers who keep the commandments of the Lord become “friends” with Him and this results in further intimate and personal knowledge of Him. These disciples had kept His commandments, thus He calls them friends, and are exhorted to continue.

Sadler states that in John 2:23 John does not describe a false faith. Instead, Jesus’ refusal to commit Himself to them is best understood in contrast to His conduct with the apostles. In John 15:15 Jesus calls the apostles His friends and as a result He has made known to them all the things He has heard from His Father.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the transitive use of *pisteuō* in John 2:24 can legitimately take a non-soteriological meaning. This is consistent with all other uses of this form in the NT, and is consistent with the thought of John’s Gospel. Jesus did not entrust Himself to these believers in the sense that He did not spend time with them, give them further privileges and responsibilities (commandments), or impart discipleship truth to them. He knew their hearts. He knew they were not willing to confess Him publicly. John does not state the problem of these Jerusalem believers explicitly in these verses, but reveals the nature of the problem through his Gospel. The terms John uses in 2:23 shows that these people were believers who had eternal life. And as John makes clear, Nicodemus is an example of such a believer.

### III. NICODEMUS IN JOHN THREE

Nicodemus is mentioned three times by John (3:1-18; 7:45-52; 19:38-40). Though these are the only times he is mentioned in the Scriptures, he is an important character in John’s Gospel. Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in connection with

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<sup>21</sup> William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 257.

<sup>22</sup> Gaebelien, *John*, 287.

<sup>23</sup> M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: George Bell and Sons), 59-60.

Nicodemus in John 19 and is called a secret disciple, which is part of John's argument.

Nicodemus is connected with the material in John 2:23-25. He is seen as an example of the believers in those verses. John 2:25 ends with the word *man* (*anthrōpos*). In 3:1 the reader is told that there was a *man* (*anthrōpos*) of the Pharisees named Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night. In addition, the mention of the "signs" which Jesus was doing (2:23) is connected to Nicodemus' statement about Christ's "signs" in 3:2. John 2:23-25 and the conversation with Nicodemus both take place in Jerusalem. Finally, the whole conversation with Nicodemus is held together with the phrase "believe in His name" (3:18), which takes the reader back to 2:23.<sup>24</sup>

Nicodemus had observed the signs that Jesus was doing in Jerusalem and knew that these were of God (3:2). He thus went secretly to inquire more of the Lord and of His teaching, and heard the discourse from Him on the need to be born again through simple faith (through believing in Him). This fits beautifully with the summary statements in 2:23-25 and with the overall plan of John's Gospel.

There is little doubt that Nicodemus became a believer and was born again as evidenced in John 7:45-52 and 19:38-40. However, what was Nicodemus' response to the Lord in chapter three? He knew and admitted that Jesus was a teacher come from God (3:2). It would be logical to assume that he responded to Jesus' words to him with the simple faith of which the Lord spoke. The summary statement of 2:23-25 answers this question in that he is like those mentioned who exercised saving faith. If Nicodemus is included in this group there must be a problem related to him that also parallels that of 2:24-25.

Jesus' teaching in chapter three is directed towards Nicodemus as an unbeliever. However, v 21 poses some difficult exegetical problems when related to an unbeliever.

In John 3:21, Jesus spoke of the one who "does the truth." Lenski says that phrase refers to a believer.<sup>25</sup> The phrase is only found in one other passage in the NT, namely, 1 John 1:6. Hodges states that in 1 John, the one who does the truth is a

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<sup>24</sup>L. J. Topel, "A Note on the Methodology of Structural Analysis in John 2:23-3:21," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33 (Feb 1971): 217.

<sup>25</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), 277.

believer who experientially has God's truth actualized in his life.<sup>26</sup>

The phrase that such a person's works might be made known as "having been done by God" also refers to a believer. Westcott says that these deeds are those done by the Christian in fellowship with God.<sup>27</sup>

The statement that such a person "comes to the light" also refers to a believer. The phrase is only found in the NT here in 3:20-21 (twice). "Light" is a very dynamic term in John and in all of the New Testament. It is the sphere of God's rule, of His presence as opposed to the darkness, which is the rule and sphere of Satan. Jesus has stated that the reason men do not believe and are headed for judgment is that they hate the revealing presence of God's light and they love their evil deeds. A Christian who has the same values as a non-Christian will also be slow to have his deeds approved (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-3). Yet one who is truly doing the truth (walking in obedience to God) will come out in the open (he "comes to the light"), before God and before men. He will come out in the open where God is and where men can see that his works are worked by God.

The phrase that such a person's works are "made known" is related to this idea. The Christian who lives an open life will have his works manifest to men as those done by God. Men will see his good works and thus glorify his Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:16).

Nicodemus, then, is an example of the believers in 2:23-25. He comes to the Lord and the Lord tells him he must be born again. Because Jesus knew all men, and knew what was in man (John 2:25), He perceived that Nicodemus either had believed in that instant (when he heard John 3:1-18) or would believe in the future. Thus, He exhorted him to a life of open discipleship in John 3:19-21.

In 2:24 Jesus did not entrust Himself to certain believers. After John's discussion of this group, he mentions that Jesus spends time with His disciples (3:22). The disciples openly identify with Him and His relationship with them is in contrast to

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<sup>26</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "Fellowship and Confession in 1 John 1:5-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (Jan-Mar 1972): 52.

<sup>27</sup>Westcott, *John*, 124.

His relationship with those who were actually born again but would not come to the light.

#### IV. NICODEMUS IN JOHN 7

Nicodemus is seen in chapter seven in a meeting of the Sanhedren. All are against Jesus, except Nicodemus. The others rhetorically ask, “Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?” (7:48). But no one knows when a secret believer believes. Yet Nicodemus is one who actually did believe in Him (as 7:51 implies).

This writer believes that the words of Nicodemus in 7:51 are an open confession on his part. This openness, however, is not as great as it could be nor as it will be in chapter 19. Nicodemus is “doing the truth” and “coming to the light” (3:21).<sup>28</sup> Ryle agrees and says that John 7 shows that Nicodemus is a real believer, but a slow-growing disciple.<sup>29</sup>

#### V. NICODEMUS AND JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA IN JOHN 19

This is the only time Joseph is mentioned in John’s Gospel and he is closely associated with Nicodemus. The death of Christ drew them both out of the darkness of secrecy into the light of open confession of their Savior who just died for them. Both were members of the Council and were rich. Like Nicodemus, Joseph was a true believer as John states in 19:38.<sup>30</sup> But he is also a secret believer.

Nicodemus was also a secret believer. The reason was the fear of the Jews. One who confessed Christ would be put out of the synagogue and would lose the approval of men (John 9:22; 12:42-43). Jesus said that if believers openly confessed Him

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<sup>28</sup> George Reith, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1948), 134.

<sup>29</sup> John C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1883), 490-91

<sup>30</sup> John says Joseph was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews.” While not all of Jesus’ disciples were born again (see John 6:64), John intends the reader to see Joseph as an example of one of the rulers who “believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42).

they would be persecuted (15:18-23). The actions of Nicodemus and Joseph are a bold and open act of confession.

Luke tells us that Joseph made a similar attempt as Nicodemus in John 7 in defending Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:51). Yet, John calls him a secret disciple and shows that he and Nicodemus here finally make an open confession of the Lord.

Joseph is called a secret disciple but it is certainly clear that he and Nicodemus had confessed their faith in Christ to one another. This is seen in the fact that they each had complementary functions in the Lord's burial and thus had planned it together.<sup>31</sup>

It may be concluded that for John being a secret disciple meant an unwillingness to confess Christ openly before men. Confession of Christ between two believers who both are secret disciples is not the confession that Jesus demands from His disciples. But these men eventually encouraged one another in this bold act of faith.

