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**Salvation and the Sovereignty of God: The Great  
Commission as the Expression of the Divine Will**

KEN KEATHLEY

3-22

**Model Faith for Christian**

**Service: Matthew 19:28–20:14**

LON GREGG

23-34

**What Do We Mean By Propitiation? Does It  
Only Count If We Accept It?**

ZANE C. HODGES

35-42

**The Soteriology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon  
and How It Impacted His Evangelism**

JERRY HARMON

43-63

**Does Christ Occupy David’s Throne Now?**

FREDERIC R. HOWE

65-70

**Book Reviews**

71-84

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# SALVATION AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD: THE GREAT COMMISSION AS THE EXPRESSION OF THE DIVINE WILL

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## I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“...but he that believeth not shall be damned.”—Mark 16:16b

Embedded in Mark’s account of the Great Commission is the implied expectation that not everyone to whom the Gospel is offered will accept it, an expectation that history has borne out. The question at hand is why this is so. Is God’s salvific will not done or does God not want everyone to be saved?

There seem to be four options. First, *universalism*—despite present appearances eventually everyone will be saved, either in this life or the next. Second, *double predestination*—God does not desire nor has he ever desired the salvation of the reprobate. Third, God has *two wills—the revealed will and the hidden will*. The Scriptures, in passages such as the Great Commission texts, reveal God’s universal salvific will. But God also has a secret will in which, for reasons known only to him, he has decreed to pass by many. And fourth, God indeed has *two wills—an antecedent will and a consequent will*. God antecedently desires that all be saved, but he consequently wills that faith is a condition to salvation. Only those who believe will be saved.

The first two options understand God to have only one will while the last two alternatives perceive two wills in God. The fourth position, the antecedent/consequent wills view has been the majority position throughout church history. However, theologians from the Reformed perspective generally have rejected the antecedent/consequent wills posi-

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a chapter taken from *The Mission of Today’s Church*, ed. by R. Stanton Norman, published by Broadman and Holman, to be released in 2007.

tion because it seems to give the ultimate decision about salvation to man rather than God. This, they contend, denigrates God's sovereignty and threatens the gracious nature of salvation while magnifying human choice. This chapter will examine the four options concerning God's salvific will and shall conclude that the antecedent/consequent wills position has the fewest theological difficulties and is more in keeping with the commands and instructions of the Great Commission. The Great Commission expresses the divine will. The Gospel is to be offered to all; those who believe will be saved.

## II. THE FIRST TWO OPTIONS: GOD HAS ONE WILL

Those who emphasize the simplicity of God generally argue that there is only one will in God.<sup>2</sup> This approach generally requires that God's nature is understood with one divine attribute as the controlling motif by which all other attributes are interpreted. A theology which sees God's fundamental essence as love will be much different from a system based on the assumption of the primacy of the divine will. Whether based on divine love or divine volition, the single will approach has difficulty explaining the rationale behind all components of the Great Commission, namely, that all must hear the Gospel even though all do not believe.

### A. OPTION ONE: GOD IS LOVE AND THIS LOVE IS EXPRESSED BY HIS WILL TO SAVE ALL

Obviously, affirming the universal salvific will of God poses no difficulties for the one who believes "God is love" (1 John 4:8) sums up the divine essence. However, this approach logically seems to require universalism or something close to it. This appears to be true regardless of one's position concerning the nature of the human response to the Gospel. In fact, because of how Reformed theologians understand grace to work on the human will, those who affirm God's genuine love and desire of salvation for all tend to embrace universalism even more readily than their Arminian counterparts.

Some significant Arminian theologians wonder aloud if their theological starting point does not necessitate an eventual arrival at universal-

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<sup>2</sup> When theologians speak of the simplicity of God they are referring to his undivided essence. This means there is no division, tension, or conflict within God. God is never in a quandary or has conflicting desires.

ism. In his presidential address to the Wesleyan Theological Society, Al Truesdale examines the question as to whether the doctrine of everlasting punishment is compatible with an affirmation that love is “the defining center of God.”<sup>3</sup> Truesdale begins with the claim that love is the “one element of who God is that governs all the rest.”<sup>4</sup> He proceeds with a five-step argument which deduces that the doctrine of eternal damnation is not an option for the consistent Wesleyan and suggests annihilationism or post-mortem salvation as possible alternatives.<sup>5</sup> He concludes by admonishing the reader with a quote from Barth, “On the basis of the eternal will of God we have to think of *every human being* [emphasis original], even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father.”<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that Truesdale builds his argument on the premise that God’s singular will for the salvation of all is the manifestation of God’s simple, undivided essence, which is love.

There are plenty of Arminian theologians who, like Truesdale, affirm God’s universal love and salvific will but do not arrive at his conclusions. And universalism is not found only in Arminianism. Reformed theologians who argue that God’s essential nature of love compels a singular will for the salvation of all also often arrive at universalism. Thomas Talbott serves as a prime example. Where Truesdale attempts to make a positive argument based on the loving nature of God, Talbott takes the negative approach by presenting what he believes are the consequences of denying the premise that God singularly wills the salvation of all.

In a celebrated debate with John Piper that covers a series of articles, Talbott argues that belief in the universal love of God combined with a Reformed understanding of soteriology add up to universalism.<sup>7</sup> He

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<sup>3</sup> Al Truesdale, “Holy Love vs. Eternal Hell: The Wesleyan Options,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring 2001): 104.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. Truesdale acknowledges that not all Arminians or Wesleyans would agree with his beginning premise.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, universalism, annihilationism, and post-mortem salvation are not identical positions. However, proponents of each position share the common conviction that the doctrine of everlasting punishment is untenable.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 112. cf. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Talbott’s articles are Thomas Talbott, “On Predestination, Reprobation, and the Love of God: A Polemic,” *Reformed Journal* (Feb 1983):11-15; “God’s

denounces the traditional Reformed doctrine of predestination as “blasphemy” and a “manifestation of human depravity.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Talbott, Reformed theology, with its usual distinction between God’s decrees and God’s commands, produces some very unfortunate consequences for the character of God. God commands us to love our enemies but fails to love his enemies. This would mean that love is not an essential property of God. Reformed soteriology, argues Talbott, presents us with a God who is less loving than many humans and leaves us with the disturbing notion that we might love our children more than God does. Talbott confesses that he finds such a God difficult to love, much less worship. He states,

If there be a single loved one of mine whom God *could* [emphasis original] redeem but doesn’t—if it should turn out, for instance, that God fails to love my own little daughter—then I can think of no better response than a paraphrase of John Stuart Mill: ‘I will not worship such a God, and if such a God can send me to hell for not so worshiping him, then to hell I will go.’ Of course, this may mean simply that I am not one of the elect, or, if I am one of the elect, that God will someday transform my heart so that I can be just as calloused towards my loved ones as he is.<sup>9</sup>

Calloused or not, Talbott considers Calvinism to be sub-Christian. Of those who rejoice in their election, he states, “In this regard their attitude is quite different from that of the Apostle Paul; and in this regard, they illustrate nicely the selfishness built right into the very heart of Calvinistic theology.”<sup>10</sup> In one telling exchange, Talbott challenges Piper by asking him how he would react to the knowledge that God had not elected one of his sons. Piper replies,

But I am not ignorant that God *may* [emphasis original] not have chosen my sons for his sons. And, though I think I would give my life for their salvation, if they should be lost to

Unconditional Mercy: A Reply to John Piper,” *Reformed Journal* (June 1983): 9-13; and “Vessels of Wrath and the Unpardonable Sin: More on Universalism,” *Reformed Journal* (Sep 1983): 10-15.

<sup>8</sup> Talbott, “On Predestination, Reprobation, and the Love of God: A Polemic,” 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

me, I would not rail against the Almighty. He is God. I am but a man. The Potter has absolute rights over the clay. Mine is to bow before his unimpeachable character and believe that the Judge of all the earth has ever and always will do right.<sup>11</sup>

Though his commitment and candor is impressive, Piper seems to be conceding Talbott's central point that Reformed theology teaches God might not love our children as much as we do.

Talbott argues that since Reformed theology teaches God has the ability to bring salvation to all by a monergistic work of regeneration but has chosen not to do so, then Calvinism is guilty of a number of sins. First, Reformed theology commits blasphemy—because it attributes demonic qualities to God; second, selfishness—because it teaches us to care about our election more than the election of others; and third, rebellion—because it fails to obey the command to love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>12</sup> Talbott concludes that Reformed theology can be rescued only by its adherents combining the traditional doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace with an affirmation of divine universal love. The result would be universalism and that suits Talbott fine.<sup>13</sup>

Though one is Arminian and the other Calvinist, Truesdale and Talbott make similar arguments. God's loving nature means he has only one desire toward humanity—the redemption of all. Their conclusions exclude understanding Jesus' warning in Mark 16:16, "he who does not believe will be condemned," as referring to eternal punishment.

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<sup>11</sup> Piper, "How Does A Sovereign God Love? A Reply to Thomas Talbott," 13. Piper's replies can be found at John Piper, "How Does A Sovereign God Love? A Reply to Thomas Talbott," *Reformed Journal* 33:4 (April 1983):9-13; and "Universalism in Romans 9-11? Testing the Exegesis of Thomas Talbott," *Reformed Journal*, 33:7 (July 1983): 11-14.

<sup>12</sup> Talbott, "On Predestination, Reprobation, and the Love of God: A Polemic."

<sup>13</sup> A number of other Reformed universalists make the same argument. Karl Barth, Neal Punt, and Jan Bonda present respective versions of a Reformed universalism. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957); Neal Punt, *Unconditional Good News* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); and Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Clark Pinnock observes, "What Augustinians have to do to reach universalism is enlarge the scope of election to include the whole race, and then theologize in their usual way." Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 155.

## B. OPTION TWO: GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND THIS IS EXPRESSED BY HIS WILL TO SAVE THE ELECT

Reformed theologians such as Louis Berkhof, Herman Hoeksema, and David Engelsma are called decretal theologians because they see the eternal decrees as the starting point for studying the works of God.<sup>14</sup> Like Truesdale and Talbott, decretal theologians affirm a single will in God, but because they see God's sovereignty as the defining characteristic of God's being they arrive at very different conclusions from those surveyed in the previous section. Decretal theology teaches that God, in eternity, decreed the salvation of a select and definite number. Those chosen are the elect while those rejected are the reprobate. This approach to studying salvation produces the distinctives of Reformed theology: election and reprobation, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and faith as the evidence of salvation rather than the condition for it.

Some decretal theologians hold the choice to save some and damn others to be logically initial and primary. They see the decision to ordain all other events – the Fall, the Atonement, and so on – to be the means by which God accomplishes his first decree to elect and reprobate. This position is called supralapsarianism because it teaches that God decreed a double predestination “before the Fall.” It is worth pointing out that the original Reformers – Zwingli, Luther and Calvin – were all supralapsarian.

Most subsequent decretal theologians have not followed the Reformers down the supralapsarianism path but rather have opted for infralapsarianism. Like the label indicates, this position holds that God first decreed to allow the Fall and then from the fallen race elected those whom he would save. Infralapsarianism attempts to avoid some of the obvious ethical dilemmas inherent in supralapsarianism. In infralapsarianism, God does not damn the reprobate before they fall, but damns

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<sup>14</sup> See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949). Berkhof states, “Reformed theology stresses the sovereignty of God in virtue of which He has sovereignly determined from all eternity whatsoever will come to pass, and works His sovereign will in His entire creation, both natural and spiritual, according to his pre-determined plan. It is in full agreement with Paul when he says that God worketh all things after the counsel of His will, Eph. 1:11. For that reason it is but natural in passing from the discussion of the Being of God to that of the works of God, it should begin with a study of the divine decrees. This is the only proper method.” (p 100)



them because they are fallen. Nor in this scheme does God actively ordain the damnation of the reprobate. Rather, when God chooses a select number for salvation, he simply passes over the remainder of humanity. Infralapsarians do not believe the reprobate is ordained for hell; rather, they see the reprobate as omitted from heaven.

Infralapsarians hold to a single decree of election, while supralapsarians teach a double decree of election and reprobation. Theologians generally agree that supralapsarianism has fewer logical problems while infralapsarianism has fewer moral ones.<sup>15</sup> But in the end, whether supralapsarian or infralapsarian, decretal theology teaches that God has only one salvific will and that this intent is to save only his chosen.

Decretal theology produces a distinctive set of corollaries. First, such a view of divine sovereignty requires a denial of God's universal love. Theologians like Hoeksema and Engelsma do not shrink from declaring God's "eternal hatred" for the reprobate. Engelsma declares,

It is not at all surprising that advocates of the free offer oppose the Reformed doctrine of reprobation, for reprobation is the exact, explicit denial that God loves all men, desires to save all men, and conditionally offers them salvation. Reprobation asserts that God eternally hates some men; has immutably decreed their damnation; and has determined to withhold from them Christ, grace, faith, and salvation.<sup>16</sup>

Second, decretal theology necessitates a reinterpretation of the biblical texts which seem to teach that God loves all humanity and desires the salvation of all. For example, Francis Turretin (1623-1687), a Reformed scholastic and one of the first clear proponents of infralapsarianism, insists that the love expressed in John 3:16 "cannot be universal towards each and everyone, but special towards a few." It refers "only [to] those chosen out of this world."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 131-32.

<sup>16</sup>David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994), 58.

<sup>17</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992) 1:405-08

A modern day decretal theologian, James White, takes a similar approach to the other universal texts.<sup>18</sup> He understands the “all” in 1 Tim 2:4 to mean that God desires the salvation of “all sorts of men” or “from all classes of men.” Likewise, 2 Pet 3:9 means that God is not willing that any of us, i.e., the elect, should perish.

If God loves only the elect, desires salvation only for his chosen, and has provided atonement only for the objects of his love, then a third corollary is inevitable: there is no genuine universal offer of the Gospel. David Engelsma devotes an entire book to the thesis that though the Gospel is preached “promiscuously” to all, it is offered only to the elect. In fact, he does not care much for the word “offer” at all. Preaching does not offer the Gospel. Preaching operates as the instrument by which faith is activated in the elect. The reprobate may hear the Gospel, but its message is not for them. Engelsma contends that his position is not hyper-Calvinism, but consistent Calvinism.

Decretal theology has definite effects on how one understands and obeys the Great Commission and there are consequences to such a system on preaching and missions. First, decretal theology historically has had the effect of causing many Reformed pastors to restrict who are candidates to hear the Gospel. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century many Scottish theologians argued that the Gospel should be presented indiscriminately only to members of the visible church.<sup>19</sup> Many English Baptists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century told the Good News only to men whose lives gave evidence of divine grace.<sup>20</sup> Following the hyper-Calvinism of Daniel Parker, many American Baptists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century rejected “duty-faith,” that is, the belief that unbelievers have a duty to repent and believe the Gospel.<sup>21</sup> Decretal theology led these “hard-shell” or Primitive Baptists to oppose all methods of evangelism, missions, or outreach. Organized evangelistic efforts were seen as “humanly contrived devices” which presumed to

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<sup>18</sup> James White, *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 127-42.

<sup>19</sup> James Daane, *The Freedom of God: A Study of Election and Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967), 131-43.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy George, “Southern Baptist Ghosts,” *First Things* (May 1999): 18-24.

do God's work. Even today, the Gospel Standard (Baptist) Churches reject any responsibility to preach the Gospel to all.<sup>22</sup>

Second, even though most decretal theologians of today have turned away from the restrictive postures of earlier hyper-Calvinists, they still do not see preaching as an appeal intended to persuade. For them, preaching is a proclamation or an announcement which activates faith in the elect. Preaching outwardly instructs all, but the inward call of the Spirit is given only to those God has chosen. Engelsma claims that several things in the typical evangelical sermon will be absent from a true Reformed message:

There are several things that will not be found in Reformed preaching to the unconverted. Reformed preaching will not approach the audience with the declaration: 'God loves all of you, and Christ died for all of you.' It will not say to every man: 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.'<sup>23</sup>

Third, as James Daane points out in his examination of the effect of the doctrine of reprobation on preaching, decretal theology eviscerates the Gospel of its meaning.<sup>24</sup> For many hearers, perhaps most, the announcement is that God has decided to remain at war with them and he made this decision in eternity past. The Gospel is supposed to be good news, but according to the doctrine of reprobation, the message is certainly not new and is not necessarily good.

Ultimately, reprobation is an unpreachable teaching. Preaching is proclaiming the truth for the purpose of calling the hearers to respond. Daane points out that this cannot be done with the doctrine of reprobation; it is a message that has no response.<sup>25</sup> The teaching does not apply to the elect and, as for the reprobate, there is no response to the announcement that one is rejected. The doctrine of reprobation declares that there is no saving inward call for the non-elect. No call means no

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<sup>22</sup> The articles of faith of the Gospel Standard Churches can be found at <http://www.pristinegrace.org/media.php?id=313>. See specifically articles 24-26.

<sup>23</sup> Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 88.

<sup>24</sup> Daane, *The Freedom of God: A Study of Election and Pulpit*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* Walls and Dongell point out that in pastoral counseling the doctrine of reprobation is worse than useless. See Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I am not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 186-87.

response and it certainly means no preaching. Reprobation can be contemplated, taught, and discussed, but it cannot be preached.

To sum up this section: if God's will is singular, then either he desires the salvation of all or he does not. As we have seen, starting with the premise of a universal salvific will can launch one into the fantasy of universalism. Positing a denial of any type of universal salvific will can lead one into the slough of reprobation. For these reasons most theologians, Reformed and non-Reformed, have opted instead for a two-will approach.

