

Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
“Faith Alone in Christ Alone”

VOLUME 29

Autumn 2016

NUMBER 57

The Healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), Part 2

Editor

3-15

**Does Free Grace Theology Diminish the Gospel? A
Review of Wayne Grudem’s, “Free Grace” Theology: 5
Ways It Diminishes the Gospel, Part 1**

Robert N. Wilkin

17-34

Gordon H. Clark and Assurance

Shawn C. Lazar

35-48

**The Perseverance of the Saints? Identifying Augustine’s
Influence on Evangelical Views of Apostasy**

Everett Berry

49-62

**The Promise of Everlasting Life in Paul’s First Recorded
Sermon (Acts 13:14-41)**

Zane C. Hodges

63-76

Book Reviews

77-97

Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
Published Semiannually by GES

Editor

Kenneth W. Yates

Associate Editors

Robert N. Wilkin

Shawn C. Lazar

Layout

Shawn C. Lazar

Manuscripts, book reviews, and other communications should be addressed to GES, Director of Publications, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202 or submissions@faithalone.org.

Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202 or email ges@faithalone.org. Subscription Rates: single copy, \$9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, \$18.50; 2 years, \$35.00; 3 years, \$49.50; 4 years, \$62.00; \$13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add \$4.00 for US shipping. And \$4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and \$8.50 per year for all other international shipping. New subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25; gift subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25.

Purpose: Grace Evangelical Society was formed “to promote the clear proclamation of God’s free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship.”

Statement of Faith: “Jesus Christ, God incarnate, paid the full penalty for man’s sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in the risen Christ as his or her only hope of heaven, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life which, once granted, can never be lost.”

Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

©2016 Grace Evangelical Society

ISBN: 978-1-943399-14-7

THE HEALING OF BARTIMAEUS (MARK 10:46-52), PART 2

KENNETH YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

In Part 1, I argued that Mark's so-called discipleship section (Mark 8:22–10:52) is addressed to believers. The section begins and ends with the healing of two different blind men. Both men are a picture of the disciples. The disciples were believers. They had eternal life. But they were still blind. They needed their eyes opened as to the costs of following Jesus. Jesus teaches them about those costs in the discipleship section of Mark.¹ All of this indicates that there is a difference between being a believer in Jesus Christ, and thus having eternal life, and being a follower or disciple of Jesus.

In Part 2, I will argue that Bartimaeus is a picture of what a disciple is. A disciple is one who understands what it means to follow Christ, and where that path leads.

The account of the healing of Bartimaeus can be broken down into two sections. The first section is Bartimaeus' call to the Lord (vv 46-48). The second is the Lord's call to Bartimaeus (vv 49-52).

II. BARTIMAEUS' CALL TO THE LORD (MARK 10:46-48)

In Part 1, I argued that Bartimaeus is a picture of a believer *before* he is healed. The fact that his name is given in the account strongly suggests that he was known to the early church. He knew that Jesus was the Christ, and in vv 46-48 he twice calls Jesus by the Messianic title "Son of David." But believers also need to see what following Jesus means.²

¹ Kenneth Yates, "The Healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), Part 1," *JOTGES* (Spring 2016).

² *Ibid.*

But these verses do not just deal with Bartimaeus' spiritual condition (i.e., that he was a believer). They also are part of the picture of what a disciple is. A translation would be helpful in discussing these issues:

And they came to Jericho. And as He was going out from Jericho, along with His disciples and a large crowd, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind man begging, was sitting by the road.

And having heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and to say, "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me."

And many were rebuking him, in order that he might be silenced. But he cried out much more, "Son of David, have mercy on me" (vv 46-48).

A. THE PERSISTENCE OF BARTIMAEUS

As pointed out in part one of this two-part article, many have noted that the actual miracle of the healing of Bartimaeus is not what is emphasized in this account. Instead, a major emphasis is on the character of Bartimaeus.³ A positive character trait of the blind beggar is his *persistence*.

We are told in v 46 that Jesus came to Jericho. The healing takes place when Jesus was coming out of the city.

The problem, however, is that Luke says that the healing took place as the Lord *was approaching* (*en tō engizein auton*) Jericho (Luke 18:35). As will be discussed later, this makes it appear that Mark may have redacted the account in order to make a theological point about discipleship.

A number of solutions have been offered for the supposed discrepancy. Lenski suggests that Luke's account has to take into account that the Lord, after leaving the city, went back into Jericho due to His meeting with Zacchaeus, and that the healing of Bartimaeus occurred as the Lord went back into Jericho *after* leaving it.⁴ Porter seems to support this

³ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 491; Paul J. Achtemeier, "And He Followed Him: Miracles and Discipleship in Mark 10:46-52," *Semeia* 11 (1978): 115.

⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Mark's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946), 468.

view by saying that the verb used by Luke simply means “in the vicinity of” and speaks of location, not movement.⁵

Plummer offers the idea that there were two healings. Jesus healed one blind man when He entered Jericho and another one (Bartimaeus) when He left.⁶ A very common view is that there were two cities named Jericho, an old one and a new one, and that Bartimaeus was healed between them. France, however, points out that both cities were occupied in the first century and were about a mile apart. It is unlikely that both would be called by the same name.⁷

Calvin and Hodges appear to have a better solution. Both say that Bartimaeus was sitting at the exit of the city and heard the noise of the crowd that was following Jesus when He *entered* into the city. Bartimaeus tried to get the Lord’s attention and began to cry out when he heard the uproar, not knowing when the Lord would pass by him. He kept crying out until the Lord reached him as He left the city.⁸

This seems to be the preferred solution for at least two reasons. The account in Mark shows all the evidence of an eyewitness. The name of the blind man is specified. Mark records in great detail how Bartimaeus refers to Jesus. There is, as we shall see, vividness in describing the actions of Bartimaeus in the following verses as well. An eyewitness would have not only known all these details, he would have known where Bartimaeus was located at the time.

This solution to the “problem” shows the persistent faith of Bartimaeus. He heard the coming of the Lord, while Jesus was on the other side of the city, and he kept yelling even though he could not see where the Lord was or when He would pass by. In fact, he was not sure the Lord would even come by him. He wanted to be in the presence of the Lord. He had to ask a bystander what all the noise meant. When he found out he did not relent in his quest.

⁵ Stanley E. Porter, “Luke 18:35 in the Light of Its Synoptic Parallels,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992): 104.

⁶ Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), 429-30.

⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 421.

⁸ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels of Matthew Mark and Luke*, trans. T. L. Parker, vol. 2, ed. D. W. Torrence (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 278; Zane C. Hodges, “The Blind Men at Jericho,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 33, no. 2 (1965): 327-29.

The people want Bartimaeus to be silent, but not because he has called Jesus the Son of David. Bartimaeus, as a blind beggar, is a nuisance. They do not feel that he merits the attention of One so important.⁹ We are reminded that a similar thing occurred in another teaching moment in the discipleship section of Mark when the disciples rebuked those who brought children to Jesus because children did not merit His attention (10:13).¹⁰

Nothing, however, can stop Bartimaeus. The fact that he could not see when Jesus passed by him did not stop him. Now, the crowds cannot stop him. His lowly social status cannot stop him either. He continues to “cry” out “much more.” The verb is in the imperfect and reflects a continuous crying out. He continues to cry out the whole time Jesus is passing through the city, until He reaches Bartimaeus on the other side. His faith in Christ is consistent, fearless, and overcomes the obstacles placed in front of him.¹¹ Bartimaeus, in the face of opposition, publicly calls Jesus the Son of David—the Messiah—a second time.

Such persistent faith is important when one discusses the topic of discipleship. Such a picture of faith would be expected in a section of what discipleship means. It also provides an illustration of discipleship.

B. JERICHO AND DISCIPLESHIP

The city of Jericho is important in the discussion of discipleship for a number of reasons. Throughout this section of Mark, the Lord has been on His way to Jerusalem (10:32). Jericho, approximately 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem, was the last major city before He reached His destination. He was about to complete His journey.¹²

Even though Jericho was the last major city, the trip was not over. It would still be an arduous task to arrive. Jericho was 840 feet below sea level and Jerusalem was 3500 above sea level. Edwards calls the walk

⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Cambridge Greek Commentary, ed. C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972), 345; Darrell L. Bock, *The Gospel of Mark*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tydale House, 2002), 495.

¹⁰ Adelo Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 510.

¹¹ J. F. Williams, “Other Followers of Jesus: The Characterization of the Individual from the Crowd in Mark’s Gospel” (PhD diss., Marquette, 1992), 234.

¹² Stein, *Mark*, 493.

from Jericho to Jerusalem 15 “tortuous” miles.¹³ If somebody was going to follow Jesus on the “road” to Jerusalem from Jericho, he could expect a difficult road. As Jesus teaches throughout the section of discipleship, that is what the disciple will indeed experience.

The combination of Jesus and Jericho reminds the reader of the OT “Jesus” (Joshua) and Jericho. Bartimaeus will experience the salvation of regaining his sight from Jesus just as Joshua brought salvation to the Jews at Jericho many years earlier.¹⁴ The reminder of Joshua, the Jews, and the battle at Jericho also remind the readers that the Jews engaged in warfare. Discipleship is like warfare.

As mentioned above, Bartimaeus meets the Lord as He is leaving Jericho. If there is a connection between Jesus going to Jerusalem and discipleship, the fact that the Lord was going out of Jericho towards Jerusalem fits Mark’s theme better than if the Lord was approaching Jericho when this healing took place. The next stop for the Lord is the city where He will lay down His life for others. A disciple needs to follow Him there.

C. JESUS THE NAZARENE

In v 47 we are told that Bartimaeus is told that Jesus is a “Nazarene.” This is the One Bartimaeus calls out for. Lenski feels the title “Nazarene” is neither derogatory nor an honor. It simply distinguishes this Jesus from others since it was a common name.¹⁵

However, there is at least the possibility the title is negative in Mark. He only uses it in three other places. In two of those places there may be negative connotations. In Mark 14:67, Peter is questioned by a girl when he denied the Lord. The girl calls Jesus “the Nazarene Jesus,” and places the designation in the emphatic position (“*Kai su meta tou Nazarēnou Iēsou ēstha*”). She and her companions did not have a high view of Jesus as He was on trial for blasphemy. The denial of Peter also shows a failure in discipleship that occurred when a follower of the Lord did not want to be associated with “the Nazarene.”

¹³ James R Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New Pillar Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 329.

¹⁴ John N. Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation: Bartimaeus and Christian Discipleship,” *JTSA* 74 (1991): 58.

¹⁵ Lenski, *The Interpretation of Mark’s Gospel*, 469.

A second occurrence of the word *Nazarene* is at the end of the Gospel of Mark. The angel at the tomb identifies the Lord as the Nazarene that was crucified. There was a strong negative stigma attached to being crucified. All throughout 8:27–10:45 Jesus says to follow Him on the road to crucifixion. Discipleship is difficult because following Christ leads to a cross. It was a Nazarene that was nailed to the cross.

It is difficult to determine if there is a negative connotation with the third occurrence of the word in Mark, but even there it is a possibility. Demons state that Jesus is a Nazarene (Mark 1:24).

Outside of Mark, we see at least one instance where Nazareth has a negative connotation. When told by Philip that the Messiah was a man who came from Nazareth, Nathanael said, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

Peter did not want to be associated with a Nazarene. Bartimaeus did. Nathanael wondered if anything good could come from that place. Bartimaeus publicly proclaimed that the Messiah Himself came from there.

In the first part of this pericope, Bartimaeus calls out to the Lord. In vv 49-52 Mark tells of Jesus’ call and encounter with Bartimaeus and his response to that encounter.

III. THE LORD’S CALL AND ENCOUNTER WITH BARTIMAEUS (MARK 10:49-52)

The following is a translation of this call and encounter:

And Jesus, after stopping, said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man saying to him, “Be cheerful,¹⁶ rise up, he is calling you.”

And casting aside his outer garment,¹⁷ he jumped up and came to Jesus.

¹⁶ The verb only occurs in the imperative in the NT. Perhaps it can be translated “do not be afraid” (i.e. that He has not heard you). Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), 352.

¹⁷ The word can mean either the inner or outer garment. The context makes it clear that it refers to the outer, and not the inner. *Ibid.*, 376.

And Jesus answered him and said, “What do you want me to do¹⁸ for you?” And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, let me receive my sight.”¹⁹

And Jesus said to him, “Go, your faith has saved you.” And immediately he gained sight, and was following him on the road (vv 49-52).

The persistent faith of Bartimaeus does not escape the notice of the Lord. Not only is there no rebuke from the Lord when Bartimaeus calls Him the “Son of David,” but He notices the blind man *because* he calls Him by that title.²⁰ He then calls Bartimaeus to Himself.

A. THE CALL OF THE LORD

In v 49, France points out that it is significant that Christ stops on the road to Jerusalem. At this point in the Gospel He is near His destination. In 10:32, He was leading the way to Jerusalem. He has set His face on the city and the picture is one of destiny and resolve to get there.²¹ However, even though He is determined to reach Jerusalem He stops at the cries of this blind man.

The verb *phōneō* (to call) occurs three times in the verse. Jesus calls for Bartimaeus. The verb probably suggests discipleship. The Lord called the disciples to Him in 9:35 (in the discipleship section) to teach an important truth about discipleship. Although a different verb is used, Jesus called four of the twelve in 1:16-20 to follow Him and the same thing could be said of Levi in 2:14.²² In 8:34, the Lord called the crowds to follow Him, not just the twelve. Bartimaeus is an example of the fact that Christ opens discipleship to all people.²³

¹⁸ *Poiēsō* is in the future indicative (and not the subjunctive), and is used for volitive expressions following *thelō*. This is a common expression in classical Greek. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1961), 185.

¹⁹ This is the imperatival use of *hina*. W. G. Morrice, “The Imperatival Hina,” *Bible Translator* 23 (1972): 327. Also see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 228.

²⁰ I. V. Olekama, *The Healing of Bartimaeus in the Markan Context* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999), 71.

²¹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 424.

²² Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 190.

²³ Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), 143.

The crowd tells Bartimaeus to be glad. This imperatival verb is only found on the lips of Jesus in the Synoptics, except for here. In the other instances, a miracle occurs (Matt 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50). It is always associated with good news.²⁴ This anticipates a favorable outcome of the meeting between Jesus and Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus is told that Jesus is calling him. His response is both emotional and vivid.

B. THE RESPONSE OF BARTIMAEUS

Mark is the only Synoptic Gospel that describes the physical activities of Bartimaeus when the Lord calls him. He casts aside his outer garment and jumps up. Culpepper says that the mention of the garment by Mark has symbolic significance and relates to discipleship.²⁵

The outer garment would have been a very valuable possession for Bartimaeus. In the OT, such a piece of clothing was important for a poor person (cf., Exod 22:26-27; Deut 24:12-13). As a beggar, it would have been used to collect alms and would represent his means of livelihood.²⁶

Bartimaeus was either wearing the garment or had it spread before him as a means of collecting the money for which he begged.²⁷ If the former, he cast it aside so that nothing would impede him in his quest of getting to Jesus as it might get entangled in his legs. If the latter, he threw it aside with whatever money was in it. Either way, it showed an eagerness to get to the Lord.²⁸ As a blind person, we can picture him stumbling as he “came to Jesus.”

The casting aside of the garment is a picture of leaving what is valuable to follow the Lord. In Mark, including in the discipleship section, the Lord called for those who followed Him to leave things behind (1:18, 20; 2:14; 10:21, 28).²⁹ After Jesus’ first prediction of His death to the disciples, He told them that if they were to follow Him they needed to forsake their lives (Mark 8:35).

Olekama comments that the actions of Bartimaeus picture the reckless response of Bartimaeus to the call of Christ. He sees a parallel with

²⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:2–16:20*, 132.

²⁵ R. A. Culpepper, “Why Mention the Garment,” *JBL* 101 (1982): 132.

²⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*, 141.

²⁷ Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 133.

²⁸ Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 510.

²⁹ Culpepper, “Why Mention the Garment,” 131-32.

the woman at the well in John 4 who leaves the water pot behind when she went into the city to tell others about Christ.³⁰ The woman did this after she had believed that Jesus was the Messiah. If Mark is emphasizing discipleship in this section of the Gospel, it would explain why he included the mention of the garment when Matthew and Luke did not.

C. THE REQUEST OF THE LORD AND THE REQUEST OF BARTIMAEUS

Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants from Him. The question immediately reminds us of the same question that the Lord asked James and John a few verses earlier (10:36).³¹ The response of James and John and the rebuke by the Lord that follows James and John's answer show that Bartimaeus is an example in contrast. The Lord does not rebuke Bartimaeus. James and John did not know what following the Lord entailed. Bartimaeus, however, wanted his sight with the result that once he obtained it he immediately follows the Lord to Jerusalem.³²

The verb *thelō* used by the Lord in His question seems to indicate a connection between this healing and discipleship. It is used extensively in the longer section of 8:22–10:52 concerning instruction of discipleship (8:34-35; 9:35; 10:35-36; 43-44).