Govett points out that Nicodemus had first come to Jesus at night. Now, however, he stands in the light of day and has come to the light (John 3:20-21).<sup>32</sup>

In the burial of Jesus, Joseph and Nicodemus associated themselves with a cursed man. All of Jerusalem would soon know of their actions as they put their entire futures and reputations on the line. They were now willingly and openly confessing their faith no matter the cost. Tradition says that both did suffer for their confession. Nicodemus is said to have been removed from his office in the Sanhedrin and banished from Jerusalem, while Joseph was cast into prison.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation*, 1327.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Govett, *Exposition of the Gospel of St. John* (London: Bemrose & Sons, n.d.), 328.

<sup>33</sup> J. H. Bernard, "Nicodemus," *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), 5:544; M. S. Enslin, "Acts of Pilate," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 3:813.

## VI. SUMMARY CONCERNING NICODEMUS

Nicodemus is an example of those believers in John 2:23-25. The Lord exhorted him to believe in Him for eternal life and then to openly confess Him in obedience. However, he feared openly confessing Him before men. Joseph is another example. But when Christ was buried, they openly confessed Him.

The problem with the believers in John 2:23-25 is that they were unwilling to confess Christ openly. However, nowhere in John 3 is public confession of Christ a condition for salvation. Simple faith in Christ is the only condition for receiving eternal life. The fact that John calls Joseph a secret disciple shows that a man can be born again and be secret about it.

However, open confession of Christ is essential to a life of discipleship. The Lord states it in John 3:21. Such a life brings hatred from the world. Salvation is a free gift; but discipleship may have a great cost. A secret life is not a life in close fellowship with the Lord. He will not “entrust” Himself to such a believer.

## VII. JOHN THE BAPTIST

In John 3, Nicodemus is followed by and contrasted with John the Baptist, an open and confessing believer (John 3:22-36). He publicly confessed that Jesus is the Christ (1:23, 29, 34; 3:29-30). It cost him his freedom and his life (John 3:24).

The confessing character of John’s life is apparent. Eight times in the Gospel of John it says that he “bears witness” of Christ. Twice, in 1:20, it says that he “confesses” that he is not the Christ, but Jesus is (1:21-36). He does not “deny” his faith in Christ as the Messiah. This confession marked him as an open disciple of Christ. The word *confess* implies a public, binding, and definitive profession. When one confesses, it must be in the open and confession binds him to the cause he professes.<sup>34</sup>

Westcott observes that open confession is essential to victory in the Christian life and to express love for the Lord.<sup>35</sup> John the Baptist exemplified such a life. He did not deny Christ, but

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<sup>34</sup> Michel, “Confess,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 7:200.

<sup>35</sup> Westcott, *John*, 33-34.

confessed Him openly without regard for the consequences. The contrast between him and Nicodemus is striking.

### VIII. THE BELIEVERS IN JOHN 12:42-43

In these verses, John tells the reader that many believed in Christ but did not confess him. Saving faith and confession are both mentioned in v 42. The subsequent discourse by Jesus sheds light on these believers.

In the preceding verses, John clearly describes the unbelief of the Jews (12:36-40). This description fits the plan of John's Gospel. They saw the "signs" Jesus did but did not "believe in Him" (12:37).

In v 42, John strongly contrasts these unbelievers with many of the rulers who did believe in Jesus. They "believed in Him." Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are two examples of these rulers. And like Joseph and Nicodemus before the death of Christ, these believers did not openly confess the Lord.

Various commentators state that these believers in 12:42 did not have a valid faith because the commentators believe that confession is a condition of everlasting life.<sup>36</sup> However, they interpret this verse based upon their understanding of Rom 10:9-10. They ignore the strong contrast John makes between the believers in 12:42, and the unbelievers in the previous verses. Worst of all, by making confession a part of salvation, they teach that salvation is by faith plus works.

Others are more true to the text. They recognize that these rulers "believed in Him," which was John's way of describing saving faith. These writers also see Joseph and Nicodemus as examples of truly believing rulers.<sup>37</sup>

It is also significant that the belief of these rulers is expressed as an act (the verb is aorist), while the lack of confession is in the imperfect and is a process. If confession was required for salvation, along with belief, an aorist would be expected in reference to confession as well.

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<sup>36</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1945), 159; William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John* (London: Elliot Stock, 1908), 252; Westcott, John, 185-89.

<sup>37</sup> Morris, *John*, 605-606; Plummer, *John*, 258; Govett, *John*, 2:97; Trench, *John*, 294-95.

The fact that these believers did not confess simply means that they did not follow their faith with action to openly attach to the cause of Christ. They did not walk in open discipleship. This lack of confession is the same as denial. This denial was not without reason.

The lack of open confession was due to fear of the unbelieving Pharisees. The unbelieving Pharisees excommunicated Jews who confessed faith in Jesus (12:42). The Judeans had already agreed that anybody who confessed Jesus as the Christ would be put out of the synagogue and Jesus warned His disciples about it (9:22; 16:2). This would be a terrible loss for any Jew, but especially for a ruler of the people. He would lose much wealth, reputation, and honor.

Verse 43 gives another reason these believers did not openly confess Jesus. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. These believing rulers could not let go of the worldly prestige, power, splendor, fame, and riches they had. They loved the temporary praise of men more than the eternal praise of God.

The praise of God here is intimately related to the Judgment Seat of Christ. On that day believers who have been faithful to Christ will receive the praise of God, as well as eternal rewards (1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:9-10). Believers who seek the praise of men lose the praise of God both now and forever. They also lose eternal rewards.

It is clear that faith (believing in Jesus) and open confession are distinct concepts. Confession is not essential to salvation but is essential to receive the praises of God. Persecution may be an excuse for lack of confession, but it is not a valid reason before God.

## **IX. SIMON PETER**

Peter teaches John's readers certain things concerning confession. Peter exercised saving faith (John 2:11) and lived a life of open confession for over three years. He declared he would die for the Lord if need be (John 13:37). However, that very night he openly denied the Savior three times. He denied the Lord because of fear of what men would do to him.

At the same time, the Lord openly confessed the truth before the high priest. This confession is inserted between Peter's denials (John 18:20). Even in the face of death, Jesus becomes the supreme example of open confession of the truth to men.

The example of Peter teaches us valuable truths. Open confession is something that is to continue throughout the Christian life. It is not a once for all thing that occurs at, or after, salvation. If confession were essential to salvation, one would have to conclude that Peter was not saved or had lost his salvation on this night. But that conclusion could not be valid. The Lord had predicted Peter's denial and told Peter that he indeed did have eternal life (13:38; 14:1-3). But Peter's reaction to his denials—he wept bitterly—shows that there are consequences for the believer's lack of open confession of the Lord.

## X. CONCLUSION

Salvation is conditioned upon faith alone while confession is essential to a close walk with the Lord in discipleship. In John's Gospel, the secret believer is motivated by the praise of men and by fear of persecution. Even though he has eternal life, he forfeits a close walk with the Lord and risks losing eternal rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

When we proclaim the gospel we must make it clear. Eternal life is given by faith alone in Christ's promise of that life. Secret belief is a valid belief that brings eternal life. But the secret believer cannot live a victorious Christian life. The Gospel of John calls the secret believer to come out into the light of open confession.



## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* By Mark Jones. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013. 145 pages. Paper, \$14.48.

Mark Jones is the pastor of a PCA church in Canada. Since those in the Free Grace movement are often accused of being antinomian, the title of this book caught my eye.

This book, however, does not address the contemporary scene. Instead, it deals with how Reformed theologians dealt with antinomianism after the Reformation. There is a particular emphasis on the seventeenth century. The author spends a great deal of time on how the writers of the Westminster Confession and the Puritans dealt with the various problems concerning this topic.

