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Robert N. Wilkin

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BEWARE OF CONFUSION ABOUT FAITH

BOB WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, Texas

I. FAITH IS UNFATHOMABLE TODAY

Christianity is called *the Christian faith* for a reason. Christianity is all about doctrines. It is all about what we believe. Our lives cannot be transformed unless our minds are first renewed by the Word of God (Rom 12:1-2).

You might think that one thing pastors and theologians would be absolutely crystal clear about is what faith is.

Sadly, just the opposite is true. Faith is a dense fog, an impenetrable mystery for most pastors and theologians today. People hearing them become totally confused as to what faith is.

Beware of confusion about faith.

II. BEWARE OF CONFUSION ABOUT THE DEFINITION OF FAITH

Jesus said, “He who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47).

Recently I spent about an hour on the phone with a man who has struggled with assurance for nearly 20 years. When I pointed him to John 6:47, he said something like this: “Yes, but the Greek word for believe means something more than the English word and hence merely believing the facts of the gospel is not enough.”

That man is far from alone.

Make no mistake. If we don’t know what faith is, then we can’t be sure we are believers.

Many people understand John 6:47 as though it read: “He who whatchamacallits has everlasting life.” Since they don’t know what whatchamacallit is, they don’t know if they have everlasting life or not.

In February 1989 an article was published in the GES newsletter entitled “Doctrinal Déjà Vu: An Old Issue: Faith and Assurance.” Zane Hodges cited an 1890 book by Robert L. Dabney, a Calvinist, in which he said that no one can be sure whether his faith is genuine or spurious:

There is a spurious as well as a genuine faith. *Every man, when he thinks he believes, is conscious of exercising what he thinks is faith.* Such is the correct statement of these facts of consciousness. Now suppose the faith, of which the man is conscious, turns out a spurious faith, must not his be a spurious consciousness? And he, being without the illumination of the Spirit, will be in the dark as to its hollowness.¹

Hodges concludes: “Obviously, the kind of theology Dabney represents strips believers of their grounds of assurance and dangles them over an abyss of despair.”² Over a century later, Evangelicals continue to repeat Dabney’s contention.

Walter Chantry has written a bestselling book called *Today’s Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?*³ Though the book came out 35 years ago, it is still in print and continues to sell quite well.

Many are hailing it as a contemporary Christian classic. Chantry too says we cannot be sure we have believed:

Few today seem to understand the Bible’s doctrine of assurance. Few seem to appreciate the doubts of professing Christians who question whether they have been born again. They have no doubt that God will keep His promises *but they wonder whether they have properly fulfilled the conditions* for being heirs to those promises.⁴

Chantry then concludes:

Since we read of self-deceived hypocrites like Judas, it is an imperative question. “What must I do to be saved?” is an altogether different question from, “How do I know I’ve done it?” You can answer the first confidently. *Only the Spirit may answer the last with certainty.*⁵

Remember the old Clairol ad line? *Only your hairdresser knows for sure.* Well, that is popular evangelical theology today.

¹ Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions*, ed. C. R. Vaughan (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), I:180-81, emphasis in original.

² Zane C. Hodges, “Doctrinal Déjà Vu: An Old Issue: Faith and Assurance” *Grace in Focus* (February 1989): 1, 4.

³ Walter J. Chantry, *Today’s Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 75-76, emphasis added.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76, emphasis added.

In a 1989 *Tabletalk* article Dr. R. C. Sproul echoed these sentiments. While the entire one-page article is worth considering, I only cite the conclusion here: “In other words, Peter was also uncomfortable, but he realized that *being uncomfortable with Jesus was better than any other option!*” Sproul clearly indicated that he wasn’t sure he had eternal life and that Peter wasn’t either. The best option is to be uncomfortable, that is uncertain, “with Jesus.” Sproul speaks for many Christian leaders today when he says that following Jesus on the path of discipleship is a very uncertain journey.

Dr. James White is a leading Reformed apologist. He regularly conducts debates in which he defends five-point Calvinism. In fact, I personally debated him recently on whether regeneration precedes faith and whether perseverance in good works is an indispensable proof of regeneration.

The Protestant Reformers coined an expression to convey the idea that justification before God is *by faith alone* in Christ alone. The expression is *sola fide*, which is Latin for “by faith alone.”

A few months before my scheduled debate with James White, someone sent me a CD of a series of sermons he had done in October of 2004. The sermon that really caught my attention was entitled “Sola Fide.”

At one point in the sermon White began to tell his audience that his concern was that they would be able to communicate Paul’s *sola fide* message accurately. He then raised the following objection listeners might hear: “That sounds too easy. God must demand more of me.”

I was shocked at White’s suggested reply. This is a direct quote from his October 31, 2004 *Sola Fide* sermon: “Yes, He actually demands all of you. That’s what faith is really all about.”

On his website, under the heading “Lordship Salvation, Faith, & Monergism,” White said the following about me and the Free Grace position on February 28th of 2005:

One of the upcoming debates that is sort of “flying below the radar” is my encounter in April in Oklahoma City with Dr. Robert Wilkin, the Executive Director of the Grace Theological [sic] Society. Though we had a fair amount of difficulty getting the debate set up, I think its focus upon the nature of regeneration and the issues of monergism and synergism will be helpful.

Dr. Wilkin is a leading anti-Lordship advocate. From my perspective, his position is grossly imbalanced because it insists

upon only a single element of the truth to the exclusion of everything else. *“Faith alone” becomes “faith separated from the work of regeneration, the Spirit, the new nature,” etc. Faith without repentance (all repentance passages are consigned to “discipleship”), belief without discipleship, etc.* It is a very imbalanced perspective, one that comes from an over-reaction to a works-salvation mindset.

Today I ministered the Word in both the morning and evening services at PRBC (and the adult Bible Study class, for that matter), and I spoke from John 8:12-59. One of the passages that struck me, in light of the upcoming debate with Dr. Wilkin, was John 8:51: “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word He will never see death.” *Keeping Christ’s word is surely more than a naked faith* (faith without regeneration, faith without a new nature), and yet surely we see the parallel to John 5:24: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the one hearing My word and believing in the One who sent ME has eternal life and shall not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

There are so many passages that are utterly unintelligible, outside of special pleading, in the anti-Lordship “naked faith” position. Two come to mind immediately [Acts 20:20-21 & Titus 2:11-14]...

Reformed theology cuts the ground out from underneath the position presented by Wilkin, for *the faith that saves is the work of the Spirit in regeneration itself, and hence cannot possibly be separated from the rest of the work of the Spirit. Hence, there is no contradiction between saying that a person who believes has eternal life and saying that a person who keeps Christ’s word has [sic] will never see death.* Only the synergist has to struggle to explain the relationship: the monergist has a consistent understanding.

I will be noting many more problems with the non-Lordship position in future commentaries.⁶

Whatever White means by “faith,” it clearly isn’t simply being convinced that Jesus gives eternal life to all who believe in Him.

As an aside, note how this understanding of faith makes justification by faith alone not really justification by faith alone. If justification is by

⁶ See <http://www.aomin.org/index.php?itemid=255>, emphasis added.

faith alone, doesn't that mean that justification is by "naked faith," to use White's expression? How can justification be by faith alone, and yet faith alone, that is, faith that isn't dressed up with works, will not result in justification? How can discipleship be part of saving faith and yet at the same time justification be by faith alone?

White's ministry is called Alpha and Omega Ministries. Under "Statement of Faith" on his website we read this startling statement:

As a result of this faith [God's gift of saving faith], based upon the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, God justifies *or makes righteous* the one who believes.⁷

Justification, according to this Reformed ministry, is not being *declared righteous*, but being *made righteous*. I imagine this must be an error, for that is the Roman Catholic understanding of justification and White regularly debates Roman Catholics. However, that is what the website declares.⁸ And it certainly fits with his denouncing of "naked faith," his statement that faith includes discipleship, and his insistence that "true faith" results in righteous living.

Many more examples could be given. The point is, for many if not most Evangelicals, *faith in Jesus* is a mystery which is unknowable prior to death. One goes through life hoping he is born again and fearing that when he dies he may end up in the hot spot.

III. REALIZE THAT FAITH REALLY IS INTELLECTUAL ASSENT

Faith in the Bible is precisely what faith is in English. *It is the conviction something is true.*

For example, note the exchange that took place concerning faith in John 11:25-27:

Jesus said to her [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you

⁷ See <http://www.aomin.org/AOFAITH.html>, emphasis added.

⁸ This was verified again on May 6, 2005, two weeks after the April 22 debate in which I showed a PowerPoint slide of this quote. The fact that it remains unchanged makes me think it must not be an error, but White's view.

believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

The Lord Jesus made two simple declarations about Himself and those who believe in Him. When He asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" He was asking if she was persuaded that His two declarations were true. She said she did believe what He said.

There was no fuzziness here. In order to make a passage like this complicated, one must import a foreign meaning into the word *believe* (*pisteuō*).

Consider also the purpose statement of John's Gospel:

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

The one who is convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, has eternal life. There is only one other place in John's Gospel where the expression *the Christ, the Son of God* occurs. That is in John 11:25-27, the passage we just considered. Anyone who believes that Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who believe in Him for it believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

John 20:31 does not speak of commitment, discipleship, perseverance, or good works. It speaks merely of believing that Jesus is the Christ. Again, one must read foreign concepts into *believing* in order to find anything other than mental assent in John's purpose statement.

Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus also illustrates the idea of faith as simple persuasion. John 3:12 reads:

"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

No one suggests that Jesus was revealing a mystery when He spoke of Nicodemus not believing the earthly things. Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus had said. Thus he was not yet persuaded it was true.

The second reference to belief in the same verse is speaking of the same verbal concept. Whatever believing means when speaking of believing earthly things is the same concept as believing heavenly things.

Clearly believing earthly things is simply a matter of mental assent. So, too, is believing heavenly things.

There is not a single use of *pistis* or *pisteuō* which is mysterious or unfathomable.

Believing is the conviction that something is true. Saving faith is the conviction that the justifying message is true: that the one who simply believes in Jesus has everlasting life.

Our works, feelings, will, and desires play absolutely no role in whether we believe something and whether we know we believe or not.

IV. AVOID THE TRUST TRAP

It should be noted, however, that even in our own circles there is not unanimity on this point. I have spoken with Free Grace pastors and leaders who say that saving faith is more than being convinced of facts, that believing in Jesus is more than intellectual, that faith in Jesus involves a decision of the will.

The word *trust* overlaps in meaning with *belief*, but is not identical. Often trust has the sense of relying upon something we already believe, that is, something we are already convinced is true.

Free Grace people sometimes introduce confusion about faith when they say something like, “It is not enough to believe the facts about Jesus; you must also trust Him.” Then an illustration is given like the chair illustration.

“Do you believe that chair over there will hold you up if you sit in it?”

“Yes, I believe that chair is fully reliable.”

“Well, until you actually go over and sit down on the chair, you are not trusting it. The same is true with trusting Jesus. Would you like to choose to trust Him for your salvation?”

Questions abound. If believing what Jesus has promised is not enough, then why does Jesus call people to believe Him? If trusting Jesus is more than believing what He says, then how specifically does one trust Jesus? And how does a person know when he has done it?

If we lose our grip on faith, then we lose our grip on the good news. We cannot evangelize clearly if we think faith is more than intellectual assent, that it is more than believing facts, or that it is anything other than being convinced that the saving message is true.

V. AVOID THE TEMPORARY FAITH TRAP

Some in Christianity believe that if one’s faith in Christ fails, then he proves he never had “truly” believed in the first place.

People who think this way speak of something they call “temporary faith.” By that expression they do not merely mean that the faith eventually stops. They mean that this is a special kind of faith that believes the right doctrines for a time, but because the faith eventually fails, this proves that the faith itself was substandard.

The idea of temporary faith is based primarily on the second soil in the Parable of the Four Soils:

“Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:12-13).

Many interpret the people represented by the rocky soil as having believed in Jesus, but with a counterfeit sort of faith. This “temporary faith” can continue for some time, maybe even years or decades. The Lord Jesus left vague how long this person believes the saving message.

The fascinating thing about temporary faith being substandard faith is that it is purely a human creation. Faith that ends is not non-faith. Faith is faith.

A basic tenet of philosophy and logic is that “A cannot be non-A.” This is so obvious that I fear giving an illustration would insult the reader’s intelligence, but please bear with me. I think the exercise is helpful.

Let’s say I said that a dog is not a dog, but is a radish. You would think that I was mad.

What if I claimed that a television is not a television, but is a transporter device used by aliens to beam their advance scouts into the homes of the unsuspecting? Again, you’d make reservations for me at the mental institution. A TV is a TV.

To deny that people whom Jesus Himself said believed the saving message really believed that message is craziness. If Jesus said they believed, then they believed. And clearly what they believed was the saving message (compare vv 12 and 13).

When does a person get eternal life? According to texts like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; and 11:25-27, a person gains everlasting life the exact moment they first believe the saving message. There is no time requirement as to how long one must believe in Jesus before it “takes.”

The obvious point of this parable is that some believers later stop believing. Only by introducing an alien idea into the text can one make faith in Jesus for eternal life to be less than saving unless it perseveres from new birth to the grave.

We are not born again because we have unfailing faith in the Savior. We are born again because we have come to faith in the unfailing Savior. Here's a way to remember this: Once faith, always saved.

Note well: Most people in Christianity believe that only those who persevere to the death in faith will make it into the kingdom of God. This is even an issue for us in the Free Grace movement. Not all in our movement have thought this through. There are people in our movement who think that apostasy proves one was never born again in the first place. This is a dangerous position for many reasons. It makes assurance impossible, since none of us can be sure we will persevere in faith.

It also is a slippery slope. If we are confused on this point, it logically follows that faith in Jesus must be mysterious, for anyone, ourselves included, can later prove to have never believed in the first place.

VI. THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN SPECIAL FAITH DON'T BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

Jesus said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). If a person defines "believing in Jesus" as some special kind of faith, then he doesn't believe what Jesus is saying.

Let me illustrate this concept with two ways in which people define this special faith idea.

A. COMMITMENT

If special faith includes committing oneself to serve Jesus for the rest of one's life, then Jesus was saying, "He who commits to serve Me for the rest of his life has everlasting life." That, of course, is not what Jesus said. That would be justification by works. A person who believes that does not believe the saving message.

B. PERSEVERANCE IN GOOD WORKS

If special faith includes perseverance in good works till death, then Jesus was saying, "He who perseveres in good works till death has everlasting life." That is not what Jesus said. A person who believes that does not believe the saving message.

My experience has been that many Free Grace people are so gracious that they tend to view people with works-salvation views of saving faith as believers rather than unbelievers. Yet does this really make sense? If someone does not believe that simply by faith in Jesus a person is eternally secure, does he believe the saving message?

Now I will say that since once-faith-always-saved is true, some of those who are proclaiming a false gospel are born again people who have become terribly confused. But they need to be evangelized for two reasons.

First, rarely do we know them well enough to know that in the past they were clear on justification by simple faith alone. Thus in most cases we should be concerned that they are likely unbelievers who need eternal life.

Second, even if they are indeed believers who have fallen away from the truth, they have lost assurance and the only way to get it back is for you to evangelize them. Share the saving message with them.

I could go on and speak on so-called *miracle faith*, *dead faith*, *head faith*, and so on. However, I will resist the temptation for the Bible knows nothing of different types of faith.

Many people are so embarrassed by *sola fide* that they feel the need to dress up faith with good works. By so doing they inadvertently pervert the good news of Jesus Christ.

VII. CONCLUSION: KEEP THE FAITH

At the end of his life Paul said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8).

When Paul said he "kept the faith," he meant that he had remained true to the message the Lord Jesus gave him to proclaim. While that message surely included more than the good news of eternal life, it definitely included the gospel.

Note what Hiebert says about the expression, "I have kept the faith" in his commentary on 2 Timothy:

Here apparently by "the faith" he does not mean merely his own personal faith in Christ but is thinking of the Gospel as the precious deposit that was entrusted to him. Amid the countless dangers encountered from active foes and false

friends he has unflinchingly held to that Gospel and has guarded it against perversion or adulteration. Now he is ready to render account to Him who entrusted it to him.⁹

If we lose our grip on what faith is, then we can't keep the faith. To keep the faith we must remain convinced that all who simply believe in Jesus have everlasting life.

Some say that believing the facts of the gospel is not enough. You must also "trust" Jesus Christ. That is terribly confusing at the least and a departure from the saving message at the worst. Believing the facts is precisely what Jesus preached.

Beware of wrong views of faith. We can't very well keep the faith if we don't know what faith itself is!

⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 111.

THE MORALISTIC WRATH-DODGER ROMANS 2:1-5

ZANE C. HODGES

President

Kerugma Ministries

Mesquite, Texas

I. THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

Let me say just a word about the so-called new perspective on Paul. In scholarly circles this approach is connected with the names of men like E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, and Terence L. Donaldson.

What they are saying amounts to a claim that Paul does not really clash with Judaism as sharply as many Lutherans and other Protestants have thought. According to this view, Paul is mainly challenging Jewish exclusivism. Paul, we are told, is insisting that Gentiles can enter the redeemed community by faith in Christ, but that good works are the way that entrants into that community stay inside it.

As you can see, under this conception, final salvation still depends on works. The new perspective seems to be implicitly Arminian, although a Calvinist expositor could accommodate himself to it rather easily. In the Reformed perspective, genuine entrance into the redeemed community only occurs when the entering faith results in the necessary good works.

I am happy to say I don't have to consume your time or mine refuting this "new perspective." That has already been very adequately done by a recent book. I am referring to Stephen Westerholm's book entitled, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul*.¹

Westerholm's book exhibits thorough scholarship and is an incisive critique of this point of view. My sense of the literature on Paul today is that the "new perspective" has largely run its course and is beginning to erode. I hope this erosion will prove fatal.

¹ Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004).

But even if I'm not correct in this hopeful outlook, the so-called "new perspective" is seriously misguided. It does not really understand Paul.

II. THE MORALIST OF ROMANS 2:1-5

That leads me to Romans 2. This chapter in particular has played a prominent role in the discussions related to the "new perspective." As a result, I have tried to give Romans 2 very close attention in my commentary that I am presently working on.

Romans 2:1 is addressed to a moralist. Paul's words are:

Therefore you are without excuse, O man (anyone who judges). In fact, in the matter for which you judge someone else, you condemn yourself, since you who pass judgment do the same things.

– Author's Translation

I am surprised that a number of commentators think that Paul has a Jew in mind here. I can see no basis for that in the text. Paul's statement is obviously generalized by the words I have translated as *anyone who judges*. Needless to say, in the Greco-Roman world there were plenty of critics of human behavior. Every age and society can be expected to have this type of person.