The Lord's question to Bartimaeus is also a demonstration of the fact that He is a servant.³³ He had just spoken of the fact that He came to serve others (10:45). Jesus, as the Son of David, stops to meet the need of a lowly beggar who was in need of mercy. The King reaches out to him. He puts into practice what He had just taught about discipleship. A disciple is a servant and Jesus is the Servant par excellence.

Bartimaeus asks to be healed of his blindness. He addresses the Lord by the rare title of Rabboni. Edwards points out that the title is seldom used in the extant Jewish literature to refer to a human, and frequently was used as an address to God in prayer.³⁴ This literature, however, is much later than the time of Christ. The word occurs in John 20:16 where the interpretation of the word is given. It means "teacher." While it may carry with it a slightly more respectful tone, there is little difference

³⁰ Olekama, *The Healing of Bartimaeus in the Markan Context*, 82.

³¹ Stein, *Mark*, 496; Williams, "Other Followers of Jesus: The Characterization of the Individual from the Crowd in Mark's Gospel," 235.

³² Vernon K. Robbins, "The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus," *JBL* 92 (1973): 231.

³³ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 131.

³⁴ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 331.

between it and the variant “rabbi.” Even though it does not indicate that Bartimaeus recognized Jesus’ Deity, it did signify that Bartimaeus recognized in Christ a teacher and somebody to be respected. The title intimated a master/disciple relationship, which fits into Mark’s purpose nicely. Bartimaeus not only recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, he recognizes that he himself is the Lord’s disciple.³⁵

D. THE MIRACLE AND AFTERMATH

In v 52 the Lord tells Bartimaeus to *hupage* (“go” or “go your way”) and that his faith has “saved” him (made him well). The Lord had told others to go after experiencing a healing before in Mark (1:44; 2:11; 5:19, 34; 7:29). However, as we shall see in the last part of this verse, Bartimaeus is different than others who have been healed.

It seems clear that the verb *sōzō* has a dual meaning. Bartimaeus certainly experienced physical salvation in this healing. But there is a spiritual deliverance here as well.³⁶

Bartimaeus, because he believes that Jesus is the Messiah, has received eternal life. Earlier in the chapter, in 10:26, the verb “saved” is used in this sense. In addition, immediately before the account of Bartimaeus, Jesus had taught about His substitutionary atonement (10:45).³⁷ But there is another aspect of salvation. Once a person has eternal life, as Bartimaeus did, he can enter into the privilege of discipleship. This is how Edwards and Best see the salvation spoken of here.³⁸ It certainly fits the context. That is the whole point of Mark 8:22–10:52. Bartimaeus had been saved from a life lived on the “side of the road” as an outcast. He could now pick up a cross and follow Christ and experience the salvation of his very life—a life of true meaning (Mark 8:35).

As mentioned above, the actual healing is briefly stated. The healing confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Son of David.³⁹ This is true even

³⁵ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 424; Achtemeier, “And He Followed Him: Miracles and Discipleship in Mark 10:46-52,” 124; Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 346.

³⁶ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament (Sheffield, 1981), 141; Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 331; E. S. Johnson Jr., “Mark 10:46-52: Blind Bartimaeus,” *CBQ* 113 (1978): 200.

³⁷ Stein, *Mark*, 489.

³⁸ Best, *Following Jesus*, 141; Edwards, *Mark*, 331. Neither Best nor Edwards makes the clear distinction between discipleship and eternal salvation that is made in this present article.

³⁹ Olekama, *The Healing of Bartimaeus in the Markan Context*, 73.

though He was near Jerusalem, the place where He would suffer and die. The important point for Mark, however, is that after Bartimaeus was healed, he followed (*ēklouthēi*) Jesus on the road (*en tē hodō*). Both the verb and the prepositional phrase describe Christian discipleship in Mark (1:2-3, 18; 2:14-15; 6:1; 8:27, 34; 9:33-34, 38; 10:21, 28, 32).⁴⁰

France points out the very important point that the entire phrase is prominently placed at the end of the pericope and concludes the whole section of Mark on discipleship. Discipleship is the central theme of 8:22–10:52. Mark is the only Synoptic to mention the road.⁴¹ The road, of course, is the way of suffering and rejection that leads to Jerusalem (8:27, 34; 10:32). The uniqueness of Bartimaeus is seen in the fact that Jesus had told others to “go” after being healed in Mark, but Bartimaeus alone “follows” Him on the “road.”

The verb “to follow” here also suggests the ongoing nature of discipleship. It is in the imperfect tense. We could take it as an ingressive imperfect, which would mean that Bartimaeus has begun his ongoing journey of discipleship.⁴² When one looks at the ongoing journey of the twelve disciples in Mark, with all their failures, the verb reminds all would-be disciples that it is an ongoing process.

Just as the verb *sōzō* had a dual meaning, so does the verb *anablepō* (“to see”). Clearly Bartimaeus now sees physically. But he also “sees” metaphorically as it relates to discipleship and following Christ. He is a picture of one that follows Christ on the road of suffering and to the cross. Before receiving his sight, Bartimaeus was *by* the road, now he is *on* it with the Lord.⁴³ He is one who “sees” and follows Christ on that road in contrast to the partial blindness of the disciples that was described at the beginning of the section on discipleship. The previous healing of the blind man at Bethsaida was also a metaphorical picture of the disciples (8:22-25).⁴⁴ Bartimaeus, in leaving everything behind to follow Jesus, does what the Lord said a believer must do if they would follow Him (Mark 8:34ff).

⁴⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 142.

⁴¹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 425.

⁴² Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation: Bartimaeus and Christian Discipleship,” 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁴ Best, *Following Jesus*, 141.

IV. CONCLUSION

The account of the healing of Bartimaeus occupies a critical place in the Gospel of Mark. It occurs immediately before the entrance of the Lord into Jerusalem where He will undergo His crucifixion. It also concludes a long section on discipleship, forming an inclusio with the healing of another blind man that began the section (8:22–10:52).

The initial healing of the blind man is a picture of the partial blindness of the disciples. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, but he and the other disciples are blind to what it means to follow Him, even though they are believers. The Lord teaches the disciples that following Him involves hardship and suffering. Throughout the whole section, however, the disciples fail to understand.

Bartimaeus is a foil for the disciples.⁴⁵ He too proclaims that Jesus is the Christ with the title “Son of David,” which he cries out twice. He “sees” clearly, and does not need a two-stage healing as the previous blind man. He follows Christ on the “road” to Jerusalem. He becomes a picture of those who take up their cross and follow Him in spite of the difficulties and cost.

From the beginning, it was difficult for Bartimaeus to follow the Lord. He left behind his valuable outer garment. He had to overcome many obstacles. He could not see when the Lord passed him by, so he had to keep crying out. He had to overcome the attempts of the crowd to silence him. He was a lowly beggar that by human standards had no business bothering the Son of David. It is possible that we could add that he did not mind being associated with a Nazarene and any stigma that might be attached to it. He was not ashamed to follow Him on the path He was on (8:38). He willingly followed Christ on the tortuous uphill road from Jericho to Jerusalem. Edwards is correct when he says that Bartimaeus is the sum and center of all that Mark desires to convey about discipleship.⁴⁶

The reader is invited to emulate Bartimaeus. In 8:34, Christ had opened up the opportunity for anybody to take up their cross and follow Him on the road to Jerusalem. Discipleship is not limited to the twelve.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as a Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 130.

⁴⁶ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 411.

⁴⁷ Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation: Bartimaeus and Christian Discipleship,” 29.

As Christ nears Jerusalem, Bartimaeus is one that affirms that the One who is to die on the cross is indeed the Messiah, the Son of David. This is a major thrust on discipleship in the Gospel of Mark with its three predictions of the crucifixion after Peter's confession of Christ in chapter eight. In the section from 8:22–10:52, Bartimaeus provides the picture of what it means to be a disciple and where the road of discipleship leads to in chapters 11–16.

From all of this it is clear that there is a difference between salvation and discipleship. Eternal life is given as a free gift through faith in Jesus as the Christ who gives it. Discipleship involves extreme costs. One must be humble, take up his cross, and give up his life.

The disciples fail repeatedly on the "road" of discipleship even though they have eternal life. This failure continues even after Jesus reaches Jerusalem. During the Passion Week, they desert Him. But at the end of the book He meets them in Galilee. This is where His ministry started. They will have the opportunity to follow Him in spite of their previous blindness and failures.

How appropriate that Mark's Gospel talks about discipleship and uses two blind men to illustrate it. The disciples were "blind." They did not know what following Christ involved. And there is a blindness among many believers today on the subject as well.

Most Christians today have never been taught discipleship truths. They do not see a difference between being a believer and being a disciple. They have never been taught that being a disciple is very costly but has nothing to do with receiving eternal life. It has everything to do with rewards. Throughout the section on discipleship Jesus spoke about these rewards (8:35; 9:35; 10:21, 29-31, 44). Many Christians today need to have their eyes opened, just like the original disciples did. Bartimaeus is a great illustration for all of us.

DOES FREE GRACE THEOLOGY DIMINISH THE GOSPEL? A REVIEW OF WAYNE GRUDEM'S, "*FREE GRACE*" *THEOLOGY: 5 WAYS IT DIMINISHES THE GOSPEL*, PART 1

BOB WILKIN

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Wayne Grudem, professor of theology and Biblical studies at Phoenix Seminary, is the author of an influential and best-selling book on systematic theology.¹ He has written over twenty books, including books on a Biblical view of politics, Biblical manhood and womanhood,² Christian feminism, the gender-neutral Bible translation controversy, the gift of prophecy, a commentary on 1 Peter, and many more. Now, Grudem has decided to discuss the question of Free Grace Theology (hereafter, FGT) in "*Free Grace*" *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (hereafter, *5 Ways*).³ I am delighted that he has done so. This book calls attention to our views and to our writings. However, Grudem has done a poor job of presenting and refuting FGT.

This article will consist of two parts. In Part 1, I will consider his first two chapters. In Part 2 (Spring 2017), I will deal with Chapters 3–5.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994).

² He is the cofounder and past president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

³ Wayne Grudem, "*Free Grace*" *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

II. GRUDEM CLAIMS HE DOES NOT BELIEVE IN LORDSHIP SALVATION

Early in the introduction, Grudem takes pains to say that he does not like the label *Lordship Salvation*. He goes beyond that, however, saying, “I hope that no reviewer of this book will refer to my position as the ‘Lordship Salvation’ position, for I explicitly disavow that label as misleading and confusing” (p. 25). He prefers to call his position “the ‘historic Protestant’ position” or “the ‘non-Free Grace’ position” (p. 25).

The reason why he doesn’t like the label of Lordship Salvation seems to be two-fold. Both sides agree that Jesus is Lord over all of our lives and the Lordship Salvation side admits that “our submission to Christ’s lordship is imperfect in this life” (p. 23). And he thinks that the Lordship Salvation label implies “that it is an unusual or minority view that seeks to add the idea of lordship to the ordinary idea of salvation” (p. 23).

The fact that this book was endorsed by several of the biggest advocates of Lordship Salvation—including Drs. John MacArthur and J. I. Packer—suggests that the views he advocates in this book are indeed the views of Lordship Salvation.

Despite his protests, Lordship Salvation accurately describes Grudem’s views. Thus, rather than referring to his view as *the historic Protestant position* or as *the non-Free Grace position*, I will stick with a title that is well-known and well-understood today.

III. CHAPTER 1: FGT DIMINISHES THE GOSPEL BY BEING INCONSISTENT WITH THE VIEWS OF MOST PROTESTANTS

This chapter is off topic. As Hillary Clinton famously said, “What difference does it make?” Even if FGT is inconsistent with the view of most Protestants on what one must do to be saved, that would not prove anything.

Oliver Crisp says that the “confessions of the past...are theological guides. However, they too must be subjected to the Word of God anew each generation...Sometimes they will be found wanting. So it seems that there is reason to think that the reforming task is an ongoing one.”⁴

⁴ Oliver D. Crisp, *Saving Calvinism: Expanding the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 44.

In addition, what Grudem actually says is ineffective in proving that the Reformers agreed with him.

Grudem's first point in Chapter 1 is that Protestants since the Reformation have taught that truly born-again people will persevere in faith and good works until death. He tries to support this view by quotes from people from the 16th to the 20th century, yet the quotes fail to prove his point.

He opens with two quotes from Calvin, which simply suggests that all who are born again will produce *some good works*. Neither quote defends perseverance.

The Formula of Concord (1576), the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571), the Westminster Confession (1646), and the New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) are cited next. Once again, the quotes do not discuss the perseverance of the saints. They merely say that born again people will produce acts of charity and hope.

His final citations from Wesley (1703-1791) and the Assembly of God Statement of Fundamental Truths (1916) again link regeneration and works, but fail to discuss the issue of perseverance.

FGT teaches that regeneration does result in some good works in all who live some length of time after the new birth. (Obviously if someone died at the very moment of the new birth there would be no time for any good works to be done.) Indeed, I would go so far as to say that there has not been a single *unbeliever* who ever lived who failed to produce some good works (Isa 64:6; Acts 10:35). The righteous deeds of unbelievers like Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8; cf. 11:14) have no *merit* with God—they are like filthy rags before God, who is perfect—but they are still good works. Why? Because even the unregenerate still have the image of God within them. It was marred by the Fall of Adam or Eve, but the image of God was not destroyed.

Grudem showed too little with his citations. He could have found many quotes, especially from modern Calvinists, who say that all who are truly born again will persevere in faith and good works until death. But he did not.

Even if we were to grant Grudem's argument that all the Reformers taught the regenerate persevere in faith and good works until death, that still does not establish that justification by faith alone, apart from works, is a doctrine that diminishes the gospel.

Moreover, Grudem fails to show that a single Reformer said that one needs “heartfelt trust” in Christ to be born again. Nor does he show a single Reformer who said that one must submit to the Lordship of Christ to be born again. Nor were any quotes given about the need for a “personal encounter” with Christ.

Grudem’s second point is a non-sequitur. That is, it doesn’t follow from what he showed under his first point. His second point is: “Therefore, the Free Grace movement today is not upholding the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*, or ‘justification by faith alone’” (p. 32).

The quotes he gave do not show that.

In addition, Grudem fails to cite even one Free Grace person who says anything that contradicts what he had just quoted. If he wishes to make a claim like this, then he needs to cite Free Grace writers or speakers and show how they contradict justification by faith alone.

Illustrations can help clarify what an author means. Grudem gives us a helpful illustration of a key ring with four different keys on it (p. 37). According to Grudem, the blue key opens his office door, but that the blue key is never found by itself, and is never alone from the other three keys. His point is that saving faith is likewise, never found by itself. It is always accompanied by other things like repentance and good works.

I do not think the illustration is very successful. The blue key is never alone? Surely the four keys were each cut separately and then put on his key ring. So they were alone at the start. In addition, his illustration fails since the blue key works if detached from the ring. I have many keys on my key ring and I sometimes take one off and I find it always works just as well alone as it did with the other keys nearby.

At the moment of the new birth is faith already attached to good works? If so, that would mean that good works are a necessary precursor to the new birth. If not, then at the moment one is born again faith is indeed alone, apart from works.

Maybe Grudem believes that at the exact moment of the new birth a number of good works spontaneously occur. But he does not say this or try to prove it from Scripture. Even so, these good works would still follow faith, even if only by a nanosecond.

Grudem admits that born-again people sin and that the works of believers are not always exemplary. In Grudem’s view believers might go days or weeks or months or years without having a life that is characterized by good works. But how can that be if his illustration is correct

and the key is never found by itself? If a believer had even one minute where an abundance of good works were not joined with his faith, then his faith would be proven false, and he would be proven unregenerate because saving faith is never alone.

Maybe what Grudem means is that good works are joined with saving faith *much of the time*. Of course, that does not fit his illustration which says faith is never found by itself. But even if that is what he means, then how much time can occur without a life overflowing with evident good works before the person should conclude he is not really born again? Grudem will address this question in the third chapter, but the answer is far from reassuring.

Grudem's final point in Chapter 1 is that justification by faith alone is an important doctrine. No argument there. He concludes the chapter by saying that the real question is what the NT teaches that saving faith is. Agreed. But, as we shall see in Chapter 4, his view of saving faith is not found in the NT at all.

IV. CHAPTER 2: FGT DIMINISHES THE GOSPEL BY NOT PREACHING FAITH PLUS REPENTANCE

I wrote my doctoral dissertation at Dallas Seminary (1985) on repentance and salvation.⁵ Thirteen years later I changed my view of repentance.⁶ In reading what Grudem writes, it does not appear that he has given this as much thought as he should have. His discussion of NT texts that speak of repentance reflects an inadequate attention to the contexts. *In fact, in most cases he does not discuss the texts at all!* He simply quotes them and moves on.

A. REPENTANCE IN SUMMARIES OF THE GOSPEL

Grudem's first point in Chapter 2 is that, "Repentance from sin [is] in many summaries of the gospel" (p. 41). What would you do if you

⁵ Robert N. Wilkin, *Repentance as a Condition for Salvation in the New Testament*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985. Six articles in *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* summarize my findings and can be found at faithalone.org/journal.