### III. THE THIRD AND FOURTH OPTIONS: GOD HAS TWO WILLS

Most theologians, Reformed or not, have recognized that, in John Piper's words, "God's intention is not simple but complex,"<sup>26</sup> or if God's will is simple, it is "fragmented."<sup>27</sup> If the sovereign God desires the salvation of all, provides a redemption sufficient for all, but all are not eventually saved yet God's will is ultimately done, then God's will displays a complexity that requires understanding it in stages or phases. Theologians have employed a number of categories to describe God's two wills: God's will of precept, command, or permission is often contrasted with his decretal, sovereign, or efficient will. Most positions are variations on one of two paradigms: either the hidden and the revealed wills approach (option three), or the antecedent and consequent wills view (option four). Generally, Reformed theologians opt for the revealed/hidden wills paradigm while non-Reformed theologians take the latter.

#### A. OPTION THREE: THE HIDDEN/REVEALED WILLS PARADIGM

In their discussions about divine sovereignty and human responsibility, the Reformers regularly appeal to the hidden/revealed wills position, though Luther embraces the concept much more readily than Calvin. For Luther, the two wills of God are functions of the two ways God relates to

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<sup>26</sup> Piper, "How Does A Sovereign God Love? A Reply to Thomas Talbot." 11.

<sup>27</sup> Robert C. Koons, "Dual Agency: A Thomistic Account of Providence and Human Freedom," *Philosophia Christi* 4:1 (2002): 408-10.

his creation. On the one hand, as *deus revelatus*, God manifests himself to us in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, God as *deus absconditus* hides from creation and since nothing further can be known about the hidden God then nothing further should be said. The revealed will of God, i.e., Jesus Christ, proclaims the Good News that God graciously is for us. The hidden God, with his sovereign and secret will of election and reprobation, remains terrifyingly inaccessible.

Calvin is less than consistent in his use of the revealed/hidden wills paradigm. In theological works such as his reply to the Catholic controversialist Albert Pighius, Calvin denies a genuine universal offer of the Gospel. He states, "It is a puerile fiction by which Pighius interprets grace to mean that God invites all men to salvation despite their being lost in Adam. For Paul clearly distinguishes the foreknown from the others upon whom God did not please to look."<sup>28</sup> Calvin denounces the notion that God has two wills as "blasphemy."<sup>29</sup>

However, Calvin's commentaries present a different story. In those works, he states that 1 Tim 2:4, 2 Pet 3:9 and Ezek 18:23 plainly teach that God desires the salvation of all humanity.<sup>30</sup> There Calvin appeals to the hidden/revealed wills explanation to reconcile his interpretation of the universal texts with his doctrine of double predestination. On this issue at least, one might be forgiven for wondering if Calvin the theologian ever met Calvin the exegete.

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<sup>28</sup> John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1961), 72.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-18. Calvin states, "For the distinction commonly made in the schools of a twofold will we by no means admit. The sophists of the Sorbonne talk of a regulative and an absolute will of God. This blasphemy is rightly abhorrent to pious ears but is plausible to Pighius and those like him."

<sup>30</sup> See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 246-49, and *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, Vol. 22 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 419-20. Calvin states, "But it may be asked, If God wishes none to perish, why is it that so many do perish? To this my answer is, that no mention is here made of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the reprobate are doomed to their own ruin, but only of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand without a difference to all, but lays hold only of those, to lead them to himself, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world."

Today, John Piper argues for the hidden/revealed wills paradigm.<sup>31</sup> He departs from many of his Reformed colleagues when he accepts those texts such as 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; John 3:16; and Ezek 18:23 actually are expressing a desire on God's part for the salvation of all humanity. He recognizes that traditional Reformed exegesis of these verses convince only the already persuaded.

Piper argues that God genuinely wills the salvation of all, but this desire is trumped by the even greater desire to be glorified.<sup>32</sup> In order for his grace to receive the fullest expression of glory, it is necessary that he also display his righteous wrath against sin. The full glory of his grace is properly perceived only when seen alongside his holy judgments. Some have been selected by God to be trophies of grace while others are chosen to be examples of his just damnation. Why God selects certain ones for salvation while consigning others to perdition is a mystery hidden in the secret counsels of God.

There are at least six serious problems with the hidden/revealed version of the two wills explanation. First, as Carson points out, too often theologians use the hidden will to negate the revealed will.<sup>33</sup> Luther certainly seems to do this. In his discussion of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem,<sup>34</sup> Luther's answer is to appeal to God's hidden will.

Here, God Incarnate says: 'I would, and thou wouldst not.' God Incarnate, I repeat, was sent for this purpose, to will, say, do, suffer, and offer to all men, all that is necessary for salvation; albeit He offends many who, being abandoned or hardened by God's secret will of Majesty, do not receive Him thus willing, speaking, doing and offering.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, eds. Schreiner and Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 107-124.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-24.

<sup>33</sup> D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 214.

<sup>34</sup> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Matt. 23:37 (NKJ)

<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (London: The Camelot Press, 1957), 189.

Luther points us to the revealed God in Christ but then promptly nullifies the Savior's message by appealing to the hidden God.<sup>36</sup>

By definition a hidden will is unknown, so how can one speak about it? How can we use something unknown as a theological foundation? Who has the right to declare the revealed will is not God's ultimate will and base this assertion on something admittedly unknowable? Who dares to nullify God's Word? If the hidden will does exist, then could it be hidden because God does not want us to engage with it?

A second problem with the hidden/revealed wills paradigm is just as serious as the first. Christ manifests the revealed will of God, but the revealed will is not always done because it is supplanted by God's secret will which lies hidden in the Father. This leads to the disturbing conclusion that Jesus does not present God as he really is. In his discussion of the two wills in God, Luther makes this very clear:

Now, God in His own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard, we have nothing to do with Him, nor does He wish us to deal with Him. We have to do with Him as clothed and displayed in His Word, by which He presents Himself to us.<sup>37</sup>

In the hidden/revealed wills scenario, Christ no longer reveals the Father.

The second problem leads naturally to a third one. Luther describes the secret will of God as "dreadful" and then urges his reader to look to Christ alone.<sup>38</sup> But as Barth points out, one cannot teach the hidden will of God and then tell people not to think about it.<sup>39</sup> Exhortations to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain only heighten suspicions and concerns. The difficulty the hidden/revealed wills paradigm presents to

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<sup>36</sup> Calvin takes a similar tack. See *Commentaries on Ezekiel*, 246-49 and *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, 419-20.

<sup>37</sup> Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 171. "He speaks of the published offer of God's mercy, not of the dreadful hidden will of God, Who, according to His own counsel, ordains such persons as He wills to receive and partake of the mercy preached and offered. This will is not to be inquired into, but to be reverently adored, as by far the most awesome secret of the Divine Majesty."

<sup>39</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 66.

pastoral ministry is well documented.<sup>40</sup> If our election resides in the hidden purpose, then what assurance does the revealed Christ offer us? Barth concludes that to look past Jesus is to look into the unknown.<sup>41</sup>

A fourth problem with the hidden/revealed wills solution is that it seems to make the preacher appear to be hypocritical. Engelsma highlights this problem when he scolds the Reformed pastor who preaches the revealed will while quietly adhering to a hidden will.

You can now preach to all men that God loves them with a redemptive love and that Christ died for them to save them from their sins, but at the same time you must whisper to yourself, 'But He will actually save only some of you and He will not save others of you according to His own sovereign will.' What you whisper to yourself makes the message of universal love, universal atonement, and a universal desire to save, which you proclaim loudly, a fraud.<sup>42</sup>

If what we whisper to ourselves makes what we proclaim a fraud, then indeed we are guilty of dissimulation.

Worse yet, the hidden/revealed wills approach appears to make God out to be hypocritical, which is a fifth problem. God universally offers a salvation that he has no intention for all to receive. Reformed soteriology teaches that the Gospel is offered to all, but efficacious grace is given only to the elect.<sup>43</sup> The limits of salvation are set by the sovereign

<sup>40</sup> R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 105.

<sup>42</sup> Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 41. While Engelsma mocks the Reformed pastor who preaches the universal love of God, Carson speaks sympathetically of the conflict within many. Carson states, "This approach, I contend, must surely come as a relief to young preachers in the Reformed tradition who hunger to preach the Gospel effectively but who do not know how far they can go in saying things such as 'God loves you' to unbelievers. From what I have already said, it is obvious that I have no hesitation in answering this question from young Reformed preachers affirmatively: *Of course* [emphasis original] I tell the unconverted that God loves them." D.A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 80.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, "Introduction," *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 12. They state,



and secret choice of God. Numerous times—through the prophets, the Savior, and the apostles—God publicly reveals a desire for Israel’s salvation while secretly seeing to it they will not repent. Calvin, citing Augustine, states that since we do not know who is elect and who is reprobate we should desire the salvation of all.<sup>44</sup> Shank retorts, “But why? If this be not God’s desire, why should it be Calvin’s? Why does Calvin wish to be more gracious than God?”<sup>45</sup>

Which brings us to a sixth and fundamental objection to the hidden/revealed wills paradigm: it fails to face the very problems it was intended to address. It avoids the very dilemma decretal theology creates. Peterson, in his defense of the Reformed position on God’s two wills states, “God does not save all sinners, for ultimately he does not intend to save all of them. The gift of faith is necessary for salvation, yet for reasons beyond our ken, the gift of faith has not been given to all.”<sup>46</sup> But then he concludes, “While God commands all to repent and takes no delight in the death of the sinner, all are not saved because it is not God’s intention to give his redeeming grace to all.”<sup>47</sup> I must be candid and confess that to me the last quote makes no sense.

Let us remember that there is no disagreement about human responsibility. Augustinians, Calvinists, Arminians, and all other orthodox Christians agree that the lost are lost because of their own sin. But that is not the question at hand. The question is not, “Why are the lost lost?” but “Why aren’t the lost saved?” The nasty, awful, “deep, dark, dirty, little secret” of Calvinism is that it teaches there is one and only one answer to the second question, and it is that God does not want them

“Our understanding of God’s saving grace is very different. We contend that Scripture does not teach that all people receive grace in equal measure, even though such a democratic notion is attractive today. What Scripture teaches is that God’s saving grace is set only upon some, namely, those whom, in his great love, he elected long ago to save, and that this grace is necessarily effective in turning them to belief.”

<sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3:23:14.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 166.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Peterson and Michael Williams, *Why I am not an Arminian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 130.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

saved.<sup>48</sup> Other theological systems may have similar problems<sup>49</sup> but Reformed theology has the distinction of making this difficulty the foundational cornerstone for its understanding of salvation.

#### B. OPTION FOUR: THE ANTECEDENT/CONSEQUENT WILLS PARADIGM

Throughout church history both the Eastern and Western Churches have taught that God desires the salvation of all, but he requires the response of faith on the part of the hearer.<sup>50</sup> This antecedent/consequent wills approach sees no conflict between the two wills of God. God antecedently wills all to be saved. But for those who refuse to repent and believe, he consequently wills that they should be condemned. In this way God is understood to be like a just judge who desires all to live but who reluctantly orders the execution of a murderer.<sup>51</sup> The antecedent and consequent desires are different but they are not in conflict.

The antecedent/consequent wills position seems to be the clear teaching of Scripture. God antecedently “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” that consequently “whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Christ antecedently orders the Gospel preached “to every creature,” but he consequently decrees that “he that believeth not shall be damned.” The antecedent/consequent wills paradigm fits very nicely with the Great Commission.

<sup>48</sup> See Daane, *The Freedom of God*, 184. Both Dort and Westminster warn about preaching decretal theology publicly. Many thoughtful Calvinists concede that the moral and logical problems with the doctrine of reprobation are irresolvable. See Paul Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 76-77, 99-100; and Thomas Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 381-82. Both the point and the phrase come from Walls and Dongell, *Why I am not a Calvinist*, 186-87.

<sup>49</sup> See Jerry Walls, “Is Molinism as Bad as Calvinism?” *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990), 85-98.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 112. Oden states that the Church arrived at this consensus concerning God’s two wills through a series of councils: Ephesus (431), Arles (475), Orange (529) and Quiersy (853). Jewett, a Calvinist, concedes that only the Reformed tradition reject the antecedent/consequent wills paradigm. See Jewett, *Election and Predestination*, 98.

<sup>51</sup> John of Damascus seems to be the first to use the analogy of the just judge to explain the congruence of the two wills of God. See Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 83, and Jewett, *Election and Predestination*, 98.

Oden lists four characteristics of the antecedent will of God.<sup>52</sup> First, it is universal. Salvation is desired for all, provided for all, and offered to all. This unconditional omni-benevolent attitude is truly antecedent in that it is directed to all humanity prior to its acceptance or rejection. Second, the antecedent will is impartial. Christ died for the sins of the whole world. Universal love logically requires unlimited atonement. Third, God's will to save all is sincere. There is no hidden will; no secret decree of reprobation. And fourth, the antecedent will is an ordinate will. It is impossible for God's desire to remain impotent or unfulfilled. The antecedent will to save all is the basis of his actions to provide the means of grace to sinners through Christ.

God's consequent will possesses three components.<sup>53</sup> First, it is consistent with the qualities with which he has endowed his creatures. Humans are fallen, but they are still in the image of God, nonetheless. God's grace is not coercive and can be refused. When the hearer encounters the Gospel, he is graciously enabled by the Spirit to respond freely. The hearer's decision to accept or reject the Gospel is genuinely, terrifyingly his. Admittedly, why some reject the Gospel is a mystery. But in the antecedent/consequent paradigm, the mystery of iniquity resides in man rather than God.

The second aspect of God's consequent will follows from the first. If God wills that salvation is consequent to our choice, then this will is conditional. Third, the consequent will is just. God's granting of salvation to those who believe is perfectly consistent with his holy nature because of the propitiatory work of Christ (Rom 3:21-26). His damning of all who will not believe fully accords with his righteousness. God's antecedent will is perfectly gracious; his consequent will is perfectly just.

Generally, Reformed theologians find the antecedent/consequent wills approach unacceptable. They give a number of objections of which three figure most prominently. First, the antecedent/consequent wills paradigm seems to make God's decision contingent upon man's choice. They contend that this approach subtly puts man on God's throne. Berkouwer argues that a salvation that depends upon a decision from man makes God "powerless" and "waiting."<sup>54</sup> Robert Shank replies that

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<sup>52</sup> Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 83-86.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89.

<sup>54</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 229.

God may be waiting, but he is not powerless.<sup>55</sup> In fact, the imagery of God waiting is a rich theme found throughout the Bible (Isa 1:18-20, for example). The antecedent/consequent wills approach understands God to be the sovereign Initiator and gracious Completer of redemption. If man is to choose between heaven and hell, it is because the Lord of Creation has placed the choice before him.

The second objection to the antecedent/consequent wills approach is that it seems to smack of the notion of merit. If all hearers are equally enabled by grace to receive the Gospel, and one person accepts the Message while another person rejects it, then does not this mean that in some way the first person is more virtuous than the second?<sup>56</sup> This is a difficult objection, but two points should be kept in mind. First, this objection seems to see faith as some sort of work while the Bible consistently contrasts faith from works (Rom 3:21-4:8). Faith, by its very nature, is the opposite of works because it is an admission of a complete lack of merit or ability. The beggar incurs no merit when he opens his hands to receive a free gift.<sup>57</sup> Second, the mystery is not why some believe, but why all do not believe. This again points to the mystery of evil. There is no merit in accepting the Gospel but there is culpability in rejecting it.

A third objection made by Reformed theologians is that the antecedent/consequent wills paradigm gives “pride of place” to human freewill over God’s glory.<sup>58</sup> John Piper argues that the hidden/revealed view and

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<sup>55</sup> Shank, *Elect in the Son*, 129.

<sup>56</sup> See Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 238-39; and Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 318.

<sup>57</sup> Geisler points out that faith can be viewed as a work only by an equivocation of the word “do.” “Faith is something we ‘do’ in the sense that it involves an act of our will prompted by God’s grace. However, faith is not something we ‘do’ in the sense of a meritorious work necessary for God to give us salvation. Rather, it is something we exercise to *receive* salvation because we could not *do* anything to obtain salvation [emphasis original].” See Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 198.

<sup>58</sup> Donald Westblade, “Divine Election in the Pauline Literature,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 69-70.

the antecedent/consequent view are basically the same except for one important difference.<sup>59</sup> Both views contend that God genuinely desires the salvation of all, both views hold that this desire is superceded by an even greater will, but the two views disagree on what that greater will is. Piper states that the hidden/revealed position sees the greater will to be a desire to glorify himself while the antecedent/consequent position understands the greater will to be to give the freedom of self-determination to humans. Piper concludes that the hidden/revealed paradigm does greater justice to the glory of God.

However, in their response to Piper, Walls and Dongell emphasize that proponents of the antecedent/consequent wills position do not affirm a graciously enabled human ability of self-determination for its own sake. Rather, the concern is to portray faithfully God's character. God holds the unbeliever accountable because they have not believed the gospel. Those condemned by God are justly condemned because receiving Christ was a choice genuinely available. Adhering to a doctrine of human self-determination is not an end in of itself. Upholding the integrity of God's character is. Rather than failing to magnify God's glory, the antecedent/consequent wills position glorifies God by maintaining that his dealings are just and consistent with his holy nature.<sup>60</sup> If the greatest way for humans to bring glory to God is to choose him freely, then the antecedent/consequent wills view best fulfills this goal.

Interestingly, Piper uses the just judge analogy to make his case for the hidden/revealed wills scenario.<sup>61</sup> He gives the specific instance of when George Washington was faced with the difficult dilemma of having one of his favorite officers guilty of a capital crime. Despite his affection for the young man, Washington gave the order for his execution. Piper's illustration actually is an example of the antecedent/consequent wills paradigm, because according to the hidden/revealed wills model, Washington secretly wills the crime of the officer and inclines the young man's will to commit the deed.

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<sup>59</sup> John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 123-24.