In the previous chapter (Rom 1:18-32) Paul has been at pains to pass sweeping condemnation on the behavior of men in general. But his indictment of men is more than just an indictment. He is actually in the process of showing that God's anger with mankind is displayed in mankind's depraved condition. Romans 1:28-32 is a catalogue of human vices into which God has allowed men to sink.

This brings Paul to the moralist of Romans 2. What about people who decry the iniquities of other people and pass judgment on those people? Are these moralistic individuals actually exceptions to Paul's general condemnation of human beings? This question is relevant whether the moralist is Jewish or Gentile.

Paul's answer, of course, is that even the moralist is no exception to what Paul is saying. This is indicated up front by the words, *you who pass judgment do the same things*. The moralist, in other words, is a hypocrite. But here we should note carefully how Paul phrases this point.

In the Greek text, as my translation indicates, the judgment made by the moralist is a judgment of some particular thing or other. In the phrase

in the matter for which you judge someone else, the words *in the matter* render the Greek phrase *en hō*. Of course, *hō* is singular. However, in the phrase *you...do the same things*, the underlying Greek is the plural expression *ta...auta* (*the same things*).

Paul's point is that no matter what the moralist condemns in others, he does the same wicked things they do. This does not necessarily mean that he does the very thing he finds fault with (though this often happens). Instead, it means that he does his own fair share of the sins men generally do.

Let me illustrate. A moralist might say, "I know husbands who lie to their wives. That's wrong. I would never do that." However, the moralist lies to his friends, his co-workers, and the authorities. To take another example, the moralist says, "Adultery is everywhere and it's wrong." But the same person indulges in envy, greed, and hatred.

Even the moralist, Paul is saying, falls under the sweeping indictment of Romans 1. He is not a glowing exception to mankind's depravity. He too, therefore, cannot expect to dodge God's wrath.

III. THE PERSONAL DANGER OF THE MORALIST

Precisely because the moralist does *the same things* that other sinners do, he is himself confronting personal danger.

This is made clear in Rom 2:2-3:

Now we know that God's judgment against people who do such things corresponds to the truth. So do you suppose, O man—you who judge *people who do such things and you do them too—that you yourself will escape God's judgment?*

– Author's Translation

Here Paul is affirming that God's wrathful judgment against sinful behavior is valid. It is *according to the truth*, that is, it corresponds to the reality of man's sin and is fully justified. Since this is the case, how then does the moralist expect to escape this wrath? The moralist condemns people who do the type of things Paul has catalogued in chap. 1. But the moralist is guilty of such things as well.

Paul's question, of course, is pointed and sharp. "So do you suppose, O man...that you yourself will escape God's judgment?" Sooner or later the moralist will be overtaken by God's wrath, just like other men are. How does he propose to avoid that?

There is in fact a way in which he *might* avoid it. This is suggested in v 4 where Paul writes:

Or do you despise the wealth of His kindness and tolerance and longsuffering, *not realizing that God's kind behavior is drawing you to repentance?*

– Author's Translation

The moralist should seriously consider why he has not yet been overtaken by the wrath that has fallen on people all around him. The reason is that God is dealing with him in *kindness, tolerance, and forbearance*. This *kind behavior* on God's part is in fact God's way of *drawing him to repentance*.

Repentance, therefore, is the means by which God's wrath could be evaded. But the moralist is so busy condemning others he does not stop to consider why it is that God is bearing patiently with the moralist's own sins. God wants this moralist to repent.

Paul's statement here is quite revealing. Although in chap. 1 mankind is seen as universally under God's wrath, here we see that God also individualizes His wrath. To put it simply, God's wrath does not overtake men the moment they commit sin. That wrath may be delayed by God's wish not to have to inflict it.

Let me illustrate this. Here is a man who drinks heavily. But he does not destroy his liver overnight. Yet if he continues to drink that may well happen to him. That would be God's wrath. He should repent of his heavy drinking before it is too late.

Or take another case. Here is a man who engages in gay sex. His first sinful liaison may not be with someone who carries the AIDS virus. In fact, he may go through a long series of such encounters without contracting AIDS. But then one day he contracts AIDS. That is God's wrath. He should repent of his sexual activity before it is too late.

Obviously God would prefer that the heavy drinker not reach the point of severe liver damage. He would prefer the homosexual not to contract AIDS. But if there is no repentance from such behavior, God's wrath in some form or other is inevitable.

Therefore, the moralist of Romans 2 should carefully consider his own danger instead of focusing on the failures of others.

IV. THE DAY OF WRATH

Paul now concludes his exchange with the hypothetical moralist by the words of Rom 2:5.

Before I quote 2:5, however, I want to point out that a period should follow this verse, not just a comma. Despite the KJV tradition of a comma after v 5, it is preferable to place a period there along with the NIV and *The Jerusalem Bible*. The following relative pronoun, in v 6, functions as a virtual personal pronoun introducing a new line of thought.

Romans 2:5 reads as follows:

And by means of your hardness and your unrepentant heart
you are storing up wrath against yourself in a day of wrath,
and of *revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God.*²

– Author’s Translation

What we are looking at here in 2:5 is what exegetes refer to as an *inclusio*. An *inclusio* is a stylistic device that picks up a word, phrase, or idea from the beginning of a unit and repeats it at the end of the unit as a structural marker to indicate that the unit is complete. The writer of Hebrews, for example, is quite fond of the *inclusio*.

More than one commentator has noticed that the wording of Rom 2:5 clearly recalls the material in 1:18. To begin with, there is the double use of the word *wrath* in 2:5. That is the first explicit use of this word since 1:18.

Secondly, there is the word *revelation*. In Rom 1:18 Paul affirms that the wrath of God has been *revealed* from heaven. In 1:18 the verb is used and in 2:5 the cognate noun is used.

Thirdly, the word translated *righteous judgment* is the Greek word *dikaiokrisias*. This is its only use in the NT. It quite clearly picks up a thought that is implicit in Rom 1:18. In 1:18 Paul says that God’s wrath is revealed *against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth by unrighteousness*. This double use of *unrighteousness* makes quite clear the fact that God’s wrath is due to God’s *righteous judgment* against unrighteous men.

² The third *and* (*kai*) in this verse is not found in the modern critical editions of the Greek NT. I am following the Majority Text here, but the presence or absence of this *and* does not materially affect what I am saying.

If ever there was an obvious *inclusio*, Rom 2:5 is it. This means, therefore, that in Paul's mind Rom 1:18 to 2:5 is a single unit of thought. The basic idea of the unit is very simple: All men are exposed to the righteous wrath of God including the moralist who thinks he is better than others. There are no exceptions.

This also leads to another obvious conclusion. When Paul tells the moralist that he *is storing up wrath in a day of wrath*, he is *not* talking about the eschatological future (i.e., the Tribulation, cf. 1 Thess 5:9). He is talking about right here and now!

I have to confess that I previously had read Rom 2:5 as if it had said that the moralist is storing up wrath *for* the "day of wrath." Perhaps, with a little straining, the Greek could bear that idea. But Paul doesn't say *for*, he says *in*. The moralist is *in* the day of wrath.

Paul's point is something like this. I am paraphrasing:

"You, who are as guilty as other people, are actually heaping up a real abundance of wrath in this very time which is already a day of wrath."

In other words, Paul is emphasizing the thoughtless folly of the moralizer. Everywhere around him he can see—or should see—the manifested wrath of God. But instead of trying to avoid that wrath, he is heaping it up for himself as well.

"This very day you live in," says Paul, "is a day of wrath!"

V. CONCLUSION

Romans 2:1-5 is important for several reasons.

First, it helps us to understand that there is a break in the thought between Rom 2:5 and 2:6. Not a radical break in the thought, of course. But a significant one. In 2:6-16, Paul proceeds to the issue of the final judgment of the unrighteous. Of course, there is no such judgment for those who are righteous by faith, since no charge can be brought against them (see Rom 8:33).

Second, my proposed understanding of Rom 2:1-5 places Paul's one and only reference to repentance in Romans in the context of God's temporal wrath.

One commentator states, "Repentance plays a surprisingly small part in Paul's teaching, considering its importance in contemporary

Judaism.”³ If we abandon the “new perspective” on Paul, however, surprise is an uncalled for reaction.

If Hebrews is left out of consideration, in the Pauline epistles the word group *metanoia/metanoēō* (repentance/repent) occurs a grand total of *five times* (Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:9, 10; 2 Cor 12:21; 2 Tim 2:25)! I think you will agree that this is not a very big number for thirteen epistles. The simple fact of the matter is that, in Pauline thought, repentance is not relevant to Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith. Romans has only this reference and Galatians has not a single reference.

These facts speak for themselves. Repentance in the Bible is always connected with man’s need to adjust his behavior to avoid trouble and to escape the temporal judgment of God.

Thirdly, even in their unregenerate condition, God desires man to repent in time to avoid His wrath on their particular sins.

As Jeremiah said in Lam 3:33, God “does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” Even though God is angered by men’s sin and righteously inflicts wrath upon them, He does not enjoy doing so. He would prefer that they repent.

Think of the sin that makes you angrier than any other sin. Maybe it is theft, murder, adultery, homosexuality, or something else. But remember one thing. God loves those sinners as individuals. His wrath is not immediate in individual cases. And in every case God would be glad to withhold His wrath if there is genuine repentance.

A whole city found this out one time. Its name was Nineveh. If we are going to be people of grace, our attitude toward sinners should be a real improvement on Jonah’s!

James and John once asked Jesus about a Samaritan village: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” (Luke 9:54). Jesus replied, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:55-56).

Hopefully, GES people know what spirit we are of.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 133-34.

VITICULTURE AND JOHN 15:1-6*

GARY W. DERICKSON

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
Western Baptist College
Salem, Oregon

I. INTRODUCTION

Few Bible students today can point to having an agricultural background or having lived on a farm. This has led to a distinct lack of familiarity with all or most aspects of agriculture, including viticulture.¹ Since the culture of the Bible was principally agrarian, this modern unfamiliarity may contribute to misunderstanding some portions of Scripture. When interpreting difficult passages, such issues as context and lexical meanings are certainly important. But the proper use of historical and cultural data may also inform one's understanding of key terms and concepts, thereby clarifying what might otherwise be obscure or confusing in a biblical passage.

The problem of John 15:1-6 is made apparent by the variant and disparate interpretations given this passage. Debate continues concerning the meaning of *airei* and *kathairei* in v 2 and whether v 6 describes a believer's or an unbeliever's destiny. Some of the confusion can be clarified with an adequate understanding of the viticultural practices of the first century. This article seeks to describe key viticultural practices in first-century Palestine and then use them as a basis, though not the sole basis, for answering questions concerning the fate of the unfruitful branches. This will be accomplished by first introducing the debate between the "lordship" and "free grace" views on John 15:1-6.² Then a

* This article was previously printed in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 153 (January 1996) and has been reprinted with permission.

¹ This author holds B.S. and M.S. degrees in horticulture from Texas A&M University and taught grape-pruning as a teaching assistant there.

² J. Carl Laney, "Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (January-March 1989): 55-66; and Joseph C. Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (January-March 1990): 44-53. Their arguments are generally built from lexical and textual clues, though Laney does refer to present

discussion of cultural practices will be detailed, followed by analysis of the passage with the relevant data in view.

II. INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS

At least three interpretations of the passage exist: 1) the unfruitful branches of v 2 and burned branches of v 6 represent Christians who lose their salvation; 2) they represent professing “Christians” who never had salvation; or 3) they represent unfruitful Christians who are cared for by God and then eventually are disciplined by means of death.³ The second and third views, both arising within Calvinism, are the focus of this article. They are represented by men such as Laney and MacArthur who reflect the lordship (justification) view, and Dillow who reflects the fellowship (sanctification) view.

A. PROFESSING “CHRISTIANS” WHO ARE UNBELIEVERS

The dominant view among Calvinists is that the nonfruit-bearing and removed branches of vv 2 and 6 are nonbelievers within the visible church who appear to be believers but who are spiritually fruitless.⁴ Reflecting this position, MacArthur says, “The healthy, fruit-bearing branches...represent genuine Christians.” He argues, “We are not saved by works, but works are the only proof that faith is genuine, vibrant, and alive (Jas 2:17). Fruit is the only possible validation that a branch is abiding in the True Vine.”⁵ Thus the absence of fruit demonstrates the absence of life.⁶ And, since abiding is necessary for fruitfulness, one who does not abide is one who is not saved.

cultural practices. Still, neither refers to any first-century data that might enlighten meanings within the text to support their understanding of key terms.

³ Charles R. Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” *Grace Journal* 9 (Spring 1968): 3, 7.

⁴ Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” 55; Robert A. Peterson, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages,” *Presbyterion* 17 (1991): 108; and James E. Rosscup, *Abiding in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 42.

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 168.

⁶ Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1909; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 220; Rosscup, *Abiding in Christ*, 42; J. C. Ryle, *Ryle’s Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, John

Laney identifies “two divine actions” being taken on the branches of v 2. Those that are fruitful are “pruned” (*kathairō*) while the fruitless (i.e., unregenerate) ones are “removed” (*airō*).⁷ The unfruitful branches of v 2 are identified in v 6 as the cast out branches. Judas is an example of the kind of people who initially identify with Jesus and then fall away and are the ones who, though they appear to belong to the faith, are in fact pruned out and destined to destruction.⁸

B. CHRISTIANS WHO ARE LIFTED UP AND ENCOURAGED AND THEN LATER DISCIPLINED WITH DEATH

The second view says that unfruitful branches represent believers who are cared for by God and later are disciplined. According to Chafer, abiding in John 15:1-6 refers to communion and not union because the passage’s focus is on the believer’s walk. Further, he sees the action on the branches in v 6 as an issue of communion, not union. A believer’s failure to abide and thus to bear fruit leads to discipline from God, which may include physical death.⁹ Dillow concurs with Chafer, adding that believers experience not only divine discipline in this life but also loss of reward at the judgment of Christ.¹⁰

C. THE ISSUE AT HAND

These two views conflict in their understanding of John 15:1-6. The unfruitful branch cannot be both a believer and an unbeliever. The branch that fails to abide cannot be a believer who is disciplined and also

10:10 to End (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 328; and Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” 13-14.

⁷ Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” 57.

⁸ William Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to John*, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 2:294-95; Homer A. Kent Jr., *Light in the Darkness: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 181-82; MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 166; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1928), 479; Peterson, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages,” 108.

⁹ Lewis S. Chafer, “The Eternal Security of the Believer,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 106 (October–December 1949): 402-403.

¹⁰ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6,” 51-52.

be an individual who was never regenerate. The question the exegete faces is which view has the greater probability of being correct. This must be answered on the basis of cultural as well as textual data. The assumption that the message of the Gospel of John focuses on justification, as well as a lack of understanding of viticulture, seems to force most interpreters to look to v 6 as a guide to interpreting v 2. This forces some interpreters to view “professing Christians” as distinguished from actual believers. A few Calvinist interpreters have attempted to answer the question from a sanctification perspective and so have differed in their conclusions.

If Jesus was pointing to a certain practice or was using terminology with distinct and understood meanings, then discovering the viticultural practice or the term’s meaning within the culture of His day will aid in understanding those key terms.

III. ARGUMENTS

A. PROFESSING “CHRISTIANS”

The interpretation of John 15:1-6 hinges in part on one’s understanding of v 6.¹¹ The problem of the burning of detached branches and one’s conclusion concerning their destiny directly influences the meaning of other key terms in the passage. Thus that issue must be addressed before discussing the other related arguments.

1. *Nonbelievers Are in View in Verse 6*

The justification interpretation identifies the burned branches in v 6 as unbelievers who are destroyed in hell.¹² As MacArthur wrote, “the imagery of burning suggests that these fruitless branches are doomed to hell.”¹³ Laney points to John 6:37 and Jesus’ promise not to cast out (*ek-balō exsō*) any who come to Him as proof that the branches being cast out (*eblēthē exsō*) cannot be believers.¹⁴

¹¹ Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” 16.

¹² Peterson, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages,” 108.

¹³ MacArthur, *The Gospel according to Jesus*, 171.

¹⁴ Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” 62.

Belief is the connection that unites the vine and branches. Without belief there is no abiding. The absence of abiding indicates deficient (transitory or superficial) belief... There is no fruit without faith, and there is no faith without fruit... While Reformation theology affirms that faith alone saves, it affirms with equal conviction that the faith that saves is not alone.¹⁵

Laney rejects the idea that burning refers to discipline on believers because the removal of the branches is “a prelude to judgment, not of blessed fellowship with Christ in heaven.”¹⁶

But if these branches be taken as Christians, what can the removal signify? The taking to heaven of sinning believers, as suggested by Chafer, does not remove them from Christ or from profession in Christ. If Jesus wanted to teach the truth that sinning believers may be removed to heaven it does not seem likely that He would have chosen this figure. What happens to dead and removed branches is not good.¹⁷

Peterson and Smith note that when Jesus referred to unfruitful, removed, and burned branches He used the third person, but that He referred to the disciples in the second person.¹⁸ Peterson concludes from this that Jesus “carefully distinguishes his disciples from the unfruitful branches which are headed for God’s judgment.”¹⁹ This then leads to the problem of the unfruitful branches in v 2.

2. *Fruitless Branches Refer to Nonbelievers*

In this view the unfruitful branches that are “removed” in v 2 are synonymous with the nonabiding branches in v 6. Laney suggests that the “natural flow” of the context means Jesus was referring to the same people.²⁰ MacArthur looks to the context and key players, including Judas, to argue for false believers being represented by “barren branches” that are judged.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁶ Ibid., 61.

¹⁷ Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹ Peterson, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages,” 109.

²⁰ Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” 60, 65.

²¹ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 166.

Every gardener understands this principle. Fruitless branches are detrimental to the vine. They take sap away from the fruit-bearing branches. Wasted sap means less fruit. Even after careful pruning these branches will remain barren. There is no way to make them bear fruit.²²

MacArthur also points to Rom 9:6 and 11:17-24 to argue that “a person can be in the family tree but not be a true Israelite. Likewise, one can be a branch on the True Vine without really abiding in Christ.” The “cutting off” is related to 1 John 2:19 and the departure of the antichrists from the apostolic fellowship.²³ Ryle argues,

One principle is that no one can be a branch in Christ, and a living member of His body, who does not bear fruit. Vital union with Christ not evidenced by life is an impossibility, and a blasphemous idea. The other principle is that no living branch of the true vine, no believer in Christ, will ever finally perish. They that perish may have looked like believers, but they were not believers in reality.²⁴

3. *Airei* Means “Remove,” not “Lift”

Laney defends his interpretation of *airei* as “remove” rather than “lift up” by noting that 13 of its 23 uses in John’s Gospel have the sense of “take away” or “remove” while only eight times it means “to take up” or “to lift up.”²⁵ Thus the majority of uses points to a judgmental sense. Noting that the basic sense of the word is “removal,” Smith says, “Since the context must determine what kind of removal is in view, it is certainly not the best method of exegesis to interpret the word in a manner that is contradictory to the context. . . In the context, verse 6 describes the taking away in no uncertain terms as a taking away to judgment.”²⁶ MacArthur presents a “viticultural” argument.