⁶ Robert N. Wilkin, "Does Your Mind Need Changing? Repentance Reconsidered," *JOTGES* (Spring 1998): 35-46.

wanted to prove that? You would go to passages that you think deal with what one must do to be born again—if that is what you mean by “the gospel”—which Grudem does. Then you would show the reader that the passages indeed concern the new birth, and not something else. Then you would show that repentance is mentioned as a condition of everlasting life in some or many of these “summaries of the gospel.”

Grudem did not do any of that. He did not establish that a single passage he cites is explaining what one must do to be saved. Not one.

His first passage is Heb 6:1. However, this verse is written to born-again people (Heb 6:4-5). The mention of “repentance from dead works” concerns the works of the Mosaic Law. The believing Jewish readers were being challenged by false teachers to return to animal sacrifices for their salvation from eternal condemnation. The works of the Law are dead works. The readers had to turn from those works as part of the foundation of their Christian experience. Now, it appears, they need to be reminded of that.

The issue is Heb 6:1 has nothing to do with what one must do to be born again.⁷

Grudem’s second proof text is Luke 24:47, the Great Commission passage in Luke. As in the Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20, where baptizing and discipleship are said to be the work of the disciples, the Lucan passage concerns more than evangelism. Grudem says, “This is Jesus’s summary, after his resurrection, of the gospel message that his disciples would proclaim throughout the world” (p. 43). But that is an imposition on the text. Where is the call to believe? Does Grudem think that faith in Christ does not need to be in the Lord’s summary of the gospel? Where is the promise of everlasting life? Again, it is not in the Lord’s summary according to the author.

Grudem makes a claim that is not supported by the text. Simply claiming that this is an evangelistic text is a far cry from showing that it is.

Charles R. Erdman’s comment on Luke 24:44-49 is helpful:

The Scriptures [vv 44-45: the Law, the prophets, the Psalms] contain authoritative messages concerning Christ; these messages can be understood only by those who

⁷ See J. Paul Tanner, “Hebrews,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1051-56; Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament Edition (NP: Victor Books, 1983), 792-97.

believe in Christ and are guided by him; the essential truths concerning Christ center in the facts of his death and resurrection [v 46]; *in virtue of the salvation thus secured, repentance and forgiveness of sins can be preached...* (emphasis added).⁸

The Church of Christ's favorite verse is Acts 2:38. They use it to support their idea that there are five conditions of everlasting life: believe; obey; confess; repent; and be baptized. In their view, Acts 2:38 teaches no one can be born again apart from baptism and that lifelong ongoing repentance (as well as confession, belief, and obedience) is needed to retain everlasting life, since in their view it can be lost. This verse supposedly has the last two of those five conditions.

It amazes me that Grudem would use Acts 2:38 as his third proof text. He gives no discussion of the text other than to note that "faith is not even named in this verse," which is a major problem for his view. However, there is no explanation given.

It is clear that the listeners believed before they asked, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).⁹ Note that earlier in Acts 2:37 Luke says, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart..." What they had just heard is that when they crucified Jesus they crucified "both Lord and Christ [Messiah]." They believed in Jesus at that point, but they wanted to know what they should do since they now realized that they had taken part in killing the Messiah. Peter told them that in order to receive the Holy Spirit and receive the [fellowship] forgiveness of sins, they had to repent and be baptized. The issue here is discipleship, not justification.

Lanny Thomas Tanton, a former Church of Christ minister, later went to Dallas Theological Seminary and wrote his master's thesis on Acts 2:38. He shows that in Acts the reception of the Spirit and the forgiveness of sins often occurred *after the new birth*.¹⁰

Grudem focuses on the word *repent*, but ignores the conjoined command to be baptized. That is more than an exegetical lapse. It is reading

⁸ Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1966), 256.

⁹ See Zane C. Hodges, *Harmony with God: A Fresh Look at Repentance* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 2001), 102.

¹⁰ For a journal article in which he laid out his view of Acts 2:38, see Lanny Thomas Tanton, "The Gospel and Water Baptism: A Study of Acts 2:38," *JOTGES* (Spring 1990): 27-52. It is available online at <https://faithalone.org/journal/1990i/Acts2-38.html>.

his theology into the text and ignoring anything that contradicts his position.

Are we to understand from Grudem that baptism is a condition of everlasting life? If not, why not?

Next up are Acts 3:19 and 5:31, corporate re-offers of the kingdom to national Israel, not calls for individuals to be born again. Amazingly, Grudem gives no explanation at all.

Then the author cites Acts 11:18 and gives a half-hearted effort at explanation. Grudem says that “repentance that leads to life” means “repentance that leads to everlasting life.” But even if Peter’s companions meant that “repentance leads to *everlasting* life” as Grudem suggests, that does not make it a condition. Prayer, church attendance, and Bible study lead to everlasting life too, but they are not conditions of the new birth.

Most likely, Peter’s companions meant that repentance leads to extended *physical* life. Repentance is routinely linked to physical life (Luke 13:3, 5; 2 Pet 3:9). This comment by Hodges is on the mark:

Secondly, if we thought that the reference in Acts 11:18 *was* a reference to *eternal* life, then we are left with a surprising and implausible idea in this context. We must infer in that case that the Jerusalem Christians just now realized that Gentiles could be eternally *saved*! But this is so unlikely as to be almost fantastic (emphases his).¹¹

Grudem fails to mention that when Peter summarizes what happened when he evangelized Cornelius and his household, he says nothing about repentance. He only mentions *believing* in Acts 15:7-11 at the Jerusalem Council. And if Grudem were to look at what Peter said in Acts 10:43, he spoke of *believing in Jesus*, not repentance.

Space doesn’t permit discussion of his final four proof texts: Acts 17:30-31; 20:21; 26:19-20; and 2 Pet 3:9. However, none of those texts mentions everlasting life, salvation, or justification. Indeed 2 Pet 3:9 refers to premature physical death (compare 2 Pet 3:6) as the consequence for not repenting.¹²

¹¹ Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 117. His entire discussion (pp. 117-19) is worth examining.

¹² For more information on 2 Pet 3:9 see, Zane C. Hodges, “Repentance and the Day of the Lord,” *Grace in Focus*, September-October 1999: 1, 3-4 (available at <https://faithalone.org/magazine/y1999/99E1.html>). See also Bob Wilkin, “Rethinking the New Testament Concept of Perishing,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2010): 1-24, esp. pp. 20-21.

Grudem does not exegete a single passage. He just assumes his position and quotes some proof texts. That does not lead the reader to have confidence in his findings.

B. REPENTANCE IN NARRATIVE EXAMPLES

Here, Grudem looks at examples from Jesus' ministry, presumably where Jesus called people to turn from their sins. Yet he gives only three examples, spends only one page discussing them, and in none of the examples is repentance even mentioned!

Grudem seems to hold to works salvation based on the way he discusses all three examples. The rich young ruler's problem, according to Grudem, is that he failed to sell all that he had (p. 47). If he had, then he would have been born again according to Grudem. Wouldn't that be buying your salvation? Grudem does not discuss that. He just quotes Luke 18:22 with zero explanation. And he fails to notice that repentance isn't even mentioned there!¹³

Then he quotes, again without explanation, John 4:16-18 and Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well. He thinks Jesus was telling her she had to clean up her life to be born again. Yet there is no command to repent. Indeed, repentance is not mentioned! The reason Jesus revealed that she'd been married five times and was currently living in sin was because this would convince her that He is the Messiah. That is precisely what she later said in John 4:25-26, 29. The issue in John 4 is believing, not repenting.

Finally he cites Zacchaeus in Luke 19:8-9, again with no discussion! He fails to recognize that repentance is not mentioned there either. And the reason Zacchaeus became a child of Abraham that day is he believed in Messiah, as Abraham did (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-5).

Charles Erdman says, "By his faith the publican of Jericho showed himself to be a true son of Abraham, the 'father of the faithful.' His trust in Christ secured for him that salvation which is offered to all,

¹³ GotQuestions.org has an article on the rich young ruler. The unnamed author writes, "In His conversation with the rich young ruler, Christ did not teach that we are saved by the works of the Law. The Bible's message is that salvation is by grace through faith (Romans 3:20, 28; 4:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:9; 2 Timothy 1:9). Rather, Jesus used the man's love of money to show how the man fell short of God's holy standard—as do we all. The rich young ruler needed the Savior, and so do we." See <https://gotquestions.org/rich-young-ruler.html>. Accessed November 30, 2016.

even to the lowest and most hopeless and despised.”¹⁴ Similarly, Marvin Pate says, “Zacchaeus’s confession of sin [was] prompted by his faith in Jesus” and that as a result of his faith that led to his confession “the Lord declared that salvation had come to the toll collector’s house that day.”¹⁵ He goes so far as to suggest that “his seeking Jesus (v. 3) turned out to be the result of Jesus first seeking him (v. 10).”¹⁶

C. REPENTANCE FROM SIN IN PROTESTANT CONFESSIONS

The author only cites the Westminster Confession and the Baptist Faith and Message. But whether he cites two or two hundred Protestant confessions, this proves nothing. Indeed, shouldn’t this discussion be in Chapter 1, where he discusses Protestant theology?

JOTGES readers are well aware that turning from sins is considered a condition of everlasting life by the majority of Protestants. But we also know that consensus theology is often wrong.¹⁷ As Oliver Crisp has noted,

The fact that the majority position on a given topic is one thing rather than another does not in and of itself make the majority right. Truth is not established by democracy; it is independent of the number of votes we give it. Indeed, the truth is sometimes held only by a tiny minority...¹⁸

D. WHY IS REPENTANCE NOT MENTIONED IN JOHN’S GOSPEL?

I commend Grudem for admitting that repentance is not found in John’s Gospel. Clearly this is a major problem for his view since John’s Gospel is the only evangelistic book in the Bible (cf. John 20:30-31).¹⁹

Grudem has six explanations on how repentance can be a condition for the new birth and yet not be mentioned in John’s Gospel. None of them is convincing.

¹⁴ Erdman, *The Gospel of Luke*, 194.

¹⁵ C. Marvin Pate, *Luke Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 353.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹⁷ See Stephen R. Lewis, “Consensus Theology Taints Biblical Theology,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2010): 27-41.

¹⁸ Crisp, *Saving Calvinism*, 100.

¹⁹ See Zane C. Hodges, “Introducing John’s Gospel: In the Upper Room with Jesus the Christ,” *JOTGES* (Spring 2008): 29-44 and “Miraculous Signs and Literary Structure in John’s Gospel,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2008):15-27.

First, he says that you can't base doctrine on only one book of Scripture. That is not true. Of course you can. *All* Scripture is God-breathed. That means every book is correct and we can learn doctrine from any book.²⁰ Surely Grudem is not saying that John's Gospel is contradicted by other books. Thus, this first point is patently false. Besides, repentance is not found in Galatians either. And Galatians is Paul's defense of his gospel. But Grudem fails to mention or discuss that. Indeed, James D. G. Dunn said that repentance "is a category strikingly absent from Paul."²¹

Second, Grudem says that repentance is shown to be a condition of salvation in Jesus' teaching in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. To prove this he quotes four passages—again without any explanation—one in Mark and three in Luke. None of them speaks of everlasting life, salvation, or justification. None of them prove his point. Why no passages from Matthew? How can he prove that Matthew teaches this without at least citing passages from Matthew? This is not careful study. Besides, how does the fact that repentance is found in Jesus' teachings in the Synoptics prove that it is in the Fourth Gospel, when in fact it is not there?

Third, he speculates that John was written late in the first century, long after the Synoptic Gospels. Grudem takes the position that John expected his readers to read the other Gospels along with his.

John was surely written before AD 70 (see John 5:2)²² and it could have been the first Gospel written. In addition, unlike the Synoptics which were written to believers, John said specifically that he wrote to unbelievers to lead them to faith in Christ and everlasting life (John 20:30-31). That is a point that Grudem fails to discuss. Anyone who has read John and the Synoptics recognizes that John's Gospel is far different and has a far different purpose. To suggest that John expected his unbelieving readers to find copies of other books that would supplement

²⁰ Only in 1 Corinthians 11 do we learn that women are to wear head coverings when praying or prophesying. However one understands that text, it is only found in one chapter of one book. But that does not mean we cannot understand and apply it. Though the Rapture is found in quite a few passages in Scripture, only 1 Thess 4:16-17 specifically and directly mentions the Rapture. The Rapture is true regardless of how few books of Scripture discuss it.

²¹ James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 43 (April 1992): 7.

²² See, for example, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 34; Zane C. Hodges, *Faith in His Name: Listening to the Gospel of John* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2015), 95.

his book is a hard position to defend. There is no evidence in John's Gospel for the need of companion books to help understand it.

Fourth, Grudem argues that Acts proves that repentance is a condition for everlasting life in John. Not only does Grudem not give any proof for this claim, he doesn't even quote one proof text. No discussion and no proof texts equal a failure to defend one's view from Scripture.

How does he understand Paul's answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" in Acts 16:30? Why did Paul say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved..." (Acts 16:31), if Paul taught salvation as requiring repentance? Grudem does not discuss that verse here or in the whole book. That is a serious oversight. Acts 16:30-31 contradicts his position.

Fifth, he argues that in John's Gospel "we find several indications that he assumed repentance would be an essential part of what it means to believe in Jesus" (p. 52). That would mean that Jesus talked about repentance when he asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" That is reading into the text what Grudem thinks should be there, but is not.

So does John 3:16 really mean, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that *whoever turns from his sins* shall not perish, but have everlasting life?"

The examples Grudem provides show that he expands on what Biblical repentance is. Biblical repentance is turning from one's sin (Matt 12:39-41; compare Jonah 3:10). Yet Grudem cites the following in John as equaling repentance: the Holy Spirit *convicting people of sin* (John 16:8); the Lord Jesus telling the woman at the well to *call her husband* (John 4:16); people having *personal interaction with Jesus*; the Lord Jesus *calling people to believe in Him*; and the Lord's *calls to follow Him*. Yet not one of those things is repentance.²³

Sixth, Grudem suggests that the fact that certain words like *repent* and *repentance* are not found in John's Gospel proves nothing. Well, if John is writing an evangelistic book, and he is, then for him to leave out repentance proves that repentance is not a condition for everlasting life.

For example, say that George Will wrote a book entitled, *The Greatest Generals of World War 2* and that he never once mentioned General George Patton. Would it not be obvious that he does not consider Patton one of the greatest generals of WW2? In the same way, John preaches

²³ See Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 107-26.

repentance in Revelation, but no mention of it in John. That is an argument *about* silence, not merely an argument *from* silence.²⁴

E. TWO DIFFERENT FREE GRACE VIEWS OF REPENTANCE

Another major problem with Chapter 2 is that Grudem muddies the waters on what FGT says regarding repentance and everlasting life.

He says that there are two FGT views on repentance and salvation: 1) repentance is required, but it is merely a change of mind; and 2) repentance is an optional resolve to turn from sin.²⁵

However, there are actually three or four views of repentance and salvation within FGT. In addition to the change of mind and the view that repentance is turning from sins but is not required to be born again, there are the views of Drs. Charlie Bing and Jody Dillow. Grudem puts Bing under the change of mind view. However, that is not quite correct. Bing makes it clear that in his view repentance is a change of heart that involves “a person’s inner change of ... moral direction”:

But there may be a better [definition of Biblical repentance]. When we examine what is meant biblically by *mind* (*nous*) we find that it is sometimes used for the inner orientation and moral attitude. (cf. Rom. 1:28; 7:23, 25; Eph. 4:17, 23; Col. 2:18). Thus the mind, biblically speaking, is not always the pure intellect. So the best translation of *metanoia* would be a *change of heart*. It refers to a person’s inner change of attitude and moral direction. The Bible does not psychologically dissect the inner person, but leaves it at that (emphases his).²⁶

That is not the same as the change of mind view that I advocated in my dissertation, or that was advocated by Lewis Sperry Chafer or Charles Ryrie.

Dillow goes a bit further. In his book *Final Destiny*, he suggests that, “repentance is a necessary precursor to saving faith.”²⁷ He says that one

²⁴ See Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 5-11.

²⁵ The way he explains the second view is misleading. We do not say that repentance is optional, any more than we say that church attendance or baptism are optional. Yes, a person can be born again without repenting, attending church, and being baptized. But if a person does not turn from his sins and follow Christ, he will be a miserable person in this life and he will suffer loss and shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

²⁶ Charlie Bing, *Grace Notes*, No. 22, 2016 available online at <http://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=22>. Last accessed Oct 19, 2016.

²⁷ Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny* (NP: Grace Theology Press, 2013), 52.

must admit his sinfulness and guilt²⁸ and “must have a desire for moral change.”²⁹ “There must be an acknowledgement of sin and a desire to be different.”³⁰ “A nonbeliever must admit his sin to God, acknowledge he is wrong, and be willing to seek a new way of life.”³¹

Grudem does discuss Bing’s view of repentance and salvation, but only quoting selectively from his dissertation. He misses Bing’s discussion of repentance as a change of heart that includes an inner change of moral direction.

Though he quotes from Dillow’s *Final Destiny* in subsequent chapters, Grudem does not discuss Dillow’s view of repentance, which is odd since Dillow’s view is a different view and is closer to Grudem’s view of repentance than any other view within FGT.³²

Grudem clearly does not discuss all of the FGT views on repentance.