Jones says that antinomianism is a very complex issue. It comes in many forms. In all these forms there is an error in Christology. Antinomians emphasize the imputed righteousness of Christ at the expense of how He lived His earthly life as well as His high priestly ministry.

One of the primary ways antinomianism manifested itself in history is a denial that the Christian is under the moral law of the Old Covenant. But Jones lists at least nine other ways, some subtle, in which antinomianism expresses itself (pp. 7-9). These include how one sees predestination, arguing that works are not necessary for eternal salvation, or whether the assurance of our justification can be discerned by our sanctification (pp. 4-5). He recognizes that antinomianism does not necessarily equate to a sinful lifestyle.

The issue is also complex because sometimes theologians who opposed antinomianism did not use their words with caution. Luther and John Cotton both said things that led some to conclude they were antinomian. In the case of Luther, Jones says the Reformer simply used strong rhetoric to argue against the Catholic Church. We must interpret the words of these past theologians in the context they were uttered.

A couple of the chapters provoked my interest. Chapter two is entitled, "The Imitation of Christ," and deals with sanctification. Jones says that antinomians saw sanctification as being

completely the work and responsibility of Christ. Jones refers to this as “immediate” sanctification. The orthodox Reformed theologians said the believer has a role, because the believer retains his or her own will. The Holy Spirit infuses grace in the believer so that he or she is now empowered to act in a holy way. Jones calls this “inherent” sanctification (pp. 25-26).

Chapter five is entitled “Good Works and Rewards.” Jones says that the antinomians denied that God will reward good works in heaven. Interestingly, the opponents of antinomianism state that good works do not provide evidence of faith, but they do contribute to final salvation. These works are a way or means, but not the cause, of salvation. He says that the human heart cannot always understand this subtlety (pp. 64-68). This reviewer has a difficult time understanding these “subtleties” as well.

Jones says that there will be rewards in heaven according to the Reformed theologians. There will be differences in glory between the saints. This idea of rewards allows the believer to serve the Lord cheerfully. He regrets that the doctrine of rewards is not taught enough today (pp. 74-77).

Chapter seven is entitled “Assurance.” Jones says that the Reformed theologians insisted that there are both objective and subjective aspects of assurance. Both are necessary. The antinomians said that the only grounds of assurance are faith in Christ and the Gospel. This is the objective sense. In addition, the “orthodox” maintained that assurance is not essential to faith (pp. 98-99).

For the Reformed theologians, good works are not *the* ground of assurance, but do provide a subjective ground. Good works inevitably follow justification (p. 100).

This book does not exegete passages. It mostly quotes or alludes to what Reformed theologians said about the topic. Therefore, it is basically a book on theology and history. There are a couple of things about the book that might interest readers of the *JOTGES*. One is that the contemporary issues raised by the Free Grace movement are not new. Issues like assurance, the relationship of works to justification, and rewards, were discussed as long as there has been Reformed theology and Puritan thought.

It is also interesting to see Reformed theologians arguing for things normally associated with Free Grace theology. They argued, for example, for rewards in the coming Kingdom and that the believer has a role in sanctification.

This book indicates that the charges leveled against the antinomianism of the seventeenth century are not always the same as that leveled at Free Grace people. For those who are interested in how these various issues were discussed by theologians immediately after the Reformation, I recommend this book.

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***“Reformed” Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant.*** By Douglas Wilson. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002, 2010. 208 pages. Paper, \$17.00.

What does it mean to be a Christian? In *“Reformed” Is Not Enough*, Douglas Wilson argues that theologians should think of the covenant in more objective terms, where being a Christian means belonging to a mixed covenant community composed of baptized believers and baptized unbelievers.

Wilson defines a *covenant* as a solemn bond, “sovereignly administered, with attendant blessings and curses” (p. 65). They are *objective* in that they have physical aspects and clear boundaries that tell us who is in it and who is outside of it (pp. 66, 81), and the blessings or curses associated with it have real effects.

According to Wilson, a Christian is someone who is baptized in the name of the Trinity by “an authorized representative of the Christian church” (p. 21). Upon baptism, they enter into covenant with Jesus Christ and become a part of the historical (but not eschatological) church. Not every covenant member is saved (or elect), but there is a link between every member and the covenant’s promises and curses (p. 91). Whether or not a member experiences blessings or curses depends, proximately, on their faith and obedience, but ultimately, on whether or not God has elected them to eternal life (pp. 30-31, 39, 66). When a baptized person believes, they become regenerate, and all of the covenantal blessings apply to them. But when an unbeliever is baptized, you get more than a wet pagan. As Wilson explains,

“When you baptize an unrepentant pagan, what you actually get is a covenant-breaker. His baptism now obligates him to live a life of repentance, love, and trust, which he is refusing to do” (p. 101). If any member refuses to live by the covenant they incur its curses, because they are still members despite their unbelief (pp. 85, 90). According to Wilson, there is no such thing as a nominal Christian. Instead, there are only faithful or unfaithful Christians, meaning there are only covenant keepers or covenant breakers (p. 99). The eschatological church, which will only be composed of believers, will only be revealed at the last day, which Wilson would understand to be the Great White Throne judgment.

Although this is a thought-provoking work, it was written for a Reformed audience, and assumes many beliefs and practices that a Dispensational readership would find unconvincing (e.g., infant baptism, applying Israel’s covenantal model of citizenship to the Body of Christ, applying the New Covenant to the Church, the idea that God predestines everything including sin, or that the warning passages address professing Christians and speak of loss of salvation). However, even given these differences, there are two very serious errors dealing with justification and assurance that need a response.

First, Wilson clearly (but inadvertently?) denies the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This was a charge made against him by many in the Reformed community. In chapter four, Wilson attempted to defend his belief in justification, only to affirm that works are necessary for our salvation. For example, Wilson denied that faith in the propositional truth of the gospel is enough to be saved: “I do not deny the propositional truth the *solas* refer to, but I do maintain that to limit them to mere propositions is to kill them. Faith without works is dead...Propositions without works are dead—even if the propositions are true” (p. 46). As a proponent of unconditional election, Wilson believes that the faith of the elect will always be accompanied by works: “We are saved through faith alone, but never through a faith that is alone. Saving faith is never lonely” (p. 47). Since faith is a gift from God, it always expresses itself in obedience:

Faith is the only instrument God uses in our justification. But when God has done this wonderful work, the faithful instrument does not

shrivel up and die. It continues to love God and obey Him. If it does not, but just lies there like a corpse, then we have good reason to believe that it was lying there like a corpse some days before—not being therefore an instrument of justification. Faith without works is a dead faith, and a dead faith never justified anybody (p. 48).

In other words, Wilson denies that simply believing in Jesus' promise of everlasting life (or believing that we are justified through faith apart from works) is the sole condition for having everlasting life. You also need works because *they are essential to the nature of saving faith*. This puts Wilson in the absurd position of saying that two people can believe in Jesus for justification, but with two different *kinds* of faith. The one who has faith plus works is justified, while the one who has faith without works is not justified. Wilson apparently doesn't think it is blatantly self-contradictory to say that we need works in order to be justified by faith apart from works.