Vinedressers had two chief means of maximizing the fruit that grew on the vine. One was to cut off the barren limbs. The other was to prune new shoots from the fruit-bearing branches.

²² Ibid., 170.

²³ Ibid., 171.

²⁴ Ryle, *Ryle’s Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 335.

²⁵ Laney, “Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” 58.

²⁶ Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” 9.

This all insured that the vine would produce more fruit, not just leafy growth. Verse 2 describes both chores:...Barren branches grow more rapidly, and new ones sprout quickly. They must be carefully and regularly pruned. It is the only way to insure maximum quantities of fruit.²⁷

This is a nice-sounding description for the nonviculturalist. But is it what was actually practiced? That will be seen later.

4. *Not Abiding "in Me" Refers to Nonbelievers*

Smith rejects the fellowship interpretation of "in Me" in v 2.

Those who hold that the unfruitful branches represent Christians base their interpretation largely upon this phrase and allow it to determine their view of the rest of the passage. Most commentators, however, have felt that the rest of the passage is so clear that this one phrase should be carefully weighed in the light of the whole context...The familiar technical usage of the phrase "in Christ," as it is found in Paul's prison epistles, was not until many years later. At the time when Jesus spoke these words no one was "in Christ" in this technical sense because the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not begin until Pentecost. When these words were spoken, to be "in Christ" was not different from being "in the kingdom." Jesus' parables about the kingdom being composed of wheat and tares, good and bad, fruitful and unfruitful, are very familiar.²⁸

Laney invalidates Smith's argument by noting that the phrase clearly refers to salvation elsewhere in the Gospel of John.²⁹ Even so, he attempts to refute the argument that "in Me" in v 2 indicates that the unfruitful branches are believers by making it an adverbial phrase modifying the verb "bearing" rather than an adjectival phrase modifying "branch." Thus bearing fruit occurs "in the sphere" of Christ and emphasizes the "process of fruit-bearing" rather than the "place."³⁰

5. *Modern Practice*

Laney attempts to strengthen his arguments by reference to modern viticultural practices. Quoting from a circular from the California Agricultural

²⁷ MacArthur, *The Gospel according to Jesus*, 168.

²⁸ Smith, "The Unfruitful Branches in John 15," 10.

²⁹ Laney, "Abiding Is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6," 63.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

Extension Service entitled “Grape Growing in California,” he notes that “regular pruning is necessary during the vine’s growing season.” From it he identifies pinching, topping, thinning, and pruning as four actions taken to control growth and improve fruit production.³¹ He then says that Jesus’ point was that “as the vinedresser cuts away what would hinder the productivity of the vine, so God the Father, through loving discipline (cleaning, purging, purifying), removes things from the lives of believers that do not contribute to their spiritual fruitfulness.”³²

The problem with this data is that it does not point out the difference between growing-season pruning and dormant-season pruning, as will be noted later. To his credit, Laney admits that “the destruction of the Jews at the time of the Arab conquest (A.D. 640) suggests that changes may have occurred in agriculture as the Arab people took over Palestine.” This leads him to conclude that the “grammatical and lexical context” is all that is left to the interpreter “to gain a proper understanding of the passage.”³³ This is true if no way exists by which to ascertain the viticultural practices of first-century Judea. But there is.

B. CHRISTIANS WHO ARE ENCOURAGED AND THEN DISCIPLINED

In the fellowship or sanctification interpretation of this passage the imagery Jesus used in the vine-branch analogy describes fellowship with God rather than union with Him. “With John, the kind of relationship pictured in the vine-branch imagery describes an experience that can be ruptured (John 15:6) with a resultant loss of fellowship and fruitfulness,” and so the passage describes “the believer’s fellowship with God.”³⁴ Vanderlip notes that in the Gospel of John “life” occurs 32 times in chaps. 1–12 and then only three times in chaps. 13–20 because Jesus was then with His disciples who had “come to possess life and therefore the

³¹ Laney identifies H. E. Jacob, “Grape Growing in California,” Circular #116 (California Agricultural Extension Service, College of Agriculture, University of California at Berkeley, April 1940) as his source (*ibid.*, 57).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁴ Zane C. Hodges, “1 John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 888-89.

subject matter of the book advances to other themes.”³⁵ As a result what Jesus said in John 13–20 should be understood differently.

1. Believers Are in View in Verse 6

Dillow does not see a soteriological focus in v 6. Instead, “the point of the figure of the vine and the branches is not to portray organic connection but enablement and fellowship. This casting out then is not from salvation but from fellowship.”³⁶ The fire of 1 Cor 3:15 is the same as this verse.

Paul wrote that the believer is the building and that the building is built up with various kinds of building materials and that the fire is applied to the building. The apostle obviously saw an intimate connection between the believer and his work. To apply the fire of judgment to the believer is the same as applying it to his work. Indeed the believer’s works are simply a metonymy for the believer himself...The believer who does not remain in fellowship because of disobedience is cast out in judgment and withers spiritually, and faces severe divine discipline in time and loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ.³⁷

This branch is neither a nonbeliever nor one who loses his salvation.

2. Fruitless Branches Refer to Believers not in Fellowship

Dillow rejects the idea that unfruitful branches cannot be either regenerate or abiding. He asks, “If the fruitless branches are only professing Christians, then what bearing did the passage have on the disciples?” In his response to Laney, Dillow argues that

the passage gives every indication that it was addressed in its entirety to the disciples to tell them how they could bear fruit in *their* lives. Jesus said to them, “If you [the disciples, not those to whom they would one day minister] abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.”³⁸

³⁵ George Vanderlip, *Christianity according to John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 31.

³⁶ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6,” 53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-52, italics his.

Cook concurs.

Abiding in Christ is to be distinguished from *being* in Christ, although ideally there should be no practical difference between the two. We may observe the distinction by noting John 15:1-11, where the “in Me” branch of verse 2 is seen to be different from the “abide in Me” branch of verse 4. To *be* in Christ is to be born again, to be regenerated, to have had forgiveness of sins through Christ. Thus the disciples are in Christ (v. 2) because they have been cleansed of their sins (v. 3). To *abide* in Christ, however, is to be an obedient follower in fellowship with Christ the Savior and Lord (vv. 4-5, 9-11). An examination of 1 John 3:24 will reveal that obedience is the condition for abiding. Moreover, in John 15:10 our obeying Christ and thus abiding in Him is compared to the Son’s obeying the Father and thus abiding in Him; the Son was already *in* the Father by virtue of His sonship, but the Son *abided* in the Father by obeying Him. We see, then, that just as Christ’s abiding in the Father was the maintenance of personal fellowship with the Father, so our abiding in Christ is the maintenance of personal fellowship with Christ.³⁹

3. *Airei* Means “Lift up,” not “Remove”

Dillow identifies R. K. Harrison’s interpretation of *airei* as “lifts up” in v 2 and notes that in at least 8 out of its 24 occurrences in John it is used in that sense.⁴⁰ He then responds to Laney by noting that Harrison reported how fallen vines in Palestine “were lifted ‘with meticulous care’ and allowed to heal.”⁴¹ Further, in a footnote Dillow remarks that Harrison states that *airei* has *airō* (“to lift”) as its root rather than *aireō* (“to catch, take away”).⁴² Dillow then points to his own personal observation of viticultural care,⁴³ concluding that if “lift up” is the meaning, “then a fruitless branch is lifted up to put it into a position of fruit-bearing.” He adds that this interpretation does not contradict v 6, but that it rather

³⁹ W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 133-34, italics in original.

⁴⁰ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6,” 50. He lists John 5:8-12; 8:59; 10:18, 24 as examples.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 51, fn. 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51.

suggests “that the heavenly Vinedresser first encourages the branches and lifts them in the sense of providing loving care to enable them to bear fruit. If after this encouragement, they do not remain in fellowship with Him and bear fruit, they are then cast out.”⁴⁴ This casting out is from fellowship, not salvation.

4. *Not Abiding “in Me” Refers to Believers out of Fellowship*

Dillow notes Smith’s argument that “in Me” is only a general reference to people being in the kingdom rather than to the Pauline concept of being in Christ, since both the present kingdom and the future millennial kingdom include a mixture of true and false believers.⁴⁵ Dillow responds by pointing out that professing Christians are not in Christ. He says that “it is unlikely that ‘in Me’ can refer to an ‘Israel within Israel’ (i.e., the truly saved within the professing company) in view of the consistent usage of ‘in Me’ in John’s writings to refer to a true saving relationship.”⁴⁶ He asserts that the phrase “in Me” always refers to fellowship with Christ in its 16 uses in the Gospel. “It is inconsistent then to say the phrase in 15:2 refers to a person who merely professes to be saved but is not.”⁴⁷ Further, “the preposition *en* is used ‘to designate a close personal relation.’ It refers to a sphere within which some action occurs. So to abide ‘in’ Christ means to remain in close relationship to Him.”⁴⁸ Jesus’ use of the phrase refers to “a life of fellowship, a unity of purpose, rather than organic connection,” which is distinct from the Pauline concept of “in Christ.”⁴⁹ Based on the use of the phrase to describe the relationship of Christ and the Father and His nonrelationship with Satan (John 14:30), Dillow argues that it does not speak of “organic connection or commonality of essence, but of commonality of purpose and commitment.”⁵⁰ Its use in John 17:21 indicates a unity of purpose rather than organic connection. “If this ‘in Me’ relationship referred to organic connection, Jesus

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Smith, “The Unfruitful Branches in John 15,” 10.

⁴⁶ Dillow, “Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6,” 45.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

would not have prayed for an organic connection between Him and believers because it already existed.”⁵¹ He concludes from this,

To be “in Me” is to be in fellowship with Christ, living obediently. Therefore it is possible for a Christian not to be “in Me” in the Johannine sense. This seems evident from the command to “abide in Christ.” Believers are to remain in fellowship with the Lord. If all Christians already remain “in Me,” then why command them to remain in that relationship? It must be possible for them not to remain.⁵²

C. SUMMARY

The two views approach the passage differently and attempt to answer the other’s positions. Both point to textual as well as contextual data. Both refer to viticultural practices, or at least their understanding of them. Before interpreting the passage, an examination of some of the available information that might illumine the meanings of key terms is appropriate.

IV. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DATA

Viticulture was an integral aspect of first-century Judah’s culture. When Jesus presented the analogy of the vine and the branches to His disciples, He was speaking from a familiar context. Because its practice was so widespread it is likely that all the disciples, including the fishermen, may have seen grapes cultivated in their villages or on hillsides around their homes.

A. TRAINING OF PLANTS

In early Israel the branches of cultivated grapes were either allowed to trail along the ground or were trained to grow over a pole.⁵³ Pliny’s mention of this indicates that it was still being practiced in first-century

⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

⁵² Ibid., 47-48.

⁵³ Jehuda Feliks, “Vine,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 16:156; James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972; reprint, New York: Nelson and Phillips, n.d.), 360-61; W. E. Shewell-Cooper, *Plants, Flowers, and Herbs of the Bible* (New Canaan, CT: Keats, 1977), 75; and David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan* (Decatur, GA: Almond, 1985), 228.

Palestine as well.⁵⁴ When the stems were trained along the ground the grape clusters were propped up to keep them from contacting the soil and being ruined.⁵⁵ Trellising of vines seems to have been introduced by the Romans as one of their advancements in viticulture and was used extensively in Palestine. It allowed air to flow through the branches to dry the dew more quickly.⁵⁶ Pliny described five approaches to training grapevines “with the branches spreading about on the ground, or with the vine standing up of its own accord, or else with a stay but without a cross-bar, or propped with a single cross-bar, or trellised with four bars in a rectangle.”⁵⁷ Thus when Jesus related His analogy, the disciples would probably have been familiar with both trailing and trellising practices.

B. PRUNING

Pruning of the vineyards occurred at two principal times during the year. Immediately following the harvest the grapes were pruned severely in the fall and all leaves were stripped from the plants to induce dormancy.⁵⁸ Spring trimming of vines was practiced before blooming as well as after.⁵⁹

The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, dated around A.D. 280, contain a contract for labor in a vineyard. They, along with Pliny’s writings, represent the nearest viticultural documents to the first century. In this contract the procedure for vineyard management began with “pruning, transport of leaves and throwing them outside the mud-walls.”⁶⁰ This corresponds to the postharvest pruning. Following this the workers were committed to “planting as many vine-stems as are necessary, digging, hoeing round the

⁵⁴ Pliny says, “This is better for wine, as the vine so grown does not overshadow itself and is ripened by constant sunshine, and is more exposed to currents of air and so gets rid of dew more quickly, and also is easier for trimming and for harrowing the soil and all operations; and above all it sheds its blossoms in a more beneficial manner” (*Natural History* 17.35).

⁵⁵ Walter Duckat, *Beggar to King: All the Occupations of Biblical Times* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 264; and Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, *Harper’s Encyclopedia of Bible Life*, rev. Boyce M. Bennett Jr. and David H. Scott (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 183.

⁵⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* 17.35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 228.

⁵⁹ Pliny, *Natural History* 17.35.

⁶⁰ *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part 14, “1631. Contract for Labor in a Vineyard,” 18.

vines and surrounding them with trenches.”⁶¹ The planting of stems refers to asexual reproduction of grapes through cuttings and would be done during dormancy, using material taken from the plants in the pruning. This stage of contracted labor was postharvest and followed the severe pruning in the early dormant season. The contract continues, “We being responsible for the remaining operations after those mentioned above, consisting of breaking up the ground, picking off shoots, keeping the vines well tended, disposition of them, removal of shoots, needful thinnings of foliage.”⁶² This describes their responsibilities during the growing season. Direct actions on the vines included “picking off shoots, removal of shoots,” and “needful thinnings of foliage,” no one of which fits the description of the removal of a branch. This work, being of minor impact on the plant, was designed to encourage fruit development while discouraging extensive vegetative growth.

For best results the growth rate of a grapevine must be carefully maintained. If it has too few growing points, it grows too fast and becomes vegetative, producing fewer flowers and smaller grape clusters. If it is allowed to have too many growing points, it grows too extensively and its energy is wasted on growth and the clusters do not produce large or juicy grapes. The severe pruning in the early dormant season involves the reduction of the plants to their appropriate number of growing points, the buds. Later the spring removal of shoots reflects the process of insuring that the plant is not allowed to grow too slowly by spreading its energy among the large number of suckers and water sprouts that appear on the main trunk as well as the fruiting branches.

Based on Isa 18:5 Duckat asserts, “After the plants budded and the blossoms turned into ripening grapes, the vine dressers cut off the barren branches.”⁶³ However, this is refuted by Pliny, who notes:

Thus there are two kinds of main branches; the shoot which comes out of the hard timber and promises wood for the next year is called a leafy shoot or else when it is above the scar [caused by tying the branch to the trellis] a fruit-bearing shoot, whereas the other kind of shoot that springs from a year-old branch is always a fruit-bearer. There is also left underneath the cross-bar a shoot called the keeper—this is a young

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Duckat, *Beggar to King: All the Occupations of Biblical Times*, 264.

branch, not longer than three buds, which will provide wood next year if the vine's luxurious growth has used itself up—and another shoot next to it, the size of a wart, called the pilferer is also left, in case the keeper-shoot should fail.⁶⁴

Of significance is the number of nonfruit-bearing branches left on the vines. Pliny also noted that after the harvest, when the most severe pruning occurs, the fruiting branches are pruned away for they are considered useless.⁶⁵ This procedure has not changed since the first century. Branches are selected for various purposes and pruned accordingly during dormancy. The fruiting branches for the following season are allowed to keep between 8 and 20 buds, depending on the cultivar.⁶⁶ This serves to regulate the branch's growth rate in the spring at a level that encourages maximum flowering and fruit-set. The nonfruiting branches are pruned more severely to encourage vegetative growth with a view to a thick branch which can be used for fruiting the following year. Other adventitious growths, like water sprouts that arise from the roots at the base of the vine, are removed.

V. INTERPRETATION

Did Jesus intend to teach that unfruitful followers were not true believers, or that they faced divine discipline, or something else? How much should the immediate audience and the viticultural terminology influence one's understanding of the passage?

A. THE SETTING AND CONTEXT

As part of His final discourse, Jesus' words in John 15:1-6 are addressed to His believing disciples. Judas had recently departed from their company with the intention of betraying Him, something the others would learn very soon. Jesus was discussing His relationship to them as their source of life and as the one whose ministry would be continued through the Holy Spirit after His departure. Because the disciples

⁶⁴ Pliny, *Natural History* 17.35.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* When discussing propagation practices, he says, "Vines give more numerous kinds of shoots for planting. The first point is that none of these are used for planting except useless growths lopped off for brush-wood, whereas any branch that bore fruit last time is pruned away (*ibid.*)."

⁶⁶ Jules Janick, *Horticultural Science*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Freeman, 1972), 240-48.

responded with worry and sorrow, Jesus was reassuring and comforting them. In light of His departure and the promised ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus introduced the vine-and-branches analogy to reveal to them the importance of their continued dependence on Him. They must “abide.” Whether He delivered the analogy within the walls of the residence or enroute to the Garden of Gethsemane is uncertain and immaterial. However, the season, the time of early spring growth, is important to note.

B. THE CENTRAL ISSUE

The central issue of Jesus’ analogy involves abiding and fruitfulness in light of His departure and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In John 15:1-10 Jesus mentioned “abide” or “abiding” 10 times, and He spoke of fruit six times. Jesus was clearly teaching that only by abiding in Him can His followers hope to be fruitful. As a result of abiding they will bear “much fruit.” He urged them to “abide” in Him and His teachings through obedience. But what about the two kinds of branches and the action of the Vinedresser?

C. THE BRANCHES

Of course the fruitful branches are true believers. But what about the unfruitful branches? And what are the nonabiding branches? Can practices in Jesus’ day provide any clues to His use of *airei* in v 2 or the significance of burning in v 6?

D. THE FARMER’S ACTIONS IN VERSE 2

Most commentators state that farmers removed unfruitful branches and then cleaned up the fruiting branches to make them more fruitful. But that is not accurate.

As already stated, two kinds of pruning occurred in the vineyard. First, pruning occurred after the harvest while the vines were dormant. This pruning removed unwanted material from the desired branches, including all remaining leaves, as well as unwanted branches and water sprouts. Second, spring pruning removed succulent sprigs from the fruiting branches, dead and diseased wood, adventitious buds on the trunk of the vine, but not all nonfruiting branches. Some nonfruiting branches were kept on the vine. So to what did Jesus refer in John 15:2?