He tries to say that all who hold to FGT reject the idea that one must regret his sins and must desire to live a new life in order to be born again. Yet as we saw above, Dillow says just that in his book *Final Destiny*. And Bing says something quite close to that in his dissertation and other writings.

FGT holds multiple views on what repentance is and whether repentance is a condition for everlasting life. Chapter two of *5 Ways* fails to clearly delineate the views.

F. SAVING FAITH DOES NOT INCLUDE OBEDIENCE

Why is Grudem discussing saving faith and obedience in a chapter about repentance? Probably he does so because he says that faith includes repentance and yet many people consider repentance to be a work.

Scripture calls repentance a work. For example, Jonah 3:10 says: “Then God saw *their works, that they turned from their evil way*; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it” (emphasis added).

²⁸ Ibid., 53-54.

²⁹ Ibid., 54, favorably quoting a missionary friend in Romania.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 56.

³² I do not think that the explanations of repentance by Bing and Dillow are consistent with FGT or with what they write elsewhere. However, if Grudem is discussing FGT on repentance, he should explain their views.

For some reason, Grudem is comfortable saying that saving faith *necessarily results in* a life characterized by good works (e.g., pp. 70-74), but he is not comfortable saying that saving faith *includes* obedience. According to the dictionary, the word *include* means “to contain.” If saving faith is never without good works, then saving faith includes or contains obedience. Lack of obedience would prove lack of saving faith.

It should be noted that what Grudem denies toward the end of Chapter 2 (pp. 70-74)—that saving faith includes obedience—he inadvertently admits in Chapter 1.

Compare these two statements by Grudem in Chapter 1:

The faith that justifies...is always *accompanied by*—or *includes*—repentance from sin and is always followed by other actions such as doing good works and continuing to believe (p. 38, emphasis added).

...genuine faith *must be accompanied by good works*...
(p. 33, emphasis his).

Grudem says that the words “accompanied by” mean “includes” (p. 38). Thus, when he says that “genuine faith must be *accompanied* by good works” he clearly means “genuine faith must *include* good works.”

In this section, and later in the book when he discusses Jas 2:14-26, Grudem makes it clear that he believes that saving faith includes obedience. According to him, faith without works is not saving faith.

Grudem graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary and was influenced by the teachings of Dr. John Frame. Grudem actually endorses Frame’s *Systematic Theology*. In that book, Frame says, “The second element of trust is subjection to Christ as Lord, a willingness to obey. As Jas 2:14-26 says, faith must be living faith, *obedient faith, faith that works*, or else it is dead” (emphasis added).³³ In *5 Ways*, Grudem says the same things. He says that heartfelt trust is an element of saving faith (Chapter 4), and that heartfelt trust is subjection to Christ as Lord (see esp. pp. 106, 110). In fact, what Grudem says regarding Jas 2:14 is very similar to what Frame says, “James begins this entire paragraph by saying that faith without works cannot save someone” (p. 135). Like Frame, Grudem says that, “faith without works cannot save anyone.” In other words, Frame and Grudem are saying that it is *faith plus works which saves eternally*.

³³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 953.

In this section, Grudem criticizes me for poor scholarship. Citing my book *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* he says:

Robert Wilkin...says that those who disagree with Free Grace teachings say that “faith includes works,” and that these people define faith as “including” obedience. But rather than documenting this claim by quoting from recognized theology texts and historic Protestant statements of faith (which never say that faith includes obedience), Wilkin simply attributes this view to unnamed “preachers and theologians” or to “radio and TV preachers, pastors, theologians, popular authors, and missionaries,” or even to “most people within Christianity” (pp. 73-74).

Grudem makes a number of major errors here. Indeed, the errors are so great that I wonder if he did more than skim a few pages in my book.

First, he errs by saying that I was talking about people who say *that faith includes works and obedience*. That is not what I was writing about. I was discussing people who say that “saving faith is different than regular faith,” that “saving faith is not intellectual assent,” that “saving faith is heart faith,” that “saving faith is more than believing facts,” that “saving faith is an ongoing commitment to obey,” and that “saving faith always perseveres.”³⁴ Those are the headings.³⁵ Why does Grudem say I am talking specifically about those who say that faith includes works? None of the headings in the chapter specifically address that issue.

Second, he errs by not quoting me. He just pulls out a few words or a phrase. The result is that he misleads the reader about what I was saying. And on one occasion he doesn't even get the phrase quite right. I wrote, “Most people from within Christianity...”³⁶ and he left out the word *from* indicating I said, “most people within Christianity.” Worse than that minor mistake, he says I was talking there about people who say that faith includes works, when I was actually talking about people who “have rejected justification by faith alone apart from works.”³⁷

³⁴ Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words*, 8-15.

³⁵ Actually there are a few more headings in the chapter, but for the sake of space I left the final few off.

³⁶ In fact, I did not write that in my chapter on faith, which is where the other snippet he gives comes from. That snippet comes from the conclusion of the book, 160 pages later! So not only does he not give full quotes when he criticizes me for not giving quotes in my chapter on faith, he gives a misleading snippet from a different chapter.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 171. What I actually wrote was: “Most people from within Christianity today and over the centuries reject and have rejected justification by faith alone apart from

Third, he errs by criticizing me for not documenting others even though I do. I mention by name and with full quotes—not just a word or phrase—Donald Dunkerly, John MacArthur, Gregory Koukl, James Danaher, Curtis Crenshaw, Alan Day, James Montgomery Boice, and Darrell Bock.³⁸ I don't see how he could miss seven pages of quotes. That is a serious error.

G. CONCLUSION: A WEAKENED GOSPEL

“My conclusion,” says Grudem, “in this chapter is that the Free Grace movement preaches a weakened gospel because it avoids any call to people to repent of their sins” (p. 74).³⁹ Yet Grudem goes on to say that FGT is not a false gospel!

How can the message of FGT be the true gospel if it leaves out two elements that are central to what saving faith is, turning from sins and heartfelt trust that includes submission to the Lordship of Christ?⁴⁰

Grudem cites the FGA covenant, which does not mention repentance, trust, or submission, and then says, “That statement is a wonderful summary of the New Testament gospel message, and it is inconceivable to me that anyone could read that statement and say that people who believe and advocate those truths are preaching a false gospel” (p. 75).

But Grudem can't have it both ways. If the summary of the NT gospel routinely includes *the need to turn from one's sins and to submit to the Lordship of Christ*, then leaving those things out must not be “a wonderful summary of the New Testament gospel message.”⁴¹

works.”

³⁸ Ibid, 8-14.

³⁹ Why would this make FGT “a weakened gospel?” Grudem does not explain, other than to say repentance “cannot be omitted without grave consequences in the lives of people who hear such a weakened message” (p. 74). But what if FGT does not omit repentance, but simply says that it is not a condition of everlasting life?

⁴⁰ The false gospel anathematized by Paul in Gal 1:8-9 is the message that one is justified by works (Gal 5:4). Thus I would agree with Grudem that FGT is not a false gospel. However, his own message is very similar to that of the Judaizers. To be justified, Grudem says one must turn from his sins, submit his life to Christ, and follow Christ his entire life. That position is contradicted by Gal 2:16, as well as over 100 places in the NT where the sole condition of regeneration or justification is faith in Christ.

⁴¹ Grudem does not interact with the GES affirmations of belief for some unknown reason. Since GES is the older organization, it would seem that any serious study of FGT would at least include a discussion of the GES affirmations and distinctives (e.g., assurance is of the essence of saving faith).

If the FGA covenant is a fine statement, then Grudem just threw away his insistence that repentance must be preached in order to proclaim the NT gospel.

V. CONCLUSION

Wayne Grudem fails to show that FGT diminishes the gospel in either of his first two chapters.

I appreciate Grudem's irenic tone. However, a book should include more than gracious interaction with others. Grudem has moved outside his comfort zone in this book. *5 Ways* does not evidence the careful scholarship found in most of his other works.

GORDON H. CLARK AND ASSURANCE

SHAWN C. LAZAR

Associate Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Corinth, TX

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Faith and Saving Faith*,¹ Gordon H. Clark argues that all faith is propositional. To *believe* is to be *persuaded that a proposition is true*. The difference between faith and saving faith is not in *how* you believe, but in *what* you believe. To have saving faith means to believe the saving proposition.

Clark's propositional definition of faith became influential in Free Grace Theology (hereafter FGT). One reason is that it is Biblical. Another reason is that it helped defend the purity of the doctrine of justification against attempts to redefine faith in a way that includes works.

However, while Clark's definition of faith is well known, his doctrine of assurance is not. The purpose of this article is to examine Clark's doctrine of assurance both critically and constructively. First, I will explain how Clark understood assurance of salvation. Second, I will show that his doctrine makes it impossible to be assured. Third, I will argue constructively that Clark's definition of faith clarifies the nature of assurance as being persuaded that the assuring proposition is true.

II. CLARK'S DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE

Clark often criticized other thinkers for their lack of definitions, so it is surprising that he never defines assurance. However, his doctrine can be summarized along the following lines.

¹Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1990).

A. FAITH WITHOUT ASSURANCE

“When we think of the Reformation, we usually think first of the doctrine of Justification by Faith,” Clark explained. “But the Reformers also discovered assurance.”² According to some scholars, Reformers like John Calvin thought that assurance was the essence of saving faith.³ If so, Clark believed they were confused.⁴ According to Clark, you can believe in Christ for salvation and yet not be sure that you are saved. You can have saving faith, without assurance of salvation, because assurance is not the essence of saving faith.

B. ASSURANCE IS POSSIBLE

Clark believed that it was *possible*, but not *certain*, for a believer to have assurance of salvation. “The Gospel promises the possibility of assurance. It does not quite promise every Christian actual assurance.”⁵ Significantly, Clark rejected the idea that believers should have assurance from the very first moment of faith.⁶ This confirms that Clark thought faith and assurance were two different things.

C. ASSURANCE DEPENDS ON DIVINE MONERGISM

According to Clark, assurance depends on monergism. This is the belief that God alone (mono) causes (ergism) salvation to happen, apart from man’s free response or cooperation.⁷ It should be noted that Clark was a convinced Calvinist, and argued that we can be assured that salvation *will* happen only because God *predestined* it to happen. Assurance,

² Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1965), 176.

³ Gordon H. Clark, *Sanctification* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation), 35. For example, see M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1985); R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Robert L. Dabney, “Theology of the Plymouth Brethren,” *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney*, vol 1, ed. C. R. Vaughan (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), 173, 183; David Engelsma, *The Gift of Assurance* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994).

⁴ Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith*, 36.

⁵ Gordon H. Clark, *Today’s Evangelism* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1990), 92.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷ Clark, *Presbyterians*, 174.

he claimed, “presupposes and depends on perseverance and irresistible grace.”⁸

By contrast, Clark denied an Arminian can “consistently be assured of his salvation” because they deny divine monergism. Instead, they believe in synergism—that man cooperates (ergism) with (syn) God in salvation. In particular, they believe that salvation can be lost by a free choice of the will (i.e., “a regenerate man can unregenerate himself and ultimately be lost”⁹). Since Arminians do not understand that “the new birth begins an eternal life, i.e., a life that does not end in a year or two,” they can never be sure they will not choose to unregenerate themselves sometime in the future. Hence, they cannot consistently have assurance.¹⁰

D. ASSURANCE IS BASED ON PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES

According to Clark, assurance depends on psychological experiences. These experiences are influenced by many factors such as temperament, education, and culture. Since different believers have different experiences, Clark concluded they cannot have the same degree of assurance:

In general, one must be extremely cautious, not merely in asserting that faith and assurance are inseparable, but in making any universal statement of *the psychology of Christians*...The New Testament and church history... give abundant evidence of *the infinite variety of Christian experience*.

Not only because of particular sins and temptations, but also because of differences of temperament, of upbringing, of education, and of cultural and historical conditions of one’s age, no one pattern of experience fits everybody. Some are too fearful of presumption, others are not fearful enough. Elijah went to heaven in a fiery chariot, but Jeremiah may have died in despondency. Assurance of salvation, like other blessings, does not come to all Christians; but it is part of the fullness of God’s

⁸ Ibid., 175.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.; Clark, *Sanctification*, 36. This point would *not* apply to FGT. Although we also hold to synergism, and say that growing to spiritual maturity depends on cooperating with God, we deny that salvation can be lost, even if a believer later repudiates their salvation. A regenerate person can stop believing in Jesus and remain eternally secure. Their apostasy will affect their eternal rewards, but not their eternal salvation.

grace which we may legitimately and consistently hope to enjoy.¹¹

E. ASSURANCE IS BASED ON GOOD BEHAVIOR

Clark taught that assurance can only be gained gradually over time, based on observing good behavior. Clark said that “a sufficient degree of obedience” was necessary “to have met the requirements” of being assured.¹² Elsewhere he claimed that “freedom from sin is the evidence to support an assurance of salvation.”¹³ Clark believed that 1 John 2:3 teaches an introspective basis of assurance:

Assurance of salvation is a topic John considers in several sections of this Epistle. It is possible to consider this the main subject throughout. One could say that our standing with God is tested by righteousness, love, and doctrine, and these three, repeated, give grounds for assurance.¹⁴

If we live well, and believe the right doctrine, we have every reason to be assured of our salvation. For example, Clark thought the superintendent of the primary department of his church, a “woman of remarkable gifts,” was someone who should have had assurance based on her behavior. From “all external appearances (and that is all the rest of us could judge by) she was the one who had the greatest reason to be assured.”¹⁵ Sadly, Clark reports that she was not, in fact, assured.¹⁶

Contrariwise, Clark said we can lose our assurance based on our bad behavior. He thought that 1 John also spoke of “proofs that one is not a Christian.”¹⁷ According to 1 John 2:4, Clark thought, “There is good reason for asserting that the disobedient man does not believe the truth. The reason is that intellectual conviction inevitably controls action.”¹⁸

¹¹ Clark, *Presbyterians*, 179, emphasis added.

¹² Clark, *Sanctification*, 38-39.

¹³ Gordon H. Clark, *The Holy Spirit* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation), 48.

¹⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *First John* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation), 54.

¹⁵ Clark, *Today's Evangelism*, 90-91.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁷ Clark, *First John*, 54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55. Clark has misunderstood this verse. First John 2:4 is not about proving that you are regenerate, but proving that you have an intimate knowledge of God. *Salvation* and *spiritual maturity* are two very different issues. A person can believe in Jesus for eternal life and therefore be regenerate, without necessarily being a mature believer with intimate personal knowledge of God. But you cannot claim to be spiritually mature

If your actions are sinful, that is evidence you do not believe in the Lord. Clark admitted that you do not need to be sinlessly perfect to have assurance, since even Paul sinned later in life, “and if that means he was not a saved man, nobody is.”¹⁹ But long-term disobedience shows that you never genuinely believed in Jesus.

F. ASSURANCE CAN BE LOST

Since assurance is based on good behavior, acting sinfully can result in the loss of assurance. Clark states:

“while it is impossible to lose one’s faith or salvation, assurance may be shaken, diminished, and intermittent. There is such a thing as backsliding, both sudden and gradual. The Christian may fall into sin and lose his assurance.”²⁰

G. FALSE ASSURANCE IS BASED ON GOOD BEHAVIOR

“False assurance is a common thing,” Clark explained.²¹ “Just because a person believes that he is saved is an insufficient reason for thinking that he is saved.”²² This false assurance is found among both non-Christians and nominal Christians and is commonly due to focusing on one’s own behavior, instead of upon God’s unilateral actions. “The unregenerate are not assured of *grace*: they believe that they are good enough to deserve heaven.”²³ He faults Arminians who are:

very sure that they are saved now; but are not sure that they will be saved tomorrow or next week. If they die tonight, they will be in heaven immediately. But if they should live a while longer, they might fall into sin, fall from grace, and

and to know God intimately, while behaving badly or believing wrongly. Walking in darkness and believing wrong doctrine are signs of having a shallow knowledge of God, not an intimate one. See Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 73-79; Gary W. Derickson, *1, 2 & 3 John* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 144-45.

¹⁹ Clark, *Holy Spirit*, 49.

²⁰ Clark, *Presbyterians*, 179. Note Clark’s Calvinistic belief that the elect can never permanently lose their faith.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

²² Clark, *Today’s Evangelism*, 91.

²³ Clark, *Presbyterians*, 178.

then they would be eternally lost. But they are very sure just now.²⁴

Clark finds this type of assurance hard to understand. “How can anyone be very happy if he thinks he has an eternal life that is so little eternal that it might end next week?”²⁵

However, while Clark faults the unregenerate for basing their assurance on being “good enough to deserve heaven,” paradoxically, in the very same paragraph he adds:

But the assurance spoken of in the Confession is a result of faith in Jesus Christ. It is an assurance that can be found *only in those who love him in sincerity and who endeavor to walk in all good conscience*” (emphasis added).²⁶

This is paradoxical because Clark faults Arminians for basing their assurance on good behavior, while suggesting that Calvinists do the same thing—base their assurance on their good behavior. At the very least Clark is saying that Calvinists should base assurance on their *sincerity* and their *endeavoring* to live good lives.