Second, Wilson also misunderstands and undermines assurance. On the one hand he correctly says that all believers should have assurance and he wants to avoid "morbid introspection" (p. 127). But his criteria for having assurance makes it impossible. He says the elect have certain marks of being elect, including such things as: holding fast to Christ in our confession; seeing the "unmistakable" presence of the Spirit in our lives in putting to death our bodies' misdeeds (p. 128); having love for our brothers; humility of mind; delighting in the means of grace and seeking spiritual food (p. 129); understanding spiritual things; walking in obedience (p. 130); and being chastised for disobedience (p. 131). Although Wilson says that objective assurance is never found through peering "into the murky recesses of one's own heart" (p. 131), he evidently thinks it can be found by evaluating our behavior, which is consistent with his insistence that saving faith requires works. The question is, who on earth has confessed enough, loved enough, understood enough, put to death enough, obeyed enough, or delighted enough to be sure they are eternally saved? And how can anyone be sure they will go on doing those things without falling away? Although Wilson later warns his readers not "to look inside themselves for assurance" (p. 136), that is exactly what he suggests. And the only

result of such introspection is monstrous doubt. The Biblical basis for assurance lies outside of us, by simply believing in Jesus' promise. It does not lie in reflecting upon our behavior.

Let me end on a positive note. One helpful aspect of Wilson's book is the way he calls attention to the temporal consequences that believers can experience by rebelling against Christ. Putting those consequences in terms of covenantal blessings and curses may shed some light on the doctrines of eternal rewards and temporal wrath which are prominent aspects of Free Grace theology, and key to understanding the books of Romans, Hebrews, and James. I recommend this books for discerning readers only.

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***Getting "Saved": The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament.*** Edited by Charles H. Talbert and Jason A. Whitlark. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. 324 pages. Paper, \$30.00.

This book has twelve essays by six authors. "This volume of essays is concerned with soteriology. How does one gain a covenant relationship with God and remain in that relationship so as to experience final salvation?" (p. 1). Talbert writes five of the essays. Whitlark writes three essays. Four authors write one essay each: Michael W. Martin, Andrew E. Arterbury, Clifford A. Barbarick, and Scott J. Hafemann.

Talbert, Whitlark, and Arterbury are all professors at Baylor University. The other three teach at Lubbock Christian University (Martin), University of St. Andrews (Hafemann), and Pepperdine University (Barbarick).

The book is broken into four sections. The authors write about salvation, by which they mean regeneration or escaping eternal condemnation, in 1) the Pauline Corpus, 2) the Gospels, 3) the Catholic (General) Epistles, and 4) the book of Revelation.

The authors all agree that "staying in" so as to obtain eschatological salvation requires obedience and good works which God is ready to produce in all believers who cooperate with Him:

The saints' perseverance in holiness, blamelessness, and love is a result of God's inward working (Whitlark, p. 56).

The Pastoral Epistles see God's grace undergirding the believer's existence in its beginning (regeneration) (e.g., Titus 3:4-7), in its fulfillment (e.g., 2 Tim 4:8), and in its progress from beginning to fulfillment (e.g., for the individual's defense and deliverance, enabling inheritance of the heavenly kingdom [e.g., 2 Tim 4:18] and for the Lord's servant on mission, enabling a successful service [e.g., 2 Tim 4:17]) (Talbert, p. 71).

In Hebrews... "getting in" (the new covenant family) is grounded in God's gracious election while "staying in" is grounded in God's enablement of fidelity... (Whitlark, p. 72).

One "gets in" by grace and one "stays in" by grace (Martin p. 120). "In this third religious pattern, human obedience may be required, but it is divinely enabled..." (Martin, p. 120, footnote 3).

In Luke's writings, that a person begins the process of discipleship does not necessarily mean that the person will remain on that pathway to its completion (Arberbury, p. 156).

James participates in Paul's full-orbed understanding of grace and uniquely articulates the necessity of a gospel-empowered life from beginning to end for the realization of eschatological salvation (Whitlark, p. 215).

As newborn babies crave the nourishing milk they need for growth, so the Petrine community is exhorted to long for that which will "nourish" them and grow them into salvation...into eschatological salvation (Barbarick, p. 222).

Nowhere else in the NT do we find a more carefully argued presentation of the contours of salvation than in 2 Pet 1:3-11 (Hafemann, p. 240).

The promises of eschatological deliverance *in the future* are conditioned on increasing obedience in the *present* (2 Pet 1:8ab, 10b, 11) (Hafemann, p. 261).

Entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ is at stake in the believer's continuing obedience (Hafemann, p. 261).

The Revelation to John believes the major motivation for religious faithfulness is certain knowledge of future judgment with its rewards and punishments (Talbert, p. 282).

As can be seen by these quotes, many times the authors discuss E. P. Sander's concepts of "getting in" and of "staying in." Like Sanders, they argue that obedience is necessary to stay in God's covenant community and that failure is possible. Unlike Sanders, they stress that the grace of God, that is, divine enablement, is that which makes obedience possible.

*JOTGES* readers may wonder what happened to John's Gospel. Well, there is one chapter in this book which somewhat touches on salvation from John's Gospel. The eighth chapter, by Talbert, is entitled, "The Fourth Gospel's Soteriology between New Birth and Resurrection" (pp. 176-91). Yet the chapter only covers John 15:1-17 and the concept of mutual abiding, the believer abiding in Jesus, and Jesus abiding in the believer. Talbert's point is that "it is divine grace that enables the covenants to function appropriately in the period between the disciples' new birth and their departure from this life" (p. 191). In other words, God enables the believer to abide in Christ and if he does so he will ultimately obtain eschatological salvation. There is no discussion of John 3:16; 5:24, 39-40; 6:28-29, 35, 37, 39, 47; 11:25-27; or 20:30-31.

This book shows the current state of scholarship concerning soteriology. One has the chance to get in by grace and if he does, he then has the chance to stay in by grace. God enables. If the believer utilizes God's enablement until death, he will persevere in obedience and gain eschatological salvation. If not, he will end up in the lake of fire, not because that is what God wanted, but because the believer failed to utilize the enablement God gave him.

The view articulated in this book is a sort of hybrid of Calvinism and Arminianism.

This book is not for laypeople. It is written by scholars for scholars. I would recommend this book for pastors and parachurch workers who are well trained in Greek and in theology. But let the buyer beware that the faith-alone-in-Christ-alone message is not found in this book.

Robert N. Wilkin  
Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People.*** By Jim Cymbala and Dean Merrill. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. 206 pages. Paper, \$15.99.

I had heard of Jim Cymbala, his church, and the famous Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. I read that his church has over 16,000 members.

I first noticed the people who endorsed his book. There is a list on the back cover as well as on the first page inside the front cover.

David Wilkerson is an endorser found on the back cover. He was a famous Assemblies of God preacher. It is well known that the Assemblies of God teach that salvation depends on persevering to the end, and that people can lose their salvation if they don't persevere. I will never forget the night that David Wilkerson spoke at the Marshall Civic Center. His message was that suicide is the unpardonable sin and if a person has thought of committing suicide, they have committed this sin. It was awful. David Wilkerson was without question a false teacher who preached a false gospel in a denomination that preaches a false gospel.

The rest of the endorsers are on the first page of the book, including Nicky Cruz who is also an Assemblies of God preacher and a personal disciple of David Wilkerson. On page 33, Jim Cymbala says, "Nicky has been a close friend of mine and a frequent guest at the Tabernacle."

Thomas Trask is the General Superintendent of the General Council of the Assemblies of God. Article VIII of the Assemblies of God bylaws says this: "The General Council of the Assemblies of God disapproves of the unconditional security position which holds that it is impossible for a person once saved to be lost."

Jack Hayford is a pastor in the Foursquare denomination. He was once the president of this denomination for 5 years. My wife and I became very familiar with Foursquare when one of our sons was in college and fell in love with a girl in this denomination. He even flew to California to meet her family and church. He, and we, found out first hand that Foursquare teaches that a person must persevere to keep salvation or they will lose it. Here is a quote from Jack Hayford: "It is an extremely demanding

and difficult thing to lose your soul. If you want to, you can do it. It can be done. And there are people who have done it.”