E. *AIREI* AND *KATHAIREI*

A play on words is evident between *airei*, which many writers say means “he removes,” and *kathairei*, “he prunes.” *Kathairei* may also

mean “he cleanses” and so is linked to John 13:10, “you are clean [*kathairoi*], but not all.”⁶⁷ Since Jesus was apparently referring to Judas in that verse, some commentators say Judas was the unfruitful branch that had to be removed.

However, much of the difficulty of the passage is removed when exegetes stop attempting to make v 6 an exposition of v 2. Understanding Jesus’ intended meaning in this passage is made easier by recognizing the viticultural practices to which He referred. The weakness of the “taken away in judgment” view of *airei* becomes evident when the term is understood within its viticultural context.

Airei is not an attested viticultural term. *Kathairō*, on the other hand, does have at least one viticultural use, and when used in a literal sense it does carry the idea of cleaning.⁶⁸ It has a figurative sense of spiritual cleanness and, building from its viticultural meaning, Jesus used the term again in v 3. As an attested viticultural term, Jesus’ use of it in this analogy must therefore be consistent with its normal use and meaning. His use of parables to teach spiritual truths is based on analogies built from accurate portrayals of the natural world. What He described is what happened. Through analogies with the familiar world listeners were able to recognize the spiritual truths being taught.

Since *kathairei* was the legitimate viticultural term describing the process of removing suckers from a fruiting branch, it should be understood that way. Thus the possibly nonviticultural term’s meaning should be understood in conjunction with its clearly attested viticultural counterpart. If it was not a term common to viticulture, Jesus may have chosen *airei* because of its similarity in sound to *kathairei* in order to make a play on words (paregmenon, or derivation).⁶⁹ More likely, however, He was using a term farmers used then to describe their own practice. Its lack of attestation does not mean that it was not a term common to

⁶⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 308.

⁶⁸ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 386.

⁶⁹ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 304. He describes this figure as a repetition of words “derived from the same root,” that “are similar in origin and sound, but not similar in sense.”

viticulture, though an argument from silence is not convincing proof either. But whether *airei* is accepted as a viticultural term or not, its use within the analogy must correspond to a common practice the disciples knew and understood. Since both terms are used in the passage they are better understood as being done simultaneously. In other words Jesus was not putting together two tasks from separate seasons. He was most likely referring to seasonal care of vineyards at the time He spoke, namely, spring training and trimming.

The approach of most exegetes is to see in Jesus' words a process by which farmers pick off the adventitious sprigs from the fruiting branches (cleanses them) and cut off nonfruiting branches (takes them away). This interpretation of *airei*, however, contradicts the evidence from Pliny that nonfruiting branches were preserved and nurtured for use the following season.⁷⁰ It would be better to see Jesus indicating what actually occurred during the spring, namely, certain nonfruiting branches were tied to the trellises along with the fruiting branches while the side shoots of the fruiting branches were being "cleaned up." The nonfruiting branches were allowed to grow with full vigor and without the removal of any side growth or leaves, since the more extensive their growth the greater the diameter of their stem where it connected to the vine, giving greater ability to produce more fruit the following season. Removing the nonfruiting branches from the ground and placing them on the trellis would allow the rows of plants to benefit from unhindered aeration, considered an essential element to proper fruit development.⁷¹ To see *airei* as removal (judgment or discipline) is to contradict the actual practice of the time.

Recognizing the practice described by the two terms, the meaning of "in Me" becomes apparent also. Both kinds of branches may be in Christ and may be abiding, since they both existed and were desired on every vine in Jesus' day. Denying that the unfruitful branch of v 2 is attached to the vine violates the reality of the world from which the description arose.

What about Jesus' instructions to abide (*menō*, v 4)? He told His disciples that they were fruiting branches that had been "cleansed" and so they could anticipate immediate fruitfulness, though that depended on their maintaining a proper relationship ("abiding") with Him. He implied by this that others were believing in Him who were not yet ready to bear

⁷⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 17.35.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

fruit, but who needed to maintain a proper relationship with Him, to abide in Him (i.e., to stay in fellowship with Him) in order to bear fruit eventually. This understanding of vv 3-5 conforms to the cultural practices from which the analogy arose.

F. THE NONABIDING BRANCHES

The nonabiding branches of v 6 are not the same as the unfruitful branches of v 2. Verse 6 does not raise the issue of fruitfulness reflected in v 2 and is not looking at the same time of year. Sprigs cleaned from the vines in the spring would be too small and succulent to do more than wither away. They would not have enough wood in them to form a pile and make a fire. There also would not be any adventitious “branches” with sufficient time to develop woody stems, but only succulent sprouts. Even a two-foot long sprout would wither to practically nothing in the spring. To build a fire as described in v 6, mature wood would have to be removed. This happens in the severe pruning at the beginning of the dormant season after all fruit has been harvested, and all branches look alike. It happens to fruitful as well as unfruitful branches.

Rather than warning of discipline or judgment, v 6 illustrates uselessness in light of dormant-season pruning. Within the vine-and-branch analogy, the best illustration of the uselessness resulting from a failure to abide could come only from the postharvest pruning. Everything pruned in early spring was either growing from a branch (sprigs and suckers), the branch not being removed, or from an undesired location on the trunk. Only at the end of the season would “branches” be removed, piled up, and burned. In fact Jesus may have chosen to allude to postharvest cultural practices specifically because He did not want His disciples mistakenly to link fruitfulness or fruitlessness to divine discipline. Rather, He wanted them to see the importance of abiding. In a vineyard anything not attached to the vine is useless and discarded. A part of the discarding process at the end of the productive season is the burning of dry materials. The burning need not describe judgment; it is simply one step in the process being described. It is what happens to pruned materials. Their uselessness, not their destruction, is being emphasized.

The two verses following this illustration help clarify Jesus’ point. He was clearly addressing His believing disciples. He linked answered prayer to abiding (v 7) and His Father’s glory to their fruit bearing (v 8). Both abiding and fruit bearing, developed and defined in vv 4 and 5, are related directly and conditionally to the men standing in Jesus’ presence. Both vv 6 and 7 begin with third-class conditional clauses, indicating that

it was possible for the disciples, undeniably identified by “you” in v 7, to fail to abide. If they could fail to abide in v 7, they could also be described by and subject to the warning in v 6. When the fruitfulness that results from abiding demonstrates their relationship to Christ as His disciples (v 8) and is seen in light of the promises of vv 5 and 7, their usefulness as His disciples must be in view in the warning in v 6. This is especially true since the focus of the whole passage is on what they were to experience in this life following Jesus’ departure, not the one to come.

If one takes the fire to represent the judgment of nonbelievers in hell, it must be based on failure to abide, not on failure to bear fruit, since fruitfulness is not mentioned in v 6, though it is the issue of the passage. But Jesus’ excluding it from this verse is significant. How can one be a branch attached to Christ and then become detached without ever having been regenerate or without losing salvation? The “Israel within an Israel” answer is woefully inadequate. The best solution for a person who considers this a commentary on justification would be that Jesus was not implying a separation from Him but that the branches never abided in Him. The problem with this is that it would mean, strangely, that Jesus issued a warning to unbelievers in the middle of encouraging His disciples, individuals who believed in Him but who needed to be strengthened to keep trusting Him in view of what they would experience over the next three days. If uselessness was not Jesus’ point, then the only interpretation for anyone holding eternal security would be spiritual decline and discipline by death for persistently disobedient believers.

VI. CONCLUSION

When Jesus gave the analogy of the vine and the branches, He based it on the cultural practice of His day, which was to clean up only the fruit-bearing branches and tidy up the rows during the early spring growth following blooming. Severe pruning and removal of branches did not occur until the grapes were harvested and dormancy was being induced. Since Jesus was speaking in the spring, it is more natural to see His words in John 15:2 as referring to the spring practice. The viticultural use of *kathairei*, which described the removal of sprouts from fruiting branches, should inform the meaning of *airei*. Both actions occurring simultaneously, the verse looks at the farmer’s care for all the branches belonging to the vine, whether fruiting or not. That v 6 looks at the fall, postharvest pruning is seen in the practice of burning all the wood not

attached to the vine. Thus even if v 6 is seen as teaching a judgment on those who do not abide in Christ, it cannot be used to inform the meaning of v 2. They are separate practices from opposite ends of the season and would have been understood as such by the apostles.

Jesus' message to His disciples was that, though He was departing, the Father was still caring for them. To bear the fruit God intended, they needed to continue to rely on Jesus and to respond to His instruction. If they chose not to "abide," they would not bear fruit and would therefore not be used by God.

REPOPULATING AFTER THE FLOOD: WAS CAINAN OR SHELAH THE SON OF ARPHAXAD?

WILBUR N. PICKERING

Retired Missionary
Brasília, Brazil

Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah [or Shelah]. After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

– Genesis 11:12-13

...the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech.

– Luke 3:35e-36

I. INTRODUCTION

With only 8 total people on planet earth after the flood, bearing children was obviously a high priority.

Both the Old and New Testaments give genealogies of the sons of Noah. But there is a minor inconsistency between what Moses and Luke report. Moses says that Shelah (=Salah) was the *son* of Arphaxad. Luke says that Shelah was the son of Cainan and the *grandson* of Arphaxad.

There is, of course, a simple way to harmonize these accounts as both being true. The term “begot” refers not only to sons, but to grandsons (or even great-grandsons).

In this paper we will speculate as to why Moses left Cainan out of the genealogy and see why, in any case, this is not evidence that the dates reported in Genesis are thereby unreliable. And, since this issue concerns children born immediately after the flood, our inquiry will necessarily consider the uniqueness of that time for mankind.

II. WAS CAINAN THE SON OF ARPHAXAD?

There are several spelling variations that together are attested by almost one percent of the manuscripts. Ninety-nine percent have *Cainan*.

Apparently only two omit, P^{75v} and D, but no printed text follows their lead. So there is no reasonable doubt that Luke in fact wrote that Shelah was fathered by Cainan, not Arphaxad.

This Cainan has been widely used to justify treating the genealogies in Genesis like accordions—if one name was demonstrably left out in the Genesis account, then who knows how many others were also left out. This Cainan is also used to deny the validity of constructing a strict chronology based on the time spans given in the genealogies.

But where did Luke get this information? The LXX contains Cainan in Gen 11:12, but is so different from the Massoretic text here that it looks like fiction. Recall that the LXX is based on codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, produced centuries after Luke. It is more likely that our LXX is based on Luke than vice versa. Where then did Luke get it?

I understand that Luke obtained the information about this Cainan from records existing in his day, and being correct information was led by the Holy Spirit to include it in his Gospel. This is just like Jude, who quoted Enoch. Enoch's prophecy must have been in existence in Jude's day, but we have no copy in Hebrew today (though Jews are reported to have used one so recently as the 13th century A.D.). Similarly we have no copy of Luke's source.¹

This brief note was inspired by the discussion of the subject given by Dr. Floyd N. Jones in *Chronology of the Old Testament*² (which comes close to solving all the alleged numerical discrepancies in the OT, at least

¹ Let's recall Luke's stated purpose in writing: "It seemed good to me also, most excellent Theophilus, having taken careful note of everything from above, to write to you with precision and in sequence, so that you may know the certainty of the things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). Given his stated purpose in writing, Luke's account must be historically accurate (cf. 2:2 and 3:1). So then, I take it that the Holy Spirit guided Luke to include Cainan.

² Floyd Nolen Jones, *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics*, 14th ed. (The Woodlands, TX: Kings Word Press, 1999), 29-36. I imagine that many readers may feel uncomfortable with the author's very dogmatic way of expressing himself, but I would urge them to filter out the rhetorical style and concentrate on the substantial arguments, that are of extraordinary value. For example, his solution to the conundrum of the reigns of the kings on the two sides of the divided monarchy is simply brilliant, and to my mind obviously correct, leaving no loose ends. (In this connection, he debunks the claims of Edwin R. Thiele and William F. Albright.)

as I see it). However, the explanation that follows is original with me (if anyone else has proposed it, I am unaware). Let's recall the exact wording of Gen 11:12-13. "Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah [or Shelah]. After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters."

III. THE TERM "BEGOT"

The verb *begot* requires that Shelah be a blood descendent of Arphaxad, not adopted. He could be the son of a son of Arphaxad, his grandson, or even his great-grandson, etc., except that in this case the time frame only has room for one intervening generation. The plain meaning of the formula in the text, "W lived X years and begot Y; after W begot Y he lived Z years," is that W was X years old when Y was born, is it not?³ I take the clear meaning of the Hebrew Text to be that Arphaxad was 35 years old when Shelah was born, whatever we may decide to do about "Cainan."

IV. THE SITUATION IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FLOOD: THE PRIORITY OF CHILDBIRTH

Let's try to imagine the situation in the years immediately following the flood. After the flood the name of the game was to replenish the earth. Indeed, the divine command was: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 9:1). So, whom could Noah's grandsons marry? Obviously their cousins, Noah's granddaughters. There would be an urgency to reproduce—thus, the girls would be married off at puberty, and the boys wouldn't be wasting around either. The women would be giving birth as often as they possibly could. Really, the absolute top priority would be to increase the number of people.

Arphaxad was born two years after the flood, but his wife could have been born a year or two earlier. (The sacred text is clear to the effect that only eight souls entered the ark, but some of the women could have conceived during the flood.)

³ It follows that this formula destroys the "accordion" gambit. There were precisely 130 years between Adam and Seth, 105 between Seth and Enosh, 90 between Enosh and Cainan, etc., etc.

V. THE COLLAPSE OF THE ACCORDION THEORY

Thus, Arphaxad could have fathered Cainan when he was 17 or 18. Similarly, Cainan could have fathered Shelah when he was 17 or 18. In this way Arphaxad could be said to have *begotten* Shelah when he was 35. Cainan could have died early or been passed over in Genesis because the time span did not constitute a generation, or both. Or, as things got back to normal, culturally speaking, the haste with which Arphaxad and Cainan procreated might have been viewed as unseemly. The expedient of omitting Cainan would make the account more normal *while preserving precision as to the elapsed time*.

But Luke would be correct in saying that Shelah was “of” Cainan who was “of” Arphaxad. Shelah was Arphaxad’s grandson.

In any case, the Messianic line was passed on by Shelah. Without Luke’s record I, for one, would never have stopped to consider what must have happened immediately following the flood—the absolute priority must have been to increase the number of people.

VI. CONCLUSION

Skeptics point to discrepancies and gleefully suggest that these are errors in God’s Word. Yet the more we study such discrepancies, we find that reasonable explanations exist and that often, by meditating on these differences, we are blessed to learn more about God’s Word and human history.

Both Moses and Luke were correct. Shelah was the grandson of Arphaxad and the son of Cainan.

Moses was absolutely correct when he said that Arphaxad was precisely 35 years old when Shelah was born. The accordion theory of OT genealogies finds no support here.

Loretta Lynn, the famous coal miner’s daughter, bore her first child, a girl, when she was 14. Her daughter in turn had her first child when she too was 14. Thus Loretta Lynn was a grandmother at age 28! Is it really any surprise that immediately after the flood, when childbirth was so vital, that Arphaxad was a grandfather at 35? Hardly.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF TRUTH*

JOHN W. ROBBINS

President

The Trinity Foundation

Unicoi, Tennessee

I. INTRODUCTION

Let me say at the outset that I do not intend to break any new ground with this paper, but merely to restate a position taught in Scripture and long held by Christians (and by some non-Christians) for a new age and a new church that have largely repudiated it. The irrationalism and anti-intellectualism that have prevailed among the learned since at least the time of Immanuel Kant also began to dominate popular thought in the 19th century, and they show no sign of relinquishing their dominion in the 21st century.

Let me also say that I do not intend to discuss what are usually regarded as the primary theories of truth: the older coherence and correspondence theories, and the modern pragmatic and performative theories. Nevertheless, I must point out that all four theories agree that truth is propositional. According to the coherence theory of truth, true propositions must be logically consistent and imply or presuppose one another; according to the correspondence theory of truth, true propositions must agree with so-called “facts”; according to the pragmatic theory of truth, propositions become true when put into practice if they “work,” that is, lead to some successful or predicted result; and according to the performative theory of truth, saying a proposition is true is merely affirming one’s assent to the proposition. In all this, whatever problems these theories have, they do not have the problem of denying that truth is propositional.

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The matter I wish to address is even more fundamental in the discussion of truth than these theories, for in the past century or so, the propositional nature of truth itself has been widely denied, especially in religious matters. There has always been an influential strain in theology that teaches and emphasizes the unknowability of God, going back at least to Dionysius the Areopagite, whose 5th century works, *Mystic Theology* and *Divine Names*, in parts a plagiarism of the heathen Proclus, were widely accepted and ushered in the Dark Ages. According to Dionysius, God does not even know himself: “God does not know what he himself is because he is not a what.” As Gordon Clark explains:

The highest cause cannot be truly designated by any name; all our expressions are only symbolic. Metaphorically, God can be called Truth, Good, Essence, Light, Sun, Star, Breath, Water, and an infinite number of other things. But God is actually above all these predicates, for each of these has a contradictory—truth and falsehood, good and evil, light and darkness—but God has no contradictory. He is super-essential, super-good, and so on, as Dionysius said.¹

Here are samples of Dionysius’ theology:

Triad supernal, both super-God and super-good, Guardian of the theosophy of Christian men, direct us aright to the super-unknown and super-brilliant and highest summit of the mystic oracles, where the simple and absolute and changeless mysteries of theology lie hidden within the superluminous gloom of the silence, revealing hidden things, which in its deepest darkness shines above the most super-brilliant, and in the altogether impalpable and invisible fills to overflowing the eyeless minds with glories of surpassing beauty.²

Deity of our Lord Jesus, the cause and completing of all, which preserves the parts concordant with the whole, and is neither part nor whole, and whole and part, as embracing in itself everything both whole and part and being above and before, perfect indeed in the imperfect as source of perfection, but imperfect in the perfect as super-perfect and pre-perfect,

¹ Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2000), 198.

² *Mystic Theology*, 1:1.

form producing form in things without form as source of form, formless in the forms as above form, essence penetrating without stain the essences throughout, and super-essential, exalted above every essence, setting bounds to all principalities and orders and established in every principality and order.³

This sort of sanctimonious gibberish has been echoed by theologians of all stripes, not just those who are classified as mystics, down through the centuries, including, as we shall see in a few moments, the Dutch Calvinist, Herman Bavinck, whose four-volume work on *Reformed Dogmatics* is appearing in English for the first time.

II. TRUTH IS PROPOSITIONAL

The view of truth that I wish to restate is this: Truth is propositional, and only propositional. To put it even more plainly, truth is a property, characteristic, or attribute only of propositions. This view is in stark contrast to views, both academic and popular, of truth as encounter, truth as event, truth as pictorial, truth as experiential, truth as emotive, truth as personal, truth as mystic absorption into or union with the divine.