III. PROBLEMS WITH CLARK’S DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE

Now that we have a broad understanding of Clark’s doctrine of assurance, we can consider four reasons why Clark’s theology makes it impossible to be assured.²⁷ These problems are not necessarily internal to Clark’s doctrine of assurance, but often involve the implications of his theology and philosophy as a whole.

A. NO CLEAR SAVING MESSAGE

Clark did not know what the saving message was. He denied there was a minimum saving proposition,²⁸ but could not define a maximum. He thought the content of saving faith was a complex of propositions

²⁴ Clark, *Today’s Evangelism*, 92.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Clark, *Presbyterians*, 178.

²⁷ I have chosen not to discuss the way in which Clark’s philosophy of Scripturalism undermines assurance by undermining the possibility of knowing that we exist at all, let alone, knowing that we have believed.

²⁸ Clark, *Today’s Evangelism*, 65.

known only to God.²⁹ He counseled preachers to preach the whole Bible and trust that God would use some combination of propositions to bring the elect to faith.³⁰

Of course, if you believe in justification by faith apart from works, but do not know what you must believe in order to be justified, you can never be sure you have saving faith. Your faith might consist entirely of non-saving propositions. Without a clear saving proposition to believe, Clark's doctrine of assurance will lead to doubt.

B. BEHAVIOR IS NOT CONSISTENT

One will recall that Clark faulted Arminianism for making assurance depend on persevering in faith and good works. He pointed out that since the Arminian cannot be sure he will not choose to unregenerate himself in the future, he cannot be sure of his salvation. However, Clark's doctrine of assurance is subject to a similar objection.

Clark based assurance on good behavior. This poses a problem, because while you might be behaving properly *now* there is no certainty you will continue to do so in the *future*. It may be that in the future you will behave very badly and therefore prove that you were never regenerate in the first place. Since Clark cannot know what his future experiences and behaviors will be, he cannot consistently be assured of his salvation.

Of course, it is also doubtful whether anyone behaves well enough *in the present* to be presently assured of their salvation. Clark himself wondered about this: "We know all too well that we do not keep God's commandments as we should. How sanctified must we become before we pass from timid hope to bold assurance?"³¹ He went on to ask, "But this is very disturbing, for all of us disobey God's commands. Can we then be assured that we have been regenerated? Maybe our faith is pseudo."³² Clark did not have an answer to these doubts.

The truth is, our behavior is sinful now. To make matters worse, it may be even more sinful in the future. Hence, behavior cannot provide a consistent foundation for assurance. Once again, Clark's doctrine of assurance will lead to doubt.

²⁹ Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith*, 110.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Clark, *First John*, 54.

³² *Ibid.*, 55.

C. NO CONSISTENT PROOF OF BEING ELECT

Clark claimed that assurance must be based on monergism, including the belief that God has only predestined to save the elect. This Calvinistic view undermines assurance, because while you can be sure that God will save the elect, you cannot be sure that you are among them. Therefore, if there is no infallible or consistent way of knowing if you are elect, then you cannot have assurance of salvation.

D. LACK OF A CLEAR DEFINITION

Being assured of your salvation depends on knowing what assurance is. Significantly, Clark did not define assurance, which leads to confusion about its nature. According to Clark, assurance is not a type of belief. Rather, it is related to psychology, but it is not clear how.

Of course, if you are not sure what assurance is, you will not be sure that you have it. Since Clark does not clearly tell us what assurance is, his doctrine of assurance will lead to doubt.

IV. ASSURANCE IS PROPOSITIONAL

While Gordon Clark's doctrine of assurance is self-defeating, I believe his doctrine of faith clarifies the true nature of assurance. Hence, in this section, I will develop a constructive account of the nature of assurance, based on Clark's doctrine of faith.

A. FAITH IS PROPOSITIONAL

In order to better evaluate Clark's doctrine of assurance, one must first understand his doctrine of faith. A summary is helpful to provide a context for understanding why assurance should be thought of as propositional.

According to Clark, faith is a mental act. It is not a sensation, behavior, emotion, or feeling.³³ It is something that happens in the mind. In particular, faith is propositional. Just as verbs have objects, so does faith. When you believe, you are believing something (i.e., a proposition).³⁴

When you believe a proposition, you are persuaded that it is true. Of course, in order to believe that a proposition is true, you must first

³³ Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith*, 5, 32, 105; Clark, *Presbyterians*, 143.

³⁴ Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith*, 32, 39, 107, 118.

understand what it means. You can understand the meaning of a proposition without believing it to be true (e.g., “The moon is made out of green cheese”). But you cannot believe a proposition is true without first understanding it.³⁵

Accordingly, Clark held that faith consists of *understanding* (*notitia*), and *assent* (*assensus*), but not *trust* (*fiducia*). He thought that theologians who took *trust*—particularly trust in a person—as a third element in faith were wrong because to trust in a person is simply to believe the proposition, “This person always tells the truth.”³⁶ Hence, Clark concluded, trust is a case of assent, not something different from it.³⁷

Since all faith is propositional, the difference between faith and saving faith is not in *how* you believe, but in *what* you believe. Not all propositions are part of the saving message. Believing that “Montreal is north of Burlington” or “Allah will spare the righteous” are not saving propositions. Faith becomes salvific when it believes the saving proposition.³⁸

B. ASSURANCE IS PROPOSITIONAL

Just as faith is propositional, so is assurance. Although Clark thought that assurance was something other than faith, I believe that is an error similar to the one he refuted about the meaning of *trust*. Like trust, assurance is a case of assent, not something different from it.³⁹ Specifically, assurance of salvation is assent to the *assuring proposition* (i.e., “I have

³⁵ Ibid., 118; Clark, *Today's Evangelism*, 64; Clark, *Presbyterians*, 151; Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, Revelation* (Hobbs, NM: The Trinity Foundation, 1995), 99.

³⁶ Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith*, 60, 104.

³⁷ Clark, *Today's Evangelism*, 76.

³⁸ Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith*, 105, 109.

³⁹ I did find one quote from Clark, where he seemed to agree with this: “Assurance and conviction are belief, strong belief, voluntary belief, and as intellectual as you please.” See *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 100. It is not clear what Clark meant when he said that assurance is a “strong belief.” What is stronger than believing that something is true? That it is “really” true? It seems like truth is truth. It is either all true, or not. However, beliefs can be relatively “stronger” or “weaker” in the sense of being more or less supported by corresponding evidence, and being more central to your worldview. For example, I believe “I am married with children” and that “Dushanbe is the capital of Tajikistan.” I believe both propositions are true. But my belief about being married with children is much stronger than my belief about Dushanbe, because the former is supported by years of memories, paid bills, and thousands of changed diapers (to name only some corresponding beliefs). By contrast, my belief about Dushanbe comes from a vague memory of playing a trivia game where that came up as the answer. If I am wrong about Dushanbe, it will make little difference to my life. If I am wrong about being married with children, I would have to question my sanity.

eternal life”). If you believe that (or the equivalent⁴⁰), then you have assurance of your salvation. That is all that assurance of salvation is—believing that you are saved. The question is, “How can you come to that belief?”

C. JESUS’ QUESTION TO MARTHA

Assurance may be thought of as the conclusion to a simple deductive syllogism where we are first presented with Jesus’ promise of life and are expected to deduce the appropriate conclusion. For example, consider this discussion between Jesus and Martha on the subject of eternal life:

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (John 11:25-27).

Jesus presents Martha with a promise: everyone who believes in Him “will never die.” This is another way of saying that whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life, the great theme of John’s Gospel (cf. John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:35). Jesus’ promise that whoever believes in Him will never die can be considered the first premise (P1) of a syllogism:

P1: Whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life.

Next, Jesus asked Martha, “Do you believe this?” That question is meant to prompt Martha to complete the syllogism by supplying the second premise (P2) and drawing the appropriate conclusion (C).

For argument’s sake, imagine if she had answered, “No.” What conclusion would she have come to?

P1: Whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life.

P2: I do not believe.

C: Therefore, I do not have everlasting life.

⁴⁰ For example: “I will go to heaven when I die.” “I am justified.” “I am reckoned righteous.” “I will live with God forever.”

In that case, Martha would obviously not have assurance of salvation. She might have assurance based on other grounds, as the conclusion to another syllogism,⁴¹ but not based on Jesus' promise of life.

Of course, Martha could also have answered, "*I don't know* if I believe." In that case she would have concluded:

- P1: Whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life.
 P2: I don't know if I believe.
 C: Therefore, I don't know if I have everlasting life.

Obviously, someone who does not know if they have everlasting life does not have assurance. Disbelief and doubt have the same result of lacking assurance.

But Martha actually answered, "Yes, Lord, I believe." In which case, Martha could complete the syllogism this way:

- P1: Whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life.
 P2: I believe.
 C: Therefore, I have everlasting life.

Given that conclusion, Martha would have assurance of salvation. She would believe that she would have everlasting life and never die.

All believers ought to have the same assurance of salvation as Martha did, based on believing the same premise, namely, Jesus' promise of everlasting life.

D. ASSURANCE IS THE ESSENCE OF SAVING FAITH

If you believe the proposition, "Whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life," then you must also conclude, "I have everlasting life," because that is what Jesus promised. If you fail to draw that conclusion, you either do not understand Jesus' promise, or you do not believe it.⁴² But

⁴¹ She might have assurance based on a different line of reasoning. For example, she could hold that: "Everyone who sacrifices on Mount Samaria is saved; I sacrifice on Mount Samaria; I am saved."

⁴² Or you might not believe that you believe. That is, it is possible to believe P1 but not know whether or not P2 is true. Indeed, some theologians argue it is hard, if not impossible, to know if the second premise is true. For example, in his critique of Free Grace theology, Wayne Grudem expressed this very doubt. He thought the question, "How do I know *that I have truly believed?*" was the central question in the assurance debate [Wayne Grudem, "*Free Grace*" *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 85, emphasis his]. He was right. If you cannot affirm the second

if you understand and believe it, you must know you have everlasting life, because that is what Jesus promised, and what you are claiming to believe in Him for.

If Jesus had promised that believers could have the *possibility* of gaining everlasting life *sometime in the future*, then you could believe that promise and lack assurance. Given that promise, assurance would not be the essence of saving faith.

However, Jesus promised believers everlasting life *as a present possession* (John 3:16, 36; 5:24). If you believe that promise, then you must believe you have eternal life as a present possession. And if you believe that you have everlasting life as a present possession, you have assurance of your salvation. Hence, given what Jesus promised to believers, assurance is the essence of saving faith. If you have never been sure of your salvation, that means you have never believed Jesus' promise of life, which is the saving message.

E. FALSE ASSURANCE

Having assurance of salvation means being persuaded that the proposition, "I have everlasting life," is true. Of course, not everyone who believes they have everlasting life actually do. There is such a thing as false assurance. But what, exactly, is the difference between genuine assurance and false assurance?

Once again, I think Clark's theology provides an obvious answer. I argued that assurance is propositional. Assurance of salvation is the logical conclusion to a syllogism based on believing Jesus' promise of life. But not everyone who concludes they are saved do so based on

premise, you cannot conclude "I have everlasting life" from Jesus' promise of life. Now, Grudem finds it hard to know if he had genuine saving faith because he does not hold to a propositional definition of faith. Instead, he thinks genuine belief has a number of different components, whether emotional, behavioral, and/or mystical (see Shawn Lazar, "Wayne Grudem on Genuine Faith" *Grace in Focus* [May/June 2016], 33-37). Since these evidences are inconsistent, he is not sure if his faith is genuine. Insofar as Clark also based the genuineness of faith on behavior (as seen in his comments on 1 John), he too, would harbor doubts about P2. Moreover, Clark and other Scripturalists would also find P2 doubtful because according to Scripturalism, the only propositions you can know are the propositions of Scripture and what can be logically deduced from them. Since your existence and beliefs are neither propositions of Scripture, nor logically deduced from them, a consistent Scripturalist could not answer Jesus' question to Martha and come to the conclusion that he had eternal life. By being skeptical towards P2, Clark's Scripturalism cannot lead to assurance, but will instead lead to doubt.

Jesus' promise. They might conclude they are saved based on other considerations. Whether or not their assurance is genuine depends on the truthfulness of those other considerations. Put another way, while genuine assurance is deduced from true premises, false assurance is deduced from false premises. The following are some examples of false assurance deduced from false premises.

1. *False religion.*

The most obvious source of false assurance of salvation is to believe in a false religion. So, for example, a non-Christian might reason in the following way:

- P1: Allah will save those who do x.
- P2: I do x.
- C: Therefore, I will be saved.

Someone who believes in a false god may have assurance of salvation, but since their first premise is false, so is their assurance.

2. *Works salvation.*

Another popular source of false assurance within cultural Christianity is belief in salvation by works:

- P1: God will give everlasting life to everyone who does good works.
- P2: I do good works.
- C: Therefore, I will have everlasting life.

Although the person who thinks they are good enough to be saved will have assurance of salvation, it will be false because the doctrine of works salvation is false (Rom 3:20).

3. *Emotionalism and mysticism.*

People might be assured of salvation based on something they have felt or experienced. For example:

- P1: Whoever sees a mystical white light is saved.
- P2: I saw a mystical white light.
- C: Therefore, I am saved.

P1: Whoever feels a burning in the bosom is saved.
P2: I felt a burning in my bosom.
C: Therefore, I am saved.

P1: Whoever has a sense of joy is saved.
P2: I felt joy.
C: Therefore, I am saved.

If someone believed the conclusion to any of these syllogisms they would have assurance of their salvation, but it would be false assurance because the Bible does not base assurance on fleeting experiences and emotions. Instead, it bases assurance on faith in the promises of God, especially Jesus' promise of everlasting life.

V. CONCLUSION

Although Gordon H. Clark's doctrine of assurance makes it impossible to have assurance, his doctrine of faith helps to clarify what assurance is. Having assurance of salvation is not a matter of feeling emotions, having a mystical experience, or behaving in a certain way. Instead, it is being persuaded that the proposition, "I have everlasting life" is true. Assurance is the essence of saving faith because it is the necessary conclusion to believing Jesus' promise. Since Jesus promised that everlasting life was the present possession of all believers, if you believe Jesus' promise, you must necessarily believe you have everlasting life as a present possession. Hence, you will be assured of your salvation. If you do not have assurance, you either do not understand Jesus' promise of everlasting life, or you do not believe it.

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS? IDENTIFYING AUGUSTINE'S INFLUENCE ON EVANGELICAL VIEWS OF APOSTASY¹

EVERETT BERRY

*Criswell College,
Dallas, TX*

I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the historical development of a Biblical doctrine always necessitates a familiarity with arguments that are formulated by substantial Christian thinkers which leave an indelible mark on how the church later deals with that doctrine. The purpose of this essay is to illustrate this truth by showing how Augustine of Hippo's view of perseverance and apostasy continues to influence the ways in which various Evangelical traditions address these topics today.² This will be accomplished by first arguing that some mainstay theological categories pertaining to the issue of the perseverance of the saints can be traced back to convictions that Augustine initially expressed during the famous Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian controversies.³ From there, it will be shown that subsequent views of perseverance often reach frequent impasses because they are based on selective parts of Augustine's soteriology. Finally,

¹ Editor's note: This article is the result of a paper presented at the 2015 annual Evangelical Theological Society Conference. It is of interest to readers of the *JOTGES* because it shows that debates about assurance of salvation and the perseverance of the saints have a long history.

² Augustine was a bishop in North Africa in the late fourth century and early fifth century whose writings have heavily influenced Western Christianity.

³ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1969), 151; Pelagius, *Pelagius' Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of Paul*, 9 vol., ed. Alexander Souter and J. Armitage Robinson, *Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1922-1931; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004). Note that these controversies dealt primarily with the role of divine grace and man's free will in salvation.

we will conclude with a few remarks about some of the shortcomings in Augustine's view of perseverance.

II. AUGUSTINE'S UNDERSTANDING OF SIN, SALVATION, AND ELECTION: PRELIMINARIES TO THE DOCTRINE OF PERSEVERANCE

Throughout the latter years of Augustine's life he combated the perspectives of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism which dealt with many questions related to sin, regeneration, justification, predestination, and ultimately perseverance. Like any good theologian, he carefully interpreted relevant Biblical passages, synthesized them, and then articulated his understanding of each subject in order to show how they all fit together theologically. His view of sin led to his view of grace, which in turn converged to help guide the way he viewed election, justification, and so forth.

Consequently, if we want to examine what Augustine thought about how believers could persevere in their faith, we must first survey what he thought about how one becomes a believer. The best way to accomplish this is to summarize what he believed about sin, election, justification, and perseverance.

A. AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF ORIGINAL SIN

Augustine claims that when God first made Adam and Eve, He placed them in a kind of probationary period to test whether they would obey his rule concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here, in their unfallen state, they had the volitional freedom to love God and obey him or choose to love something less. Obviously they chose the latter. Once they transgressed God's restriction, they forfeited their naturally perfect environment, the potential for natural immorality, and brought divine curses upon themselves as well as the very earth over which they had been given dominion.⁴

⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, in *The Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)* vol. 2, ed., Philip Schaff, trans., Marcus Dods, (Christian Literature Publishing, 1887; Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 14.16-19; William E. Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds., Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 47.