<sup>60</sup> Walls and Dongell, *Why I am not a Calvinist*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 128.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This article has considered the four options concerning God's salvific will: God has one will that all are saved, God has one will that certain ones are saved, God has two wills—one hidden and the other revealed, and God has two wills—an antecedent will for the salvation of all and a consequent will that faith is the condition to salvation. None of the four positions is without difficulties. However, the antecedent/consequent wills paradigm seems to have the fewest theological problems and be closest to the testimony of Scripture.

The Great Commission is the expression of the divine will. His desire is that the whole world hear the Good News so that those who receive the Gospel might be saved.

# MODEL FAITH FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE: MATTHEW 19:28–20:14

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Of the many powers of faith in Jesus Christ, one of its greatest would be the sway it holds over the prospect of eternal reward. Above the doorway to that “Faith Hall of Fame” lies the motto “he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6). The famous Parables of the Minas (Luke 19:12-27) and the Talents (Matt 25:14-30) point to faith in the long-absent Noble as the avenue to generous recompense of service. James says baldly that faithlessness destroys all hope of receiving anything, ever, from the Father: “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...[otherwise he should not] suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (Jas 1:6-7). No doubt faith was the basis of Paul’s assurance of reward also; he *knew* “there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day...” (2 Tim 4.8). Paul reflected, “I know Him whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim 1:12). Faith makes reward a reality!

If we may grant the role of faith in assuring our eternal reward, we might approach a difficult passage like Matt 19:28–20:14, the Parable of the Vineyard Workers, in better hope of understanding this challenging tale. That this parable is a test to interpreters is evident from the briefest survey of commentaries. Students diverge as to whether this story so much as contemplates reward for work rendered! Related are two other main controversies, namely the rationale for the equality in the day’s wages, and the reversal of the order in the pay line at day’s end. If we can first establish, however, that this parable is in fact a guide to seeking confidently after reward, then perhaps the key of faith may help us unlock the motivational treasures hidden in this famous story.

## II. THE *DENARIUS*: TOKEN OF ETERNAL LIFE?

So then, should the interpreter approach the parable as a moral about how Christians should properly serve in hope of reward? Or is it rather, as is sometimes asserted, a reminder about appreciating a free salvation? Despite all the trappings of the marketplace, the exchange of cash for service rendered, and the haggling over the salary, one popular view holds that the *denarius* given at the end of the parable's workday represents the free gift of eternal life. Since given to all alike, no matter the work expended during the "workday," the coin must necessarily correspond to that eternal life all believers will receive equally and freely at the coming of Christ. In anticipation and appreciation for this gift of life, believers naturally will spend the balance of their days in the harvest fields of the Master who saved them, just as the parable pictures them doing.

But unless Jesus departed in this one instance from the clear teaching of the Bible that eternal salvation is "not of work," we shouldn't doubt for a moment that the money exchanged at the end of the workday (20:8) was intended to be compared with Christian reward, and not as an equivalent of eternal life. Consider the following:

- The very word *denarius* suggests compensation for labor rendered (note the NRSV translation "the usual daily wage"). Likewise *misthoō* (the verb used in vv 1, 7 for the "hiring" of laborers and as the substantive for the "hired hands" themselves) and *misthos* (usually translated "wage" ["hire"]) suggest work and its recompense.
- In the immediate backdrop of the parable, Jesus told the rich young ruler he could expect "treasure in heaven" (19:21) in exchange for a stringent self-denial. He told Peter that he should similarly expect a royal appointment to compensate his loyal assistance to Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Far from rebuking Peter for an "unspiritual," ungrateful pursuit of reward in service for Himself, Jesus instead highly commends zeal for reward in general and the disciples' zeal in particular (19:28-29). Peter's passion indeed needs tempering, as we will argue below, but tempering with faith, rather than with gratitude.



- In the parable itself, the full-day laborers grumble about the toil and the hot sun, an unlikely argument of workers suing for a free gift. The landowner tacitly acknowledges their point, in fact, that under normal circumstances, they might deserve more money for their harder work, if they didn't have a previous contract with him to the contrary (20:13). He does obviously not respond that their wage was instead a gift, which should be received with gratitude; this would be an insult! (Indeed, if the *denarius* were a gift, the exchange would violate the common-sense principle stated in Rom 4:4: "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.")
- From a biblical perspective, of course, we recall that eternal life as a gift is imparted through regeneration, at the moment of belief (e.g., John 3:14-15; 5:24; 10:28; 11:25), rather than following some period of service. But here, the workers toil up to 12 hours before receiving the *denarius*, hardly a fitting illustration for an eternal life initiated (before any work!) in a moment of faith.
- All three Matthean references to eternal life, two of which form the context of this parable (19:16, 29), are to potential *future* rewards, not *present* gifts—always conditioned upon labor. This future eternal life that requires wholehearted devotion to Christ, is never mentioned in connection with belief (but "work" is consistently demanded), and is preceded by service. If by the *denarius* Matthew means to represent a present gift of eternal life, it is a meaning completely outside his own otherwise consistent thought on the topic.

Just as later in Matthew (note 24:45-51 and 25:28), this parable considers the exchange between laborers and their employer as a matter of commerce; this is a parable about rewards. Settling this issue, however, accentuates the second major challenge in the parable. If the wage is to be compared to reward rather than to final salvation, is not then the owner's payout unjust? Why should all workers, no matter their labor, receive the same wage?

### III. THE *DENARIUS*: A DENIAL OF DIFFERENTIAL REWARD?

Admittedly, a “rewards” reading of the passage at first glance poses a challenge to the normal principle<sup>2</sup> of eschatological recompense according to an individual’s works. More labor and harder work should command more compensation; not all should receive an equal reward. But the parable itself anticipates and responds to this objection. As he himself insists (vv 13-15), a landowner is free to exercise his generosity even in this. If the laborers who expected more because of more work desire a just wage, justice they received; the landowner fulfilled the explicit terms of their agreement.<sup>3</sup> The landowner acknowledges the normal principle, but he has not violated it. As sovereign of the harvest, he is entitled to be generous with his own goods;<sup>4</sup> he may “over-compensate” a group who might not seem to deserve a full day’s wage.<sup>5</sup> Those who wish to dictate the terms of recompense have no right. God is not beholden. God’s sovereign generosity is equally just in reward as in salvation.

Does this parable teach that all Christians will receive the same reward? Clearly not. How well believers serve clearly affects reward. Passages in which servants receive generous recompense for whole-hearted labor during their allotted service opportunity guarantee this! The present parable simply adds the subtlety that laboring in faith is especially blessed by the Rewarder of this service (see full development of this point below).

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<sup>2</sup> In proximity, Matt 16:27; see also Rom 2:6; 1 Cor 3:8; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 2:23; 21:12. In parabolic literature, differential reward is taught in Luke 19:11-26 (Parable of the Minas), where degrees of reward and even non-reward are implied. See also 2 Tim 2:12 and the promise of diverse rewards in Revelation 2-3 to “overcomers” (along with its implication of non-reward to non-overcomers).

<sup>3</sup> Matt 20:13-14a. Note the emphasis on “*symphōneō*” (agree), repeated in vv 2, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Matt 20:14b-15.

<sup>5</sup> From a strictly business point of view, the “eleventh-hour” laborers’ contribution to bringing in a fragile harvest may have been proportionally more valuable to the landowner than the full-day laborers. “These verses express the typical urgency surrounding the harvest in ancient times”; C. S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

#### IV. “LAST FIRST”: ARBITRARY REVERSAL OR HONORARY RECOGNITION?

While acknowledging the principles of differential reward and God’s sovereign generosity, however, the parable has another point in mind. The dominant lesson, as suggested by the *inclusio* (19:30 and 20:16) of the “first/last” paradox,<sup>6</sup> concerns the *order* of the compensation more than its *equality*; it is more a question of honor of place than of return on labor.<sup>7</sup> In addition to their higher rate of compensation, the end-of-day laborers receive a higher priority of recognition: the first hired are last compensated, and the last hired are the first paid. Thus the final interpretive question raised by reading the parable as a lesson in reward: why this reversal, especially in light of the additional grief and burden borne by the full-day laborers (v 12)?

##### A. FAITH RECOGNIZED

The answer of the parable is that the degree of faith exercised, and not the grief endured, is the overarching principle in God’s compensation of his servants. Those who labor in fuller confidence of their Master are first recognized in the day of reckoning. Greater trust in His just reward is justly rewarded with greater honor in the end.

This principle of faith becomes clear in a careful consideration of the payment offers made to the three groups of workers hired during the day. From the perspective of these offers, the greater faith of the later-day workers becomes evident, and hence the justice of their exaltation in the hour of compensation.

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<sup>6</sup> Note however the reversed order of the saying in the second instance. The parable (as emphasized by the *inclusio*) climaxes with the emphasis on the “last” kind of worker hired, the model Jesus intends his hearers to emulate.

<sup>7</sup> In its historical setting, the parable indeed served the purpose of correcting the apostolic attitude by asserting God’s sovereignty and generosity in reward. Its literary setting in Matthew, however (as indicated by the *inclusio*) means to encourage the readers—no matter our place in the age—that we are at no disadvantage in pursuit of God’s blessing, provided we act in faith.

The following chart summarizes the arrangements:

<b>SUMMARY OF PAYMENT OFFERS</b>		
<b>Workers</b>	<b>Wage Offer</b>	<b>Terms</b>
Full-day	Denarius (20:2)	“Agreement” (implied; 20:2, 13)
Mid-day (3rd, 6th, 9th hour)	“Whatever is right...” <i>(ho ean ē dikaion)</i>	<b>“...I will give you.”</b> <b>(20:4)</b>
11th hour	“Whatever is right...” <i>(ho ean ē dikaion)</i>	<b>“...You will receive.”</b> <b>(20:7)</b>

As is clear from the chart, there is substantial difference between the offers. The only aspect repeated is the promise of a “fair” return to the partial-day workers (italicized in chart). The offers differ in all other respects, suggesting three distinct categories of laborers.

The earliest (full-day) group of vineyard workers, to begin with, is twice said to have “agreed” with the landowner about the day’s wage in advance. They pursued business as usual, likely with the normal round of handshakes or similar pledges of payment. In our culture, these workers are called “contract laborers,” because there is a formal accord, set in advance, controlling the work arrangement.

Whom do these workers represent? The parable’s immediately preceding context naturally suggests an allusion to those servants of Christ who, like the apostle being addressed (19:27), may approach the pursuit of Kingdom reward solely within the framework of commercial conventions. Keying on Jesus’ promise of “treasure in heaven” to the rich young man (19:21), Peter naturally, if somewhat faithlessly, inquired for detail: “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” (19:27). The disciples (Peter customarily serving as spokesman—cf. 15:15; 16:16) desired to know “up front”; they quite reasonably sought specific assurance of the outcome of their service.

After the later workers of the parable received a full-day’s wage, the “agreement” the first group had struck at daybreak serves as the ground for dismissing their expectation of extra compensation. Jesus apparently detects in the disciples’ otherwise wholly commendable zeal for reward the potential for disappointment in seeing others rewarded disproportionately. Their pursuit of confirmation to the point of specifics may result in

reward according to the specifics negotiated; it may not allow room, as faith should, for the Master's generosity or grace. Tempering their zeal, then, is Jesus' concern, as skillfully illustrated in the later workers of the parable, that they not overlook God's willingness to lavish his blessing on the slightest effort expended for Christ!

The main distinctive of these later workers' pay offers is that they include no such assurance as that given to the earlier laborers. Both the mid-day and eleventh-hour groups have only the owner's sense of justice ("whatever may be fair"), rather than an explicit wage offer, on which to depend.<sup>8</sup> While the earliest workers could count on the social and commercial conventions surrounding a *denarius* wage, these workers were at the mercy of the landowner's integrity.

And whom do these latter groups represent? If Jesus meant the early group to picture the apostles, these later workers would then naturally suggest some ideal that Peter (and Matthew's readers) should ponder. In that there could be no face-to-face assurances (such as the apostles received) for those Christians who were to follow them in the apostolic train, these workers would naturally represent those later believers, none of whom would enjoy the same opportunity for direct negotiation with the Master. Later servants of Christ would be reduced to dependence on the fairness of their Lord in their pursuit of his wage. Both later groups model an implicit recognition of the gracious sovereign justice of the Lord in rewarding everyone according to his deeds; the first group alone fails in this respect.

The chart above, however, implies yet a further distinction between the workers. How is the reader to understand the difference between the terms offered (note bold print in the chart) to the mid-day and eleventh-hour workers? In other words, what is the significance<sup>9</sup> of the column 3 distinctions between the later workers?

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<sup>8</sup> W. W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, 1989) describes the new labor relation: "It is important to note that there were actually two kinds of workers hired that day: those who wanted a contract and agreed to work for a penny a day, and those who had no contract and agreed to take whatever the owner thought was right." See also Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: E. Stock, 1909; reprint, Minneapolis: James family Christian Publishing Co., 1978), 273.

<sup>9</sup> It is unlikely that the distinctions are merely stylistic. In the immediate context of the parable, Matthew has just employed verbatim repetition ("what-

These distinctions, simply stated, further manifest the pattern of diminishing assurance of compensation. In his statement of terms to the mid-day groups, the landowner directly states, "I will give you... [the wage]." But in the eleventh-hour terms, he fully removes himself from the offer that he makes, thus eliminating another formality in the pay arrangement. It is not now that *he* will compensate, but only that the workers "will be compensated," somehow: "Whatever is right, *you will receive.*" Implied by this passivity is the further hint that the wage may rather come through some agent under his (the landowner's) supervision. The late-day workers might be required, not only to trust the owner's indirect promise, but also his "Proxy," requiring yet further confidence in the owner's integrity. (Indeed, as the parable unfolds, a new character, the "paymaster," plays exactly the role intimated in the landowner's passive promise to these workers!)

If we may conclude then that the offers made to the three groups indeed reflect diminishing concrete assurance of payment, we can summarize as follows: if the first group worked for a *contract*, the second was offered only a *commitment*. The last group, however, was asked to rely on no direct personal promise at all. These late-day workers were asked to depend utterly on the *character* of the landowner, even to the extent that the wage might not come through the landowner himself, but from some agent he might employ in distributing the day's rewards.

## B. THE DISCIPLES' PARALLEL

That these last workers represent Jesus' ideal is to be expected, given Matthew's previous illustrations of threefold discipleship rankings, always given in a strict order of approval or disapproval (13:4-7; 20-23;<sup>10</sup> 25:22-38). In precisely this fashion, these "last" hired (last in time as well as last in contribution) become "first" in recognition. Recognizing the eleventh-hour workers as the most trusting, their employer leapfrogs them ahead of their coworkers on all counts.

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ever is right"); it is unlikely he would depart from doing so without reason. In at least one other Matthean reward parable where parity is a point (25:21, 23), Jesus also repeats terms exactly. In this genre, we must assume significance where distinctions are found.

<sup>10</sup> Note further in Matt 13:8, 23 the threefold refinement among fruit-bearing disciples: "hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirtyfold" crop obtained. Cf. threefold distinctions also in Matt 18:15-17; 19:12.

Acknowledging that these men worked in spite of the most-diminished assurance also satisfies the expectation of the parable itself that some personal quality is being illustrated. The relative absence of *economic* merit in this group (whose contribution and even whose industry might easily be questioned)<sup>11</sup> is the main surprise element in the reversal of the pay order at day's end. Unless the point of the parable is God's purely capricious (or "sovereign") generosity, rewarding without respect to any worker criteria whatsoever, we should instead anticipate Jesus to be illustrating some *character* merit instead.<sup>12</sup>

On these terms, the landowner's reversal of the workday pay queue is no surprise. The trusting stragglers clearly lend the landowner greater credit, in that their trust helps bring his faithfulness fully to light.<sup>13</sup> They are confident of recompense without hearing so much as a personal avowal, let alone a deal. Naturally, the landowner in response would honor those workers who trusted him implicitly over those who expected more concrete terms.

Homer Kent's comment on the passage points to the moral: "We must trust Him unreservedly and believe that He will always give what is best."<sup>14</sup> Peter and the like must remember that even apostolic commitment was less to be praised by God than absolute confidence in the justice of His compensation. On these grounds, those who come last,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Idlers," a term applied to both the mid-day and 11<sup>th</sup>-hour workers, is typically pejorative. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, eds. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 104. Further, the exchange in 20:6-7 eliminates all doubt that the 11<sup>th</sup>-hour workers were chosen for some special economic qualifiers peculiar to themselves. It was not as though these workers had been busy with more productive or more important activities; they were simply idling, unoccupied.

<sup>12</sup> As is typical of Matthean parabolic instruction; cf. 15:10-20; 18:21-35; 21:33-44; 24:45-51; 25:1-13; 25:14-30.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the NLT rendering of Rom 4:20: "Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God." *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1996)

<sup>14</sup> Cited by Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*.

<sup>15</sup> The "day" pictured by this parable represents the *inter-advent age* (commencing with the apostles and terminating with the Day of reward), rather than the *lifespan* of those who come to the vineyard. Peter and the disciples are

without the concrete assurances provided through physical contact with the Lord,<sup>16</sup> might even surpass their predecessors in recognition. Neither their high calling nor the greater contribution made by the apostles can ever substitute for full confidence in the Caller.

After all, with the coming of Christ, God's servants will necessarily be dealing with His Intermediary, just as the parable suggests; they had better prepare by ramping up their faith! Whether His followers paused at this telling of the parable to consider it, Jesus is teaching that the great Landowner will indeed be passive on the Day of recompense. The Father has indeed committed all reward to his Paymaster, His very Son (cf. John 5:22-30). Characteristically Christian faith is that God promises, but His Agent delivers. Faith looks to the Bema (the Judgment Seat of Christ), as of God (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10-12). Trust in God is expressed by trust in Him whom He has sent.