Ron Mehl was a pastor of Beaverton Foursquare Church in Beaverton, Oregon. On a blog entitled, “Bible Answers from Beaverton Foursquare,” we read, “If we are wholeheartedly following Jesus, and have a desire to please Him, then the possibility of losing our salvation is a moot point.”

Inside the book, Jim Cymbala speaks frequently and favorably about Charles Finney, the famous 19th century evangelist (pp. 115, 149, 174-75). Here is just one of many revealing statements made by Charles Finney: “Perseverance in faith and obedience is a condition of final and ultimate acceptance and salvation.”

On page 117, Jim Cymbala speaks favorably of William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street revival of 1906. Here is a quote by Seymour, “Salvation...when we get it, we will know it. When we lose it, we will know it.” Seymour confronted a preacher named Durham who preached eternal security and locked him out of his mission.

On page 118, Jim Cymbala speaks favorably of Leonard Ravenhill. I actually met and heard Ravenhill in 1976 when he spoke at the First Presbyterian Church in Marshall, TX. Here is a sample of his teaching: “Get rid of this bunkum about the carnal Christian. Forget it! If you are carnal you are not saved. You don’t trust God if you believe once saved, always saved.”

I went to the Brooklyn Tabernacle website and discovered that Francis Chan spoke there in November 2011, and in June 2014. Francis Chan is famous for writing and preaching a theology summarized in this statement by him: “The thought of a person calling himself a Christian without being a devoted follower is absurd.”

Jim Cymbala’s pattern here is as disturbing as it could be. He is a promoter of false teachers who proclaim a false gospel. But, no doubt, Jim Cymbala does not consider them to be false or he would not promote them. He is not a novice. He’s been involved in ministry for over 35 years. He is bound to know what these men teach, and yet, he promotes them.

In the book, it is hard to find what he says that someone must do to be saved. He certainly gives himself a good opportunity to do so on pages 44, 77, and 143 as he tells stories about people

getting saved. The terminology he uses is vague as the following statements show:

“Oh God, I need you in my life. Help me please” (p.44).

“He gave his heart to the Lord” (p.77).

“David surrendered to the Christ he heard about that night” (p.143).

Cymbala makes a very disturbing comment about “faith alone” for salvation on page 81:

Even the great Protestant Reformers who taught us the principle of sola fide (faith alone) also preached that intellectual assent alone does not bring salvation. There is one more step for demonstrating a real and living faith, and that is calling out to God with all of one’s heart and soul.

Having said that, he does not explain what that means as it relates to salvation. He goes on to relate it to the ongoing prayer life of the church.

If you want to learn more of what gospel Jim Cymbala proclaims, I suggest you go to the church website and listen to these two sermons, “The First Gospel Sermon, Part 3”, and “Finishing the Race.” In these sermons he says we must hate all our sins and turn from all our sins. He says our lifestyles must be godly if we are to make it into Christ’s kingdom. Readers of this journal know that it is because we are ungodly that eternal salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from works. I do not recommend this book.

Bob Bryant  
Cypress Valley Bible Church  
Marshall, TX

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***50 Things You Need to Know about Heaven.*** By John Hart. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. 137 pages. Paper, \$9.99.

John Hart is a Professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

I love the idea of fifty very short chapters dealing with fifty important questions about eternity future. Each chapter can be read in a few minutes.

*JOTGES* readers will appreciate the fact that Hart takes a Free Grace viewpoint in this entire book. The nature of the book does not give him opportunity to stress that things like turning from sins, submission, obedience, and perseverance are not conditions of everlasting life. But what he does do is stress that the sole condition of everlasting life and spending eternity with the Lord is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ (pp. 15, 18-19, 22, 25, 34-35, 95, 120-22).

Also in this book is a discussion of hell, the Judgment Seat of Christ, eternal rewards, assurance, etc.

Though this book does not given in-depth answers to the questions it answers, it is well done and well worth having. I recommend it.

Robert N. Wilkin  
Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

***Civil Government: God's Other Kingdom.*** By Daniel M. Deutschlander. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 215 pages. Paper, \$16.50.

Daniel M. Deutschlander is a Lutheran pastor and retired professor of history, German, and religion at Martin Luther College. His book, *Civil Government: God's Other Kingdom*, defends a distinctly Lutheran view of the role of civil government.

The book is divided into three sections. The first addresses the Biblical evidence. The second addresses the history of Church-State relations. And the third gives an overview of current problems in those relations.

In the first section, Deutschlander does an able job reviewing the Biblical evidence showing God's positive evaluation of civil government. He begins with Genesis, and continues on through the Patriarchal and Theocratic periods, arguing that God always appointed the civil government to use the sword to punish evildoers.

This divine approval continues in the NT, culminating in Paul's discussion in Rom 13:1-7. The Apostle taught that all

civil governments are appointed by God, are His ministers to commend the good, terrorize evil, and carry out punishment on evildoers up to and including the death penalty (p. 41).

According to Deutschlander, the Biblical evidence shows that civil government is part of God's providential ordering of the world. God uses it to restrain the outward behavior of sinful man, while using the Church to preach the Word in order to renew the inner man. These two kingdoms are very different. The State uses force, while the Church uses words. The State employs reason and natural law, while the Church appeals to revelation. The State belongs to this world, while the Church belongs to heaven. The two kingdoms are different, but both are ruled over by Christ, even if that reality is not always acknowledged by the rulers themselves (p. 51-53).

Deutschlander argues that, according to several Biblical examples (from Daniel to Cornelius), it has always been appropriate for the people of God to be involved in public service, even under pagan governments. This is because being a ruler is a good vocation, so long as it is not abused.

Deutschlander believes that being a soldier is compatible with Christian love, because there is a distinction between acting in one's own interest, and acting in the interests of another. Christian soldiers fight as expressions of love for their neighbors, protecting them from harm. But as private citizens, these same Christians should willingly suffer when persecuted for the faith, without fighting back.

Still, any vocation can be abused. Deutschlander cautions that a particular war or military order may be unjust, forcing Christians to become conscientious objectors.

The second section summarizes the history of Church-State relations in Europe, but from a unique perspective. For Deutschlander, much of Christian political thought can be understood as a departure from the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

For Lutherans, there was a clear distinction between Church and State. That was not the case for Calvinists or Catholics. Deutschlander sees the Calvinists and Roman Catholics as sharing the belief that governments should be explicitly religious, and therefore confusing the two kingdoms of God. This was evident in the Crusades (pp. 126-28). It was also evident

in John Calvin's attempt to make Geneva the city of God on earth (p. 144). And the reason for this is because both denied the doctrine of justification. For example, Deutschlander says:

Calvinists do not see the doctrine of justification as central. In point of fact, the Calvinists deny that Christ died for the sins of the whole world. They deny that the Holy Spirit works faith solely through the gospel in Word and sacraments. (p. 145).

This led to a spiritual problem for the Calvinists:

So the Calvinists denied that Christ died for all and that God earnestly desires the salvation of all through faith in the gospel message. That presented the individual Calvinist with a big problem: If God does not desire the salvation of all, how can I be sure that he desires *my* salvation and that Christ died for *me*? In trying to solve that problem and answer that question, the Calvinists' chief concern switched from proclaiming the gospel and trusting it. Instead, they turned their attention to finding a way to prove by their lives that they were among those chosen for salvation, not those chosen for damnation! (p. 146).

This spiritual dilemma then became a political dilemma. In order to prove to themselves that they were elect, the Calvinists were led to establish a "Christian Commonwealth" which would enable the Calvinists to live in such a way as to see the fruit of their elect status:

Their goal would be to prove that they were the chosen of God by advancing the glory of God. They would advance his glory by the kind of lives they led and by the kind of society they established. That is exactly how the denial of justification ends up in a confusion of the roles of the church and state! (pp. 146-47).