Likewise, another feature they incurred was a deep-seeded corruption to their very nature, or spiritual disposition, which poisoned their will so they could no longer choose freely to love God. On their own, without any pre-emptive work of divine grace, now they will only choose to love things in accordance with their lustful desires which are enslaved to pride and idolatry.⁵

Moreover, all of these consequences are transferred to Adam's prodigy. Otherwise known as original sin, this concept is a lynch pin for Augustine. He refers to this idea in his first anti-Pelagian work entitled *On the Merits and Remission (or Forgiveness) of Sins* (AD 412), where he refutes the belief that infants do not require baptism because they are not tainted with the sin of Adam.⁶ Augustine claims that the Pelagian notion that people only imitate Adam's rebellion is shortsighted. Why? Because we mimic Adam's actions by virtue of the fact that we are replicas of his fallen nature. We are "little Adams" at birth, not when we consciously choose to sin at some point in life.

So, Augustine's interpretation of original sin entails two components. One is the act of sin that Adam initially committed, which incurred guilt upon himself as well as his descendants. Adam is essentially the prototype for all humanity. The other feature is that along with the fact that humanity is legally condemned *with* Adam, it has also become practically corrupt *like* Adam. This means that people are under the double burden of Adam's sin (original sin) as well as their own individual sins (actual sin).⁷

B. AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF ELECTION

Hand in hand with Augustine's view of fallen humanity, or as he labeled it, the mass of the damned (*massa damnata*), is his perspective on divine election.⁷ Because humanity is now only free to follow its moral inclinations, which are always driven by sinful motives, no one on their own will ever pursue God or seek after His mercy. This means that the Lord must sovereignly enact the power of His grace if anyone is to be delivered from their current plight. And when He does, His choice to

⁵ Augustine, *On the Merits and Remission of Sins and On the Baptism of Infants*, NPNE, vol. 5, trans., Peter Holmes and Robert E. Wallis, 1.10-11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.9; 20.3.

⁷ Bradley G. Green, "Augustine," in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, ed., Bradley G. Green (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 251.

provide salvation extends to the specific recipients who will experience it.⁸ This idea, which later becomes known as unconditional election, is at the heart of what caused such friction between Augustine and his opponents, especially the Semi-Pelagians.

Early on in his life, Augustine considered an alternative possibility—that God elected certain sinners unto salvation on the basis of foreknown faith. He deduced, for instance, that Jacob was chosen over Esau because the Lord knew he would eventually express faith in His promises.⁹ In time, though, Augustine deduced that this approach was problematic because it based God’s distribution of grace on human works, which openly contradicts Paul’s rhetorical questions in 1 Cor 4:7. Paul asks, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though you did not receive it?” The obvious answer to the first question is nothing and therefore the second question should lead to humble repentance. This persuaded Augustine to change his mind and conclude that even faith in Christ is from the Lord, not the will of man. Predestination, then, is God’s act of preparing to give grace as a gift while faith is the actual gift of grace itself.¹⁰

Inevitably, when objections arose regarding the basis upon which God determines who will be part of the elect and who will not, his response simply was that this kind of question hits against the bulwark of God’s sovereignty. If election is based solely upon God’s purposes to the exclusion of human activity, then such inquiries will always come to a dead end because the answers are not revealed to us.¹¹ Furthermore, an unjust sinner cannot interrogate a just judge regarding his judgments. Theoretically, God could have chosen to show rebellious humanity no salvific mercy at all, but instead he graciously chose to grant it to some.¹²

C. AUGUSTINE’S VIEW OF FAITH, REGENERATION, AND JUSTIFICATION

Moving to the topic of how sinners experience God’s grace, Augustine’s convictions about sin and predestination converge with a

⁸ Augustine, *To Simplicianus*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. 1.12, eds., J. E. Rotelle and Boniface Ramsey, trans., Boniface Ramsey, (New York, NY: New City Press, 2008), 2.16.

⁹ Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, in NPNE, vol. 5, 3.7.

¹⁰ Mathis Lamberigts, “Predestination,” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed., Allan D. Fitzgerald, O. S. A. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 678.

¹¹ Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, Chapters 35–40.

¹² Green, “Augustine,” 258.

proto-sacramental view of regeneration and justification. Such a combination begins with his understanding of baptism because it is the means of addressing the immediate problem of original sin. Augustine sees it as the “laver of regeneration” that brings “remission for sin.” Baptism heals the wound of the inherited guilt that infants bring into this world when they are born.¹³ While this went against the grain of his Pelagian opponents, it coincided well with the majority opinion in the Christian empire that baptism provided the preliminary fulcrum for divine forgiveness.¹⁴

Augustine then connects baptismal regeneration to the next stage of justification. He does so by arguing that once grace commences in the new birth, a sinner “merits” eternal life apart from works and thus receives God’s righteousness. This is why baptized infants who die receive salvation, because it is merited by virtue of the forgiveness they receive. Their new identity in Christ eliminates their culpability in Adam.¹⁵ At the same time, however, regeneration enacts justification, which subsequently leads to a faith that expresses itself in love and works. Believers eventually come to walk in obedience to God’s law by the power of the Spirit so the event of justification can culminate in glorification.

So for Augustine, justification is in one sense punctiliar because it takes place alongside the moment of regeneration. But in another sense, it is progressive in nature because it continues to transform believers as they engage in consistent holiness.¹⁶

The wrinkle in this logic emerges when Augustine eventually postulates that regeneration and justification are not given to the elect only. This is because there are many saints who apostatize. Thus we now come to his views of spiritual endurance.

¹³ Augustine, *On the Baptism of Infants*, NPNF, 1.24-30; Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, NPNF, vol. 5, 2.11.

¹⁴ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 803-16.

¹⁵ Gerald Hiestand, “Augustine and the Justification Debates: Appropriating Augustine’s Doctrine of Culpability,” *Trinity Journal* 28 (2007), 115-39.

¹⁶ The details of Augustine’s view of justification can be difficult to discern because it is one subject that he did not explicitly address in any particular treatise. David F. Wright, “Justification in Augustine,” in *Justification in Perspective*, ed., Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 55-72; Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 44-54.

D. AUGUSTINE'S VIEW ON PERSEVERANCE

Though we can look at sporadic segments of Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings to piece together some of his thoughts on perseverance, the best place to look is his treatise solely devoted to the subject, which was entitled *On the Gift of Perseverance*. This work is made up of some sixty-eight chapters wherein Augustine treats the basic parameters of what perseverance is, how it is to be experienced, and why it is essential to the life of the believer. He begins the introduction by defining perseverance as "a divine gift by which an individual perseveres in Christ to the end of this life."¹⁷ He then works through his thesis by showing how it coincides with NT warnings against apostasy, the teachings of earlier Church Fathers (for example, Cyprian and Ambrose), the doctrine of predestination, and Biblical examples of prayers for endurance.¹⁸

From here, the looming question that remains is: Why do some believers persevere while others do not? Augustine asserts that the true elect, who are chosen by God to persevere, indeed do so while those who are not fall away. He also deduces that no one knows for certain whether they are among the elect and will therefore persevere. Consequently, people should not presume that perseverance is given to anyone until they reach the end of their lives.¹⁹ Thus, the apparent dilemma here is that because the human will still exists in a transitional state between the contexts of regenerating/justifying grace on the one hand and the flesh on the other, Augustine refrains from offering full assurance of perseverance because it would be presumptuous to do so.

Yet as a pastor Augustine does assure his readers that perseverance is a divine gift that cannot be lost. The catch is that God does not provide the gift simply so it can be enjoyed passively. It is given to enable us to pursue Christ with passion and devotion. One could say that one reaches the goal of perseverance by striving after it and that struggle is the means whereby the elect (not all saints) actually experience it. This is partly why Augustine stresses the importance of prayer for perseverance. It is only given to those who in faith ask for it and seek it.²⁰

¹⁷ Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, NPNF, 1.7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chapters 4–7, 20, 48–49. Augustine alludes to Cyprian's discussion about how the Lord's Prayer includes several petitions for endurance and grace to persevere as well as Ambrose's teaching that apostasy should be sobering to believers who are still in the faith.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, chapters 1, 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, chapters 10–11, 39.

Additionally, because perseverance is a gift that is certain in God's decree but uncertain for believers practically, it should be preached to all so that the listeners will be admonished to look to the Lord for strength and grace.²¹ And if one should ask why God would decree that some saints lapse without repenting and being restored, Augustine answers that such tragedies act as severe warnings to other believers against complacency in their own faith.²²

So in summary, Augustine's view of perseverance derives from a combination of early sacramentalism with strong determinism. It contains elements of the former because he believed that saving grace was initially received through the participation in the act of baptism. This act initiated the preliminary grace of regeneration in the heart of the participant which may (or may not) then lead to final justification and glorification depending on how the recipient later responds to the grace of the new birth throughout his lifetime.

Augustine's beliefs on the subject also contain components of determinism because God does not just select who the saints will be. He also chooses which saints will ultimately persevere in their faith. Consequently, he sovereignly oversees those who commit apostasy as well as those who faithfully endure and are saved. As it pertains to perseverance then, Augustine clearly allows for the possibility that a saint can prove to be a stillborn, thereby not experiencing eternal life in the age to come. Thus for all practical purposes, Augustine allows for three categories of people: unbelievers who remain in unbelief; believers who later return to unbelief; and believers who persevere. One can say that he affirmed the perseverance of the elect, but not of all the saints.²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, chapters 25, 34, 51, 57–60.

²² *Ibid.*, chapter 19.

²³ Editor's note: This point may be of special interest to the readers of JOTGES. Augustine says that some believers experience the beginnings of salvation, but if they fall away they will not be in the Kingdom of God.

III. HIGHLIGHTING MAJOR VIEWS OF PERSEVERANCE

In light of how Augustine understood this subject, we are prepared to give attention to the influence that his view has had on traditions still to come in the Church's history. One immediate observation to make is that the sacramental components of Augustine's views of regeneration and justification, which supported his belief in a saint's capacity to apostatize, set the parameters for the theology of Thomas Aquinas, the Council of Trent and the subsequent Roman Catholic tradition.²⁴ Also, to a certain extent, his conflation of baptism with the new birth was adopted with nuanced qualifications by the Lutheran and Anglican traditions.²⁵ But when it comes to the possibility of there being a distinction between saints who persevere and apostate ones who do not, Evangelicals affirm an assortment of proposals.

Ironically, the reason for this diversity is not because there is significant disagreement on whether apostasy can occur. Rather the dilemma is identifying the nature of apostasy and what apostates actually are before they apostatize. For Augustine, saints who eventually apostatize are those who genuinely experienced the grace of regeneration and justification but choose to renounce those gifts and so prove not to be part of the elect. Yet Evangelicals today couch their perspectives somewhat differently.

A. REFORMED PROPOSALS

Many Evangelicals follow the lead of John Calvin and Reformed traditions by agreeing with Augustine's beliefs about original sin and unconditional election.²⁶ Where they diverge significantly is when it

²⁴ John Jefferson Davis, "The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 2 (1991), 214.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 215-17; Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism (1529): The Sacrament of Holy Baptism," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed., Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 325-326; and Book 27 "On Baptism," in "The 39 Articles of the Church of England," in *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, ed., Philip Schaff, rev. by David S. Schaff, reprint (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 504-505.

²⁶ See Calvin on these subjects in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed., John T. McNeill, trans., Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), Book 2, Chapters 1-3; Book 3, Chapters 3, 21-24. Then compare his summary with any subsequent Reformed confession or catechism to see how Augustine's view of sin and determinism are further preserved. For starters, one can compare the related sections of

comes to his views of baptismal regeneration and sacramental justification. They argue instead that all saints who exercise faith unto justification also persevere.²⁷ The reason being is that saving faith is necessarily an enduring faith.²⁸ Pertaining to the numerous NT warning passages concerning apostasy, though, the case is made that they are actually tests for determining whether a believer's confession is legitimate. The assumption is that NT writers gave warnings to churches with the concern that some were believers while others possibly were not. The way that saving faith is identified as salvific is through the act of perseverance, which implies that those who do not abide by the warnings were never truly regenerate in the first place. Reformed Evangelicals therefore agree with Augustine that the elect do persevere. The point of departure is that they deny any categorical difference among the elect between those who persevere and those who do not.

Also, it warrants mentioning that there is a subset of Reformed thought that has received some attention in recent years as a nuanced modification of the traditional view. This nuanced view sees the NT warning passages against apostasy as a divine means whereby believers are empowered and/or motivated to persevere in their faith. Unlike the standard Reformed view that sees the warning passages as a means of separating the possessors from the imposters, this idea sees the warnings as being given to genuine believers. Because there is a Biblical tension between the initial part of salvation that is already attained, and the final vindication that is still to come at the final judgment, the warnings

the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the 2nd Helvetic Confession, and the Westminster Confession.

²⁷ What is somewhat ironic is that Luther and the later Lutheran tradition agree somewhat with Augustine that there were sacramental overtones in the rite of baptism which led to regeneration. The divergence came with Luther's insistence that believers could have a higher level of personal assurance than Augustine and his Catholic successors thought. But again, Luther still conceded that there was no means of having complete certainty that all believers would indubitably remain in a state of grace. See references in Luther's works as well as the treatment of his thought in Davis, "The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine," 215-16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 214-17. The reason for this is rightly identified by Davis who asserts that Calvin grounded perseverance in election and a forensic view of justification. Thus, two sovereign acts (election and justification) lead to the third (perseverance). However, for Augustine perseverance is defined with sacramental overtones that can allow for some to experience portions of salvific grace without receiving all of it.

are interpreted as the vehicle God uses to ensure that the elect will never fall away.²⁹

B. ARMINIAN VIEWS OF PERSEVERANCE

In strong contrast to the Reformed perspective(s) of perseverance, the second tradition that stands as the most longstanding theological alternative for many Evangelicals is commonly known as the Arminian understanding of perseverance. Simply put, proponents contend that believers are admonished in the NT to persevere in their faith because if they fail to do so for some reason, they could lose their salvation. This is why the warning language against apostasy is so strong in the NT. One can be genuinely converted at one time but later lapse back into an unconverted state.

It should also be noted that the Arminian approach developed in two distinct strains. Traditional, or classical, Arminianism has its roots in the late 16th century Dutch theologian Jacobus (James) Arminius and his later supporters.³⁰ Arminius emphasized that believers were to be circumspect in how they lived so that they would not potentially sear their conscience, abandon their faith, and ultimately fall short of final salvation in Christ.³¹

This trajectory was then taken in a new direction by later thinkers beginning with the 18th century revivalist preacher John Wesley. Wesley agreed with Arminian thought that the possibility of apostasy could

²⁹Two key works that defend this position are Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); and Thomas Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

³⁰There is significant debate as to whether Arminius' followers were defending the same understanding of perseverance and apostasy that Arminius proposed. The reason for this was because Arminius differed from his Reformed colleagues regarding predestination, election, and free will but he agreed with many of their views regarding sin and redemption. See J. Matthew Pinson, "Introduction," in *Four Views of Eternal Security*, ed., Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 15; and Carl Bangs, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed., John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 216-17. It is still the case, though, that Arminius made comments which clearly supported the idea that a believer could possibly apostatize. One can reference some of his brief observations in James Arminius, "On the Perseverance of Saints, On the Assurance of Salvation," in *The Works of James Arminius*, 3 vol., trans., James Nichols (Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 2:725-26.

³¹See Arminius, *On the Perseverance of Saints*, 725; and the treatment of Arminius' work in Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 172-81.

occur.³² Nevertheless, his views of justification and atonement, which differed significantly from Arminius, were conflated with his unique concept of the “Second Blessing” and the doctrine of entire sanctification. These things modified the purpose of perseverance in ways that went beyond traditional Arminian beliefs.³³

Despite these nuances, however, Arminian views mutually concede that apostasy is a potential reality for genuine converts. In this regard, they follow the Augustinian trail in making a distinction between persevering and non-persevering believers. Yet they reject Augustine’s views of original sin and predestination in exchange for an emphasis on free will and conditional election. So ironically, while they repudiate Augustine’s views of sin and Divine sovereignty, they agree that apostasy can still happen, just for a different reason. The reason is that since one is free to choose salvation, one is also free to later reject it.

C. FREE-GRACE VIEW OF PERSEVERANCE

Finally, a third set of proposals is advocated today by some Evangelicals who want to establish a position that avoids the perceived shortcomings of both the Reformed and Arminian traditions. The contention is that any view which requires believers to persevere in order to obtain eternal life in the age to come automatically nullifies the meaning of *sola fide* and eliminates any reliable basis for personal assurance of salvation.

The charge is that the Reformed view offers the promise of protection for those who persevere but it cannot assure anyone that they will actually do so. On the flip side of the coin, the Arminian reading of Scripture is problematic as well because even though it provides people with confidence that they are believers in the present, it cannot offer any real security because they could later apostatize.³⁴ So you can either be in doubt as to whether you ever truly received salvation in the past (Reformed) or be in constant fear that you may lose it in the future (Arminian).

³² For example, see John Wesley’s comments in “A Call to Backsliders, and Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints,” in *The Essential Works of John Wesley*, ed., Alice Russie (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2011), 519-32, 1153-66.

³³ Pinson, “Introduction,” 18.