The NT elsewhere echoes the challenge to believe in the Father's fair compensation through Christ. The indolence of the "wicked" servant of Matt 25:24-27 is blamed in part on his doubt of the returning Master's character. Christian slaves should serve with absolute confidence in Christ's recompense, no matter any short change they might receive from earthly masters (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-24). Examples could be added. God honors those who serve His Son with the confident expectation that He will reward them fairly at the Bema. Justifying faith receives eternal life as a gift, but full faith in Jesus, Agent of God's just reward, is necessary for a full salvation.

### C. CONFIRMING ENIGMA: "MANY CALLED, FEW CHOSEN"

There is still one final evidence of God's special favor promised to those who pursue his reward in robust faith. The final assertion in the

called (as elsewhere in Matt—cf. 13:24-43; 47-50) to envision unexpected developments between themselves and the day of wages.

As such, the latecomers correspond primarily to those who will commence service *historically* later in the age, rather than later *chronologically* in their lifetime. Accordingly, it is the *grief* of their service (i.e., burning heat of the day) to which the early-day workers appeal in hope of additional wages, not the length (20:12). While their sacrifices were necessarily to be greater, as they involved the birth pangs of the age of Christian service, the disciples' labor was to be rewarded, just as that of those who later served Christ, with respect to the spirit of faith in which it was rendered.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. John 20:29 for a similar admonition of an apostle.



section resonates with the main point of the story, concluding the lesson with an enigma: “For many are called, but few are chosen.”<sup>17</sup>

Though the saying is enigmatic, identifying the principals is straightforward. Those “called” are they who respond to the invitation (“calling”)<sup>18</sup> to work—all the workers engaged during the day. The “chosen” of Jesus’ statement, then, are to be identified with those few “first” workers paid (as identified in the immediately preceding clause). This “election” then from among “invitees” is not salvific,<sup>19</sup> but honorific; of all invited to serve the divine Landowner, he will single out (“choose”) the last hired (the faithful) for special recognition. The saying perfectly conforms to its setting, ratifying Jesus’ point that God is seeking those who will honor him through implicit faith.

Jesus’ point is stated in terms of an election, but the full import of this choosing is left vague. The suspense is resolved, however, in a later passage (Matt 22:14), where Jesus repeats and clarifies the saying. Here, Jesus compares the “calling” (again, “many are called”) with the “invitation” to the royal wedding supper of the preceding parable. Of all guests “invited” to the wedding, those “chosen” to participate in the full celebration are only those who make preparation commensurate with an occasion of such gravity (a supper honoring the king’s son).

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<sup>17</sup> The saying is omitted in several modern translations, but textual evidence is weighted against a few early manuscripts, and in favor of the majority reading. Eliminating the reading are  $\aleph$ , B, L, Z, and scattered others. The Majority Text, with C, D, W, and most versionary witnesses, attests to inclusion. There seems little cause for rejecting the reading.

Various explanations have been offered for the variant. Read as a scribal gloss to the “first/last” saying, the addition would serve the function of “clarifying” or “proving” our parable’s inversion of expectation, based on the statement of 22:14 (as an instance of Metzger’s “dogmatic alteration”; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2d ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 201.)

<sup>18</sup> BAGD, 399.

<sup>19</sup> For a contrary (and representative perseverantist) perspective, see Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), where the explanation of the election is...“probably this—to teach us that men who have wrought in Christ’s service all their days may, by the spirit which they manifest at the last, make it too evident that, as between God and their own souls, they never were chosen workmen at all.”

In the parable, a casually dressed guest is singled out for exclusion, as demonstrating less than the decorum proper to such an invitation. The “chosen,” on the other hand, share (co-participate) in the joy,<sup>20</sup> while the unprepared invitee is relegated to anguished regret—weeping and gnashing of teeth.<sup>21</sup> Applied to the coming celebration of the consummation of Christ’s love for His people, 22:14 carries the instruction that God’s fullest welcome will be offered only to the well-prepared. As such, it complements the message of 20:16 that the Great Employer will recognize most highly those whose zeal, complemented by a God-honoring trust in the justice of His dealings, prepares them best for that consummation. This is none other than the coming day of reward described in our parable.

## V. CONCLUSION

Considered in its biblical setting then, the Parable of the Vineyard Workers offers powerful encouragement to us, late-day laborers all, who are invited to help gather a crop for life eternal. Understood from the framework of faith, its interpretive challenges yield to the principle everywhere affirmed in Scripture, that God abundantly honors confidence rightly placed in Him, whether faith for regeneration or for fair reward. If we approach our labors in the full conviction of God’s generosity to recognize all efforts expended in trust, we will be at no disadvantage to those who served Christ from the very beginning. Though last in time, we may realistically aspire to the high standard set by the disciples of Jesus in the flesh. May we rise to the challenge!

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<sup>20</sup> Inclusion in the celebration. Cf. Matt 25:21, 23, where the “good and faithful” servants of an absent landlord are invited “into the joy of [their] lord.”

<sup>21</sup> Hebrew expression of grief; cf. Ps 112:10. Cf. also the comment of Ralph Gower and Fred Wright: “To be put out of the lighted room into the darkness could lead to despair (and so, “gnashing of teeth” Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30)” *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997).

# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY *PROPI TIATION*? DOES IT ONLY COUNT IF WE ACCEPT IT?

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard an illustration like this? A man is spending his last week on death row. Suddenly the warden appears and shows him a piece of paper. The paper is a full pardon signed by the Governor. After the man looks it over, he says, “I don’t want it.” He hands it back to the warden. The illustration ends with the execution of the condemned man.

What’s wrong with this story? Well, to begin with, there is no way a state would execute a pardoned man. The prisoner would be ushered unceremoniously out of his cell—at least eventually, depending on legal technicalities. Yet users of such an illustration think it is a good one. If human beings reject the pardon Jesus Christ bought for them by His death on the cross, they will go to hell and pay for their sins.

Can this be true? No, it cannot.

## II. JESUS, OUR PROPITIATION

The illustration above cannot be correct. The reason is that it denies the reality of the propitiation that the Lord Jesus Christ made on the cross. An expected objection must be confronted. Someone might argue this way: “The propitiation that Jesus made on the cross is real. It is fully adequate for all men. However, it is only effective if men believe it.”

This view leads to a new illustration. A man deposits one billion dollars in the bank. Any debtor can come and draw freely on the account. It is sufficient to meet his needs. If he doesn’t draw on it, the account does not pay for his debt. *He* has to pay for it.

What’s wrong with *this* story? The same thing as before. It denies the reality of the propitiation that Jesus made on the cross. Nothing has really been paid for.

Such illustrations fly into the face of the Word of God. Listen to the words of the Apostle John in 1 John 2:2, referring to Jesus Christ: “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

The Greek word translated “propitiation” (*hilasmos*) means either “appeasement necessitated by sin” or “expiation.”<sup>1</sup> The long-running debate centering on the difference between “appeasement” and “expiation” can be ignored. It does not really make a difference to this discussion.

The word “appeasement,” or the softer term “satisfaction,” are each acceptable here. The concept of propitiation refers to something that appeases, or satisfies, the righteous justice of God. The word “satisfaction” is a pretty good equivalent.

But is there anything in 1 John 2:2 about Jesus Christ being *potentially* the “satisfaction” for the sins of the world? No, there is not. The Apostle flatly states that Jesus *is the propitiation* for the sins of “the whole world.” He *is* that. Not that He *can* be, or *potentially* is, but He simply *is*. Note, too, that this statement is exactly parallel to the truth that He is the propitiation for *our* sins. In whatever sense He is the propitiation for *our* sins, He is also the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

Very simply put, the propitiatory work of our Lord Jesus Christ is *universally* effective. That is true whether anyone believes it or not. On the cross, Jesus paid for every single sin that has ever been committed by any person who has ever lived on the face of the earth. That is magnificent and overwhelming!

Of course, the same truth is stated by the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor 5:19 where he writes, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them . . .” At the cross, God imputed the sins of the *entire world* to Jesus Christ and did *not* impute them to the world.

Paul also expresses this truth in 1 Tim 2:5-6: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the *Man Christ Jesus, who*

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<sup>1</sup> A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 474.

*gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*” Again, in whatever sense He is a ransom for us, He is a ransom *for all*.

For the same reason, John the Baptist declared in John 1:29: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Unfortunately, many Christians do not understand the splendid universal sufficiency of the work of Christ on the cross. They frequently misrepresent it when they evangelize the unconverted. Fortunately, one does not have to have a perfect understanding of the cross to be saved. If that were the case, probably no one would be saved.

### III. PROPITIATION AND FINAL JUDGMENT

At this point, someone will ask, “But how can God send anybody to hell if Jesus paid for all their sins on the cross?” Good question. In fact, so good that it is a shame that grace people haven’t tried very often to answer it clearly.

Reformed people, however, have faced this issue and have an answer of their own. In their view, if Christ died for all of a man’s sins, then that man can’t be sent to hell. Therefore, he must be among the elect. This leads directly to the conclusion that Christ really died only for the elect.

This is the doctrine of limited atonement. Christ did not die *effectively* for the sins of all humanity. The key word, of course, is *effectively*. In some sense, a Reformed person might suggest, the cross may be viewed as sufficient for all, but effective only for the elect. Obviously, the Reformed answer is inadequate for grace people. But what should *our* answer be like? Let me state it and then try to support it.

Here it is: Since Christ effectively died for the sins of the entire world, nobody goes to hell for their sins. They go to hell because they do not have eternal life. This suggested answer is confirmed by the biblical account of the final judgment found in Rev 20:11-15.

The first thing that strikes us about this account is that there is no mention of sin. That is very important: *there is no mention of sin in Rev 20:11-15*.

Of course, there *is* mention of men’s works. Revelation 20:12 states, “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” Clearly the things men have done in their lives—their works—are reviewed at the Great White Throne judgment. This is both natural and very much to be expected.

Countless human beings have gone out into eternity convinced that their works will make them acceptable to God on the Day of Judgment. They are wrong, of course. Paul makes this plain in Romans and Galatians.<sup>2</sup> But many people are still convinced, to the day of their death, that the deciding issue will be their works. They hope that their good works will outweigh their bad works. They hope that God's verdict on their works will result in them going to heaven.

Naturally, God will not ignore this issue in the final judgment. That would be like a judge on earth refusing to hear evidence that a defendant thought would help him. Everything that any man or woman has ever done will be reviewed at the Great White Throne.

Interestingly enough, Revelation 20 does not state the result of this review. But the Book of Revelation was written to Christian churches that already knew what the result would be. Anyone who understands God's plan of salvation also knows that the result of such a review will be negative. It will reinforce the testimony of Scripture that "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom 3:20).

To be sure, a review of anyone's works will involve looking at his or her sins. But at the Great White Throne, the issue will not be sins *as such*, but works, both good and bad. And even so, notice one important fact. Men are not condemned to hell even on the basis of their works.

As the text of Revelation makes clear, there is another book opened at the Great White Throne. It is the Book of Life. But this book is consulted only after the review of men's works based on the *other* books. Yet when it *is* consulted, its verdict is clear. We are told, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:15).

Men do not go to hell because of their sins or their wicked works. They go to hell because their names are not found in the Book of Life. They do not have eternal life.

#### IV. WHERE DO YOU SEND THE UNRIGHTEOUS?

We all understand that human beings suffer the consequences of their sinful conduct while on earth. Trouble, sickness, rejection and dozens of other experiences—including physical death—are included in the ways in which sinners suffer these consequences.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Rom 4:5; 11:6; Gal 2:16.

We often call this the law of sowing and reaping. Paul tells us (Gal 6:7) that “whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” God has built this law into human experience. As long as a man remains a sinner he is subject to this unchanging law.

Christians are also subject to the law of sowing and reaping. Paul makes that clear in Gal 6:7-8. He tells the Galatians, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”

When any man, including a believer, lives sinfully and thereby sows to his flesh, he reaps corruption. Paul insists on that. But a believer has another option. He can also sow to the Spirit and reap an enrichment of his experience of eternal life. This last fact is important, but only the first part of the statement is pertinent to this article.

Sowing to the flesh produces corruption, no matter who does it. The death of Christ *does not affect* this law, either for the believer or the non-believer. This fact is very important. The word Paul uses for corruption in Gal 6:8 is the Greek word *phthora*, which fundamentally refers to “the breakdown of organic matter.”<sup>3</sup> By extension it can refer to moral or spiritual ruin or decay of one kind or another.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke more often about hell than any person in the New Testament. In one of His most striking discussions of hell, He described it in terms of *corruption*. Mark 9:45-46 illustrates this:

And if your foot causes your downfall, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, than having two feet, to be cast into Gehenna into the fire that shall never be quenched—where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (author’s translation).

This memorable description vividly describes a scene of decay and ruin. In Gehenna there is an endlessly burning fire and there are worms whose activity is unceasing. Gehenna, or hell, may be described as a place of *eternal corruption*.

We may think of hell, therefore, as an extension of the law of sowing and reaping. Those who go there are reaping eternal *corruption*. In fact, it is the only suitable place to put unsaved sinners. It is the only place that suitably fits their sinful nature and character.

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<sup>3</sup> BDAG, 1054.

Hell is justified, therefore, because its inhabitants do not share God's kind of life. They do not have eternal life and, as a result, they cannot live with Him. Instead, they must endure everlasting corruption.

The cross of Christ eliminated sin as the grounds for *judicial condemnation*. It satisfied God's righteous demand for a *judicial* punishment for human sin. It made possible the justification and new birth of all who believe. As Paul puts it so beautifully in Rom 3:26, God can now be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

In all cultures that I am aware of, there is a distinction made between natural or circumstantial retribution and judicial retribution. This can be easily illustrated.

Here is a man who has long been a drug dealer. One day, in a drug war he is shot and killed. This is clearly a consequence of his drug dealing ways. But it is a natural consequence in the sense that circumstances led to it. On the other hand, he might be arrested and sentenced to death for murdering another dealer. When he is executed, he is suffering the *judicial* consequences of his drug dealing.

The distinction that has just been made is perfectly natural and quite common whenever we talk about consequences. At the cross, Jesus Christ suffered the punishment that God, the Judge of all men, demands for sin. It cannot ever be paid again. No one will ever suffer a *judicial* punishment for sin, because Jesus paid that.

The suffering that Christ endured on the cross was excruciatingly painful, both physically and emotionally. But what He suffered is enough to remove *judicial* punishment from all humanity for all time.

In the following illustration, please don't hold me to a strict literal sense. The illustration is suggestive and thought provoking. Please take it that way.

Going to hell is like being marooned on a rotting boat that is going in circles on a sea of boiling water. That is the natural, future consequence of human sin. The *judicial* consequence would be like being on the same boat but chained to the oars night and day, compelled to row the boat without letup or relief. The first is dreadful enough. The second is far worse.

What is the bottom line? It is this: Men are not sent to hell for their sins. They are sent there because they are not listed in the Book of Life. But the death of Christ does not cancel the law of sowing and reaping. When people who are dead in trespasses and sins go to hell, they are *eternally* reaping what they have sowed.



Hell was originally prepared for the devil and his angels as stated in Matt 25:41. But hell is the only appropriate place to send unregenerate people who die in their sins. As Jesus said in John 8:24, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

## V. CORRUPTION AND LIFE

Perhaps you noticed in Gal 6:7-8 that the Apostle Paul contrasts *corruption* with *everlasting life*. The Lord Jesus does the same thing in Mark 9:45-46. There He states that “it is better to enter *life* lame, than . . . to be cast into Gehenna . . . where their worm does not die.”

Both Jesus and Paul set *life* and *corruption* before us as opposites. Of course, for the believer here and now there is the potential experience of both things, depending on where he sows—whether to the flesh or to the Spirit. But this, of course, is due to the fact that the believer’s inward nature is regenerate and his body still awaits transformation.

However, the believer yearns for his eternal body as Paul tells us in 2 Cor 5:1-4. Paul’s words are vivid: “For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor 5:4).

Just a little earlier (2 Cor 4:16), Paul had stated that “our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” In other words, we have eternal *life* within us, but our physical body is subject to *corruption and death*.

When the Lord comes, however, our bodies will be changed so that they can fully express the *life* within us. At that point, our “mortality,” Paul says, will be “swallowed up by *life*.” From then on, we will no longer experience *corruption*. Our whole experience will be that of *eternal life*.

What about the unregenerate person? When *he* is raised from the dead to stand at the Great White Throne, his body will *still* be untransformed. It will *still* be an appropriate habitation for his equally untransformed inward man. Where then should such a person be sent?

The unsaved man cannot enter into *life*, since he has no divine life within him. Thus he must be put into the one habitat that is suitable for him. That is Gehenna, where “the fire shall never be quenched” and “where their worm does not die.” The spiritually dead sinner is cast into “the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15) where he continues to reap unending *corruption*.

Lacking eternal life, his doom in Gehenna is sealed. At the Great White Throne he can claim nothing based on his works. And when his name is not found written in the Book of Life, the lake of fire is his only possible destination.

Hell is the inevitable consequence of remaining *dead* in trespasses and sins. This deadness leads first to the death of our physical bodies, and then to the second death, as well. That is, it leads to the lake of fire (Rev 20:14).

## VI. CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the result of this brief article will be to magnify our view of the cross of Christ. So splendid is the propitiation accomplished at the cross, that every human being that has ever lived is freed from judicial condemnation for his or her sins.

When we sing, “Jesus paid it all,” we mean it. God does not exact from any man the judicial penalty that Jesus paid at the cross. Jesus Christ’s completely sufficient suffering on the cross for the sins of the world will never be repeated in the case of any human being whatsoever.

Furthermore, as a result of the cross, every man or woman is eligible for the free gift of eternal life. All they need to do is believe in Jesus for that gift. But those who do not believe remain dead in their sins and subject to the corruption that sin always brings. Though eligible for *life*, they have remained in spiritual death. Hell is the consequence of remaining dead to God.