This last view, that truth is personal, not propositional, has led theologians to substitute the nebulous concepts of “commitment,” “personal relationship,” and “union” for the clear and Biblical concept of belief, thus undermining the Gospel itself. The NT uses *believe* and its cognates hundreds of times, specifically with regard to *believing the Gospel*, *believing Scripture*, *believing Christ*, and *believing God*. (Incidentally, when Scripture uses the word *believe* followed by the name of a person or a pronoun, it always means believing the words spoken by or about that person. Using a noun or a pronoun is simply a shorthand way of referencing a proposition or collection of propositions.)⁴ On the other hand, *commit* and its cognates are used much less frequently, and almost always with regard to committing sins. Donald MacKinnon commented on this shift from belief to commitment, saying that the analysis of faith “in terms of self-commitment to a person leaves unanswered (or even deliberately seeks to evade) the distinction between such commitment

³ *Divine Names*, 2:10.

⁴ See Gordon H. Clark, *What Is Saving Faith?* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004).

and that involved in a Fuehrerprinzip (Fuehrer or Leader Principle).⁵ To speak plainly, if commitment to a person is substituted for belief of propositional truth, then there can be no reason not to commit passionately to a demon. The very learned German society of the 1930s, with more Ph.D.'s *per capita* than any other nation on earth, and the billion-member Roman Church-State, both governed by a Fuehrerprinzip, have done so.

Part of this anti-intellectualism that pervades all religions—Eastern, Western, Christian, non-Christian, Roman, Orthodox, and Protestant—at the start of the 21st century is the head/heart dichotomy. This notion that the head, representing the mind and intellect, is inferior to the heart, representing the “soul” and emotions, is completely foreign to Scripture. Nevertheless, one constantly hears and reads theologians, professedly Christian, who prattle on about “heart religion” versus “head religion,” praising the former and condemning the latter.⁶

Let me define a couple terms, and then I will turn to the body of my paper, an examination of Scripture. First, I am not using the word *proposition* in any novel fashion, but in its standard sense: A proposition is the meaning of a declarative sentence. Interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences do not express propositions. Single words, without context, do not express propositions. Rhetorical questions, ostensibly interrogative sentences, are functionally declarative sentences. Voices of verbs do not matter. Two declarative sentences, one in the passive and one in the active voice, can express the same proposition: *Jim hit the ball* and *the ball was hit by Jim* express the same proposition. Language does not matter: *Il pleut*, *Es regnet*, and *It is raining* all express the same proposition. This principle, by the way, is a *sine qua non* for the translation of Scripture. If this principle were not true, the translation of Scripture, indeed the translation of any document from one language to another, would not be possible.

III. THE ECSTATIC HERESY

I mentioned previously the fact that contemporary churches have repudiated the Biblical view of truth. A recent issue of *Christianity Today*

⁵ Quoted in Carl Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster, 1999), 3:486-87.

⁶ For a refutation of the head-heart dichotomy from Scripture, see Clark, *What Is Saving Faith?*, 55ff.

carried an essay on “The Ecstatic Heresy.” Robert Sanders, the author, begins by citing three quotations, which I reproduce here. The first statement was issued by the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church on March 24, 2004:

The Dammann case [the trial of a lesbian Methodist minister] does reveal continuing differences in the United Methodist Church concerning the issue of homosexuality. The Council of Bishops is painfully aware of this disagreement. In such moments as this, we remember that our unity in Christ does not depend on unanimity of opinion. Rather, in Jesus Christ we are bound together by love that transcends our differences and calls us to stay at the table with one another.

Please note that the propositional view of truth is here characterized as “opinion.” What transcends this is something called “love” and “staying at the table.” Unity is not unity of speech and mind, as Paul commands in 1 Cor 1:10: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”—but unity of emotion, feeling, or experience.⁷ Paul commands propositional unity—“speak the same thing,” “the same mind,” “the same judgment”; yet it is precisely this unanimity of opinion that the Methodists repudiate.

The second statement was made by Douglas Oldenburg, moderator of the 1998 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly. His remarks described two men, a homosexual Presbyterian pastor and a pastor who opposed homosexuality, who had both addressed the Assembly passionately. When they finished their speeches, they embraced. Oldenburg says,

When they finished, all of us stood up and applauded, with a lump in our throats and a tear in our eyes, as we watched them embrace one another. Convictions were not reconciled that day, but two people who held different convictions were reconciled in Christ.

⁷ Oprah Winfrey said in “What I Know for Sure,” in the January 2002 issue of her magazine *O*: “The truth is that which feels right and good and loving. (Love doesn’t hurt. It feels really good.)” So bad news cannot be true, unless, of course, we are ourselves bad and rejoice in hearing bad news. Then it is true for us.

Here the propositional view of truth is called “conviction,” and it is subordinated to something called “reconciliation in Christ,” which apparently consists of a homosexual hug. Once again, the unity Oldenburg praised, and which he found so moving, was not Christian unity, but something else. Christian unity, as the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Pet 3:8, is unity of mind: “Finally, all of you be of one mind...” The phrase “in Christ,” which is a favorite of mystics and anti-intellectuals, is meaningless unless it means to think Christ’s thoughts as expressed in Scripture. People are reconciled only by thinking the same thoughts, for only then are they in fellowship.

The third quotation comes from Frank Griswold, presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church:

How we all fit together, how our singularities are made sense of, how our divergent views and different understandings of God’s intent are reconciled, passes all understanding. All that we can do is to travel on in faith and trust, knowing that all contradictions and paradoxes and seemingly irreconcilable truths—which seem both consistent and inconsistent with Scripture—are brought together in the larger and all-embracing truth of Christ, which, by Christ’s own words, has yet to be fully drawn forth and known.

Here, something called the “larger and all-embracing truth of Christ,” which encompasses and unifies all paradoxes, contradictions, and “seemingly irreconcilable truths,” and which passes all understanding, is opposed to literal propositional truth. In the dark, all cows are black.

These opinions are common in churches today: Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, Baptist, Charismatic, Arminian, Protestant, Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox. No communion is free of these sentiments. American culture, both civil and ecclesiastical, is saturated with this view of truth. This view of truth is not new, as Sanders points out; it has been around for centuries, though the twentieth century saw some of its most emphatic expressions.

In his *Christianity Today* essay, Sanders lists ten ecstatic principles, not all of them relevant to my purposes here today, but I will mention three. The author contrasts these ecstatic principles with orthodox principles, but he does not always succeed in stating the Biblical position accurately.

Ecstatic Principle # 1: God in Himself or in His revelation as Word and words, is never really verbal. He always transcends language.

This, of course, is a common assertion of mystics, who generally describe union with God as an ineffable experience. It is also an assertion of Neo-orthodox theology, which says that God's revelation is not in propositions but in events, especially the event of an encounter of persons. It is also the position of Reformed thinkers such as Herman Bavinck, who in his book *The Doctrine of God* spends the first 25 pages or so asserting that

adequate knowledge of God does not exist. There is no name that makes known unto us his being. No concept fully embraces him. No description does justice to him....The words *Father, God, Lord* are not real names, but "appellations derived from his good deeds and functions."...He is exalted above all being and above human thought....Accordingly, whenever we wish to designate God, we use metaphorical language....We cannot form a conception of that unitary, unknown being, transcendent above all being, above goodness, above every name and word and thought...The statements "God cannot be defined; he has no name; the finite cannot grasp the infinite" are found in the works of all the theologians. They unanimously affirm that God is highly exalted above our comprehension, our imagination, and our language....Whatever is said of God is not God, for God is ineffable.⁸

These words, of course, are incompatible with the Biblical view of truth, with the doctrine of propositional revelation, and with the Biblical idea that God communicates truth about himself, man, and the world to men in words and propositions.

Bavinck's words are, however, compatible with Eastern religions, including Eastern Christianity. Hindu theology, for example, speaks of God negatively, apophatically. The well-known Hindu phrase used when speaking of ultimate reality is "*neti, neti*"—not this, not this. God is mysterious, beyond human language and thought, beyond literal propositional statements.

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 13-37.

IV. CHRISTIAN COLLEGES

This irrationalism, perhaps *anti-rationality* would be a better term, is inculcated in our so-called Christian colleges. The Grove City College newspaper, *The Collegian*, in its April 4, 2003 edition, published a sophomoric dialogue by one Matthew Litwa. Here is the relevant portion of that dialogue:

At this point [after I had said that I had the absolute truth] my friend inquired whether it was not more appropriate to say that Jesus Himself was—and is—the Truth (John 14:6). That is, that Jesus Christ embodied the faithfulness and wisdom of God—and that He became our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

That seemed more accurate. “But,” I prodded, “did not our Savior say many true things about salvation?”

“Surely,” David replied. “Yet what form were they in?”

“Mostly aphorism, parable, metaphor, illustration—at times Christ basing what he said on miracles He had previously done.”

“And the whole point of these sayings,” my friend explained, “including the ‘I Am’ sayings, was to point to a reality that transcended speech itself.”

I paused to reflect. Then David said, “Did, ultimately, our Savior reveal formulaic and propositional truth to His disciples, or did He reveal Himself?”

That sparked a thought in me. Systematic theology, communicating propositions in tight logical form, was not how our Lord communicated. Propositional creeds, too, seemed to come later—this along with theological treatises on, say, justification by faith. I voiced these thoughts to my friend.

“Sometimes I think we Protestants,” David smiled, “speak more about justification by faith than we do about the One we have faith in.”

I agreed, and then my friend summarized our discussion to that point: “As far as I know,” he said, “the only absolute truth we have is in Jesus telling us how to be saved. And how are we saved?”

Automatically, my reply came: “By trusting in the Person of Christ.”

“Not through believing propositions?”

“Well, partly, I guess. But as I suggested before, the propositions are only designed to get us to the Person—and the Person is the Truth.”

“Do we possess this Person?”

“Sort of. He is in our hearts and minds. Nonetheless, we surely do not own and control Jesus! Nor can we break Jesus up into little absolute-truth formulas and inscribe them on a page.”

“Certainly.” David said. “In fact, propositionalizing salvation in Jesus, in my opinion, would be attempting to make salvation like math. And, don’t get me wrong, I love math! Math says, ‘Use this formula, and get this product.’ But mathematical salvation? What an awful concept!”

“In my mind,” my friend proceeded, “scientific salvation cancels real salvation. For real salvation is in a Person—Jesus—‘bleeding and dying on a cross.’ As so many of my Evangelical friends have maintained: Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. A relationship! A messy, complex, indefinable, muddy thing. Yet, oh, how rich it is, and how wonderful and joyful it can be.”

“So,” I asked my friend, “we do not own and control the Truth?”

“Not if you mean Jesus,” he answered. “We don’t tell Jesus what to do. He saves anyone He would like—relates to anyone He would like.”⁹

In this dialogue we see the disparagement of propositional truth, the notion that truth is personal, not propositional, the notion that Christ

⁹ This dialogue, which might have appeared in any American “Christian” college or church newspaper, expresses common religious opinions and explains why President Bush gave the answers he did to Charles Gibson’s questions on the ABC News program *Good Morning America* on October 26, 2004: “Do we worship the same God, Christian and Muslim?” Bush: “I think we do.” Gibson asked, “Do Christians and non-Christians and Muslims go to heaven, in your mind?” Bush replied: “Yes, they do. We have different routes of getting there...The almighty God decides who goes to heaven.”

spoke almost exclusively in metaphors and parables, the notion that “reality transcends speech”—all of which is consonant with Hindu theology but antithetical to Christian theology. We also see the assertion that “Jesus is in our hearts and minds,” but no explanation of what this statement means, but it does not mean that we think and believe Jesus’ propositions.

This ecstatic principle, that “God transcends language,” contradicts the first chapter of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God.” The *King James Version* translates *logos* as *Word*. It is an intellectual term. It means speech, wisdom, theology, doctrine, proposition, logic. Scripture says that the Word is God; it never says that God transcends language. Rather the opposite: It asserts that the *logos* is God.

The important point to realize here is that this view of God, logic, and language is not restricted either to the East or to the mystic fringe of Western Christendom, but is widely accepted by Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theologians.

Ecstatic Principle # 2: Theological statements use language, but literal language refers only to objective [Sanders means empirical] realities. Language applied to God is always symbolic since God is ineffable.

Douglas Wilson, a popular and prolific author who claims to be Reformed but is not, has proposed what he calls “poetic epistemology.” His poetic epistemology is based on this principle that language applied to God is always metaphorical. In fact, Wilson asserts, in agreement with several non-Christian language philosophers,¹⁰ that all language is metaphorical; that there is no such thing as literal language. Of course, such a view is self-refuting, for its proponents mean us to understand their words literally. The Dutch theologian Bavinck as well falsely asserts that all language about God is metaphorical.

Ecstatic Principle # 3: Scripture is the history of ecstatic experiences given verbal content [Sanders apparently means verbal expression] according to the social context of the biblical peoples....Consequently, one must first hear the word

¹⁰ See Gordon H. Clark, *Language and Theology* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 1980, 1993).

within the biblical words in order to sense the divine that transcends all historical contexts.

This, of course, is a fairly clear statement of a principle of Neo-orthodox theology. But it is also echoed by the leading figure of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in the mid-twentieth century, A. W. Tozer, in a sermon reprinted in *The Presbyterian Journal* on February 11, 1970. *The Presbyterian Journal*, now defunct, professed to be a conservative Calvinist publication representing the more Biblical wing of the Southern Presbyterian Church. In that sermon Tozer, hardly a Calvinist, asserted that there were two kinds of truth. The first kind is the kind unbelieving Jews had. It is, in his words,

intellectual merely...I gather this not only from verse 17 [*John* 7:17, "If a man chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own"] but from the whole *Gospel of John*. To these people truth was an intellectual thing, just as we know two times two is four.

Two times two is four: That is truth, but it is an intellectual truth only....They [the Jews] believed that if you had the words of truth, if you could repeat the code of truth, you had the Truth. That if you lived by the word of truth, you lived in the Truth.

The battle line, the warfare today, is not necessarily between the fundamentalist and the liberal. There is a difference between them, of course. The fundamentalist says God made the heaven and the earth. The liberal says, Well, that's a poetic way of stating it; actually it came up by evolution. The fundamentalist says Jesus Christ was the very Son of God. The liberal says, Well he certainly was a wonderful man and he is the Master, but I don't quite know about his deity. So there is a division, but I don't think the warfare is over these matters any more. The battle has shifted to another more important field. The warfare and dividing line today is between evangelical rationalists and evangelical mystics....

Your evangelical rationalist...says what the Pharisees, the worst enemies Jesus had while on earth, said: Well, truth is truth, and if you believe the truth you've got it.

There is something behind the text that you've got to get through to...Is the body of Christian truth enough? Or does

truth have a soul as well as a body? The evangelical rationalist says that all talk about the soul of truth is poetic nonsense. The body of truth is all you need; if you believe the body of truth you are on your way to heaven and you can't backslide and everything will be all right and you will get a crown in the last day....Just as *Colossians* argues against Manichaeism and *Galatians* argues against Jewish legalism, so the book of *John* is a long, inspired, passionately outpoured book trying to save us from evangelical rationalism, the doctrine that says the text is enough. Textualism is as deadly as liberalism.¹¹

Unfortunately, Tozer does not tell us what the "soul of truth" is, as opposed to the body of truth, that is, the text, the propositional revelation itself, which he disparages. Since the "soul of truth" cannot be explained in literal language, it is indeed poetic nonsense. Further, since Tozer thinks the whole Gospel of John is a passionate argument against what he calls evangelical rationalism, let us begin our study of a Biblical view of truth by looking at John's Gospel.

V. THE PROPOSITIONS OF SCRIPTURE

It is best to begin our study of Scripture, not by examining passages that are pregnant with theological meaning, but rather by examining passages that are quite mundane. The reason for this is that we may be misled or distracted by the theological meaning of the passage, and so miss the meaning of the words *true* or *truth*. After we have seen how the words *true* and *truth* are used by the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture in ordinary, mundane sentences, then we can examine those freighted with theological import.

Take, for example, this verse: John 4:37: "For in this the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.'" Here it is a saying, a proverb, that Scripture describes as "true": "One sows and another reaps." There is nothing mystical, nothing behind the text, no "soul of truth" as distinguished from the truth itself, which is the proposition: One sows and another reaps. The truth here is literal, verbal, and propositional. There is no hint that the truth is ineffable or inexpressible, or that human words are somehow inadequate to express this divine truth. The words used,

¹¹ For a thorough discussion of Tozer's errors, see Gordon H. Clark, *What Is Saving Faith?* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004), 133-40.

whether Aramaic, English, French, or Greek, are entirely adequate to express the truth.

John 5:31: "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." Here Christ says that His spoken words about Himself are "not true," that is, they are false, if He alone bears witness. Clearly He has in mind the legal rule, stated clearly in the OT, that there must be at least two witnesses for statements to be accepted as true in court. One witness alone is not sufficient for credibility in court. His statements about Himself, if corroborated, are true. It is His spoken statements that Scripture describes as true or false.

John 5:32: "There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true." In this verse Jesus says that He knows that John's spoken statements about Jesus are true. Once again, the word "true" describes propositions; in this case, the statements that John had made about Jesus, such as "It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose"; and "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." There is nothing mystical or mysterious about this. The words that John used to describe the Son of God were true. Obviously, the phrase "Lamb of God" is figurative, rather than literal, but its meaning can be and must be expressed in literal terms, if one is to understand the meaning of the figure. That is, in fact, the import of the NT, in which Christ literally explains the figures of the OT sacrificial system. John the Baptist's human words accurately and adequately described the Son of God incarnate. There is no defect in language, no deeper meaning inexpressible in words that we must somehow "get through to" or "sense." The words, the propositions themselves, are the truth we must understand and believe.

John 10:41: "Then many came to Him and said, 'John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.'" Here it is John's spoken words that are described as true, the words that John spoke about Jesus. Truth is verbal; it may be spoken or written; and it is always propositional. Truth is never described in Scripture as anything other than verbal, or propositional. Scripture never teaches that truth is encounter, event, picture, emotion, or experience. Truth is always verbal, propositional, intellectual, and received by the understanding alone. Scripture knows no "personal truth" as distinguished from propositional truth. There are, of course, truths about persons, but those truths are always propositional. If someone wishes to describe those propositions as

“personal truth,” we can only point out that he is using the phrase in a way not intended by Martin Buber and his ilk.