This led to the Calvinists using the State to enforce doctrine, thereby mixing the two kingdoms.

Catholics had the same basic approach. Consequently, Calvinists and Catholics were involved in a series of conflicts

over control of the State, such as in the Thirty Years War in Germany, the battle between the Calvinist Huguenots and the Catholic kings in France, and between the Calvinists and Catholics in England and Scotland.

The Lutherans had a completely different understanding of the role of the State. However, they “got caught in the crossfire” between these warring parties (p. 149).

Deutschlander’s book is very well written, and presents a perspective that is not often seen in political discussions among Christians. I found it very profitable, and it challenged my own presuppositions about politics. I would highly recommend it.

Shawn C. Lazar  
Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

***Religion Saves: And Nine Other Misconceptions.*** By Mark Driscoll. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009. 287 pages. Hardback, \$19.99.

Mark Driscoll is the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington. He wrote this book in response to a series of questions he asked visitors to the church’s website. He wanted to answer their most controversial questions.

Each chapter deals with a different subject. The nine are: birth control; humor (when used in sermons that offend certain groups); predestination; grace; sexual sin; faith and works; dating; the emerging church; and the regulative principle (i.e., that the Bible regulates both our theology and methodology).

The three chapters that would probably be the most interesting to readers of *JOTGES* are: predestination; grace; and faith and works. In chapter three (Question 7), Driscoll discusses predestination.

He points out that there are two broad schools that deal with the topic, Calvinism and Arminianism. He gives a short history of how each developed. He sees the differences between the two as a non-essential issue. Godly people differ in their understanding of predestination. In addition, such godly people can also differ on whether it is possible to lose one’s salvation by not persevering in faith (pp. 70-75). The author admits that he holds to the Calvinistic position.

Driscoll clearly sees repentance as turning from sin and as being separate from faith. Both are necessary for eternal salvation (pp. 75-76). When it comes to election, the author notes that some scholars say the Biblical references may refer to nations and not individuals. However, he sees them as indicating individual election. Everyone deserves to go to hell. If God has chosen to save some, this in itself is gracious (p. 93).

The order of salvation is also important for Driscoll. Regeneration occurs before conversion. With regeneration, the Spirit gives faith and a repentant heart (p. 94). A person can know if they are of the elect if they hate sin and love Jesus (p. 101). A better statement would have been that even if one accepts individual election, he or she knows they are of the elect if they have believed in Jesus for eternal life.

It is clear from this chapter that Driscoll falls squarely within the Lordship camp. This becomes even clearer in his chapter on grace. He wonders at the extent of God's grace. Common grace is extended to all people, but saving grace is extended only to the elect. Saving grace is efficacious and never fails (pp. 110-12). This brings about a change in life. If there is no change, the person never possessed eternal life (pp. 116-17).

Driscoll discusses several kinds of grace. Regenerating grace causes a person to be born again and gives new desires. Afterwards comes converting grace, which brings the gifts of faith and repentance of sin. Persevering grace enables every true believer to continually repent of their sin and return to Jesus if they stray (pp. 118-24).

In the chapter on faith and works, Driscoll states that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone (p. 162). However, works necessarily follow. Regenerated people live their lives with a new Lord, who rules over them. Their faith is seen in the good works that come about from regeneration. To prove this point, he cites Matt 7:15-10 and Jas 2:14-26 (pp. 178-79). Driscoll does not discuss the context of these verses, and many readers of *JOTGES* will recognize that Driscoll's conclusions do not square with the contexts.

The author's summary on faith and works is found at the end of the chapter. He recounts how some recent converts met at his house. They were completely different people. If they hadn't changed their lifestyles he would have been "hard-pressed" to

believe they were Christians. He says that a person cannot meet Jesus without change (pp. 179-80).

In the other chapters of the book, Driscoll does give some practical pastoral advice to those with questions about things like dating, birth control, and the emerging church. One might find some food for thought here. But for those looking for a clear presentation of the gospel of grace, they will not find it in this book. Driscoll clearly accepts the common belief that without works one does not have eternal life. The negatives of this book outweigh the positives. As a result, I do not recommend it.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***The Explicit Gospel.*** By Matt Chandler with Jared Wilson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012. 237 pages. Paper, \$17.99.

Matt Chandler is the Pastor of a megachurch in a Dallas suburb called *The Village Church*. In addition to a main church campus in Flower Mound, TX, there are three satellite churches which feature “Flat Matt.” Those churches have their own worship team and pastors, but the preaching is done via video feed from the Flower Mound church. Total membership of the four churches is over 5,000 and is said to be growing at over 1,000 new members per year.

Endorsers of the book include David Platt, a very strong Lordship Salvation proponent (see his book *Radical*), Mark Driscoll, a Calvinist who is a leading emerging church leader, D. A. Carson, a Lordship Salvation theologian, and Rick Warren, a church-growth guru.

*JOTGES* readers will likely be disappointed in the fact that, despite the title of the book, Chandler does not focus on what we must believe or do to have everlasting life. He does drop little hints here and there that he believes in a sort of soft Lordship Salvation. However, his aim is to consider what the gospel of Jesus Christ is and what it can and should produce in the lives of individuals, cities, and countries.

The book has three major sections: the gospel on the ground (God, man, Christ, response), the gospel in the air (creation, fall, reconciliation, consummation), and implications and

applications (dangers in a gospel that is on the ground or in the air too long and moralism and the gospel).

It is hard to get a handle of what Chandler is trying to do. He seems to be arguing against a social gospel only, but in favor of a social gospel combined with a spiritual gospel. While he says that we will not succeed in transforming the world before Jesus comes, he suggests that we can transform our cities and our countries for Christ.

Chandler seems to adopt the theology and methodology of the emerging church movement. Salvation seems to be broader than individual deliverance from eternal condemnation. It seems to include personal wholeness and transformation as well as societal wholeness and transformation.

I did not find any mention of *everlasting life* in this book. Nor did I find any mention of spending eternity with the Lord. The emphasis is on the here and now.

Though this book is not easy to follow, I believe it is well worth reading for not only OT and NT scholars, but also pastors and well-educated lay people. I recommend it.

Robert N. Wilkin  
Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***These Are the Generations: The Story of How One North Korean Family Lived Out the Great Commission for More Than Fifty Years in the Most Christian-Hostile Nation in Human History.*** By Mr. and Mrs. Bae with Eric Foley. Colorado Springs, CO: DotW Publishing, 2012. 120 pages. Paper, \$9.95.

To most people, North Korea is shrouded in mystery and vaguely understood to be one of the most repressive nations on earth. Few people remember that its capital, Pyongyang, used to be known as the “Jerusalem of the East,” because of a great revival that occurred there in 1907. Today, it is virulently anti-Christian. But at one time, North Korea was the most Christian part of Asia. That all changed at the end of WWII, when the Korean peninsula was divided into two occupied zones and the north was placed under Soviet control. After that, North Korea quickly devolved into the evil Communist regime we are

familiar with today. *These Are the Generations* shines a light on the true horror of living in North Korea, as experienced by one Korean family.

The book's greatest strength is the window it provides into the daily life, aspirations, and struggles of the average North Korean.