In hell the law of sowing and reaping goes on and on and on. The fire is never put out and the worms of corruption never die. In hell, the superlative gift of life, paid for by our Savior’s blood, has been missed forever. But that splendid gift is for *everybody*, for the simple reason that Christ died for *everybody* equally.

That’s wonderful! Let’s get out there and tell people about this.

# THE SOTERIOLOGY OF CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON AND HOW IT IMPACTED HIS EVANGELISM

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The fact that one of the greatest preachers of the modern era was a five-point Calvinist is beyond question.<sup>1</sup> All one would have to do is read any one of Charles Spurgeon's sermons to be convinced that he loved and proclaimed boldly the doctrines of grace. Another indisputable fact about Spurgeon's ministry is that it was baptized with evangelistic fervor. So passionate was he that in a sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1869 he proclaimed;

I am as firm a believer in the doctrines of grace as any man living, and a true Calvinist after the order of John Calvin himself; but if it be thought an evil thing to bid the sinner lay hold of eternal life, I will yet be more evil in this respect, and herein imitate my Lord and his apostles, who, though they taught that salvation is of grace, and grace alone, feared not to speak to men as rational beings and responsible agents...Beloved, cling to the great truth of electing love and divine sovereignty, but let not these bind you in fetters when, in the power of the Holy Ghost, you become fishers of men.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Spurgeon was not a man whose theology neatly fit into any box. Though he called himself a Calvinist, he did not agree with all aspects of modern Calvinism, as this article clearly shows. Nor was he consistently what we call *Free Grace* in his preaching. While Spurgeon has views with which most *JOTGES* readers disagree, there is much in him with which we would be of the same mind.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon: Spurgeon "Speaks for Himself"* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1973) 73.

### A. FAMILY INFLUENCES

Charles Spurgeon came from a godly heritage. His great grandfather Job Spurgeon was a godly minister who was thrown in prison in 1679 for refusing to conform to the Church of England. He spent fifteen weeks laying on a straw pallet in extremely severe winter weather without any fire.<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon would later state of his great grandfather, "I cast my eye back through four generations and see that God had been pleased to hear the prayers of my grandfather who used to supplicate with God that his children might live before Him to the last generation."<sup>4</sup> God did hear the prayers of Job Spurgeon at least for the next four generations. Following in his father's path, James Spurgeon, the grandfather of Charles, was a godly man and a fervent preacher of the gospel of grace. When he was a small child, little Charles was sent to live with his grandfather because of the financial hardships his family endured.<sup>5</sup> This turned out to be providential in that Spurgeon's theology already had begun to be molded at this tender young age. James Spurgeon had a profound influence on his grandson. Charles Spurgeon, in an 1895 sermon at the Tabernacle, recollected listening to his grandfather's preaching, "Mark you, this dear old man was a Calvinist, an out-and-out preacher of free grace."<sup>6</sup>

The prayers and life of James Spurgeon had a lasting impact on little Charles as well, "I well remember hearing my grandfather's earnest prayers for all his household. It was always near his heart that his children and his children's children might fear the Lord, I have lively recollections of his devotions."<sup>7</sup> Grandfather James was very attached to Charles. He kept the lad at his side always, even when counseling and praying with parishioners. When he gathered with ministers to discuss theological issues Charles listened intently.<sup>8</sup> On Sunday mornings Charles would sit quietly in his grandfather's parlor as his grandfather would get ready for Sunday morning.<sup>9</sup> The tie between grandfather and

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<sup>3</sup> R.B. Cook, *Gathered Jewels, From The Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon Together With A Sketch of His Life And Work* (Baltimore: International News & Book Co., 1896), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon* (Chicago: Moody, 1984) 4.

<sup>5</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Cook, *Gathered Jewels*, 30.

grandson was so close that Charles became one in heart with his grandfather's desire to see God's mighty work in the hearts of the church members. One incident revealed the strong moral courage of the tender young Spurgeon. Upon learning that his grandfather was grieved over the behavior of one of the church members, Charles confronted the man. He marched into the tavern and rebuked him. Thomas Roads later recalled the event.

To think an old man like me should be took to task...by a bit of a child like that! Well, he points at me, with his finger just so, and says, what doest thou here, Elijah? Sitting with the ungodly; and you a member of a church, and breaking your pastor's heart. I'm ashamed of you! I wouldn't break my pastor's heart, I'm sure." And then he walks away..."

I knew it was all true, and I was guilty; so I put down my pipe, and did not touch my beer, but hurried away to a lonely spot, and cast myself down before the Lord, confessing my sin and begging for forgiveness.<sup>10</sup>

When it came time for Charles to return to his father's home it was a very tearful departure. Although Spurgeon left his grandfather's house he did not leave the sphere and atmosphere of spiritual life. His father, John Spurgeon, was a godly man also, steeped in the Scriptures and earnest in prayer. He preached to a small congregation of Independent Congregationalists at Tollesbury. His preaching was "acceptable and beneficial."<sup>11</sup> More importantly to the theological influence of Charles, his father, like his father before him, was a Calvinist.<sup>12</sup>

## B. PURITAN INFLUENCES

Because of the influences of both father and grandfather, Spurgeon was introduced to the writings of Puritan authors. At the home of his grandfather, the Manse at Stambourne, the young Charles discovered in the attic a large number of books. Among them was Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Spurgeon carried this book downstairs and read it. It opened up a new world to him. He claims to have read it a hundred

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<sup>10</sup> Iain Murray, ed., *The Early Years* (London: Banner of Truth, 1962), 85.

<sup>11</sup> Cook, *Gathered Jewels*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 19.

times.<sup>13</sup> Spurgeon remarked about the impact the book had upon him as a lad, “When I first saw in it the woodcut of Christian carrying the burden on his back I felt so interested in the poor fellow that I thought I should jump for joy when after he had carried it so long he at last got rid of it.”<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon was introduced to the Puritans.

Ernest W. Bacon said concerning the influence of Puritan writings, “Spurgeon was so steeped in and fashioned by the writings and principles of the Puritans and can only be understood in their light...Both in his preaching of Christ, in his controversies, and in his personal life, he would not have been what he was without them.”<sup>15</sup>

Although introduced to the writings of the Puritans in his early years, his interest did not wane when he grew older. He read such writings all the rest of his days. He delved into them as one that finds great spoil. He stored their deep truths in his mind and quoted them in his sermons. He always carried a Puritan book with him on his walks and Mentone retirements. Their emphasis and outlooks became his at all points.<sup>16</sup> Spurgeon would later publish a book titled, *Commenting on Commentaries*, which is basically a book commenting on Puritan writings. Murray wrote:

The slender work contains a mine of literary information on 17<sup>th</sup> century writings which might otherwise have been lost to modern times...he wanted more searching of the Scriptures and he believed Puritan writings were one of the finest inducements to obtain that result.<sup>17</sup>

Of course the works of the Puritans were not the only readings he applied. He also read the Bible voraciously. By the time he was converted he could say, “I had read the Bible; there was no part of it with which I was not acquainted.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir Of The Puritans* (London: Allen & Unwin LTD, 1967), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Murray, *The Early Years*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir Of The Puritans* (London: Allen & Unwin LTD, 1967), 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Iain H. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: Banner of Truth, 1973), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 31.

Spurgeon never went to college. He was encouraged by his father and grandfather to enroll. He himself thought it was a good idea. But a strange providence hindered him from enrolling. He was given an appointment with the president of the Regent's Park college, Dr. Angus. He was to meet with him at the MacMillian house. The servant girl placed Spurgeon and Dr. Angus in two different rooms and neither of them knew the other was waiting in the room next door and the foolish servant girl neglected to inform either of them. After two hours Dr. Angus left thinking the young Spurgeon did not bother to come. Spurgeon was greatly disappointed but came to regard this as a strange providence.<sup>19</sup> Later he declined to go to college and stayed with his flock at Waterbeach. This prevented him from being influenced by the English Baptist who were primarily Hyper-Calvinists.

Although he never again pursued formal education he was by no means uneducated. He read a great number of books and his gigantic intellect never forgot what he read. During his first pastorate at Waterbeach he continued forming the theology that would become the foundation of his ministry in London. He wrote:

I read all Dr. Gill's *Body of Divinity* and Calvin's *Institutes*; and when I had done that, I thought, 'Now I have got hold of the truth, I am certain I have; and I can meet all opponents, and if they are not conformed to the views of that most learned man, Dr. Gill, and that excellent confessor, John Calvin, I will soon cut them up root and branch.' However, I soon began to find out that there was a good deal to be said, after all, concerning some matter's that Dr. Gill and John Calvin did not mention,<sup>20</sup>

Spurgeon read also the works of Wesley and would later confess:

I love the name Calvin, but always regard him as sitting on one side of the room; and I love the name of Wesley, but I regard him as occupying another side place in the assembly...I am myself persuaded that the points of the Calvinist alone is right upon some points, and the Arminian alone is right upon others. There is a great deal of truth in the positive side of both systems, and a great deal of error in the negative side of both systems. If I were asked, 'Why is a man damned?' I should

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<sup>19</sup> Cook, *Gathered Jewels*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 74.

answer as an Arminian answers, 'He destroys himself'. I should not dare to lay man's ruin at the door of divine sovereignty. On the other hand, if I were asked, 'Why is a man saved?' I could only give the Calvinist answer, 'He is saved through the sovereign grace of God, and not at all of himself. [*sic*]',<sup>21</sup>

One can see the influences of Spurgeon's early years played a major role in shaping his theology and practice. His education, though informal, was thorough in the works of brilliant theologians guided by the tutelage of his grandfather and father. The balanced approach of Spurgeon began to take shape.

## II. SOTERIOLOGY

Spurgeon openly confessed his utter commitment to the Bible. He preached God's Word as he found it. He built his soteriology on the Word of God. At times, when his theology seemed to be paradoxical, he rested on revelation rather than reason. Drummond wrote:

But in this sense, he ministered much in the tradition of Calvin himself. Calvin preached the Bible as he found it. For Spurgeon authority rested in sola scriptura, although from time to time he would attempt to corroborate his position by tradition, experience, reason, even the creeds. Still, primarily, as an absolute believer in the infallible Word of God, he built his theology on the Bible as he understood it.<sup>22</sup>

Spurgeon depended completely upon the Scriptures to do the work of revealing Christ to the sinner. He viewed the Scripture as the "wonderful library about God." He held to verbal inspiration all his days and every sermon was based on Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

Spurgeon's theology also revolved around the Lord Jesus Christ and rested on His life, death, and resurrection. This naturally resulted in a God-centered theology rather than a man-centered approach to truth.<sup>24</sup> He said:

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 659.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 619.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 659.



The great system of Calvinism known as the ‘doctrines of grace,’ brings before the mind of the man who truly receives it God and not man. The whole scheme of that doctrine looks Godward, and regards God as the first, and the plan of salvation is chiefly arranged for the glory of the most high.<sup>25</sup>

It must be emphasized once more that the theology of Spurgeon had an inherent tension because of this approach. He did not try to resolve those major conflicts between divine sovereignty and human responsibility he simply embraced them as being equally true:

The system of truth is not one straight line but two. No man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once...Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act, that there is no precedence of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism; and if, on the other hand, I declare that God so overrules all things, as that man is not free to be responsible, I am driven at once to Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestinates, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see.<sup>26</sup>

Some may see this reasoning as weakness. When Spurgeon was asked to explain such a mystery he simply stated that it was not his business to do so and that “faith was reason at rest in God.”<sup>27</sup> This kind of response has not been without criticism. Although he was criticized for his approach, he held to his principles unto the end. He responded to criticism by appealing to the Bible:

There are some who read the Bible, and try to systematize it according to rigid logical creeds; but I dare not follow their method, and I feel content to let people say, ‘How inconsistent he is with himself!’ The only thing that would grieve me would be inconsistency with the Word of God. As far as I know this Book, I have endeavored, in my ministry, to preach

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 34 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1888), 364. Here after referred to as MTP with volume number, year, and page.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 4 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1856-1861 reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 337. Hereafter NPSP.

<sup>27</sup> Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: Banner of Truth, 1973) 9.

to you, not as a part of the truth, but the whole counsel of God; but I cannot harmonize it, nor am I anxious to do so. I am sure the truth is harmonious, and to my ear the harmony is clear enough; but I cannot give you a complete score of the music, or mark the harmonies on the gamut, I must leave the chief musician to do that.<sup>28</sup>

Spurgeon remained loyal to the “doctrines of grace” throughout all of his ministry. They were the core of his theology and he was fully committed to all five points. When the new Metropolitan Tabernacle opened on Thursday, April 11, 1861 five different preachers preached on the five themes of grace.<sup>29</sup> He once said in a letter, “Those doctrines are dear to us epitomizing and concentrating the theology of the Bible...”<sup>30</sup>

### III. CALVINISM VERSUS HYPER-CALVINISM

Many English Baptists of Spurgeon’s day made the same mistake that many make today. They make no distinction between a Calvinist and a Hyper-Calvinist. Spurgeon saw a distinct difference and considered Hyper-Calvinism an error and a doctrine which caused great damage. He called it a “soul destroying system which takes manhood from man and makes him no more responsible than an ox.”<sup>31</sup> From the outset of his ministry in London, Spurgeon knew there was a type of Calvinism popular in Baptist chapels different from his own. He wrote to his father in December 1853:

The London people are rather higher in Calvinism than I am; but I have succeeded in bringing one church to my own views, and will trust, with Divine assistance to do the same with another. I am a Calvinist; I love what someone called ‘glorious Calvinism’ but ‘Hyperism’ is too hot for my palate.<sup>32</sup>

Spurgeon became the pastor of New Park Street Baptist in London. This was the church where the famous John Gill pastored, who according

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<sup>28</sup> Spurgeon, *MTP*, vol. 52, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 635.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Iain Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (London: Banner of Truth, 1995), 155.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

to some was the originator of Hyper-Calvinism.<sup>33</sup> Spurgeon saw this system as having a destructive influence on missions and evangelism. He noted, "During the pastorate of my venerated predecessor, Dr. Gill, this Church, instead of increasing, gradually decreased... But mark this, from the day when Fuller, Carey, Sutcliffe, and others, met together to send out missionaries to India, the sun began to dawn of a gracious revival which is not over yet."<sup>34</sup> Of Gill Spurgeon added bluntly, "*The system of theology with which many identify his [Gill's] name has chilled many churches to their very soul, for it has lead them to omit the free invitations of the gospel, and to deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus.*"<sup>35</sup>

Spurgeon found himself excluded from fellowship with many Baptist ministers during his first year in south London because he, "was too low in doctrine for the Hyper-Calvinism friends."<sup>36</sup> The first serious attack on Spurgeon's preaching came from those who were Hyper-Calvinists. The controversy came as a result of comments made by the older and esteemed Baptist pastor James Wells. *Wells contended that the idea of all being called to faith in Christ as Spurgeon preached was "Fullerism,"* which was the "error" introduced among Baptists by Andrew Fuller (1754-1815).<sup>37</sup> *Although being called a Fullerrite was intended to be negative, Spurgeon took it as a compliment.* Spurgeon referred to Fuller as "that man of God."<sup>38</sup> *Spurgeon believed Fuller was correct when he asserted, "no writer of eminence can be named before the present century, who denied it to be the duty of men in general to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls."*<sup>39</sup>

Spurgeon was convinced from his own early readings of the Puritans that they were not supporters of the beliefs of Hyper-Calvinism. Spurgeon claimed, "I have all the Puritans with me—the whole of them

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<sup>33</sup> Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1999), 136.

<sup>34</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 120.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 67

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

<sup>38</sup> Spurgeon, *MTP*, Vol. 13, 719.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Fuller, *Defense of a Treatise Entitled the Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, quoted by J.W. Morris in *Memoirs of Andrew Fuller* (London, 1816), 263.

without a single exception.”<sup>40</sup> He called Hyper-Calvinism a false Calvinism saying, “*The Calvinism of some men is not the Calvinism of John Calvin, nor the Calvinism of the Puritans, much less the Christianity of God.*”<sup>41</sup> The English Baptists, however, were not convinced. A.C. Underwood said the controversy was due to Spurgeon’s “departure from unadulterated Calvinism.” He wrote:

The truth seems to be that old Calvinistic phrases were often on Spurgeon’s lips but the genuine Calvinistic meaning had gone out of them. This explains the attacks made upon him, as soon as he began his ministry in London by those who had never departed from an unadulterated Calvinism.<sup>42</sup>

The truth is Spurgeon learned the doctrines of grace from the Congregational roots of his father and grandfather. He was unaffected by the rise of Hyper-Calvinists from among English Baptists in the Eighteenth century. His preaching was an awakening of true Calvinism with the fires of evangelism. He was God’s tool to recapture the long lost passion of missions that Hyperism had buried. Spurgeon fought against this error and many of its foolish teachings. One example is a letter where he renounced the assertion that infants would not go to heaven as some Hyper-Calvinists taught and still teach.

I have never, at any time in my life, said, believed, or imagined that any infant, under any circumstances, would be cast into hell. I have always believed in the salvation of all infants, and I intensely detest the opinions which your opponent dared attribute to me. I do not believe that on this earth, there is a single professing Christian holding the damnation of infants; or if there be, he must be insane, or utterly ignorant of Christianity.<sup>43</sup>

Another reason Spurgeon rejected Hyper-Calvinism was that it rejected universal invitations and contended that the gospel addresses invitations to specific people (heavy laden, penitent). They made subjective experience a preliminary qualification in place of the objective com-

<sup>40</sup> Spurgeon, *MTP*, vol. 7, 148.

<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon, *NPSP*, vol. 5, 367-8.

<sup>42</sup> A.C. Underwood, *A History of The English Baptist* (London: Baptist Union Publications, 1947), 204.