³⁴ This critique on Arminianism is articulated as such by Norman Geisler in “A Moderate Calvinist View,” in *Four Views of Eternal Security*, 63-70.

Advocates of what is often labeled *the Free Grace position* offer an alternative to these views.³⁵ They argue that NT warning passages about perseverance are not about apostasy at all.³⁶ Rather they are given to encourage believers to be faithful in their service to the Lord so that they will not forfeit eternal rewards in the final judgment. Some would prefer to speak of the Bema, or the Judgment Seat, of Christ.³⁷ Therefore, while the initial experience of salvation is fixed and determined when someone is converted, a believer's status in the coming earthly kingdom is contingent upon his/her loyal service in this life. Salvation from hell is certain for all who believe in Christ.³⁸ Rewards, on the other hand, are another matter because they are determined by obedient behavior.

In the end then, both Augustine and advocates of this position believe in three categories of people. But instead of affirming that there are unbelievers, persevering believers, and non-persevering apostates, Free

³⁵ Many participants in this stream have formed somewhat of a coalition that has resulted in what is called the Grace Evangelical Society. It has its own magazine entitled *Grace in Focus* as well as a journal, the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. One can consult their home website at <http://faithalone.org/> (accessed May 30, 2015).

³⁶ Editor's note: What Berry means by "apostasy" here is a falling away with the result that one loses his eternal salvation. Free Grace proponents do believe that a genuine believer can deny the faith. The difference, as Berry points out in this article, is that Free Grace proponents contend that such believers do not lose their salvation.

³⁷ Two works that make this case in different ways include Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 3rd ed. (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 2002); and Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997). It should also be noted that advocates of this position are almost always Dispensational premillennialists. The key point is that NT believers, or the church, will be raptured to heaven and subsequently individual believers will be judged in heaven by their works to determine their functional role in the future millennial kingdom after Christ returns to the earth. Only later at the Great White Throne Judgment, as described in Revelation 20, will unbelievers be judged by their works and condemned to eternal death in the lake of fire. The point is that judgment by works is never to determine whether someone is a believer but rather to measure the amount of reward or loss that believers will experience. To see this fleshed out in concise form, see Robert N. Wilkin, "Christians will be Judged According to their Works at the Rewards Judgment, but not at the Final Judgment," in *The Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, ed., Alan P. Stanley, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 25-50.

³⁸ Apart from the Free-Grace label, probably the closest thing one can use to demarcate this perspective is the phrase "eternal security." This refers to the idea that once people become believers, their position in Christ is irreversible regardless of what they do after their conversion. What is a bit peculiar about this position is that various advocates may have Reformed or Arminian views of sin and election and yet still advocate eternal security. So while there can be Free Grace thinkers who affirm unconditional or conditional election, they all mutually affirm eternal security. In other words, Free Grace advocates may bicker on whether God chooses who believes but they all concede that believers choose whether they will inherit rewards in the millennial kingdom or not.

Grace proponents claim there are believers who will inherit rewards in the future earthly kingdom, believers who will enter the kingdom with little or no inheritance, and unbelievers who will not enter the kingdom at all.³⁹

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The point to see in this comparative study is that all of these views are working through the same Biblical questions that Augustine attempted to answer centuries ago. Likewise, the theological constructs that he bequeathed are formidable because often Evangelicals disagree with Augustine on the issue of perseverance partly because they differ on the viability of his views on soteriology. Furthermore, the issue again is not solely about whether believers can possibly apostatize. The deeper, more unsettling, concern is identifying what someone is before any potential lapse in faith. If someone professes Christ at a certain stage of life only to abandon their faith at a later time, the looming question is this: “What were these people before they showed their true spiritual colors?” Were they believers who simply deactivated the sacramental process of salvation (Augustinian), believers who denied their faith (Arminian), people who initially acted like they had faith but eventually showed they had none (Reformed), or are they AWOL believers who will miss out on their full inheritance in the coming earthly kingdom (Free Grace)?

As we have seen, determining an answer to this question is partly determined by which components of Augustine’s theology of perseverance are embraced. Or to speak in more Biblical terms, one’s view of sin, conversion, and election necessarily guide one’s thinking regarding the related issue of perseverance.

On a final note, Augustine’s convictions about perseverance do retain certain theological problems. One is the troubling distinction between persevering and non-persevering believers. The NT indeed warns believers to endure in their faith under threat of Divine judgment. However, the warnings are not written to foster an attitude of doubt regarding one’s faith or engender psychological paralysis because people can never

³⁹ Some of these categories receive a helpful discussion in Ján Henzel, “When Conversion is Joy and Death Victory: Historical Foundations of the Doctrine of Perseverance,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no. 2 (2003), 123-48.

be certain whether they will persevere or not. Instead, the warnings are pastoral, even perhaps therapeutic to a degree, in that they are given to encourage, edify, and rebuke. One could say they were given to build the confidence of believers who were enduring and deconstruct the unhealthy presumption of others whose commitment was waning.

This leads to a second concern, which entails the sacramental overtones that guided Augustine's theology. The reason he can distinguish between two kinds of believers is because regeneration and justification are not inseparably linked to glorification and resurrection. One can be sovereignly chosen to experience no salvific grace at all, elected to some of the initial blessings of salvation via baptism, regeneration, and justification, or elected to all of its blessings including perseverance and resurrection. Essentially then, election appears to be somewhat convoluted because in Augustine's model, God sovereignly determines to grant effectual saving grace to some that ultimately is ineffective. And it is here where Evangelicals in every camp can learn a valuable lesson about the practical nature of perseverance. It should always be treated as a theological link that is inseparably connected to every other theological component of the Christian experience.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Editor's note: The point here is that how one sees God's grace, the reception of eternal life, and what happens at the moment of faith/justification, will determine how one sees enduring in good works and assurance of salvation.

THE PROMISE OF EVERLASTING LIFE IN PAUL'S FIRST RECORDED SERMON (ACTS 13:14-41)

ZANE HODGES¹

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, it is commonly held that there are many different ways that a Christian can present the message of eternal salvation to an unbeliever. As a result, it is maintained that we cannot say that there is only one statement of truth in this regard. One way of expressing the message is not to be preferred over many other options. There can be no doubt that the postmodern view of reality supports such thinking.²

When one looks at how Jesus proclaimed the saving message, however, he finds that the Lord had a consistent content to what He offered the unbeliever. He made eternal life the very core and essence of that message.³ Many passages in the Gospel of John bear this fact out (3:15-16; 4:14; 5:24; 6:27, 40, 54; 10:28; 17:2-3). In other words, when Jesus told people how to be saved from hell, He offered them eternal life. That is what they were called to believe in Him for (cf. 1 Tim 1:16).

However, some Evangelicals maintain that the evangelist today need not be that consistent. What needs to be believed by the unbeliever can take many diverse forms, it is argued.

The Apostle Paul is sometimes pointed to as an example of such diversity. It is maintained that he did not preach an evangelistic message that necessarily included the offer of eternal life. Depending upon the circumstances and audience, he offered unbelievers other benefits if they

¹ This article comes from the seminary notes of the class Zane Hodges taught on the book of Acts at Dallas Theological Seminary. Other parts are supplemented by other writings of Hodges. The introduction and all footnotes were added by the editor. However, even the introduction is based upon what Hodges wrote in other publications. In addition, changes were made in the class notes in order to place them in the proper format for publication in this journal. Used by permission.

² Zane C. Hodges, *The Atonement and Other Writings* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 45.

³ *Ibid.*, 47.

believed. These other benefits might be the forgiveness of sins, justification, or simply salvation in a very general sense.⁴

What this all means is that Paul did not necessarily preach the same evangelistic message that the Lord did. For Paul, an unbeliever did not have to understand that he had eternal life at the moment of faith. He would be eternally saved if he simply believed in Jesus for a number of different things. The unbeliever would have this salvation even if he did not have assurance at the point of faith that he had eternal life.

This article will argue that Paul preached the exact same saving message that Jesus preached. The content of that message was that the unbeliever needed to believe in Jesus for the free gift of eternal life. This becomes clear in the first sermon that Luke records for us in the ministry of the Apostle. It occurs in Acts 13 and was given in the city of Antioch in Pisidia.

II. THE SERMON IN THE SYNAGOGUE (ACTS 13:14-41)

In the synagogue at Antioch we have the first account of the content of Paul's preaching. It is an evangelistic message, as Acts 13 makes clear. In addition, it was given to a group of unbelieving Jews.

Immediately before Paul's sermon in the synagogue, Luke records how Paul performed a mighty miracle (13:11). In this account we see that Paul was powerful in his *deeds*.

In the synagogue, Paul becomes powerful in *word*. In this order, of deeds then word, the reader is reminded how the book of Acts began. Acts is the second book Luke wrote. The first was the Gospel of Luke. In the Third Gospel, Luke says he wrote about what Jesus began "to do and teach" (Acts 1:1; *ho Iēsous poiein kai didaskein*). Through Paul, Christ continues to "do" and "teach." We should certainly expect that the message Paul preached was the same message Jesus preached. If the core of Jesus' evangelistic message was eternal life, then it makes sense that the core of Paul's evangelistic message would be eternal life as well.

The sermon itself breaks down into three sections. The first deals with God's grace to Israel in the past (vv 16-25; *andres Israēlitai*). The second is God's salvation for Israel in the present (vv 26-37; *andres adelphoi*,

⁴ Ibid., 48.

huioi genous Abraam kai).⁵ The final section speaks of God's potential judgment upon Israel in the future (vv 38-41; *andres adelphoi*).

A. GOD'S GRACE TO ISRAEL IN THE PAST (vv 16-25)

The sermon of Paul starts with an emphasis on how God had shown His grace to the nation of Israel in the past. Prior to their time in Egypt, God "chose" them as His people (v 17; *ekseleksato*). While in Egypt He "exalted" them, even though they were strangers in that land (v 17; *hypsōen*). From their previous existence as slaves, He "brought them out," that is, He delivered them from their bondage (v 17; *eksēgagen*).

Even in their disobedience in the wilderness, after such a great deliverance, He endured, or put up with, such rebellion (v 18; *etropophorēsen*). He brought their descendants into the Promised Land by defeating their enemies and giving them an inheritance in that land (v 19; *kateklēronomēsen*).

After being in the land, He was generous to them. He "gave" them a series of judges who delivered them from their enemies. This occurred even though their sin had led to such oppression by neighboring nations. God also "gave" them a king that they had asked for (vv 20-21; *edōken*).

When that king proved to be unsuited to the task of leading the people, God removed him and provided them with a good leader. He "raised up" David (v 22; *ēgeiren*).

Their first king, Saul, was merely "a man of the tribe of Benjamin" (v 21). David, on the other hand, was a man after the heart of God (v 22). God "gave" them Saul, but "raised" up David. In Saul He graciously gave them what they "asked" for (v 21). In David, He sovereignly provided what they needed. The verb "raised" suggests the divine sovereignty beyond the expression of divine generosity inherent in the verb "to give."

David's value to them is seen in his obedience to God ("who will fulfill all My will"; v 22). Saul did his own will to the harm of the people. The need of the people, however, was for God to rule the one who ruled them.

⁵ In both v 16 and v 26, Luke says that Paul also addressed those who "feared" God. In his notes, Hodges does not make it clear whether he felt this designation refers to the Jews themselves, Gentiles who had converted to Judaism, or Gentiles who attended the synagogue but had not converted. Regardless, it is clear, as will be discussed later in this article, that Gentiles were in the audience. It will be assumed at that point that these God-Fearers were Gentiles.

Finally, in His grace, God fulfilled His promise to them by “bringing”⁶ them the One who would bring salvation, the “Savior” Jesus (v 23, *ēgagen...Sōtēra*). In bringing salvation to Israel through Christ, God renews, as it were, His grace to His ancient people. A new era of His grace is now opened if the nation will accept Him. In Christ the Old Covenant terminates and the New Covenant begins. Later in the sermon, Paul will refer to the New Covenant by citing Isa 55:3 (v 34).

It is clear in this passage that Luke, in his account of Paul’s sermon, is connecting Jesus with David. David is a prototype of his greater Son who was truly and perfectly after God’s own heart. The fact that David did “all the will of God” reminds us of God’s commendation of Christ at His baptism. God was well pleased with His Son because He would truly do the will of God. This connection with the baptism of Christ is evident in the following verse. Paul makes specific reference to the baptism of John in v 24.

The connection between David and Christ is made especially clear with the first word in v 23. “Of this man” (*toutou*), that is David, the Savior and His salvation come. Jesus was a descendant of David.

At the end of this first section, Paul mentions two facts about the coming of the Messiah (v 24). These two facts prepare the way for the second part of the sermon. The first fact is that John’s baptism, preached before Christ’s entrance into His official ministry, was a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Therefore, Paul’s audience must be prepared to repent and to disassociate themselves from the sinful rejection of the Savior by their fellow countrymen (vv 27ff).⁷

The second fact presented here at the conclusion of part one of the sermon is John’s testimony about Christ. That testimony magnified the greatness of Jesus (v 25). Paul’s audience needed to understand the magnitude of guilt one would experience if they rejected One that great. The nation of Israel would face severe consequences for their disbelief.

⁶ Both the Critical Text and the Majority Text have the correct reading, He “brought” unto Israel, which is the translation followed by versions such as the Revised Standard and NET. The King James Version unfortunately translates the passage with a different verb and has, He “raised” unto Israel. Evidently a scribe repeated the verb “raised” from v 22 in v 23.

⁷ The point here, as Hodges held, is that John’s message was directed towards the nation of Israel. It was not a message on how a person was spiritually saved. Before God could bring the Kingdom to the *nation* of Israel, there had to be national repentance, that is, a national turning from sin. This repentance would lead the way for the blessing of the coming Kingdom.

John's ministry marks the end of God's gracious dealings with Israel in the past. All the Law and the prophets were until John. John culminates OT history, and Christ inaugurates NT history. John stands at the end of the past sequence of divine dealings, while Christ stands at the beginning of the present sequence of divine dealings. As will be seen, these present dealings will include Gentiles as well.

B. GOD'S SALVATION FOR ISRAEL IN THE PRESENT (vv 26-37)

While John preached a message of national repentance in order to bring the blessing of the Kingdom to the nation as a whole, with the ministry of Jesus there is the offer of salvation for the individual Jew. This offer is a display of the grace of God in the present.

The title of this part of the sermon could be, "The word of this salvation" (v 26; *ho logos tēs sōtērisa tautēs*). The theme of the section is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. These things made the salvation possible.

In addition, it is a salvation offered to the Jews in the synagogue (*hūioi Abraam*). They are the legitimate heirs of God's gracious dealings with Israel in the past.

Verse 27 suggests that the message is being preached to them in the context of the rejection of the Messiah by those in Jerusalem. It is as though God would now put the issue to them, the Jews of the Dispersion. Will they endorse or will they reject the action of their brethren? Paul says that God is sending the word "to you" (v 26).⁸ Their countrymen had crucified the Messiah. Will they now act as true "sons of Abraham" and believe in their Messiah, or would they bring divine judgment upon themselves (v 41).

In vv 27-29 there is an appeal to OT prophecy. It is implied that these Jews in the synagogue should heed the voices of the prophets. The prophetic books were read every Sabbath day in that synagogue.

These verses present three facts about the death of Jesus, the Messiah. The first is that those who killed Him were ignorant. The second is that Jesus was innocent. The third is that the death of Christ was inevitable because the prophets had predicted it.

However, God triumphed over the ignorance of men. This triumph was proved by the resurrection of the Lord. The Apostles are the

⁸ The word *you* is emphatic in the original, occurring before the rest of the clause: *hūmin ho logos tēs sōtērias tautēs apostalē* ("to you the word of this salvation was sent").

witnesses of this triumph (vv 30-31). They proclaimed His resurrection to the “people,” which refers to the Jews in the nation of Palestine.

What all this means is spelled out in vv 32-37. While the original Apostles were witnesses in Palestine, Paul and his companions are preaching the “good news” to those in Antioch (*euangelizomai*, v 32). We see here that Paul senses his special mission abroad as over against the ministry of the Twelve to Israel in the land. This special mission is the larger work to which Paul is called. There can be no doubt that he conceived his work at Antioch as being obedient to the commission he received at his conversion (Acts 9:15-16; 26:16-18). At this point in the book of Acts we see Paul’s emergence into the foreground of the narrative.

Paul has a “promise” to give them (v 32). This is surely the promise of Messianic salvation (v 26). Even though the Jews in Palestine had rejected their Messiah and crucified Him, these events did not nullify the promise. In fact, in the resurrection of Christ they completely fulfilled it (v 33, *ekpeplērōken*). The decree of Psa 2:7 is now unalterably fixed (v 33). Judgment is sure for those who reject Christ (v 41). Those who trust in Him will be blessed (v 34). The New Covenant, with its “sure mercies,” becomes a viable offer in Christ.

The resurrection of Christ, then, brings the promise made to the Fathers to complete fulfillment and certitude. It needs to be remembered that the quotation from Psalm 2 is given within a background of rebellious rejection. This is what had happened in Jerusalem with Christ (Acts 4:25-28). However, God’s complete triumph over this rebellion is seen in raising the Messiah. In that act, the mighty Sonship of Christ is preeminently affirmed. Psalm 2 proclaims the session of Messiah on the heavenly throne and His formal “adoption” as God’s King-Son according to the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:14; Heb 1:5). This is the good news of the promise that Paul brings them.