For example, it was fascinating to read of Mr. Bae's attempts to become a member of the Communist Party, which would ensure his family enjoyed a better standard of living. The way into the Party was through the military, so Mr. Bae joined the Korean People's Army (where no one gets paid!, p. 42), and he moved up through the ranks based on his ability to play volleyball and the accordion: "By the time I completed my military service, I had trained approximately three hundred people how to play the accordion" (p. 43). He excelled in his military career and eventually did join the Communist Party, only to be imprisoned after telling a friend about the Ten Commandments (pp. 52-53). The prison conditions Bae described were truly horrific: "Up at 5:00 a.m...Then I had to sit cross-legged with my hands on my knees in the same position for the next seventeen hours. I was not permitted to turn my neck or slouch with my back" (p. 54). Any movement incurred swift punishment, such as getting beaten senseless with a rod. After a year, Bae was released, which in itself was a minor miracle.

Mrs. Bae offered her own perspective on living in North Korea. She explained that the fear that husband and wife will betray each other to the Communist party is so strong, that it sometimes takes years before enough trust is built up between them that they will reveal their faith to one another (p. 83). And the book ends with her harrowing escape from North Korea, accompanied by her young children, following mountains paths into China, Laos, and Thailand, until finally settling in South Korea, where she was not allowed to see her husband until a lengthy process of naturalization had ended.

As eye-opening as these stories were, there is a major problem with the book. The back cover says that it tells the story of how "one North Korean family received and passed on the gospel from generation to generation." However, there is little or no indication that Mr. and Mrs. Bae, or their family, knew the gospel, even in a limited sense.

Judging from their testimonies, Mr. and Mrs. Bae definitely came to have faith in God, tried to live their lives according to the Ten Commandments (e.g., pp. 31, 52, 56, 61, 87), and believed in the importance of prayer and repentance (pp. 82, 87). Beyond that, they may have had a vague familiarity with the stories of Genesis (creation, Noah's ark, Sodom, p. 111). But there is little evidence that they had a specifically Christian faith.

Jesus is only named or alluded to a handful of times in the book (pp. 85, 92, 104, 110). And there is no mention of His death, atonement for sin, resurrection, or ascension. And the Baes never profess to believe in Jesus for everlasting life (or for justification).

If any gospel was passed on through their family, it was belief in a generic form of theism where blessings and curses depended upon obedience to the Ten Commandments. It's possible that Mr. and Mrs. Bae (and their grandparents) did have saving faith in Christ, and simply failed to mention it in the book. If so, that is quite an oversight on the part of the editors. However, if obedience to the Ten Commandments passes as the "gospel" among North Korean Christians, then the country is even darker than we knew.

This book is recommended for its insight into the truly horrible persecution and living conditions experienced in North Korea.

Shawn C. Lazar  
Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and the Tanakh.*** Seth D. Postell. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011. 204 pages. Paper, \$24.00.

Rarely does a book come around that is truly revolutionary. This book is one of the rare ones.

Postell, a Professor at Israel College of the Bible in Netanya, Israel, evidences a high regard for Scripture and for the Lord who gave it to us.

This book may intimidate many readers because the author uses many words and expressions which are unfamiliar to them (e.g., Tanakh, text-centered analysis, *inclusio*, Wellhausen's

documentary hypothesis, canon, canonical, typology, inner-textuality, intertextuality, theophanic, compositional analysis, canonical seams). However, readers should not shy away from this book. As scholarly books go, this one is fairly easy to read and understand.

Postell's thesis is that Genesis 1-3 introduces key themes which resonate throughout the rest of the Pentateuch and indeed the entire OT (which Postell calls *the Tanakh*, which stands for "the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings," p. 155). In his view both the human and the Divine authors (Moses and the Holy Spirit) intended the history reported in Genesis 1-3 to serve as types of Israel's future. Some of those prophetic elements include: a "longing expectation for the coming of the conquering king [the Messiah]" (p. 166), "a new work of God in the last days" (p. 4), "Even a cursory reading of Gen 1:1-2:3 reveals the author's predominate focus on the *eretz* ("land")...[which] occurs twenty-one times [in 1:1-2:3]" (p. 83), "The Pentateuch, therefore, opens (Genesis 1) and closes (Deuteronomy 34) with a focus on the unconquered land" (p. 147), "Jacob and Moses exemplify the eschatological hope in the coming of the conquering king (Gen 3:15) from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8-12; Deut 33:7) who will one day gather the people of Israel from exile (Deut 33:5; see also 30:12-13); namely, a king who will fulfill Adam's mandate" (pp. 147-48), "Adam and Eve's cowering in fear [Gen 3:8] foreshadows Israel's fearful (faithless) retreat from the theophanic appearance of the Lord on Mount Sinai" (p. 128). This leads Postell to agree with Schmitt who argues that "faith is a primary theological concern in the Pentateuch" (pp. 126-27).

Postell argues that OT saints believed in bodily resurrection, the Promised Land as the eternal home for Israel, the coming Messiah as king and conqueror, and, though he does not say this directly, he implies that they believed in eternal security by faith alone, apart from works (e.g., "The ideal readers must trust God to fulfill his purposes through the coming-conquering king whom God will raise up in "the last days," p. 148).

*JOTGES* readers will be disappointed if they expect to find in this book a defense of justification by faith alone. That is not Postell's purpose, though as just mentioned he implies he sees that teaching in the OT.

Some readers may reject Postell's views since later Scripture does not specifically identify as types most of that which he says are types. However, if there can be types which are not specifically called types in Scripture—and I believe there can be—then Postell's thesis makes Genesis 1-3 and the Pentateuch come alive.

This is the sort of book that is so full of interesting statements that it is well worth reading more than once. I highly recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin  
Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant.***

By Mike Stallard, John Master, Dave Fredrickson, Roy E. Beacham, Elliott E. Johnson, Rodney J. Decker, and Bruce Compton. Editor Mike Stallard. Schaumburg, Ill.: Regular Baptist Press, 2012. 285 pages. Paper, \$24.99.

This book presents three *dispensationalist* views of the Church's relationship to Israel's New Covenant. The non-dispensationalist view that the Church replaces national Israel, the progressive dispensationalist view that the Church partially fulfills the New Covenant, and the older dispensationalist view of Lewis Sperry Chafer that there are two New Covenants—one for Israel and one for the Church—are briefly mentioned and summarily dismissed. Thus, this is a book *by* traditional dispensationalists *for* traditional dispensationalists.

The three views presented in the book are: (1) Roy E. Beacham, the Church has no legal relationship to or participation in the New Covenant, (2) Elliot E. Johnson, the Church has an indirect relationship to the New Covenant, and (3) Rodney Decker, the Church has a direct relationship to the New Covenant.

The book is enhanced by a foreword by John Master that also espouses the "no relationship" view, and by an epilogue by Bruce Compton in which he sees a connection between the Church and the New Covenant.

The two introductory chapters are essential reading and themselves worth the price of the book.

Dave Fredrickson answers the question: "Which Are the New Covenant Passages in the Bible?" He does this by first examining various models that have been put forth for identifying the OT New Covenant passages and then proposing a new model for "surfacing" (p. 66) New Covenant passages in both Testaments. He finds "six primary elements and eleven primary passages regarding the new covenant in the Old Testament" (p. 61) and "seven primary elements and six primary passages regarding the new covenant in the New Testament" (p. 67). Two handy tables summarize his findings.

Mike Stallard, the book's editor, contributes the second introductory chapter, "The Interpretation of the New Covenant in the History of Traditional Dispensationalism." Here he surveys the thought of not only well-known dispensationalists like John Nelson Darby, William Kelly, Frederick William Grant, Arno C. Gaebelein, C. I. Scofield, H. A. Ironside, William Newell, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Homer A. Kent, but also lesser-known figures such as Benjamin Wills Newton, Émile Guers, C. K. Imbrie, and W. R. Nicholson. He also refers to the views of the New Scofield Reference Bible. Unfortunately, however, he does not mention the early twentieth-century Baptist Clarence Larkin or the contemporary Renald Showers.