<sup>43</sup> Ian H. Murray, *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Selected with Notes by Iain H. Murray* (London: Banner of Truth, 1992), 150.

mands and invitations of Scripture.<sup>44</sup> Spurgeon responded to this by saying, “*The message is not ‘wait for feelings’, it is ‘believe and live.’ I find Jesus Christ says nothing to sinners about waiting, but very much about coming.*”<sup>45</sup> Hyper-Calvinists contend that the ability to believe belongs only to the elect and that at the time determined by the Spirit of God. For a preacher to call all his hearers to immediate response of repentance and faith is to deny human depravity and sovereign grace. Spurgeon responded by going to the very heart of the debate, the issue of human responsibility. Spurgeon affirmed the truth that man is responsible. He believed in free agency which is not to be confused with free will. Although the Fall forfeited man’s ability to believe he did not lose his responsibility to obey.<sup>46</sup> *Spurgeon regarded an emphasis on man’s free agency as absolutely essential to true evangelism.* In a sermon titled “*The Sin of Unbelief*” he said:

I hold as firmly as any man living, that repentance and conversion are the work of the Holy Spirit, but I would sooner lose this hand, and both, than I would give up preaching that *it is the duty of men to repent and believe and that it is the duty of Christian ministers to say to them, ‘Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.’*<sup>47</sup>

Hyper-Calvinists asked him, “How can sinners be offered a salvation which Christ did not fulfill on their behalf?” Spurgeon set that question aside as something that God has chosen not to explain. It was enough for him that Christ offered himself to all and the Gospel is for “every creature.”<sup>48</sup> He believed the principle Moses gave very long ago in Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” The secret things are those mysteries which God has not required of any minister to explain. The things revealed are the clear invitations and commands given in Scripture. These commands are man’s responsibility. He resisted the fatalism taught by Hyper-Calvinists. In a sermon at the opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861 he said, “*If he be lost damnation is all*

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<sup>44</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 72.

<sup>45</sup> Spurgeon, *MTP*, Vol. 13, 196.

<sup>46</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Spurgeon, *NPSP*, Vol. 1, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 75.

*of man; but if he be saved, still salvation is all of God. Divine sovereignty is a great and indisputable fact, but human responsibility is quite as indisputable.”*

Spurgeon frequently showed the foolishness of a fatalistic approach. In a sermon on the Good Samaritan, he compared the priest who passed on the other side to a Hyper-Calvinist, “*they see the poor sinner, and they say, ‘he is not conscious of his need, we cannot invite him to Christ.’ ‘He is dead,’ they say, ‘it is of no use to preach to dead souls’ so they pass by on the other side.*”<sup>49</sup> In another sermon preached on Sunday Morning February 7, 1864, titled, “*Election No Discouragement to Seeking Souls*” he argued that the doctrine of election does not oppose the free invitations of the gospel.<sup>50</sup>

When a sinner is anxiously disturbed about his soul’s affairs, his chief and main thought should not be upon this subject [am I one of the elect?]; when a man would escape from wrath and attain to heaven, his first, his last, his middle thought should be the cross of Christ. As an awakened sinner, I have vastly less to do with the secret purpose of God, than with his revealed commands. For a man to say, ‘Thou commandest all men to repent, yet I will not repent, because I do not know that I am chosen to eternal life,’ is not only unreasonable, but exceedingly wicked...Do I therefore, when I am hungry, thrust my hands into my pockets and stand still, and refuse to help myself with the well loaded table, because I do not know whether God has decreed that the bread should nourish me or not? If I did, I should be an idiot or madman; or, if in my senses I should starve myself on such a pretense, I should deserve the burial of a suicide.<sup>51</sup>

Once upon an early occasion in his ministry at Tring, he had proclaimed that God answered his prayers before he was converted. Some Hyper-Calvinists in the audience took exception to the statement and quoted a text which they claimed was biblical, “The prayer of a sinner is an abomination to the Lord.” “How can a dead man pray?” they asked. A large group of interrogators surrounded him. Just then help arrived from an unexpected source.

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<sup>49</sup> Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 48.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Election* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1978), 79.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

A very old women in a red cloak managed to squeeze herself into the aisle, and turning to his accusers said: "What are you battling about with this young man? You said that God does not hear the prayers of unconverted people, that He hears no cry but that of his own children. What do you know about the Scriptures: Your precious passage is not in the Bible at all, but the Psalmist did say, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and the young ravens which cry.' Is there any grace in them? If God hears the cry of the ravens, don't you think He will hear the prayer of those who are made in His own image? You don't know anything at all about the matter, so leave the man alone, and let him go on with his Master's work."<sup>52</sup>

In a sermon on the text 1 Tim 2:3-4, Spurgeon disagreed with one notable expositor who explained away "all" to mean "all kinds." Spurgeon said he "applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it." Spurgeon contended that the Holy Spirit said "all" not "all kinds" and he meant it!<sup>53</sup> How then does Spurgeon explain the text, "who will have all men to be saved...?"

Does not the text mean that it is the wish of God that men should be saved? The word 'wish' gives as much force to the original as it really requires, and the passage should run thus- 'whose wish it is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.'<sup>54</sup>

How then does Spurgeon answer the question, "If God wishes all men to be saved, why doesn't he make it so?" Spurgeon replied that this is the great debate of all the ages. "I have never set up to be an explainer of all difficulties and have no desire to do so." He continued, "This is one of those things which we do not need to know."<sup>55</sup>

One can see then that Charles Spurgeon felt the Scriptures eminently trustworthy and he never placed reason above revelation. He felt himself in line with Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin in the doctrines of grace. On his first visit to Geneva he wore Calvin's robe and preached in Cal-

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<sup>52</sup> W.Y. Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1920), 103.

<sup>53</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 151.

<sup>54</sup> Spurgeon, *MTP*, vol. 26, 46-50.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

vin's pulpit in St. Pierre.<sup>56</sup> He embraced, however, what he called free agency or human responsibility as Day illustrated:

Once, in Leeds, he read and commented on Romans 9 and 10. Reaching verse 10:13, he said: "Dear me, how wonderfully like John Wesley the apostle talked! 'Whosoever?' Why, that is a Methodist word, is it not?" (Amens from the Methodist; frowns from Hypers!) "But (he proceeded) read verse 9:11 and see how wonderfully like John Calvin he (Paul) talked—'That the purpose of God according to the elect might stand.' (Amens and frowns change faces!) The fact is that the whole system of truth is neither here nor there. Be it ours to know what is scriptural in all systems, and accept it."<sup>57</sup>

#### IV. SPURGEON'S EVANGELISTIC PRACTICE

Spurgeon clearly recognized the vital relationship between theology and Christian ministry. He firmly believed that practical ministry should emerge out of basic theology. It comes then as no surprise that Spurgeon's ministry was one marked by fervent evangelism. The congregation of New Park Street Church was a small group of just over a hundred souls and basically people of lower middle class. They met in an auditorium that seated 1,200. David S. Smith wrote, "There is no doubt that Spurgeon had decided that evangelism was the order of the day."<sup>58</sup> At that time and at that place Spurgeon determined what course of action he was going to take: "The glory of God being our chief object we aim at it by seeking edification of saints and the salvation of sinners."<sup>59</sup> In just a few months the old church was too small to handle the crowds. The church rented Exeter Hall which seated 4,500; soon it was also too small. The church then rented the Surrey Music Hall, the largest auditorium in London. Soon 10,000 filled the Hall inside and another 10,000 waited outside. On October 7, 1857 Spurgeon preached in the Crystal Palace to

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<sup>56</sup> William R. Estep, "The Making of a Prophet: An Introduction to Charles Haddon Spurgeon," *Baptist History and Heritage* 4 (October 1984): 6.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Ellisworth Day, *The Shadow of the Brim* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1934), 144.

<sup>58</sup> David S. Smith, "Luther and Spurgeon: Purposeful Preachers," *Concordia Journal* 22 (January 1996): 40-41.

<sup>59</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1964), 49.



a congregation of 23,654 people.<sup>60</sup> Thousands were saved under the preaching of London's new Puritan preacher. The ministry of Spurgeon was marked by several evangelistic attributes.

#### A. EVANGELISTIC PASSION

Spurgeon believed like G. Campbell Morgan after him that a Pastor and a Bible teacher should have an evangelistic emphasis in their ministry.<sup>61</sup> No other preacher surpassed Spurgeon in a passion to see lost sinners repent. In this respect he has been compared to the evangelist George Whitefield. His heart yearned for conversions.

I remember when I have preached at different times in the country, and sometimes here, that my whole soul has agonized over men, every nerve of my body has been strained, and I could have wept my very being out of my eyes, and carried my whole frame away in a flood of tears if I could but win souls.<sup>62</sup>

Spurgeon took the task of preaching the gospel to the multitudes seriously. "Often, in coming down to this pulpit, have I felt my knees knock together, not that I am afraid of anyone of my learners, but I am thinking of that account which I must render to God whether I speak his Word faithfully or not."<sup>63</sup>

Spurgeon preached the gospel not only in the pulpit but also in personal, one-on-one encounters with the people of London. He commended the use of tracts.<sup>64</sup> He encouraged his people to be carrying the Gospel on Sundays. During his career he frequently arranged to have a group of members leave the Tabernacle to start a new church and often one of the prominent men of the Tabernacle went with them to provide leadership.<sup>65</sup> In one letter he encouraged the Men's Bible Class to win souls:

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<sup>60</sup> Estep, "The Making of a Prophet," 9-10.

<sup>61</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 127.

<sup>62</sup> Spurgeon, *MTP* 1898, 55.

<sup>63</sup> Darrell Amundsen, "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," *Christian History* (April 1991):23.

<sup>64</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 127-29. Hayden gives great illustrations of Spurgeon's personal witnessing encounters and his encouragement for the members of the Tabernacle to do likewise.

<sup>65</sup> Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, 137.

The more I suffer the more I cling to the gospel. It is true, and the fires only burn it into clearer certainty to my soul. I have lived on the gospel, and I can die on it. Never question it. Go on to win other souls. It is the only thing worth living for. God is much glorified by conversions, and therefore this should be the great object of life.<sup>66</sup>

Spurgeon would preach for conversions in his own pulpit. His sermons illustrated how to aim for salvation decisions. Albert Mohler wrote of his preaching, “But whatever the text—Old Testament or New Testament—Spurgeon would find his way to the gospel of the Savior on the cross. And that gospel was put forth with the full force of substitutionary atonement and with warnings of eternal punishment.”<sup>67</sup> On one occasion he challenged a discouraged preacher who was not seeing conversions, “Do you expect to have conversions every time you preach?” Spurgeon asked. “Of course not” the discouraged preacher responded. Spurgeon snapped back, “That’s why you don’t.”<sup>68</sup> Clearly, he had such confidence that the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation and would not fail. This seemed to be the fuel that ignited his fire. While some may get discouraged by assuming upon themselves the responsibility of salvation decisions, Spurgeon rested confidently in the purposes and power of God. That was his secret.

## B. EVANGELISTIC INVITATIONS

Spurgeon believed that gospel invitations were to be universal. The Hyper-Calvinists of his day believed the gospel was a means for the ingathering of God’s elect. Nothing should be said by way of encouraging individuals to believe that the promises of God are to them particularly. Spurgeon rejected such restrictions quoting Rev 22:17, “Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”<sup>69</sup> He would preach and give gospel appeals like a fervent Arminian Methodist.<sup>70</sup> Frequently, Spurgeon was heard to say, “I fear I am not a very good Calvinist be-

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<sup>66</sup> Murray, *Letters of Spurgeon*, 136.

<sup>67</sup> Albert Mohler, “A Bee-line to the Cross: The Preaching of Charles H. Spurgeon,” *Preaching* 8 (Nov-Dec 1992): 25.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 69-70.

<sup>70</sup> Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 618.

cause I pray that the Lord will save all of the elect and then elect some more.”<sup>71</sup> He proclaimed in a sermon:

I have preached here, you know it, invitations as free as those which proceeded from the lips of Master John Wesley. Van Armin himself, the founder of the Arminian school, could not more honestly have pleaded with the very vilest of the vile to come to Jesus than I have done. Have I therefore felt in my mind that there was a contradiction here? No, nothing of the kind;<sup>72</sup>

There have been those who contend that Spurgeon never gave a public invitation to come forward like most Baptist churches do today. Eric Hayden disagreed and provided ample evidence to the contrary. Hayden was a former pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle and his family attended there since the days of Spurgeon. Hayden argued that those who make such assertions argue from silence because there was never any indication from a printed sermon. He recalled, however, the stories told to him by his grandfather. Spurgeon would often request inquirers to go below to one of the basement lecture halls to be counseled by his elders. The very architecture of the Tabernacle having all the available floor space being taken by pews did not lend itself to hundreds coming forward.<sup>73</sup> Drummond wrote that Spurgeon did give invitations at times to come forward publicly like the Arminians did. In *The Sword and The Trowel* of 1865, it stated, “C.H. Spurgeon earnestly exhorted those who had accepted Christ as their Savior to come forward amongst his people and avow their attachment to his person and name...”<sup>74</sup> In another edition of *The Sword and The Trowel*, Spurgeon published a paper by a former student of his Pastor’s College entitled, “*How To Get at Enquirers.*” One method suggested was, “Request the anxious to remain in their seats while the rest leave...as there is often a reluctance to be seen walking up the aisle.” Spurgeon frequently did this urging his twenty or so elders to be “on watch for souls.” There was also an account of Spurgeon kneeling and praying with an inquirer in front of the Lecture Hall.<sup>75</sup> Spurgeon loved to quote John Bunyan’s invitation appeal:

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<sup>71</sup> Estep, “The Making of a Prophet,” 6.

<sup>72</sup> Spurgeon, *Election*, 80.

<sup>73</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 658.

<sup>75</sup> Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon*, 8.

‘Repent and be baptized every one of you,’ said Peter, -- one man might have stood up in the crowd and said, ‘But I helped to hound him to the cross!’ ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you.’ ‘But I drove the nails into his hands!’ saith one, ‘Every one of you,’ says Peter. ‘But I pierced his side.’ ‘Every one of you’ said Peter. ‘And I put my tongue into my cheek and stared at his nakedness and said, ‘If he be the Son of God let him come down from the cross!’ ‘Every one of you’ said Peter.<sup>76</sup>

It must be stated in fairness, however, Spurgeon did not use a public invitation and inquiry-room as a regular practice. Although he regarded these and other methods as valid ways of appealing to troubled souls, he did not want it to appear that it was a *necessary* part of evangelism. He believed strongly that sinners must deal *directly* with God once a preacher preached a clear gospel. “You have not very far to go to find him. Cover your eyes and breathe a prayer to him. Stand behind one of the columns outside or, get into the street and let your heart say, “Saviour, I want peace and peace I can never have till I have found thee.”<sup>77</sup>

Spurgeon’s Tabernacle did not have musical instruments and had no “song service” like churches practice today. The service included a simple order; Silent Meditation, Pastoral prayer, Hymn, Bible Reading, Long Prayer, Hymn, Sermon, and Benediction.<sup>78</sup> The spirit and vitality of the services were deeply impressive. Under the ministry of A.C. Dixon, the Arminian pastor, the song service with musical instruments and invitations as a regular practice was added.<sup>79</sup> Spurgeon feared the dangers of making such innovations a regular part of the services. He spoke to the students of his Pastor’s College Society of Evangelists about this trend; “In our revival services, it might be as well to vary our procedure. Sometimes shut up that inquiry-room. I have my fears about that

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<sup>76</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon vs. Hyper-Calvinism*, 75-6.

<sup>77</sup> Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 226-27. In the chapter *The Aftermath of the Metropolitan Tabernacle*, Murray describes the unfortunate innovations that were used in the Tabernacle after Spurgeon’s death. This was partly due to the influence that men like Finney (whom Spurgeon did not particularly admire) and Moody had on evangelicalism in that day. The chapter describes the men who followed Spurgeon and how these new “methods” crept into the services of the Tabernacle, mostly under the American A.C. Dixon.

<sup>78</sup> Drummond, *Prince of Preachers*, 372.

<sup>79</sup> Murray, *Forgotten Spurgeon*, 230-33.

institution if it be used in permanence, and as an inevitable part of the service.”<sup>80</sup> It is very doubtful that Spurgeon would approve of the innovations that one sees in the churches today. He spoke of this toward the end of his ministry. His words ring like that of a prophet.

Why is this? Whence this distaste for the ordinary services of the sanctuary? I believe that the answer, in some measure, lies in a direction little suspected. There has been a growing pandering to sensationalism; and, as this wretched appetite increases in fury the more it is gratified, it is at last found to be impossible to meet its demands. Those who have introduced all sorts of attractions into their services have themselves to blame if people forsake their more sober teachings, and demand more and more of the noisy and the singular. Like dram-drinking, the thirst for excitement grows. At first, the fiery spirit may be watered down; but the next draught of it must be stronger, and soon it is required to be overproof. The customary gin-drinker wants something stronger than the pure spirit, deadly though the draught may be. One said, as she tossed off her glass, ‘Do you call that gin? Why, I know a place where, for threepence, I can get a drink that will burn your very soul out!’ Yes, gin leads on to vitriol; and the sensational leads to the outrageous, if not to the blasphemous. I would condemn no one, but I confess that I feel deeply grieved at some of the inventions of modern mission work.<sup>81</sup>

### C. WINNING SOULS

Spurgeon clearly defined what it is to win a soul to Christ and what it is not. In his College Lectures to Sunday School teachers and students he preached a series of lectures on the business of soulwinning. According to Spurgeon soulwinning was not; stealing members out of another church, hurriedly inscribing more names upon our church rolls in order to show increase, nor merely to create excitement.<sup>82</sup> Soulwinning according to Spurgeon involved three key elements; the mind, the heart, and the will. Soulwinning is to instruct a man that he may know the truth of God, to impress him so that he may feel it, and they must be quick-

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Soulwinner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 15-20. These were the major points of Spurgeon’s sermon, *What Is It To Win A Soul?*

ened by the Holy Ghost so they may act upon the truth. The Holy Ghost must do the work of regeneration.<sup>83</sup> *What are the marks that a person has truly been regenerated? Spurgeon gives six—conviction of sin, a simple faith in Jesus Christ, unfeigned repentance of sin, a real changed life, true prayer, a willingness to obey the Lord in all His commands.*<sup>84</sup> It was a serious matter to Spurgeon to baptize and accept into the church someone who did not show good evidence of being saved.<sup>85</sup> In a letter Spurgeon wrote to a new convert, one sees how he viewed the matter:

My Dear Sir,

Your letters have given me great joy. I trust I see in you the marks of a son of God, and I earnestly pray that you may have the evidence within that you are born of God.