John 19:35: “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.” John, speaking of himself as an eyewitness of the crucifixion, describes his testimony, his written statements, as true. Furthermore, John knows that he is telling the truth. Notice that the truth is something that can be told. In the previous verse, truth is something that can be spoken. It is verbal; it can be understood and communicated from mind to mind. It can be possessed by many minds simultaneously. Because he knows the truth, John is not guessing, for he has been given knowledge by the Holy Spirit, who causes him to write these propositions. John tells the truth for a purpose: “so that you may believe” the truth. This statement contributes to the whole purpose of John’s Gospel, which is not, as Tozer asserted, to warn us against an imaginary error called evangelical rationalism, but, as John himself explained, “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). John wants his readers to understand and believe the propositions he expresses. Here the apostle says that truths about Jesus are what we must believe in order to be saved, and he mentions three truths, three propositions, explicitly: Jesus is the Christ; Jesus is the Son of God; you have life in His name.

It is important to understand the relationship between propositions and belief, which is the sole instrument of our salvation. The object of belief is always a proposition. One cannot believe something that is not propositional, even if it is verbal. If I say “tree” without context, that is not an object of either understanding or belief. A picture or image is still less than an object of understanding or belief. The Bible is God’s Word, not His picture. It is the Word who was in the beginning, not the emotion or the icon. Scripture says “In the beginning was the *logos*.” It does not say, “In the beginning was the *pathos*.”

VI. THE LESSONS OF DANIEL

The fact that pictures and images *per se*, and even single words without context, express no truth may be seen very clearly in the first six chapters of the Book of Daniel. In chap. 2 Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is described:

And the King said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream."

Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever. Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

Nebuchadnezzar replied, "My decision is firm. If you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore, tell me the dream and its interpretation."

To make a long story short, Daniel intervened with the captain of the guard in order to avoid being slaughtered with the rest of the wise men of Babylon, and prayed that God would reveal to him the dream and its meaning. God did so, and Daniel thanked Him:

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His....He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things....You have given me wisdom and might, and have made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to us the king's demand.

Daniel proceeds to describe the image the king saw in his dream. The king did not understand the meaning of the image of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. He assumed, because the dream recurred, but he did not know, that there was a meaning. Apparently a picture is not worth a thousand words. An image, a picture, is not true and not a truth. It is opaque to the understanding and requires an explanation in words and propositions. Only propositions can be true.

But there is more. In the king's first dream, there is not only a dumb image, but an event or series of events: A stone strikes the feet of the image, and the image crumbles. But the events are as opaque to the understanding as the image. Both image and event are non-verbal and non-propositional, and the king has no inkling as to what they mean, or even if they mean anything. Both the events and the images require explanation in words and propositions. Meaning and truth can be communicated

only in words, in propositions, which God revealed to Daniel to give to the king.¹² Only propositions can be true or false.

In chap. 5, another king, Belshazzar, sees the handwriting on the wall, and he does not understand it. The account of this vision advances our understanding of truth, for the vision now is not of a mere image or event, but of actual writing. And still the king does not understand: “Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler of the kingdom.”

Once again Daniel is summoned, and he reads the writing: “*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.*” The single words are as opaque to Belshazzar and the others present at his feast as the dream image and events were to Nebuchadnezzar, and for the same reason: They are not propositional. As I said earlier, single words without context or explanation are neither true nor false. They are literally meaningless. But God tells Daniel the requisite propositions, and Daniel speaks those propositions to king Belshazzar:

This is the interpretation of each word. *Mene*: God has numbered your kingdom and finished it. *Tekel*: You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. *Peres*: Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

Daniel tells the king three truths, that is, three propositions. Now for the first time the king understands and knows. Earlier he had been very

¹² Some might object that gestures and “body language” can also convey meaning. But they cannot do so unless that meaning is first explained and understood in propositions. Then they might function as a sort of shorthand for understood propositions, just as single words do in context. Jesus’ captors knew what Judas’ kiss meant only because Judas had told them in propositions beforehand what it signified. The gesture of a kiss was a signal to indicate which man to arrest. In many cultures, it is understood beforehand that a kiss signifies love or affection. Like single words, gestures *per se* convey no truth. As for other gestures, besides a kiss, and “body-language,” they vary from culture to culture, and they receive meaning only by being explained in propositions. Americans traveling abroad are wise to inform themselves, in propositions, of the significance of certain gestures and postures in other cultures. In church, the actions of eating bread and drinking wine, *per se*, convey no meaning or truth. They are signs used to signify truths that can be expressed only in propositions. That is why the Lord’s Supper must never be observed without a sermon explaining it.

emotional; his knees were knocking together; and he was yelling and crying. None of this vivid experience, none of this emotion, gave him truth; the single words alone did not give him truth; the visible miracle of the hand writing on the wall did not give him truth; only the revealed propositions spoken by Daniel were intelligible and true. The first six chapters of Daniel give us invaluable lessons in epistemology and the doctrine of propositional revelation, but no commentator that I have read seems to grasp that point.

VII. MORE BIBLICAL PROPOSITIONS

Let us now return to verses that mention *true* and *truth* explicitly, beginning with the OT:

Genesis 42:16: “Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth” (NIV). The speaker, of course, is Joseph, king of Egypt, addressing his brothers. First, notice that truth is something that can be told; it can be expressed in words. Second, it is not single words spoken by his brothers that Joseph is testing, but statements, propositions, such as “Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more.” The *New King James* reads: “Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether there is any truth in you....” Here the truth is in them, that is, in their minds, and testing those words is testing them. Their minds understand and express these propositions.

Deuteronomy 13:13-14: “Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’—which you have not known—then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you....” In this passage what is “true and certain” is the proposition: “an abomination was committed among you.” The same or a similar usage appears in Deut 14:4 and 22:2.

Ruth 3:12: “Now it is true that I am a close relative....” What is true is the proposition, here stated explicitly, “I am a close relative.”

Second Samuel 7:28: “And now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are true....” Here the Scripture explicitly says that “true” is a characteristic, attribute, or property of words, not single words, but the propositions that God reveals.

First Kings 10:6: "Then she [the Queen of Sheba] said to the king: 'It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom.'" Here the Queen describes as true a report about Solomon that she had received. Second Chronicles 9:5 echoes this statement. The report, of course, consists of propositions.

First Kings 17:24: "Then the woman said to Elijah, 'Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth.'" It is the spoken word of Elijah that is the truth. Elijah's word is the Word of the Lord, and this doctrine that God speaks His truth through men to men in human words overthrows all theologies of revelation that say or imply that human language cannot express divine truth; that the finite cannot grasp the infinite; that God's Word transcends human thought, conception, and language.

Psalm 19:9: "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Here the *King James* uses the standard word that philosophers use for propositions: judgments. The Lord's judgments are completely true.

Daniel 3:14: "Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?'" Here the king asks the three Israelites if a certain proposition is true. That proposition is stated explicitly: "you do not serve my god or worship the gold image which I have set up." Daniel 3:24 and 6:12 also refer to explicitly stated propositions which are described as true. Daniel 10:1 refers to an entire message, that is, many propositions, that is true.

Rather than further belaboring the point that Scripture uniformly teaches that truth is propositional, let us examine verses that seem to say truth is something else.

Deuteronomy 21:16: "Then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn."

Luke 16:11: "Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?"

John 1:9: "That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world."

John 4:23: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...."

John 6:32: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.’”

In these verses, and there are many more, something other than words, statements, or propositions is described as true: true firstborn, true riches, true light, true worshipers, true bread. Don’t these verses prove that truth can be non-propositional? Not quite.

Up to this point we have been examining verses in which the words *true* and *truth* are used literally. Literally the words *true* and *truth* describe propositions, and propositions alone. But like many words, the words *true* and *truth* can also be used figuratively. In the verses quoted immediately above, and many others like them, the words *true* and *truth* are used figuratively. Augustine explained the figure in a rather quaint fashion: “True bread” means that the bread is addressing the eater and saying, “I am bread, and my claim to be bread is true.” “True riches” means that the riches are saying, “We are riches, and our claim to be riches is true.” And so with “true worshipers” and “true light.” These are all figurative uses of the word *true*, and they fail to show that the word *true* and the property *truth* properly and literally apply to anything except propositions.

There is, however, one more use of the word *truth* that is sure to come to everyone’s mind: It is Christ’s statement, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Does not this statement contradict the claim that only propositions can be true, for Christ is surely not a proposition, and yet He says, “I am the truth”?

First, let me point out that there are many more verses than this one which describe God as truth:

Deuteronomy 32:4: “He is the Rock; His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.”

Psalm 31:5: “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth.”

Isaiah 65:16: “So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth, because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from my eyes.”

John 14:17: “...the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

John 15:26: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”

John 16:13: “However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

First John 5:6: “This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.”

In these verses not only is God the Father described as truth, but the Spirit is described as truth. In the verse we read first, Christ said He was the truth.

Now the reader must decide whether these expressions are literal or figurative. Further, if these statements are figurative, what do they mean literally? And if they are literal, do we not have many assertions in Scripture that truth is a property of persons, not just propositions, and that truth is personal, not propositional?

Commentators frequently, perhaps usually, take the view that in these verses the words *true* and *truth* are used figuratively, not literally. So when Christ says that He is the truth, He literally means that He is the source of all truth. And that is certainly true: Christ, the Holy Spirit, God is the source of all truth. But is that all Christ meant? If Christ were saying simply that He is the source of all truth, but not the truth itself, then the inescapable implication is that He is something other, something behind, the truth. And that returns us to the dark unknowable of the mystics, not merely unknowable to us, as Dionysius pointed out, but unknowable to Himself. If God is beyond predication, then He Himself cannot predicate anything about Himself, and cannot know what He is.

Therefore, we must say that when the Scripture describes God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit as truth, it is speaking literally. In his book, *The Johannine Logos*, Gordon Clark uses this insight to explain why the Apostle John uses the same Greek word, *logos*, to refer to both Christ and Scripture, specifically to the doctrines, the propositions, that Christ taught. There is no gap between the *logos* and His words, for His words are the Word. “My words are Spirit, and they are life.” It also explains why the Apostle Paul says, “We have the mind of Christ.” In the propositions of Scripture we have the very thoughts of God. Believing Jesus is believing His words. Believing in Jesus is believing His words. Christ

made this very clear in John 5:46-47: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” Believing Moses is believing his written propositions. Believing Jesus is believing His (at that time) spoken propositions. There is no non-propositional something behind the text that we must “get through to” or “sense.”

According to Scripture, truth is always and only propositional. There is nothing in Scripture that states or implies that truth is encounter, event, picture, image, or emotion. Passages that seem to imply that something other than propositions is truth turn out to be figurative uses of the word *truth*. If the Gospel is to be preserved and propagated, it can be preserved only within the framework of literal, propositional truth, for salvation is, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

BOOK REVIEWS

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

The Death of Right and Wrong: Exposing the Left's Assault on Our Culture and Values. By Tammy Bruce. Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing, 2003. 341 pp. Cloth. \$25.95.

This is one of the best books I've read in years. Yet it is not a Christian book. Nor is the author a Christian. In fact, Tammy Bruce is an avowed lesbian and former President of the LA Chapter of NOW and former national board member for NOW.

Though a feminist and lesbian, she criticizes feminism and the gay agenda, saying they have lost their way. Originally NOW fought for equal rights for women. Today it fights for supremacy and domination. Originally the gay movement fought against abuse and mistreatment. Today the gay movement wants special privileges.

There are literally hundreds of illustrations in this book that will leave you *gob smacked*. That's an expression I just learned while in England. It means your mouth will drop because you will be shocked.

I thought rap music wasn't very good, but that it was okay. Bruce shows that it is terribly evil and moving kids to rape and murder and brutality.

I thought movies and TV and the media had a liberal agenda, but their effectiveness was fairly small. Bruce shows that I highly underestimated their influence and power in our society.

The author reveals how secular universities today are teaching kids to check their brains at the entrance of the school. Big name schools like Berkeley and Ivy League Universities are some of the worst culprits.

She also gives examples of liberal judges making unbelievable rulings.

This book will make you mad and sad at the same time. It will help you apply 2 Pet 2:8, for you will be more tormented by the wickedness around us after you read this book. And that is a good thing. For society is trying to desensitize us to sin. This book exposes that agenda and goes a long way toward restoring our sensitivity to sin.

Let's pray for the author to come to faith. If you read this book, you will see why I have such high regard for her.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings. By Tom Holland. Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2004. 382 pp. Cloth. \$22.99.

Many NT scholars in the past have tried to say that Jesus' message was not the same as Paul's. Others, in the last hundred years, have tried to prove that the Gospels were written by Christian communities who created these stories in order to teach Gentile believers what Jesus might have taught if had He lived among them. Holland reacts, "But if these records do not accurately record Jesus' teaching, then we cannot possibly ask if Paul is teaching the same thing as Jesus" (p. 11). Both schools of thought have undermined the credibility of the Bible. In this new book, Holland sets out to map a new Pauline paradigm, which looks through the eyes of the Passover and a corporate reading of Scripture (i.e., a unified community rather than disconnected individuals).

In order to orient the reader to the discussion, Holland begins by looking at a prominent view in NT scholarship which sees an evolution of thought in the NT from a "Jewish message to a fully Gentile (Hellenistic) religion with Jewish origins" (p. 14). Thus, Holland identifies the quagmire that this scholarship has created: "How do we know the meaning of the New Testament documents?" (p. 14). Holland answers them by first showing how this evolution began during the second century and second, how the New Exodus motif is abundant in the NT. Holland notes that the "Old Testament expectations...overflow into the aspirations and understanding of the early church. They saw that it was Jesus who had brought these promises to fulfillment. It was Jesus who had brought about the New Exodus and with it its resultant blessings" (pp. 29-30). Holland concludes the first section "Explorations of Heritage" (pp. 11-84) by looking at major presuppositions that affect this issue (chap. 2), the influence of Isaiah on Paul's thinking (chap. 3), and a new look at the word servant or *doulos* in the NT (chap. 4).

Holland's second section, entitled "Passover and Community," touches on his belief that the phrase "the body of sin" (chap. 5) is corporate in nature, what he believes is its opposite, namely "the body of Christ" (chap. 6), and his view that baptism is corporate in nature (chap. 7).

Section three, entitled "Soteriology and Passover," will surely be the most interesting section for the majority of *JOTGES* readers. In chap. 8 Holland links the Passover with our ultimate redemption. The author is generally clear that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, however, he seems to link righteousness with the covenant community (p. 170). This is fully explained in chap. 9. Holland asserts, "It is my intention to show that justification in the New Testament does have the forensic meaning that the Reformers understood, but at the same time a much wider content that relates to how God brings people into a covenant relationship with himself" (p. 183). He believes that Paul was not criticizing Judaism because of their legalism but rather their nationalism. He thinks that "Paul's activity as a zealot was not directed toward Gentiles, but towards fellow Jews...keeping Jews in their rightful place, of being true to the law" (p. 190).

He explains N. T. Wright's view of justification, saying "Justification therefore, Wright argues, is about being declared to be *within* the covenant, a status which was the work of God's grace. When Yahweh declared Israel to be justified, he was declaring her to be his people...The believer is not justified when he believes. Rather, justification is used by Paul in the context of covenantal nomism. It is about being declared to be in the covenant" (p. 198). Agreeing, he writes, "Wright (following Dunn), correctly in my view, points out that Galatians is not about how a person is made right with God, but whether the Gentile converts should be circumcised or not. Wright says that the issue is how you define the people of God" (p. 199). This view turns Galatians into a lesson on tolerance and transforms Paul into an anti-Semite.

In chap. 10 he continues this theme. Concerning Abraham's justification, Holland writes, "He [Abraham] was effectively believing that God would be faithful to the promise he had made, and God responded by crediting to him righteousness, i.e., accrediting to him the status of what he was to become, the head of a redeemed covenant community" (pp. 214-15). This interpretation takes God's declaration that Abraham was right before Him and turns it into a coronation ceremony.

The fourth section “Christology and Passover” explains Holland’s view that the firstborn was important Passover imagery applied to Jesus (chap. 11) and that the New Exodus motif was “fundamental to the theology and letters of Paul” (p. 286), which the Book of Colossians illustrates.

Holland concludes his work by noting that “two major lenses have been missing from virtually all New Testament exegesis...the Passover and...a corporate reading of the texts” (p. 291). I believe his conclusion is correct, but unfortunately much of his evidence does not uphold it.

Michael D. Makidon
Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Secure Forever. Revised Edition. By Harold Barker. Long Green, MD: Timeless Publications, 2004. 261 pp. Paper. \$12.99.

Although not the most persuasive or consistent in explanation, Harold Barker has spoken to almost every passage dealing with the security of the believer. He generally lets each verse speak for itself with only minimal commentary as he presents to the reader a scriptural outline of the passage. This book is divided into two parts: 1) His argument for eternal security; and 2) His answer to arguments against eternal security.

Although this book does not advance any arguments for eternal security, the most helpful information I found was in the last two chapters of part 1. In chap. 17 Barker deals with the believer’s union with Christ, showing how the believer is “in Christ” and how the Father views us in Him. Just as the Father receives Christ, He receives all believers because all that Christ has done is credited to the one who believes in Christ. Chapter 18 looks at the appeals for godly living. Barker shows how the appeals to live in obedience are actually based on the believer’s security, not the threat of losing his salvation. The Bible does not use loss of salvation as a motivation for obedience; rather believers are motivated to quit sinning because of the security they find in God’s grace. This clarity is greatly needed.

Other strengths in the book include Barker clearly walking the reader through Eph 2:8-9, that eternal life is a present possession, that the Law

can no longer condemn the believer because Christ has already paid the penalty, God chastens (corrects) the believer because of his sin but He does not disown him, God is omniscient with exhaustive foreknowledge and knew all the sins each believer would commit yet He still predestines all believers to be glorified in the future, and that the Holy Spirit is the believer's seal that will not be broken thus guaranteeing the believer's future glorification.

However, the book has very problematic weaknesses and inconsistencies that almost undo its strong arguments. Chapter 1 could be stronger in its presentation of the fact that once a believer receives eternal life he can never lose it. Personally, I feel Barker could have presented better primary passages and presented them in a more logical, persuasive order (e.g. John 6:38-40; 10:27; Eph 1:13-14; 1 Pet 1:3-5; Romans 8). He also misuses several passages. Barker uses Phil 1:6 as his third primary passage; however, this verse is not teaching that God will complete the *eternal* salvation of the believer. The completion of the good work spoken of in Phil 1:6 is better understood as the church of Philippi's fellowship with Paul in the spreading of the gospel through their financial giving. This passage does not teach that God will cause all believers to persevere in good works, nor does any other.