Of course, the meat of the book is the "debate" section.

First, Roy E. Beacham has the longest presentation where he defends the "no relationship" view. His coverage of the topic is much longer and more thorough than the other two views presented. Beacham's perspective "negates a number of long-standing and rather significant misconceptions" (p. 108) with regard to the nature, purpose, extent, and chronology of the New Covenant. He rightly points out the fallacy of artificially bifurcating the New Covenant into "spiritual" benefits that are "applied to many, if not all, of the redeemed of mankind" and "physical" benefits that are "either eliminated or minimized and restricted in their application" to national Israel (p. 108). The only way the Church "relates" to the New Covenant is that "the blood of Christ was poured out not just to secure the future of Israel" (p. 110) and the Church "receives from God soteriological blessings *like* some of those promised to Israel under the new covenant" (p. 143) Beacham's chapter should be supplemented

by Master's foreword, which also argues for the "no relationship" view. Master argues that "echoes of both Augustine and Jerome are found in some current dispensational teaching about the new covenant" (p. 25). Decker dismisses Beacham's position as "controversial" (p. 152), "not the majority position" (p. 154), "not even a major position by some standards" (p. 154), and not "tenable" (p. 163), yet acknowledges that it is "the best defense of his position that I have read" (p. 163).

Second, Elliot E. Johnson's presentation of the "indirect relationship view" is very brief in size—it is even shorter than Beacham's response to it. It is also very brief in scope, mainly focusing on an exposition of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Even so, Johnson was bound to go astray in arguing for his view since he began by misconstruing Ephesians 2:12 and 22 as demonstrating Gentile inclusion in the "blessings of the new covenant" (p. 164).

Third, Rodney Decker's treatment of the "direct relationship" view is exhaustive in detail, but incomplete in scope. He only address the New Covenant in Hebrews "and does not attempt integration with other texts" (p. 194). He concludes that "we are not only related to Jesus as our high priest, but the text seems to demand that we are related to the new covenant itself for it is on this basis that we draw near to God." Decker's statement that the writer of Hebrews "says nothing about a future covenant for Israel" (p. 219)—contrary to Hebrews 8:8 and 10:16—is immediately used against him by Johnson. Beacham concludes that Decker has "clearly confused 'the covenant' with 'the Christ' in the book of Hebrews" (p. 237).

The deficiencies in the presentations of Johnson and Decker are partially offset by the explanations of their views that appear in their responses to Beacham and each other. Overall, though, *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* is an important work for dispensationalists that I highly recommend.

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***Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern.*** By Jason B. Hood. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013. 232 pages. Paper, \$22.00.

Hood is writing for all three sides of Christianity: “the latitudinal left,” “the massive middle,” and the “reluctant or resistant right” (pp. 14-15, 183-89). He suggests that all three miss the significance of imitating Christ (for different reasons).

Hood basic thesis is two-fold: 1) Christians are to imitate God, Christ, and the saints (the three major sections of the book, pp. 19-180) in the sense that we are to imitate God’s character and His loving selfless actions, as well as His character and actions seen in godly believers, and 2) Most Christians either do not think that they should imitate Jesus or they seek to imitate Him in inappropriate ways or for inappropriate reasons.

One of his headings in Chapter 3 is the title of a book by Greg Beale entitled, “We Become What We Worship” (p. 43). While most people are self-absorbed, Hood says, we are to look “to the one we are supposed to mirror, the God who created us in his image” (p. 43). This is good stuff. He cites Rom 12:1-2, but without actually quoting or discussing it (p. 45).

*JOTGES* readers will notice that Hood is not at all clear concerning what one must do to have everlasting life. He is a scholar-in-residence at Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis (back cover), though he does not discuss this in the book itself. It sounds as though at one time he might have believed in once-for-all justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Note this statement:

When I was in college I loved the apostle Paul, and I thought I understood him. I loved the message of grace and the gospel. I had a short statement to explain the heart of Christianity according to Paul: ‘God worked to save me in the cross.’ That’s a powerful equation and a helpful short summary. But over time I discovered that this slogan could be used as a sieve to filter out a great deal of what Paul intends for the readers to know *and practice*. It failed to address *the new creation that God was working in Jesus’ resurrection two thousand years ago—and in humans here and now*. My failure to see the

bigger Pauline picture led to *a rather licentious approach to grace* and the Bible and left me confused about much of Paul's teaching. I needed to hear the insistence in Calvin's teaching that "*free remission of sins* cannot be separated from *the Spirit of regeneration* (p. 95, emphases added).

In a number of places in his book Hood indicates that transformation is something all regenerate people will experience (pp. 95, 99, 100, 105, 131, 135, 150).

He coins an expression that sadly but beautifully summarizes the view of assurance advocated by all who hold to Lordship Salvation. He says we must do "moral genetic testing" (p. 150). Genetic testing is done to determine paternity. Is this rich man really the father of this child as the mother claims? Genetic testing will tell. *Moral genetic testing* is what it sounds like. You look at your works to see if your father is God or the devil: "Our paternity is reflected in our behavior" (p. 150). Assurance, in this view, is found in one's works.

He seems to think that one of the reasons we are to imitate God in Christ is so that we can be transformed and can make it into Christ's coming kingdom (note the cooperation needed, p. 131, and the necessity of laying down one's life, p. 135). In other words, imitating Christ is a condition of everlasting life.

Hood says, "Luther is certainly concerned to get the order of indicative (fact and free offer of salvation) and imperative (the life God then requires) correct, so that imitation is a response: 'Imitation does not make a son; sonship makes an imitator,' he tells us in his commentary on Galatians" (p. 201). Hood fails to explain in what sense God *requires* of sons that they obey His commands. Is it in order to please Him and gain blessings now and in the life to come? There is no hint of that here or elsewhere in Hood's book. The reason seems to be so that the son can make it into the kingdom.

He also discusses the imperative and indicative at the end of the book. There he says that "there is a grave danger in making Christianity a matter of what we do for God...[and] in making Christianity a matter of what God has done for us and ignoring or downplaying what we are to do in response. First John seems to suggest that both of these tendencies are deadly" (p. 219).

He has a section entitled “A Problem and a Solution: Salvation as Renewal” (pp. 96-97). He says that sanctification is “the process of looking more like the Father and the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer” (pp. 96-97). While that is true, it is in the section discussing “salvation as renewal.” The point is that sanctification (i.e., renewal) is part of salvation. It is not merely believing in Jesus.

Does Hood believe that all who are regenerate will persevere in faith and good works and thus that perseverance till death in good works provides proof that one is born again? Or does he believe that the regenerate must persevere in good works in order to retain everlasting life? He is not clear, but he seems to hold to the former (see p. 168 where he speaks of “the initiation of a salvific relationship with Jesus”). Possibly that is why on the back cover Calvinists from Knox Theological Seminary, Precept Ministries, and Southern Seminary endorse this book. This is also supported by his answer to the question, “What is the motivation for imitation?” In his answer he brings in salvation/regeneration as part of the motivation to imitate Christ (p. 219). That fits with his statement earlier that,

These aspects of salvation [“such as adoption, justification, forgiveness, predestination, baptism and recreation to do good works,” p. 99] and many others are part of the underlying gospel motivation for imitation and discipleship. *But they not just motivate believers with gratitude; they are a new reality in which disciples are commanded to live, new self-conception and worldview that require new creation believers to regard themselves no longer in terms of the flesh...Believers begin to become what they already are in Christ: the true humans they were originally destined to be* (p. 100, emphases added).

I recommend this book to the well-grounded believer. I would not recommend it for new or poorly taught believers as the Lordship Salvation undercurrent in it might mislead them.

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