There is no reason why you should not be baptized. ‘If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.’ Think very seriously of it, for it is a solemn matter. Count the cost. You are now about to be buried to the world, and you may well say, ‘What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness.’

The friends who were with you in the days of your carnal pleasure will strive to entice you from Christ.; but I pray that the grace of God may be mightily manifest in you, keeping you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. I should like to see you on Thursday evening, after six o’clock, in the vestry.

I am,

Yours faithfully,  
C.H. Spurgeon<sup>86</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

The evangelistic fire of Spurgeon was not in spite of his Reformed soteriology; it was the result of it.<sup>87</sup> Spurgeon saw that the Gospel could

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>86</sup> Murray, *Letters of Spurgeon*, 70-71.

<sup>87</sup> Editor’s note: Clearly the author is speaking in light of Spurgeon’s brand of Calvinism, which is distinct from the hyper-Calvinism that is popular today.

not fail. It would accomplish the purpose God had intended from the foundation of the world. The Calvinism of Spurgeon was not “new” or “unique.” It was the correct application of revealed truth. There have been some who have taken an extreme approach to the doctrines of grace. That unbiblical, fatalistic attitude does do great damage to evangelism and missions, but that is not the correct application of the truth of the doctrines of grace. That was not the approach of Calvin, early Puritans, Andrew Fuller, William Carey and others who hold a biblical approach. Spurgeon believed the doctrine of Divine sovereignty but he also taught equally the truth of human responsibility. Salvation is all of the Lord, God does have an “elect” but believers are given a command to take the gospel to “every creature.” It is not the believer’s responsibility to know who will respond, the secret things belong to the Lord. It is the believer’s responsibility to obey the Great Commission, the thing which are revealed belong to us, that we might obey his laws and commands.

# DOES CHRIST OCCUPY DAVID'S THRONE NOW?

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus told the church of the Laodiceans, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame *and sat down with my Father on His throne* (Rev 3:21, italics added). Clearly Jesus is currently seated on a throne.

A controversy exists among Dispensationalists today concerning the throne on which Jesus is seated. Classic Dispensationalists say this is the Father’s throne, and that Jesus’ seating on His own throne (“My throne,” Rev 3:21) is yet future. The Davidic rule of the Son of God is not yet.

Progressive Dispensationalists (PDs), however, suggest that Jesus is already seated on the Davidic throne. In fact, PDs say that Jesus is currently ruling as the Davidic King.

In this paper we will consider the claims of both positions.

## II. A FUTURE-ONLY REALIZATION

The reality of the biblical promise of 2 Sam 7:14-16 is confirmed in the announcement by the angel Gabriel to Mary, recorded in Luke 1:31-33. In that affirmation, the angel assured Mary that Jesus would receive the throne of David, and that He would rule. As the incarnate ministry of Jesus Christ unfolded, the nearness of the kingdom was demonstrated, and yet sadly so too was its rejection by Israel. Matthew 19:28 is a focal passage, for it states: “And Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The implication of this text seems obvious; it will be in the regeneration (*palingenesis*, new world) that Christ *will sit* on His glorious throne, and this does not refer *in any sense*



to a present occupancy by the Lord Jesus Christ of the Davidic throne.<sup>1</sup> Possibly one of the most concise defenses of this “future only” realization is found in H. C. Thiessen’s book *Lectures in Systematic Theology*:

Under the figure of the nobleman, Christ is represented as going “to a distant country to receive a kingdom for Himself” (Luke 19:12). Just as Archelaus, on the death of his father Herod, had to go to Rome to have the kingdom confirmed to him before he could actually rule as king, so Christ had to return to heaven to receive the kingdom from the Father (Dan. 7:13f.). The kingdom was pledged to him by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:32f.), but it must not be overlooked that the Word says, “The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.” For this purpose he went back to heaven. But as with Archelaus, Christ did not establish his throne in the far country, but he will return to the scene from which he departed, and there set up his kingdom. Jesus is now seated, not upon David’s throne, but upon his Father’s throne (Rev. 3:21). The time will come when he shall sit upon his own throne (Matt. 19:28; 25:31). After he has thus come in glory, he will say to those on his right hand, “Come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).<sup>2</sup>

This analogy seems viable and realistic to this writer. Adherents of the “future only” realization of the Davidic promise do not deny the Lordship of Christ, and the fact that He is “the same, yesterday, today and forever.” As Charles Ryrie succinctly states:

Though He never ceases to be King and, of course, is King today as always, Christ is never designated as King of the church (Acts 17:7 and 1 Timothy 1:17 are no exceptions, and Revelation 15:3, “King of saints,” KJV, is “King of nations” in the critical texts). Though Christ is a King today, He does not rule as King. This awaits His second coming. Then the Davidic kingdom will be realized (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 19:15,

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: Another implication is that when Jesus rules, so will the apostles. If Jesus is ruling today from the throne of David, then the apostles are sitting on twelve thrones ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 363-64.

20). Then the Priest will sit on His throne, bringing to this earth the long-awaited Golden Age (Ps. 110).<sup>3</sup>

### III. PRESENT AND FUTURE REALIZATIONS: PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISTS

In recent years, some PDs have articulated exactly the opposite conclusion. PDs suggest that the Davidic covenant promise of rulership has already been fulfilled, and that Christ's present session in heaven involves His occupancy of the Davidic throne. There will also be a future reign on the earth in the millennial kingdom when the political aspects of the Davidic covenant will be fulfilled. Darrell Bock presented specific reasons why this position is advocated. A concise summary of this position is found as follows:

We need to note that the New Testament does indicate that the political aspects of Jesus' Davidic kingship will be fulfilled in the future. But earlier dispensationalists tended to miss the fact that in biblical theology, *the Davidic nature of Christ's present activity guarantees the fulfillment of all of the Davidic promise in the future, including the national and political dimensions of that promise.*<sup>4</sup>

A key to this position is the thought that Christ's present session in heaven is seen in the specific light of the promise to David. These basic reasons are offered as to the Davidic nature of Christ's present activity.

First, Acts 1:3 is cited. Bock reasons that the disciples were expecting the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6), and that kingdom was the Davidic kingdom. Jesus did not deny the validity of their inquiry, but affirmed that His rule is within the Father's control.

Second, several passages are cited in support of the concept that Christ's present activity in heaven is within the sphere of the Davidic covenant. These are Matthew 24; Acts 3:21; Rom 11:26; Heb 2:5; and 2 Tim 4:1.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 259.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 180.

Third, it is affirmed that Christ's present session in heaven is a Davidic blessing. And this is what the NT declares to have been granted to Jesus, Son of David.<sup>5</sup>

A line of evidence is given also for this position from Matt 28:18. Bock explains that those who object to the Davidic rule in heaven now as fulfillment of the Davidic covenant fail

...to understand the divine human unity of Christ's person, as well as how that unity fulfills the converging prophecies of divine messianic rule in the eschatological kingdom of God...Added to this is the fact that *His humanity is not generic*; He is a descendant of David who has been anointed, enthroned, and given "all authority in heaven and *on earth*" (Matt. 28:18). When he acts, He acts as the divine *and Davidic King*.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. EVALUATION OF BOTH VIEWS

In the opinion of this writer, the biblical evidence points clearly in the direction of the first view, namely, that the Davidic throne promises will be fulfilled in the future, and that Christ's present session in heaven does not represent rulership on the Davidic throne. A central passage that can be of help in this evaluation is found in Rom 1:3-4. The text states: "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

Notice closely that in the contrast between the two realms, the human nature of the Theanthropic person of the Lord Jesus Christ is from the line or seed of David. However, His human nature is a true human nature, and indeed *it is generic as well as Davidic* (in contradistinction from Bock's statement that Christ's humanity is not generic). The term "generic" simply means or describes an entity that relates to a whole group or class. The Lukan genealogy demonstrates our Lord's descent all the way back to Adam, the generic head of the human race. Historic orthodox Christology has articulated the miracle and mystery of the God-man, and orthodox theologians have defended the truth that Christ's

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 185-86.

human nature is genuine, an essential human nature, inherited from Adam, yet without sin in view of the miraculous conception and virgin birth.

The point of bringing this matter up at this juncture is immediately seen in the contrast between “the seed of David according to the flesh,” and “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness.” If ever there was a place to insert or to assume the concept that Christ was granted the throne of David at the ascension, it surely could have been here. Yet, the text itself shows that He is not declared Son of David, but Son of God with power. To be sure, this is an argument from silence. However, in this writer's opinion, it is highly significant that as seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, the term “Son of God” is the central and key term. John Murray captured the importance of this text as follows:

Thus, when we come back to the expression “according to the Spirit of holiness,” our inference is that it refers to that stage of pneumatic endowment upon which Jesus entered through his resurrection. The text, furthermore, expressly relates “Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness” with “the resurrection from the dead” and the appointment can be none other than that which came to be by the resurrection. The thought of verse 4 would then be that the lordship in which he was instated by the resurrection is one all-pervasively conditioned by pneumatic powers. The relative weakness of his pre-resurrection state, reflected on in verse 3, is contrasted with the triumphant power exhibited in his post-resurrection lordship. What is contrasted is not a phase in which Jesus is not the Son of God and another in which he is. He is the incarnate Son of God in both states, humiliation and exaltation, and to regard him as the Son of God in both states belongs to the essence of Paul's gospel as the gospel of god. But the pre-resurrection and post-resurrection states are compared and contrasted, and the contrast hinges on the investiture with power by which the latter is characterized.<sup>7</sup>

The present session of the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in the dignity of His presence at the right hand of the Father, waiting for the culmination of events in time-space history leading to His enthronement in fulfillment

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<sup>7</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959-65), 1:12.

of the Davidic Covenant in the Father's designated time. This does not in the least take away from Christ's authority, power, and sovereignty now.

The future fulfillment of the Davidic promise of kingly rule comes to full fruition in the Millennium. This is vividly described in Jer 23:5: "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth."

## V. CONCLUSION

The Lord Jesus is currently seated at the right hand of the Father on a throne. In this writer's opinion, He is seated *as the Son of God ascended and glorified*. He now awaits the triumph of His being seated on David's throne in the millennial kingdom. The Lord is in no sense sitting on the throne of David today. He is not currently ruling as the promised Davidic King.

It is profitable to ponder the significance of 2 Pet 3:13-14 in the light of future events. After stating truth about the coming day of God accompanied by events which are believed to be even following the Millennium (the destruction of the present earth), Peter urges believers with these words: "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless." This strong appeal to believers right now in the present church age is made, even in the light of events that, prophetically speaking, are in the distant future, even past the Millennium. The entire eschatological sweep forms a fitting basis for a holy life even at the present time. This vantage point puts discussions about the kingdom into a balanced and proper framework. It makes an urgent appeal to participants in discussions about these issues to keep balance, and to engage in the discussions with Christian courtesy and mutual respect, even amongst the differing viewpoint holders' concepts, thus fulfilling Rom 12:10: "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

# BOOK REVIEWS

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

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***Brothers, We are NOT Professionals.*** By John Piper. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002. 286 pp. Paper. \$14.99.

In an age when megachurches are marketed as the ministry model and pastors plaster their faces on billboards and books, it is helpful to be reminded that pastoral ministry and the CEO mindset do not mix. John Piper has provided such a reminder in his book, *Brothers, We are NOT Professionals*.

I love books on pastoral ministry almost as much as books on salvation. I try to read several of each every year. This past year, I got both subjects in this one book by John Piper. It includes not only his views on pastoral ministry, but his views on salvation as well. The former were refreshing; the latter shocking.

His chapters on Christian service (6), prayer (8), ministry priorities (10), and preaching (11 and 14) were excellent. Chapter 4 on justification by faith alone was typical Calvinist fare, but chapter 15, “Brothers, Save the Saints,” was rank and file Romanism.

In chapter 15, Piper shows that the “Puritans believed that without perseverance in the obedience of faith the result would be eternal destruction, not lesser sanctification” (p. 106). He says that “What is at stake on Sunday morning is not merely the upbuilding of the church but its eternal salvation (p. 106) and that “The salvation of our believing hearers is on the line” (p. 106).

Later, Piper reveals his belief that the salvation of the elect depends not just on their own perseverance, but on the perseverance of the pastor. “The eternal life of the elect hangs on the effectiveness of pastoral labors ... It is the job of a pastor to labor so that none of his brothers and sisters is destroyed” (p. 108). Pastors need to preach the Word so that the people grow, “because if they don’t grow, they perish” (p. 111).

Regarding eternal security, he says “It is a community project” (p. 110) and that “self-sufficiency and self-determination...will result in a tragic loss of eternal life, if there is no repentance” (p. 153).

Piper understands that some will accuse him of teaching justification by works. He says such accusations are a misinterpretation of what he is saying (p. 110). But there is no other way to interpret it. While there is a difference between justification and entering heaven, he bluntly states that no one will enter heaven unless they persevere in good works. Therefore, one gains entrance into heaven through a lifelong process of obedience and spiritual growth. He claims to be a Calvinist, but his views on salvation are closer to those of Catholics and Arminians.

Piper has a good grasp on pastoral ministry and for that, I highly value his book. But sadly, those who follow the beautiful music of Piper's preaching and writing are following the Pied Piper back to Rome.

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**Heaven.** By Randy Alcorn. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. 516 pp. Cloth, \$22.99.

The book's 476 pages are distributed over 46 chapters and two appendices. The depth of Alcorn's study is attested in 363 footnotes, a thirteen page subject index, and a helpful six page scripture index. A lengthy bibliography with 140 references shows the breadth of his research, but numerous helpful works have been omitted. The material is arranged into three parts; the first is devoted to a theology of heaven; the second is arranged as a series of questions and answers ("What will the resurrected earth be like?" "What will our lives be like?" etc.); and the third is a short homily of sorts about "Living in Light of Heaven." Two appendices, "Christoplatonism's False Assumptions" and "Literal and Figurative Interpretation" complete the work.

The book's tone is reminiscent of a chat between friends or of a Sunday school lesson. It is replete with illustrations, stories and anecdotes which by themselves make the book worth the cover price!

The title sets the stage for the intentional equivocation of important biblical terms. The reader soon discovers that the book is not about heaven, it is about the *kingdom of God on earth*. "The truth is, in our seminaries, churches, and families, we have given amazingly little attention to the place where we will live forever with Christ and his people—

the New Earth, in the new universe. This eternal Heaven is the central subject of this book” (p. xv). These two sentences suggest that heaven and the New Earth are identical, and that both refer to our eschatological destiny. This equivocation of terms is carried throughout the book, and therein lays the problem.

He understands that the kingdom of God, not the heavenly realm, is our ultimate destiny. He displays his understanding of this distinction when he writes: “The answer to the question, Will we live in Heaven forever? depends on what we mean by Heaven. Will we be with the LORD forever? Absolutely. Will we always be with him in exactly the same place that Heaven is now? No. In the intermediate Heaven, we’ll be in Christ’s presence, and we’ll be joyful, but we’ll be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and permanent relocation to the New Earth” (p. 42).

The author is aware of the difficulty posed by his equivocation and attempts to deal with the issue by arbitrarily restricting the term heaven to one of its several fields of meaning: “Some would argue that the New Earth shouldn’t be called Heaven. But it seems clear to me that if God’s special dwelling place is by definition Heaven, and we’re told that the ‘dwelling of God’ will be with mankind on Earth, then Heaven and the New Earth will essentially be the same place” (p. 45).

Throughout the book one finds provocative arguments in favor of a New Earth that is in many ways similar to this Earth. “If we can’t imagine our present Earth without rivers, mountains, trees, and flowers, then why would we try to imagine the New Earth without these features? We wouldn’t expect a non-Earth to have mountains and rivers. But God doesn’t promise us a non-Earth. He promises us a *New Earth*. If the word *Earth* in this phrase means anything, it means that we can expect to find earthly things there—including atmosphere, mountains, water, trees, people, houses—even cities, buildings and streets. (These familiar features are specifically mentioned in Revelation 21-22)” (p. 79).

Free Grace adherents will be happy to note that the author recognizes that our rule in the kingdom of God will be a reward for meritorious service in this life. “All of us will have some responsibility in which we serve God. Scripture teaches that our service for him now on Earth will be evaluated to help determine how we’ll serve him on the New Earth. The humble servant will be put in charge of much, whereas the one who lords it over others in the present world will have power taken away... If



we serve faithfully on the present Earth, God will give us permanent management positions on the New Earth” (p. 212).

A major flaw with this book is its bewildering presentation of the gospel. Free Grace adherents will be troubled by Alcorn’s explanation of what is required for eschatological salvation. Proverbs 28:13 “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy,” is cited as proof that “if we want to be forgiven, we must recognize and repent of our sins” (p. 34). Later he writes, “Do not merely assume that you are a Christian and are going to Heaven. Make the conscious decision to accept Christ’s sacrificial death on your behalf. When you choose to accept Christ and surrender control of your life to him, you can be certain that your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (p. 36).