Denying the Majority Text causes Barker to misunderstand passages like Rom 8:1 where he takes it as positional for the believer rather than practical. Other problems include him taking Rom 8:17 as a promise to all believers that they all will be joint-heirs with Christ and does not distinguish this from being an heir of God or only for those who suffer with Christ. This has to do with his view of the new nature. As he explains in chap. 6, "He [a true believer who is a new creation] may occasionally slip into sin but he will not be happy nor will he continually practice sin (1 Jn. 3:9) for he has a new nature" (p. 45). We should understand 1 John 3:9, the passage Barker uses to support this statement, to be dealing either with only the new nature (which is the true identity of the believer) or teaching that sin is never the result of being in fellowship with God. It does not teach that it is impossible for a justified believer to continually sin. Barker seems to imply that being happy and not habitually committing sin are conditions for receiving the free gift of eternal life.

Unfortunately, Barker continues this error in part two of the book. In this section he starts out by reiterating that no true believer can habitually sin. This is terribly inconsistent with other parts of his book where he argues that a believer can know for sure they are saved and eternally

secure (chap. 5). The obvious question from the grace person who holds to a true eternal security position (no perseverance in good works required) is this: "How much sin qualifies as habitual and shows that I am not a true believer?" The reply has to be, "I don't know." The main problem is that Barker divorces assurance from eternal security as though they are two different issues. Yet, they are not. Assurance is the essence of saving faith. He continues to show that his position regarding the security of the believer would be better understood as Perseverance of the Saints by making statements such as, "If it becomes obvious that a man, who once appeared to be saved, is not saved, it is only proof that he was never saved" (p. 149). This is contradictory and inconsistent teaching that all grace people would do well to avoid.

Barker ends the book by addressing what he refers to as "misunderstood passages." In this section he does not explain each passage's interpretation exegetically, but offers his explanation in a more general sense. I was encouraged to see that he does a good job of maintaining the distinction between relationship and fellowship with the passages from John, Hebrews, 1 John, etc. He understands the teaching of rewards lost and gained, that the judgment fire is often speaking of the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers and not the lake of fire for unbelievers, and he interprets many passages consistent with dispensational theology.

Barker does a good job arguing against the possibility of losing salvation, but he drops the ball with inconsistencies regarding sin in the believer's life. Though he rightly maintains that sin does not cause one to lose their salvation, it is unacceptable to conclude that the presence of habitual sin indicates that a person was never saved.

Overall this book was written for a popular audience and does not contribute much to those looking for a more in-depth treatment of the issue. In light of this, I would only recommend it for the discerning reader.

G. Brian Stone
Chaplain
Union Gospel Mission
Dallas, TX

Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation. By C. Gordon Olson. Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2002. 538 pp. Cloth. \$16.00.

One of the strengths of the Calvinistic system is the monopoly on books about Calvinism that it has long held. Until recently, most books written in opposition to Calvinism were either small pamphlets inherently limited in their effectiveness or works from the equally objectionable Arminian point of view. The tide has gradually shifted over the past twenty years, and especially during the last five or six. There is Norman Geisler's *Chosen But Free* (1999, 2001 revised edition), Dave Hunt's *What Love is This?* (2002), Robert Picirilli's *Grace, Faith, Free Will* (2002), and my own contribution, *The Other Side of Calvinism* (1999 revised edition). The new book by C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, is a welcome addition to the growing number of books that offer an alternative to Calvinism.

The subtitle of the book, "An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation," is not just a philosophical catch phrase. Olson believes that "far too much of our theology has been developed deductively, rather than inductively" (p. 2). The deductive approach is flawed because of "the tendency to make sweeping generalizations without adequate attention to the details of the data" (p. 7). It is valid "only in confirming and testing the results of our induction or in filling in the gaps where the inductive data is missing or incomplete" (p. 18). The author places a great deal of emphasis on methodology, and acknowledges his debt to "Robert Traina and his disciples" (p. 17).

Olson's thesis in *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* is that "there is a viable middle or mediate position which has been grossly neglected, even repressed" (p. 29). He proposes a "distinct mediate theology of salvation, whose historical roots are found in the semi-Augustinianism of the Synod of Orange (529) and a long line of postreformation leaders and theologians who reacted to the determinism of the Reformers" (p. 46). He refers to the theology of salvation he develops in the book as a "Mediate Theology of Salvation" because it is "intermediate to Calvinism and Arminianism" and "it also emphasizes God's mediate mode of carrying out much of His plan in the present world—through His agents" (p. 29).

Olson's book is not a reply to any specific Calvinist, and neither is it patterned after any other work. There are also many respects in which it is very unique. *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* does not follow the usual pattern of books about Calvinism; that is, it does not have a chapter (or chapters) on each of the Five Points of Calvinism. There are instead nineteen chapters on issues related to Calvinism. Thus, as expected, there are chapters on the atonement, foreknowledge, election, faith, and eternal security. But there are also chapters on the image of God in man, justification by faith, conviction of the Spirit, discipleship, and evangelism. The book also contains twelve appendixes in varying styles and on a wide variety of subjects.

Rather than include them at the close of the book in the last chapter, a conclusion, or an epilogue, Olson begins the book by listing in his Introduction thirty-one "exegetical and theological discoveries" he made in the course of his research that he considers to be significant (p. 4). This is followed by eight more "discoveries" from his research into missiology. The only problem with this is that the reader who is not somewhat familiar with the language and issues of the Calvinist/Arminian debate may not quite understand the significance of Olson's discoveries.

A nice feature of *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* is the conclusion found at the end of most chapters. However, I see no reason why these are variously titled "conclusion" (chaps. 1, 6, and 12), "conclusions and implications" (chap. 16), and "conclusions" (all the rest except chaps. 8 and 14, which do not contain a conclusion of any kind).

The final unusual feature of the book that is worth mentioning is the use of two kinds of notes: regular numbered endnotes that appear at the end of each chapter and special lettered footnotes that occasionally appear at the bottom of some pages. The former mainly give bibliographical information on the works Olson cites, with the latter being reserved for explanatory purposes.

True to its title, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* focuses on the theology of salvation, but within the general framework of the Calvinist/Arminian debate. This allows Olson to broaden his approach while focusing on what he considers to be the problems with Calvinism, of which he finds a great deal.

I was particularly impressed with Olson's wholesale dismissal of the Calvinistic concept of "God's Decree" or "God's Decrees." He considers "all discussion about the logical or chronological order of God's decrees in eternity past" to be "pure speculation," "absolute nonsense," and

“worse than the medieval theologians’ discussions about the number of angels which can dance on the head of a pin” (p. 63). There is an “almost total lack of basis for the Calvinistic concept of either a single comprehensive decree of God in eternity past, or even of a multiplicity of such decrees” (pp. 80-81). He also mentions “four centuries of useless debate about the order of fictional decrees” (p. 4).

Additionally, Olson skewers the Calvinistic arguments for God not knowing something unless he decreed it, regeneration coming before faith and repentance, and faith being an irresistible gift of God. He also shows the parallels between Calvinism and Arminianism on perseverance, eternal security, lordship salvation, and rewards.

There are two specific teachings of modern Calvinists that Olson believes differ from what Calvin himself taught: Limited Atonement and the priority of regeneration. He believes it is “increasingly clear that Calvin himself did not hold to limited atonement” (p. 126). One of the appendixes consists of quotations from John Calvin on general redemption. He also maintains that Calvin did not believe that regeneration precedes faith (p. 197). Olson is not the first to make these claims, and the quotations he gives by Calvin look convincing—until one reads other statements by Calvin that contradict them. The problem is that Calvin, like many Calvinists, contradicts himself at every turn. Indeed, the whole Calvinistic system is one giant contradiction: God ordains everything—but man is responsible for his sin; the “elect” will be saved because of God’s eternal decree—but man is responsible to preach the gospel to everyone.

Olson claims that the differences between Arminius and later Arminians parallel those of Calvin and later Calvinists because “Theodore Beza hijacked the Calvinistic movement” (p. 435). That “hijacking” may be true in the case of the followers of Arminius, but I don’t believe it is in the case of Beza. How does one hijack the teachings of the man who gave to the world the term *Calvinism*? Especially when Calvin said things like this in his *Institutes*: “We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestinated to life or death” (III.xxi.5).

Although the substance of the book may not have gone to press hastily, the same cannot be said about the preparation of the book. The

formatting of the book and the format of the endnotes leave much to be desired. The style of many of the quotation marks varies—sometimes on a single word. Complete information about the books Olson is quoting from does not always appear in the endnotes. While these and other things I have not mentioned don't detract from the overall content of the book, they are minor distractions.

Another criticism I have of the book is Olson's use of a multitude of Bible versions. He states in the front of the book that unless noted otherwise, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (p. ii). But sometimes he denigrates the NASB and quotes from the NIV (p. 100). Yet, other times he criticizes the NIV (pp. 117, 162). He also quotes from the KJV, the RSV, the ASV, *The Amplified Version*, *The New Berkeley Version*, the Williams translation of the NT, and the margin of the NASB.

Olson begins and ends *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* lamenting about the "polarization of theology" that exists today (pp. 2, 434). He maintains that even though "there is a vast mainstream of Evangelicals in the middle who are not committed fully to either system," there are "few voices which have articulated a clear middle position" (p. 2). Accordingly, the author writes to show that the truth of Scripture lies between the polarized positions of "Augustine and Pelagius," "Luther and Erasmus," and "Calvin and Arminius" (p. 84). This without doubt Olson proves, and in a unique way that departs from the increasingly stale presentation based on the Five Points of Calvinism. The book is a valuable addition to the growing body of literature on the subject of Calvinism.

Laurence M. Vance
Vance Publications
Pensacola, FL

Hubris. By Jeffrey Smith. Raleigh, NC: Gold Cuff Publications, 2004. 89 pp. Paper. \$10.99.

This book contains a hard-hitting, fast-paced slideshow of a man's experience in a cult-like legalistic church. Although the names, places, and events were changed to hide the identity of the characters, they were all inspired by true events to which many who have had similar experiences will surely relate.

Smith quickly plunges the reader into his former life. The first chapter begins with a swift punch to Jeffrey Smith's stomach, delivered by Brother Cory, the church's assistant pastor and SWAT (Soul Winning Attack Team) leader. Smith recalled, "...no one had the right to show weakness or the team could be adversely affected. I got hit a total of eight times. Only the first punch—the one delivered by Brother Cory—hurt" (p. 1). The first chapter goes on to list the rules of SWAT, much of which sound good. However, Smith also explains how the leaders formulated the rules in such a way so that they could have full control over every area of each member's life.

Smith continues to explain the verbal abuse (chap. 2), cult-like deception (chap. 3), control (chaps. 4, 10), illegal actions (chap. 6), king-like veto power over every decision—even what car to buy! (chap. 7), twisting of Scripture to suit their system (chap. 12), and physical abuse (chap. 13), each of which was rampant at Baptist Bible Tabernacle.

Although the book is short and has several grammatical and formatting errors, don't be fooled. The gripping stories it contains far outweigh its apparent weaknesses. This work will inspire you to live a life which not only proclaims the truth, but unmistakably exudes grace!

Michael D. Makidon
Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation. By Leland Ryken. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002. 327 pp. Paper. \$15.99.

As the subtitle suggests, this book deals with the issue of translation theory.

Ryken discusses this from his vantage point as a professor of English at Wheaton College. In his Preface, he states, "I did not set out to defend the essentially literal theory of translation. I began with the question of what principles should govern what we do with written texts. On the basis of that inquiry, I ended with a belief that only an essentially literal translation of the Bible can achieve sufficiently high standards in terms of literary criteria and fidelity to the original text. Concomitantly, I have

ended with a deep seated distrust of how dynamic equivalent translations treat the biblical text” (p. 10).

He begins with an overview of the current debate in Bible translation and identifies Eugene Nida, “who championed his theory of dynamic equivalence” (p. 13). Ryken says Nida declared that equivalence emphasized the reaction of the reader instead of the translation of the words and phrases themselves.

He goes on to draw parallels from modern writing and speaking to show that we are cautious to find out what an author *said*, not thought, whether it is instructions on an appliance or a much-traveled joke. He then asks, “Is it likely to be more important or less important to preserve the original wording of the Bible than it is with everyday discourse?” (p. 46).

In his chapter “Lessons from the History of Translations,” Ryken gives a brief review of numerous Bible translations, pointing out that “literal” ruled the translation process until modern times. In this he cautions concerning the present quest for novelty rather than that which has been venerated in the past—“literal translations.”

He then devotes several chapters to “fallacies”—five fallacies about the Bible, seven fallacies about translations, and eight fallacies about Bible readers. I found this to be a most interesting section of his book. Fallacy seven about Bible readers declares, *the Bible is more difficult for modern readers than for the original readers*. Ryken states, “It is time to call a moratorium on instilling a stance of helplessness in modern readers of the Bible” (p. 115). He then quotes Robert Martin, “It is better to teach each new generation the meaning of the Bible’s technical terms than to eliminate them and produce a generation [of people who] are biblically and theologically illiterate from having suffered long-term exposure to inaccurate and imprecise versions of the Bible” (p. 115).

Ryken proceeds to discuss the theology and ethics of translating with a section on “How Some Translations Undermine Interpretation.” He proposes the value of ambiguity in translations—pointing out that modern dynamic equivalence translations err by minimizing the potential of the text because of its effort to make the text simple or more clear. Ryken (in the chapter titled “Reductionism”) believes an appropriate ambiguity is essential to appreciating the levels and colors of God’s Word. Dynamic equivalence proponents have caused there to be loss as a forced simplicity has drained the richness of the text.

It should be noted that early on, Ryken makes clear that he is discussing the translation of Scripture into English, not that which is done by missionaries in many other languages. Yet, it would appear his principles would need to be honored in those non-English languages as well.

Ryken also calls for translators not to attempt exegesis, but to do their job of translation. As a professor of English, Ryken is especially concerned about how modern equivalency translations deal with biblical poetry and the damage incurred by trying to modernize what is essentially language that intends to draw out our imaginations.

Overall, the book is worth reading for those who are seeking additional light on the question of literal versus dynamic equivalence. It should prove helpful to pastors who are dealing with a listening audience on Sunday morning that may have three to five modern translations from which they are reading and often ask, “Which is the best translation?” and “Why?”

Dave McPherson

Pastor

Maranatha Bible Church

River Ridge, LA

Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept. By James W. Sire. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. 163 pp. Paper. \$14.00.

Most people spend little time pondering their worldview. Yet, it is a concept that governs much of the way we live. Sire writes, “At the base of all our thought—all our ruminations about God, ourselves and the world around us—is a worldview” (p. 18). It is the very foundation of how we think, which for Christians should be an extremely important concept.

Sire begins his first chapter by telling a story of a little boy who asked “Dad, what holds up the world?” to which his father responded “a camel.” This immediately set off a string of questions: Who holds him up? A kangaroo. And him? An elephant. And him? Another elephant. And so on and so forth. Sire notes, “This story illustrates two primary characteristics of a worldview. First is the fact that our primary foundational commitments are just that—*commitments*, that is, presuppositions...Second...his answers represent a foundational principle in the two worldviews most common...naturalism and theism” (p. 18).

In chap. 2 Sire expounds on the history of worldview as a concept, from Immanuel Kant to Francis Schaeffer. In chap. 3 he explains how much of philosophy has viewed ontology (the study of being) and epistemology (the study of knowing) backwards. He writes, “Ontology precedes epistemology and hermeneutics—and whatever else there may be” (p. 73). In chap. 4 Sire makes a simple yet brilliant observation. One either looks at the world as a theist or a naturalist: “The conflict boils down to this: either human beings are made in the image of a God with at least some human characteristics (Calvin), or God is made in the image of human beings (Freud)” (p. 82).

Sire concludes his work by defining worldview as a concept in chaps. 5-7. Although his presentation of worldviews is generally clear, his presentation of his faith in Christ lacks this same clarity: “We began regularly attending an evangelical church, and before the summer was over, I had walked the aisle at the pastor’s invitation and given over my life to Christ. My belief in God immediately became more personal, and I began to read the Bible, pray, and pay close attention in Sunday school, church and Youth for Christ meetings” (p. 139).

Overall, this book is worth reading for someone who would like to dig a little deeper into the concept of worldviews.

Michael D. Makidon
Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

PERIODICAL REVIEWS

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

“An Insiders Effort to Blow Up Psychiatry,” Jeffrey H. Boyd, *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* (Spring 2004): 28-48.

Boyd is a former Episcopal clergyman who went to medical school and became a psychiatrist.

There is much to like about this article. Boyd shows how true psychology and psychiatry must take God into account. Therapists must seek to help their patients become God-pleasers, rather than pleasing themselves.

“I am an anti-psychiatry psychiatrist. What I am opposed to is not psychiatry per-se, but the naturalistic assumptions underlying most of the secular mental health movement, i.e., the assumption that humans can be understood without ever mentioning or thinking about God” (p. 43). Bravo!

Boyd indicates that one of the reasons he has remained a psychiatrist is “because an outspoken Christian is needed somewhere in the ranks of secular psychiatry” (p. 43). Again, I applaud his conviction and reasoning.

JOTGES readers will likely be bothered by the fact that the gospel is not clearly articulated in this article. This can be understood in that the purpose of this article is not to explain the good news. However, if the purpose of the article is to explain where psychology and psychiatry has gone astray, surely the gospel is central. Thus at least a passing mention of the grace of God in justification should have been included. For one’s view of God is only correct if we understand and believe the free grace message.

Boyd does hint at the condition of eternal life twice and both times his comments are fuzzy. He speaks of a woman who invited and took Jesus into her heart (pp. 47-48). What that means is not made clear.

In spite of this weakness, I highly recommend this article. I realize that the *CTS Journal* published the article for its helpful comments on

mental health, not for its comments or lack thereof about the grace message. This is must reading for anyone interested in mental health.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

“Why Truth Matters Most: An Apologetic for Truth-Seeking in Postmodern Times,” Douglas Groothuis, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 2004): 441-54.

Truth serves as the bedrock of our society. From the complex code that drives our computers to human language, communication demands such a concept. For without it, language would cease to communicate. The world would crumble. Yet, even though we know that truth is essential, at times we just can't handle the truth. So, we avoid it like the plague. Why not? As Groothuis notes, “Diversion serves to distract humans from a plight too terrible to encounter directly—namely, our mortality, finitude, and failures” (p. 451). Unfortunately, diversion, in its many manifestations, diverts the attention of Christians and non-Christians from eternal matters. In this superb article, Groothuis points out three ways in which humans knowingly avoid truth: 1) Through the guise of humility (pp. 447-49); 2) Intellectual apathy (pp. 449-51); and 3) Diversion (pp. 451-53).

Regarding humility, Groothuis explains, “While rightly warning of the dangers of arrogance and triumphalism in apologetics, John Stackhouse affirms an attitude quite foreign to the great apologetics of Christian history by claiming that Christianity cannot be known to be true ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’” (p. 447). While his appeal to Christian history rather than the Bible is misguided, Groothuis does well to point out this error. Ironically, Groothuis notes, “...Stackhouse asserts that he *knows* that no human being knows anything for certain” (p. 447). The *absolute* language of those who claim that nothing is certain is astounding.

Groothuis then turns to what Jonathan Rauch describes as “apathism”—a relaxed attitude toward religion and irreligion. Groothuis notes, “Apathism rests on a benign indifference, refusing to become passionate

about one's own beliefs or the beliefs of others" (p. 449). Unfortunately, our own skewed view of tolerance fuels such thinking.

Finally, Groothius tackles diversion. He writes, "In the middle of the seventeenth century in France, Blaise Pascal went to great lengths to expose those diversions that kept people from seeking truth. His words still ring true" (p. 451). However, the diversions of Pascal's day are pale in comparison to those of the twenty-first century. Pascal dealt with diversions such as hunting, sports, and fishing. Today we live in a world of instant entertainment. We have DVDs, movie theatres with 30 screens, the Xbox, Playstation, and Gamecube, reality TV, and the internet, none of which are bad in and of themselves. Nevertheless, as Groothius points out, "Diversions and the omnipresent noise and clutter of contemporary culture erect barriers to the serious and disciplined pursuit of truth" (p. 453).

Day after day, the world becomes more and more complicated and harder to reach non-Christians with the gospel. At the same time, Christians are becoming less interested in reading the Bible. Much of this comes from a skewed view of tolerance, a society that promotes apathy, and diversions galore. Isn't it about time we divert the world's attention (including our own) back to what [who] truly matters, namely Jesus?

Michael D. Makidon

Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

"The Believers Jesus Doubted: John 2:23-25," Debbie Hunn, *Trinity Journal* (Spring 2004): 15-25.

For nine years Debbie Hunn (as Assistant Librarian at Dallas Seminary) has helped countless students (including myself) navigate through one of the biggest and best theological libraries in the nation. Now she continues to help countless others outside of Dallas Seminary with her recent article, which gives a clear answer to a long debated passage, John 2:23-25: "either Jesus refused to entrust himself to true believers or that people who believed in his name did not, in some cases, truly believe" (p. 15).

This article is a marvel of theological precision sprinkled with a spirit of candor often absent from scholarly works. To arrive at the best

answer to this theological conundrum, Hunn begins her quest by covering three areas that directly relate: “what it meant that the people believed in Jesus’ name, that Jesus did not entrust himself to them, and that Nicodemus also believed due to signs” (p. 15).

The first section of the article defines whether the phrase “believed in his name” was an expression of genuine faith that saves (pp. 15-18). First, Hunn surveys a number of well known scholars who believe this was either spurious faith or genuine but yet “insufficient to save them” (p. 16). Commentators holding to the latter view usually distinguish the inadequacy of one’s faith based on miracles “in contrast to the faith based on Jesus’ words” (p. 16). However, Hunn shows the incorrectness of this view by pointing to numerous places where “Jesus himself appealed to people to believe due to signs” (p. 17). Hunn correctly demonstrates that various “passages in John speak of people believing because of signs but believing in something less than Jesus as the Messiah” (John 3:2 [came from God]; 6:14; 7:37-40 [the Prophet to come]; 9:16 [He was not an overt sinner]). Even the guards sent to arrest Him expressed astonishment (7:46). Yet, John recognized their inadequate faith. Hunn correctly shows that they did not achieve the desired end result of the signs expressed in John’s purpose statement, which calls for people to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

While Jesus’ signs may get a person closer to the conclusion that He is the Christ who guarantees eternal life to the one who believes in Him, until that has been achieved the sign has not yet fulfilled its end result. But, this content was *not* lacking in the faith exercised by “the people in John 2:23 who believed in Jesus’ name” (p. 17). Thus one can conclude: “Those who believed in him due to the signs, and Jesus expected this: that is what the signs were to accomplish (12:37; 20:30-31)” (p. 17). Furthermore, Hunn strengthens this position by showing how the phrase “believed in His name” appears in two other places in John (1:12; 3:18) and other places in the NT (1 John 3:23; 5:13) where it clearly states the genuineness and adequacy of this faith to which the majority of scholars agree. Nevertheless, because Jesus did not entrust Himself to them and because of the pericope concerning Nicodemus, which seems to be an example of a sign seeker (3:2), many scholars continue to hold that belief in Jesus’ name is insufficient to save.

Hunn’s second section seeks to define the phrase “Jesus did not entrust himself,” which serves to explain whether the people in John 2:23

were genuine believers. After surfacing six possible meanings put forth by scholars (p. 18), Hunn acknowledges the ambiguousness of this phrase since many of the major lexicons do not mention John 2:24 (p. 19, fn. 19). However, after showing five examples in BDAG where believe (*pisteuō*) followed by the accusative means to entrust one's safety, Hunn concludes: "Entrusting oneself to another, then, in the examples known in the Greek of John's day, referred not to disclosure of truth, intimacy, or belief in the sayings of another, but to personal security" (p. 18).

This view fits the immediate and overall context of John, since Jesus' authority was challenged after cleansing the temple and He predicted His death for the first time in John (2:18-22). Hence vv 23-25 follow by saying that although "many believed, they would not rally to Jesus' aid when his life was threatened. And he knew it" (p. 18). Even Jesus' closest disciples would abandon Him at a later date. Thus, Hunn forcefully argues that safety was an issue for Jesus in John's Gospel (pp. 20-21). Therefore, Jesus could not entrust His safety to believers because they would not withstand the pressure, only "after Pentecost would a sheep give his life for the Shepherd" (p. 21).

Hunn's final section deals with the long recognized link between Nicodemus and the people in 2:23-25 because of the repetition of the words "man" and "signs" (2:23-3:2). Since Nicodemus acknowledged the sign of 2:23 (see 3:2), but had not yet believed in Jesus as the Messiah (3:11-12), many believe he is an example of the spurious faith of 2:23. However, Hunn notices two important details: "The text says the people in 2:23 believed in his name. Jesus says Nicodemus did not believe in what he said (3:11-12) [and]...*de* [but] in 3:1 contrasts the beliefs of the people with the beliefs of Nicodemus at that time" (p. 23). Furthermore, Hunn notices: "John had a penchant for presenting alternative views to a single event" (p. 23). Therefore, Hunn correctly concludes: "Nicodemus and many in Jerusalem saw signs that Jesus performed during the Passover. They, too, drew different conclusions" (p. 23).

While this article is superb, I have three minor criticisms: 1) One may read Hunn's article and think 1 John 5:13 defines the purpose of the letter instead of 1:4. Most *JOTGES* readers would not agree with this view of 1 John, since we believe 1 John was not written to test one's Christianity but to tell a Christian how to live one's Christianity full of joy in fellowship with God (1 John 1:4). However, I know from personally talking to Hunn that she does not endorse the tests of life view,

though it might come across that way by how she expressed herself at the bottom of p. 17; 2) Since some have made an issue of the aorist verb “believed” (*episteusan*) used by John, saying that it illustrates a belief which stops short of true salvation in contrast to the present tense, which leads one to salvation (cf. Wallace, *Grammar*, p. 621, fn. 22), even a brief mention of this issue would have been helpful. Hunn could have easily shown the fallacy of this view in two ways. Verse 22 mentions the identical verb (*episteusan*) in order to show how the disciples “believed in the Scripture,” which obviously means they truly believed Scripture. Second, other clear examples in John (2:11; 4:39, 41, 53, etc.) also show how John used this aorist verb as an adequate tense to describe a true believer; and 3) On p. 18 fn. 9 there is a typo. Obviously Hunn meant *John* 1:12 and 3:18 not *I John* 1:12 and 3:18.

Debbie Hunn has hit a home run with this outstanding article. I strongly recommend all serious Bible students read it.

René A. Lopez

Doctoral Student

Dallas Theological Seminary

Dallas, TX

“A Dispensational Critique of Open Theism’s View of Prophecy,” Michael D. Stallard, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 2004): 27-41.

Dr. Michael Stallard is Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Ph.D. program at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania. The controversy surrounding the new movement known as Open Theism has brought numerous theological and hermeneutical issues to the forefront of evangelical discussion. Open Theism touches upon several of God’s attributes. Although most of the discussion has centered on the nature of God in relation to man’s free will, Stallard’s article offers a dispensational critique regarding the way Open Theists interpret Bible prophecy. Stallard’s article exposes the threat that the Open Theist view of Bible prophecy poses to the dispensational, premillennial view of eschatology. In this regard, he points out the deficiencies in the hermeneutical approaches of Gregory Boyd and John Sanders from a dispensational, premillennial perspective.

Stallard observes that the general thrust of Open Theism is the belief that the future is not exhaustively settled in God's mind. He then specifically shows how Boyd maintains this belief by categorizing prophecy into three areas. According to Boyd, prophetic Scripture cannot be used to advocate God's exhaustive foreknowledge because 1) most of these predictions are conditional (Jer 18:1-12); 2) some represent things that God will bring to pass independent of human decisions; and 3) most are based on God's knowledge of likely consequences. Stallard then offers a brief critique of these categories (pp. 27-34).

Regarding the first category, Stallard expresses concern with how Boyd's hermeneutic will impact a proper understanding of God's covenant program. Here, he emphasizes the Davidic Covenant which not only is unconditional but whose fulfillment is intertwined with God's holiness (Ps 89:35). Regarding Boyd's second category, he scrutinizes some of the passages that Boyd uses as examples of prophecies predicting things that God will bring to pass independent of human choices. He asserts that some of these passages, such as the predictions of Peter's death (John 21:18), do involve human choices. Regarding Boyd's third category, Stallard scrutinizes some of the passages that Boyd uses to contend that God knows the future based upon likely consequences. He notes that some of these passages (1 Samuel 23) actually end up favoring the classical view of God because they portray God predicting not only what will happen but also the potential future actions of individuals.

Stallard also takes issue with how Sanders uses NT citations of the OT to contend that God can fulfill prophecies any way He chooses regardless of how He has revealed the way that they would be fulfilled in the OT (pp. 34-38). Among Sanders's examples are the use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:16-21 as well as the use of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:15-18. Stallard points out that the use of Joel 2 in Acts 2 does not necessarily prove Sanders's thesis. Dispensationalists have proposed two viable alternatives for understanding this citation in a way that is consistent with the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation. These include understanding the NT citation as either a partial fulfillment or as an analogical correspondence while allowing the OT prophecy to ultimately find a literal fulfillment in the millennial age. Stallard observes that the Amos 9 citation in Acts 15 can also be understood analogically as well.

Stallard also draws attention to Sanders's insinuation that God's will can be thwarted at a secondary level, although not at a primary level (p. 39). He questions how one can discern what part of God's will is

primary and what part is secondary. Moreover, he questions what bearing such an approach has on the dispensational emphasis upon Israel since most Open Theists would view God's promises to Israel as a secondary matter. Stallard also finds traces of moderate preterism and idealism in Boyd's interpretation of the Book of Revelation (pp. 39-40).

Finally, Stallard critiques the way Open Theists handle prophecy in light of biblical inerrancy (pp. 40-41). He asks, if the Bible contains prophetic mistakes, is it fair to call it an inerrant book?

Stallard's article is must reading for all who are concerned with the impact that Open Theism is having on the dispensational, premillennial understanding of Bible prophecy.

Andy Woods

Doctoral Student
Dallas Theological Seminary
Dallas, TX

“The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant,” Hal Harless, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 2003): 349-66.

As the current social-political debate over the place of the Ten Commandments in the public arena rages on, a similar debate has been present in the church for almost 2000 years (cf. Galatians). Ever since Christ came preaching His fulfillment of the law and eternal life for anyone who believes in Him, the question has always arisen: “But what about the law? What place does it have in our lives as Christians?”

One recent contribution to this ongoing debate is the article by Hal Harless. After laying out the issues involved and a few of the major positions, he reminds us of the foundational principle that “God justifies human beings by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and not by works” (p. 352). Keeping this truth always in mind when talking about the place of the Mosaic Covenant will be of great help in discerning the ongoing purpose and function of the law.

Harless then focuses on nine central passages to the debate. Eight of the nine clearly teach the cessation and completion of the Mosaic Covenant in Jesus Christ. These eight are Rom 7:1-17; 10:4; 2 Cor 3:7-11; Gal 3:19-4:7; Eph 2:14-16; Col 2:13-14; Heb 7:11-18 and 8:7-13 (pp. 353-63). Christ fulfilled the law and as a result, the law has passed away.

The ninth passage, Matt 5:17-19, is the one that has caused the most problems because it seems to say the opposite. Christ said that he had not come to abolish the law. This reviewer heard a sermon recently in which the pastor used Matt 5:17-19 to teach that Christians must continue to obey the OT law as a pattern of life. Harless correctly points out that if Jesus is teaching the necessity of continuing to obey the law, He is referring to all 613 commandments, not just the Ten. He says, “those who are most zealous for the Law have abandoned many jots and tittles along the way” (p. 365). If Jesus is teaching that we must still obey the Mosaic Covenant, we must obey all of it.

This is not what Jesus is teaching. Matthew 5:17-19 teaches the prophetic fulfillment of all the Scriptures, with the Mosaic Covenant being fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ (p. 366). This portion of the Sermon on the Mount agrees with the rest of Scripture about the completion and fulfillment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The rest of the Scriptures will be fulfilled at a later date.

What then is the function of the Mosaic Covenant? Harless says that when it was in effect, obedience to the Covenant determined eternal rewards. In this dispensation, eternal rewards are based on obedience to the New Covenant, the law of Christ (p. 366).

Harless has written an excellent article explaining nine of the key passages that teach the cessation of the Mosaic Covenant. Because his guiding principle was faith alone in Christ alone, he was able to present a balanced view of the purpose and function of the Mosaic Law. I highly recommend this article.

Jeremy D. Myers

Student

Dallas Theological Seminary

Dallas, TX

“Who Are ‘They’ in John 8:33?” Debbie Hunn, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (July 2004): 387-99.

A view held by most *JOTGES* readers has now gotten a wider hearing by being published in a major scholarly journal. Debbie Hunn carefully shows how one must distinguish between the two different groups Jesus addresses in John 8:30-59: “The people in 8:30-32 are not the objectors of 8:33-59” (p. 395). Those Jews who Christ addresses in

8:30-32 became believers who are *not* part of the group of 8:33-59 that Christ's "word has no place" and could not understand or listen to His word since they did not believe Him (cf. 8:37, 43, 45; p. 394).

After presenting the various views that argue for "taking all of 8:31-59 as referring to the same people" (pp. 388-97), she presents in each case a compelling argument against them. Hunn makes her case in four ways.

First, some scholars read chap. 8 as judaizing Christians of Paul's day who are not saved "yet consider themselves followers of Christ" who perhaps resented the Johannine community because of "its admixture of Samaritan elements" (pp. 388-89). However, after presenting reputable scholars who disagree with this sort of anachronistic reading, Hunn asks a rhetorical question that suggests there is nothing in the text that leads one to such conclusions (p. 389).

Second, others that deal with the text in its historical context still hold "the Jews' faith" in 8:30-32 was "superficial" and "not genuine" (p. 389). Hunn notes that such solutions fail to take the text at face value since John consistently used the Greek construction *pisteuō eis* (believe in) "to indicate genuine faith in Jesus" (p. 390; cf. pp. 391-92).

Third, still others hold "that John 8:30 and 31 refer to two different groups of people" by appealing to two different grammatical arguments for support" (p. 392). For example, the perfect participle *pepisteukotas* in 8:31 may mean *those who had believed but now believe no longer*. While this may be possible, Hunn notes Carson's objection to such a use as being "rare for the perfect participle to denote action that no longer continues, at least in its effects, and that the context makes clear when such a meaning is intended" (p. 392). In fact Hunn notices that in the "seventeen other verses in the NT that use [believe] in the perfect tense, five of which are in John, none implies that the one who had believed stopped believing."

The other grammatical argument that sees a break in 8:30-31 distinguishing two groups centers on the use of *pisteuō eis* [believe in] versus *pisteuō* with the simple dative. After providing evidence within John (cf. 9:35-38; 20:31) showing how change in syntax "does not demand a change in meaning," Hunn notes Carson's similar conclusion that whatever "distinction there may be between the two expressions does not lie in the distinction between the genuine and the spurious" (p. 394).

Finally, after showing the problems involved in distinguishing the group of people in 8:30-31, Hunn correctly argues for a "break at 8:33"

instead of seeing Jesus' words as addressing one group in 8:30-59. Hunn gives three solid reasons for this interpretation: 1) Christ could not accuse the Jews who believed in Him with "attempting to kill him (8:37)," or numerous other obstacles present in the language attributed to the group in 8:33-59, because it does not fit the group found in 8:30-32 (p. 395). Hence Hunn concludes: "Even the weakest faith does not seek the life of the one in whom it believes" (p. 395); 2) Thus Hunn can safely say: "Therefore, understanding 'they' in 8:33 as the Jewish objectors is the natural reading of John 8:33-59" (p. 395). She then backs it up by showing the development of the entire context how "even the multitude had trouble" defining the antecedents of pronouns (p. 396). "Jesus addresses one group and another replied. Many people heard Jesus as he spoke in the temple (7:14) and near the treasury in the temple (8:20); therefore, he could speak to one group and receive an answer from another" (p. 396). Obviously, the pronoun *they* in "Is this not He who *they* seek to kill?" (John 7:25) refers to the rulers, not to the crowd which had just asked "Who is seeking to kill You?" (John 7:20); and 3) The words of Jesus in 8:14-29 are directed to the Pharisees who challenge Him in 8:13 (p. 397), not to the *many* or *those* who believed in Him of 8:30-32.

Hence Hunn comments "[John] 8:33 continues the pattern of chaps. 7-8 that only Jesus' opponents speak to him. Thus, although Jesus addresses one group in 8:31-32, another answers; and the group that answers is defined not before they answer but afterward" (p. 397).

While Hunn defends her thesis well, various things are worth noting: 1) Though irrelevant to her case, some Majority Text advocates might take issue with Hunn's belief that John 7:53-8:11 is "probably not original" (p. 397); 2) Although the Greek adjective *polloi* (many) can at times mean "all" (Rom 5:15), other times it can mean part of a group (2 Cor 2:17). John uses the Greek construction *polys pisteuō eis* (many believe in) in five other places (2:23; 4:39; 7:31; 10:42; 12:42) where it clearly refers to only part of a group coming to faith. This evidence would have strengthened Hunn's case; and 3) Hunn points to a number of inconsistencies in the language that follows by showing how it cannot fit the group in 8:31-32. Yet she does not clearly point out the contradiction that 8:45 poses if those of 8:30-32 are of the same group, since Jesus states: "you do not believe in Me." I feel this would have made her case stronger.

No doubt this is one of the best articles I have read in a while. It is very well argued and presented and a must read for all Evangelicals.

René A. Lopez
Doctoral Student
Dallas Theological Seminary
Dallas, TX