He is right to admonish the readers that they not simply assume their eternal destiny, but he confuses them by indicating that only those who “surrender control of [their lives]” can be sure that their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

He finishes his presentation of the gospel with a question to the reader: “Have you confessed your sins? asked Christ to forgive you? placed your faith in Christ’s death and resurrection on your behalf? asked Jesus to be your LORD and empower you to follow him?” (p. 36). It is an inescapable conclusion that Alcorn has conflated discipleship with eschatological salvation and has obscured the Gospel in the process.

In summary it seems fair to say that Alcorn’s presentation of the gospel is laced with misquoted texts, peppered with unbiblical qualifications, and fails to convey the simple message of “salvation by faith alone in Jesus alone.” Free Grace adherents who recommend this book will need to issue a strong *caveat*.

In spite of the equivocation of important terms and the flawed gospel, there is much to commend this book for pastoral purposes, if it is read carefully and critically. It helps us visualize life in the kingdom of God as a space-mass-time universe in which the conditions established during the Creation are restored. Our eternal destiny is not disconnected from our present experience, but is an eternal enjoyment of a future world that is imperfectly reflected in this present one.

The detailed Scripture and Subject indices make the volume useful for sermon preparation, enabling one to quickly locate wonderful illustrations for preaching and teaching purposes. Part II is a compendium of

questions often encountered in pulpit and counseling ministry; the answers may prove valuable if used with discernment.

In conclusion, the book's confused gospel, equivocation of important biblical terms, and numerous instances of inaccurate exegesis—none of which have been touched on in this review—make this book unsuitable for a general audience. Although there is value in the book, it must be read with great care. It will prove a useful addition to your personal library but you should exercise great caution when recommending it for the general Christian audience. It does not belong in the hands of the undiscerning.

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*The Assurance of Things Hoped for: A Theology of Christian Faith.* By Avery Dulles. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 299 pp. Paper. \$14.95.

What a fascinating book this is. Avery Dulles, a well-known and highly respected Roman Catholic theologian, presents a Catholic view of saving faith that is in places quite similar to that of Reformed Lordship Salvation.

He goes through church history and shows what different theologians have said. He discusses Calvin's view that assurance is of the essence of saving faith, yet without using that precise expression (p. 47).

Infant baptism and the issue of whether babies in some sense receive faith when they are baptized (he says they do, pp. 241-42), is also discussed.

Chapter 14, entitled, "Concluding Synthesis," is worth the price of the book. Here Dulles reviews all of his findings in the book. Here are some of his conclusions: "Faith in the theological sense...is a self-surrender to God" (p. 274). "Although not reducible to belief, faith includes belief as a fundamental and essential ingredient" (p. 276). "Faith is obscure. It lays hold of its object not directly but through signs and testimonies that present the object only in partial and inadequate ways" (p. 277). "The saving plan of God includes mysteries that are to some degree impenetrable by the human mind" (p. 277). "Faith sets the be-

liever on the path to eternal life” (p. 279). “Eternal life will be the lot of those who believe, who strive to put their faith into practice, and who persevere in faith to the end” (p. 279).

Those are just a few example of a host of references that pastors and Bible study teachers can use to show that for many today, saving faith is unknowable and that the Roman Catholic view of faith is, in many of its expressions, identical to that of Calvinists who hold to Lordship Salvation.

How sad it is that most people in most churches, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, view faith as surrender to God and something which will gain us eternal life if we keep on living the surrendered life to the end.

I highly recommend this book for any person who is well grounded in the truth of the gospel and who interested in the nature of saving faith, or in Roman Catholicism and Lordship Salvation.

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***How Firm a Foundation: The Dispensations in the Light of the Divine Covenants.*** By Hal Harless. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004. 318 pp. \$73.95

Hal Harless has done a nice piece of work by making an original contribution to the current scholarly debate between covenantal and dispensational theologians.

As a dispensationalist Harless' main concern in both camps is that, “Covenant theology is guilty of creating covenants [i.e., ‘covenant of works’ and ‘covenant of grace,’] for which there is no solid biblical basis” and of (p. 55) being “too restrictive in limiting God’s purpose to salvation alone” (p. 278). He correctly concludes, “*The salvific and revelatory purposes of God are but components of His doxological purpose,*” which is the central theme of Scripture (italics original, p. 278). Equally so, he fairly concludes: “On the other hand dispensationalists tend to slight the covenants. To be sure, dispensationalists do not deny the biblical covenants. Nevertheless, they do tend to ignore them” (p. 55). He further adds, “Dispensationalism is to be criticized in that it has not clearly, consistently, and unequivocally asserted the divine covenants as the basis of God’s governing arrangements” (p. 278; see also pp. 55-58).

Thus, he clarifies between both camps that, “It seems clear to me that the revelation from God and the code of conduct during a dispensation consists of the aggregate of the covenantal stipulations in effect at that time. Therefore, rather than a dispensation being the administration of *a particular covenant*, as the covenant theologian would say, a dispensation is an administration of *all of the covenant stipulations in force* at the time” (italics original, pp. 57-58).

He seeks to prove his thesis by first describing the nature of the term “covenant” in light of the ancient Near East “defined as *a solemn unilateral obligation made binding by an oath*” (italics original, p. 12). Harless notes three different types of covenants: the grant covenant is unconditional and the parity and suzerainty covenants are conditional in nature (pp. 12-13).

A thorough discussion follows of the eight biblical covenants: the Edenic, Adamic, and Mosaic Covenants as descriptive of the suzerainty conditional covenants and the Noahic, Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New Covenants as descriptive of the grant unconditional covenants (pp. 69-194). He discusses each of these covenants carefully by showing its duration of establishment, its beneficiaries and stipulations. He then treats in detailed form how each of these covenants contain continuity and discontinuity in each of the seven discernable dispensations of Innocence, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace and Kingdom (pp. 221-65).

Beside numerous helpful charts found throughout the book showing a synthesis to help the reader grasp detailed concepts explained in each chapter, I found his comment (in agreement with Chafer and Ryrie) in distinguishing a dispensation and age very helpful. “Since the Church is not the distinguishable means of divine administration during the dispensation of grace, the dispensation of grace need not end immediately after the rapture. Thus, the tribulation falls within the dispensation of grace.... There appears to be confusion in this matter between dispensations and ages. These are related but not synonymous terms. A dispensation is a distinguishable economy that describes the manner in which God is managing the world. An age is a period of time that may or may not be associated with a dispensation. In this case, both the Church age and the tribulation fall within the dispensation of grace” (see pp. 257-58).

JOTGES readers will also be pleased to see how Harless answer the all too common accusation of covenant theologians that dispensationalists teach two ways of salvation: “Dispensations are not ways of salva-

tion. Salvation has always been by grace, through faith, and based on Christ's atonement either past or future" (p. 229).

Harless concludes his book with a helpful summary of the conclusions of each chapter leading to his main thesis: "What is required is a covenantal dispensationalism. Since covenant theology has commandeered the term 'covenant' many would consider 'dispensational covenant theology' or 'covenant dispensationalism' oxymorons. Ultimately, these distinctions stem from a false dichotomy. The Scriptures are both covenantal and dispensational. *Covenants prescribe and dispensations describe the structure of the progressive revelation of God's plan for the ages.* God's administration of humankind is founded upon the bedrock of His covenant promises" (p. 279). In another place Harless clarifies that, "what God is administering and man is responsible for are the covenantal stipulations that have been instituted at any given point. Dispensations are descriptive and the divine covenants are prescriptive. Therefore, the dispensations are covenantally driven" (p. 221).

This book will help one build a structure by which to hang biblical details in its proper place and interpret the Bible accordingly in its proper dispensation by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). I strongly recommend this well written and documented book to the serious Bible student. Sit back and engage your mind in getting to know the deeper truths of God's Word by reading this book. You won't regret it!

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***How Good is Good Enough?*** By Andy Stanley. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003. 92 pp. Cloth. \$9.99

Andy Stanley's small evangelistic book takes readers on an intellectual quest. Instead of telling them what to believe, with proof texts, he leads them to draw the logical conclusion that no one enters heaven by being good—only by being forgiven.

In his 92-page book, which can be read in an hour or two, Stanley refers to major religions and debunks the universally held belief that good people make it. By means of logic, anecdote, sarcasm, and even shock statements, he leads readers to consider the fallacies of trusting in their own sense of right and wrong, or even in God's supposed standard, the

Ten Commandments. He stops the reader in his tracks when he says that the most surprising obstacle to the *good-people-go* view is that Jesus did not believe it! Jesus drove religious leaders crazy by telling people their sins were forgiven. He reinterpreted Jewish laws and told the Pharisees they weren't good enough. Then he assured the outcasts of society that they had a place in heaven. Go figure!

Stanley does his version of the "Liar, Lunatic, or Lord" scenario by proving that Jesus either deceived us, He was deceived, His disciples made it up after He left, or He was truly the once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

Finally, Stanley confronts the issue of God being fair. After showing readers their guilt before God, he convinces them they do not want fairness, which would give them what they deserve. God goes beyond fair to give us grace and mercy rather than justice. This is possible only because Jesus got what He didn't deserve.

The final destination for Stanley's readers will lead them to conclude that the "whosoever" of John 3:16 includes everyone who is willing. He says, "Believing in him is the only requirement. Believing means placing one's trust in the fact that Jesus is who he claimed to be and that his death accomplished what he claimed it accomplished...what matters is that you are no longer trusting in what you have done, or will do, to get you to heaven."

The book is a non-threatening and non-ethnocentric evangelistic tool, probably suited to older teens and up. It targets academically minded people, although numerous relevant illustrations simplify it and keep the reader's attention. Best of all, Stanley adds no works to faith. He includes a "sample prayer" as a way of expressing gratitude to God, but states that "saying a prayer won't make you a Christian. Placing your faith in Christ as your savior makes you a Christian."

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***The Gospel Driven Man.*** By Ralph "Yankee" Arnold. Hull, GA: Send the Light, 2005. 200 pp. Paper. \$12.95.

Ralph "Yankee" Arnold is a man who has a passion for clarity in Evangelism. He is a graduate of Florida Bible College from back in its

glory days. He has pastored and founded and taught at a Christian School and Bible College.

This book has sixteen chapters with titles such as *Salvation Means Having Eternal Life* (3), *Faith without Works* (9), *Lordship Salvation* (10), *Repentance* (11), *Confession before Men* (12), *Water Baptism* (13), and *Keeping the Gospel Clear* (16).

There is much in this book that *JOTGES* readers will like. Arnold repeatedly stresses the freeness of the gift, the eternity of eternal life, and the passive simplicity of faith in Christ. His discussion of faith without works is consistent with that of Dillow, Hodges, and other Free Grace proponents (pp. 138-46).

He urges readers not to use fuzzy evangelistic appeals such as inviting Christ into your heart (pp. 179-88). He opposes Lordship Salvation and anything that confuses faith alone in Christ alone as the sole condition of eternal life.

*JOTGES* readers may be slightly uncomfortable with his treatment of Rom 10:9-14 (pp. 166-70). While he doesn't suggest that confession is a condition of eternal life, he also doesn't see it as a condition for salvation from escaping God's wrath in this life. Rather, he sees it as a way in which we manifest before men that we are born again.

However, when he earlier discussed Matt 10:32-33, he indicated that confessing Christ was a condition of eternal rewards (pp. 163-66). Therefore, while many might not agree with his view of Rom 10:9-14, they nonetheless will agree with his position on Matt 10:32-33 and the issue of eternal rewards.

Arnold says that "repentance is necessary for salvation" (p. 154), and he defines repentance as a change of mind, not as turning from sins (p. 154ff.). As I did in my doctoral dissertation, he argues that repentance is a synonym for faith in Christ when it refers to unbelievers and that is a call to service when it refers to believers (p. 154). While I have since repented of my view of repentance—I no longer believe it ever is given as a condition of eternal life, I certainly find the change-of-mind view to be consistent with the Free Grace gospel.

The typesetting of this book might bother some. There is much use of **bold type**, as well as a fair amount of using both **BOLD AND ALL CAPS**. This is a bit distracting.

While this book does not have much in the way of detailed exegesis, it is filled with passion and abiding love for the Savior and His pure gospel. There is much to like here.

Many in the Free Grace camp have been influenced by Florida Bible College and by Yankee Arnold. They will be delighted by this book. For those who are not familiar with Yankee Arnold, this book would be a nice addition to their Free Grace library.

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, and Documented.***

By David N. Steele; Curtis C. Thomas; S. Lance Quinn. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004. 247 pp. Paper, \$12.99.

I'll admit it—I've been corrected by the Calvinists. As I read this book, I made notes and prepared my review, and was planning to blast the book. But then I read Appendix A, and so decided to write a kinder, gentler review. Appendix A is entitled, "A Kinder, Gentler Calvinism." I figured that if Calvinists can learn to be gracious toward those who disagree, I should return the favor with this review. Every Calvinist should read this appendix. But not just Calvinists; every Free Grace advocate should read it as well, substituting in "Free Grace theology" every time "Calvinism" is mentioned. The worst testimony to Free Grace theology is ungracious advocates. We must speak the truth, but do so in love (Eph 4:15).

Of course, since this is a book review, I do have to be somewhat critical, but will try to be kinder and gentler than originally planned. If I seem over-critical at times, I apologize. All I can say is, "You should have seen the first draft."

Speaking of first drafts, my first criticism is that Appendix A, though calling for a kinder, gentler Calvinism, should have called for honesty as well. The Appendix critically quotes Laurence Vance's 1991 edition of *The Other Side of Calvinism*. Though anything published is technically "fair game," academic honesty requires that when a book is quoted, only the most recent edition is referenced. If an earlier edition is referenced, as in this appendix, the later edition must at least be mentioned in the footnote. This is not quibbling over details, because the appendix labels the book as a "bitter tirade...[which] moves beyond intellectual debate [and



is] downright nasty” (p. 144). While that was somewhat true of the first edition (I have read both), the revised 1999 edition is a much kinder, gentler, intellectually honest, exegetical refutation of Calvinism. The two quotes given as examples of this “bitter tirade” are not found in the new edition (that I could find anyway).

So proper research and academic honesty is not Calvinism’s strong suit. And that about sums up the book. When it attempts to define the theology of James Arminius and his followers, only Calvinists are quoted. Then they write that the theology of the Arminians was condemned by Church councils as heretical, but fail to mention that the Synod of Dort, which condemned Arminius, was a Calvinistic council. No Arminians were allowed in. I am not an Arminian, but it doesn’t seem like they are getting a fair trial.

Following this condemnation of Arminians, the book attempts a Biblical defense of Calvinism (pp. 18-71). Their defense consists in taking one point at a time, explaining the point under consideration, and then listing multitudes of verses which they believe supports their view. There is never any exegesis of those verses. Sometimes a phrase or two in a particular verse is in italics for emphasis. Such a practice is not Biblically or intellectually honest. It gives the unaware reader the idea that Calvinism must be true because of all the verses it can quote. But having lots of verses does not make a view correct. All cults, heresies, isms—even Satan—can practice this tactic. The verses which supposedly support Calvinism have more than one interpretation, and I am personally convinced that none of them, properly understood, teach what Calvinists claim. The list is a good source for Calvinistic proof texts, but other than that, has very little value.

The longest regular section of the book is the Documentation section. It is devoted to providing an annotated bibliography on all the best and most popular Calvinistic books (pp. 78-138). If you’re looking for more Calvinistic reading, here’s the place to start.

The afterword was written by John MacArthur, in which he says that “the ‘five points’ are nothing more or less than what the Bible teaches. The doctrines of grace and divine sovereignty are the very lifeblood of the full and free salvation promised in the gospel” (p. 139). If anyone has wondered where John MacArthur stood, wonder no longer—he is a five-point Calvinist.

The rest of the Calvinism Defined, Defended and Documented is what I view as a digression. A full 100 pages is devoted to a common

feature in Calvinistic books—a hodgepodge of appendices. I have already commented on one, but a few others bear critique as well. Appendix B, “Perseverance and Preservation” was interesting, particularly, the following quote: “We have a responsibility to persevere in the faith to the end (striving after holiness), and if we do not hold out, we have no basis for assurance that God is preserving us” (p. 149). This is an amazing admission from a Calvinist, that according to their theology, good works are necessary to make it to heaven. I know they say that such good works “prove” their salvation, rather than provide it, but if two Calvinists have faith, and only one perseveres in good works, which one makes it to heaven? The one with good works. Therefore, what is the distinguishing characteristic of those who make it to heaven? Not faith in Christ, but faithfulness to Christ.

Later, in Appendix E, we are introduced to some “Pitfalls Peculiar to Calvinists.” The first one listed is pride. We are told that “Calvinists too frequently look down their noses at their non-Reformed brothers in Christ. We place ourselves above them. We are the elite; we know more about the deep mysteries than they do. What good men we are. All such attitudes are proud” (p. 193). I heartily agree with this statement, for I have been on both sides. When I was a Calvinist, I smugly looked down my nose at other less-informed Christians. Now that I am not a Calvinist, I frequently get treated with disdain by Calvinists. And I still struggle with such theological pride. Who doesn’t? Even those who claim to have no theological convictions are proud of such a stance. So this appendix was a good reminder. Let us all watch out for pride.

But the Calvinist must be especially careful. Biblically, pride is at the root of all sin and is one of the worst offenses against the sovereignty and holiness of God (Prov 6:16-17; 16:5; 21:4). If pride is a trait most Calvinists struggle with, and if pride is one of the worst sins, then by their own theology of perseverance, no Calvinist will make it to heaven who habitually struggles with pride. My heart aches for Calvinists who struggle with such a dilemma. There would be a lot less confusion if only they would see that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, and all these struggles with sin and temptation relate to our sanctification and eternal reward.

A few of the other appendices had interesting information, but little of interest to *JOTGES* issues. If you are looking for a book which lists all the verses raised in the defense of Calvinism, this is a good book. If you

want explanations of how they use these verses to defend their theology, you will have to look elsewhere.

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