Because of the resurrection, God offers the “holy things” of David. These things (*ta hosia*) refer to the benefits (plural) of salvation (v 26), such as the forgiveness of sins and justification (vv 38-39). These benefits, though called the holy things of David, are administered by the Son of David, the “Holy One” who saw no corruption (*ton hosion*; v 35).

In v 34, when referring to the “holy things” of David, Paul quotes from Isa 55:3. In v 35, when referring to Christ as the “Holy One,” he quotes from Psalm 16. Paul wishes to place these two Scriptures side by

side. The statements Paul is making cannot be applied to David. David only served his own generation. But the resurrection of Christ makes the holy things of David absolutely sure for all generations. Messiah, whose body for a brief period of time was “about to return to corruption” (*mellonta hupostrephēin eis diaphthoran*, v 34), actually never saw that corruption. With the resurrection such corruption is not possible. Thus, He can both offer and guarantee these holy things to Israel when David himself could not. David could not because he experienced corruption in the grave.

C. GOD’S POTENTIAL JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL (VV 38-41)

The conclusion of the sermon in vv 40-41 seems to indicate that at least some of the Jews in the synagogue will reject the message. We can see this is in the quote of Hab 1:5, which speaks about the lack of faith (*ou mē pisteusēte*). The quote also speaks of those who will perish (v 41, *aphanisthēte*). Those who do so are identified as “despisers” (*hoi kataphronētai*).

Paul’s sermon implies that he is preaching this message to them because the message must be known to them first even if they do not hear it (*gnōston oun estō*, v 38). Even the Jews in the Diaspora must be allowed to ratify the rejection and sin of Jerusalem. This must be done before Paul goes to the Gentiles.

III. A MESSAGE TO THE JEWS

Clearly this sermon had a Jewish emphasis. The grace that God extended in the OT was towards the Jews. John the Baptist preached to the Jews. There was a threat of judgment upon the nation of Israel if they rejected their Messiah. This judgment included the destruction of the nation in AD 70. These things did not apply to the Gentiles.

In the sermon in the synagogue at Antioch, Paul gives a true offer of salvation to the Jews who hear it. God’s grace was once again being poured out on them. This salvation is offered to “all who believe” (*pas ho pistueōn*). However, Paul implies the message will be rejected by some, which will result in divine judgment. However, what exactly is the message Paul offers them?

IV. THE CONTENT OF PAUL'S EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE IN THE ACT 13 SERMON

In his offer of salvation in the synagogue in Antioch Paul mentions two benefits the believer will receive. These are the forgiveness of sins and justification (v 26). However, he does not mention the phrase “eternal life.”

This has led some to conclude that it is not necessary to present everlasting life as the core of the gospel. An unbeliever can believe in other things in order to experience spiritual salvation. The evangelistic message, for example, could simply be that Jesus offers the forgiveness of sins to the unbeliever. The unbeliever could believe that and be a part of the Kingdom of God even if he did not understand what that Jesus guarantees to the one who believes in Him is eternal and irrevocable. In other words, the offer of salvation can be given in a rather vague or unspecified way.

There are a number of reasons, however, why this line of thinking must be rejected. First, it is clear that the sermon recorded in Acts 13 in the synagogue is a condensed version. It only covers about 25 verses and only takes a couple minutes to read. Given the opportunity to preach, Paul certainly spoke longer than that.⁹ Paul would have said much more than is recorded here.

The second reason the presentation of the saving message in an unspecified way is to be rejected is that justification and the forgiveness of sins are not the same thing as having eternal life.¹⁰ When a person believes the Biblical message concerning everlasting life, he receives a number of spiritual benefits. Paul states in the sermon that the message he preached would bring many “mercies” (v 34). There is more than one benefit of salvation. However, they are not the same things.

Forgiveness and justification are significant adjuncts of the salvation experience. But they are not the basic element.¹¹ As will be seen here in

⁹ Hodges, *Atonement*, 51.

¹⁰ Hodges believed that the forgiveness of sins allowed the new believer to have communion with God. He believed that justification meant that the new believer was removed from being under the wrath of God to being at peace with God. While these things happen at the point of faith, they are not the same thing as receiving eternal life. See, for example, Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013).

¹¹ Hodges, *Atonement*, 64.

Acts 13, the core element of the evangelistic message is the reception of eternal life. The unbeliever is spiritually dead. God does not forgive spiritually dead people. Neither does He justify spiritually dead people. Although the new birth and reception of eternal life, forgiveness, and justification occur simultaneously at the moment of saving faith, the reception of eternal life is *logically prior* to the other two.¹²

The third reason the omission of the offer of eternal life in the evangelistic presentation is to be rejected is Paul's own experience of coming to faith in the Lord. When he reflected on his own conversion, he spoke of receiving eternal life. We see this in 1 Tim 1:15-16:

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter *believe on him to life everlasting* (emphasis added).

What exactly did Paul believe when he experienced salvation? He explicitly states that he believed that he had obtained everlasting life. But it wasn't just his experience. He became an example, or pattern, for those who come after him. When they became believers they were to believe the same thing.

The fourth reason the saving message must specifically include the offer of eternal life is what Luke writes in the aftermath of Paul's first sermon in Acts 13.¹³ In these verses, Luke tells us that Paul was offering these Jews when he offered them "salvation."

V. THE SEQUEL TO THE SERMON (VV 42-52)

After Paul preached his sermon in the synagogue, Luke tells us what happened immediately afterwards. Many of the Jews in the synagogue believed. In addition, many Gentile God-fearers in the synagogue responded in a similar fashion (v 43). This response by these Gentiles

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hodges did believe that a person could be born again without hearing the exact words *everlasting life*. In his view, one had to believe that Jesus guarantees the believer everlasting life *or the equivalent*. Thus, if a person believes that by faith in Christ he is guaranteed to go to heaven when he dies, or that he is saved once and forever, or that he is justified and can't lose that, or that he is securely part of God's forever family, then he is born again.

resulted in the evangelization of many other Gentiles the following Sabbath and beyond (vv 44-49).

But many of the Jews of the area rejected what Paul preached. They had never had such success among the Gentiles and were evangelistically “jealous” (*zēlou*, v 45). Paul had already encountered such Jewish jealousy towards the evangelizing of Gentiles on this first missionary journey.

On the island of Cyprus, prior to arriving in Antioch, Paul had attempted to evangelize the Gentile proconsul of that island. However, Paul was opposed by a Jewish magician named Elymas, who did not want to see Gentiles turn to the Christian faith (Acts 13:6-8). The Jews at Antioch were following in the footsteps of Elymas. Paul had hinted in the sermon in the synagogue that his message would be rejected by the Jews. In their opposition to the gospel they were like the Jews in Jerusalem who had rejected and crucified the Messiah. Here at Antioch the opposition reached its climax when the Jews persecuted Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district (vv 50-51).

In the account of Elymas, the Gentile proconsul comes to faith. The opposition of Elymas was ineffectual. The same thing occurs at Antioch. Many of the Gentiles come to faith, not only in Antioch but in the surrounding region as well (vv 48-49).

The reason for the failure of this opposition is that God’s purposes in His plan of salvation included the salvation of Gentiles. Paul tells the Jews that in v 47. He quotes from Isa 49:6, which says that God’s “salvation” will go to the Gentiles, even to the end of the earth. The original context of Isaiah 49 is that these words are spoken to the Servant of Jehovah. Yet Paul applies these words to himself and his travelling companion. In the book of Acts the risen Servant of Jehovah, Jesus Christ, continues to do and teach through His earthly servants.

But did Paul indeed place the offer of eternal life at the core of his message of salvation to these Gentiles? When Paul spoke of a person being eternally saved from hell, is that what he meant, or could he speak in much more general terms or in various other ways? Fortunately, Luke tells us in the aftermath of Paul’s first recorded sermon.

Immediately after the sermon in the synagogue, in the very next verse, Luke tells us what message Paul preached to the Gentiles. It was

the same message that he had preached to the Jews. They asked Paul if he would preach “these words” to them on the next Sabbath.¹⁴

Part of the sermon in the synagogue was only for the Jews. It spoke of the rejection of the nation of their Messiah by the Jewish rulers in Jerusalem. The good news to the Jews included the promise of national blessings for obedience, but also national judgment if they rejected the message. This Jewish emphasis, as noted above, is what Luke records in the sermon in the synagogue.

But there was also a common message that went out to both unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Gentiles. There were Gentiles in the synagogue as well. They were the “God Fearers” that attended the synagogue (13:16, 26). Their history did not include the grace of God towards the nation under the Old Covenant. The threat of national judgment for unbelief did not apply to them. However, the grace of God would be shown to them in the Messiah, as the prophets had foretold.

The presence of both Jews and Gentiles here in the synagogue compels Paul to encourage the new believers to “continue in the grace of God” (v 43). The Law of Moses could not justify either Jews or Gentiles (v 39). Paul seemed to sense that there would be a desire live according to the Law of Moses among these new converts and not live by the grace of God. This would soon be a large problem in this church, as the book of Galatians proves.

In any event, there was a “word of salvation” in Paul’s message for the Gentiles as well. This salvation was the message—“these words”—that the Gentiles wanted to hear more about

A. THE MEANING OF “THESE WORDS”

On the next Sabbath, the whole city came to hear the word of God spoken by Paul (v 42). Since it was a Gentile city, it is obvious that the message was given to Gentiles.

Whatever the message was, once again we see that the Jews opposed what Paul spoke to the Gentiles (v 45). The message that they opposed, the same one spoken in the synagogue the previous week, is specifically identified in the next verse:

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of *everlasting life*, lo, we turn to the Gentiles (v 46; emphasis added).

It was the message of *everlasting life* that the unbelieving Jews were opposing. They refused to believe on Jesus Christ for eternal life. In doing so, they had judged themselves unworthy of this superlative gift.¹⁵

The very message that the Jews refused to believe, Paul was bringing to the Gentiles. As the next verse says, this is the salvation that the Lord had commanded to be brought to the Gentiles (v 47). It was the same word of salvation given to the Jews in the synagogue (v 26).

The last comment by Luke on Paul's message in Antioch is conclusive (v 48). It summarizes Paul's evangelizing in that city:

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to *eternal life believed* (emphasis added).¹⁶

In this statement, Luke makes plain the evangelistic message Paul preached. When he preached spiritual salvation, that is salvation from hell, he preached eternal life. This gift is given to all who believe. This was true for both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁷

B. LUKE, THE MASTERFUL AUTHOR

Just because Luke does not mention that Paul specifically stated that eternal life was the core of his evangelistic presentation in the sermon

¹⁵ Ibid., 50. It is interesting that this is something the Jews had done to *themselves* (Greek word *heautus*). It was not that they couldn't believe the message, they voluntarily chose to not consider the message of salvation Paul brought. Hodges' notes explain it like this: "The soul that thrusts away so gracious a word of God only passes judgment on his own deserts. He is unfit for eternal life. Man's response to the light is his judgment (John 3).

¹⁶ In his notes on Acts, Hodges gives his view of total depravity and predestination. We see this view in the previous footnote, as well as his comments on Acts 17:27. After pointing out that that it is possible for unbelievers to seek and find God, because God seeks the unbeliever first, Hodges states: "Total depravity does not consist in man's *inability* to seek God, but in his unwillingness to seek God. 'There is none that seeketh after God' is an assertion true, but not of *human capacity*, but of *human choice*" (emphasis his). The point here in verse 48 is that the Gentiles were "ordained" to (or disposed toward) eternal life in the sense that they were willing to listen to the message, while the unbelieving Jews were not (Acts 13:46). For further discussion of this point and verse, see Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 184-86.

¹⁷ Hodges, *Atonement*, 50.

in the synagogue, does not mean that Paul did not proclaim it in that house of worship. Luke does refer to the “salvation” Paul preached there (v 26). He picks up the same word in the sequel to the sermon when Paul preached the “same words” to the Gentiles.

It is clear that we have a condensation of Paul’s message in the synagogue. Here in Acts 13 we see the skill of Luke as an author. His condensation of Paul’s message does not contain the critical words “eternal life” because Luke wants to save this core of Paul’s evangelistic message until the climax of his account of Paul in Antioch.¹⁸ His use of these words at the end of his preaching in Antioch—Paul’s final word on the matter—shows that for Paul the gift of eternal life is central to the evangelistic presentation to unbelievers.

VI. CONCLUSION

One cannot look at the sermons of Paul in the book of Acts and conclude that since everlasting life is not recorded in every sermon, that Paul did not make it the core of his message.¹⁹ The book of Acts was written to believers who already knew the message of eternal life and did not have to be reminded of that message at every turn.

However, in Paul’s *first* recorded sermon, Luke makes it clear that Paul did make the offer of eternal life central to his message of eternal salvation. The reader, especially the believing reader, would understand that this is what Paul meant when he spoke of salvation to unbelievers throughout the book of Acts.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁹ At the 2006 GES Annual Conference in Dallas a controversy erupted over messages given by Zane Hodges and Bob Bryant arguing that assurance of everlasting life is of the essence of what saving faith is. That is, they suggested what Zane suggests in this teaching on Acts 13—that a person is not born again until he believes the Lord’s promise of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it. At the time some suggested that Hodges was proclaiming a new message which he had never preached before. (I believe they said this because they had strong disagreement with this teaching when they heard it, yet they never recalled reading or hearing Hodges say something they strongly disagreed with before.) But he taught that truth going back at least into the sixties. He taught this course on Acts every four years or so between 1959 and 1986 (the 27 years when he taught at DTS) and he repeatedly brought out this emphasis. For more information see Donald Reiher, “Zane Hodges and GES Did Not Change the Gospel,” *JOTGES* (Spring 2010): 31-58. Reiher shows examples of this teaching in Hodges’s writings going back to the seventies, eighties, and nineties.

There were certainly things Paul spoke of to different groups depending on the situation. To the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch there were certain Jewish emphases. But at the core of that message was the offer of eternal life. This offer was proclaimed by Paul as well. One of the Jewish emphases was that this offer must go to the Jews first. But afterwards, the same offer—the gift of eternal life—would go to the Gentiles. Many of them believed in Christ for it.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Coming Kingdom: What Is the Kingdom and How Is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church? By Andrew M. Woods. Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016. 423 pp. Paper, \$24.95.

As the subtitle suggests, this book is explaining and arguing against the idea that Jesus is currently reigning as the Davidic king in some sort of present form of the kingdom. He calls this *kingdom now theology*.

There are many excellent aspects of this book.

First, Woods covers nearly everything anyone would want to know about the controversy over whether the kingdom is in some sense currently operating. He discusses progressive dispensationalism (e.g., pp. 269-83, 375-77), the social gospel (pp. 345-47), prosperity theology (pp. 370-71), the charismatic movement and cessationism (pp. 365-71), the gospel of the kingdom (pp. 58-59), the kingdom parables of Matthew 13 (pp. 103-140), refuting kingdom now arguments (e.g., 323-38), refuting the suggestion that Jesus is now seated on David's throne (pp. 241-68), and replacement theology (pp. 155ff, 191-93, 231-32, 313 [citing Fruchtenbaum], 323-38).

Second, the author's exegesis is strong throughout. He points out contextual reasons that support his views. He does not rely on consensus theology to establish the truth of his interpretations.

Third, the Free Grace position is strongly defended in this book. Indeed, the last chapter is entitled, "Lordship Salvation and Kingdom Now Theology" (pp. 379-86).

Fourth, Woods does a good job of explaining the practical benefits of seeing the kingdom as future and not yet present (Part III, pages 341-86).

Fifth, the indexes are very helpful. There is an author index, a subject index, an index of Greek words (74 words) as well as a few Hebrew and Aramaic words (8 and 1, respectively), and a Scripture index.

Sixth, Woods makes a helpful statement about assurance: "Christ gives all believers instantaneous assurance of salvation at the point of

their individual justification by faith alone (John 5:24; 6:47)” (p. 383). That is well said, and a valuable response to the lack of assurance in Lordship Salvation teaching.

There are a few relatively minor weaknesses.

First, probably over one-fourth of this book is made up of quotes, often very long quotes, from others. While it is helpful to have quoted material as a reference, Woods gives such lengthy quotes, they sometimes break up the flow of his own writing. What he has to say is so outstanding that I would have preferred shorter quotes.

Second, Woods takes a fairly strong Calvinistic understanding of total depravity [contra Acts 10, for example], as can be seen on p. 381 where he argues that the unregenerate “cannot do anything of spiritual value, such as obey, forsake, and so forth.” However, he does say that the unregenerate can believe in Christ for salvation, which is not a Calvinist position, and to which most *JOTGES* readers would say, “Amen.”

I highly recommend this book. The exegesis is well done. Many vital issues are discussed.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***Can I Lose My Salvation?* By R.C. Sproul. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015. 65 pp. Paper, \$2.50.**

R.C. Sproul is a gifted and clear theological writer. His booklet, *Can I Lose my Salvation?* concisely addresses the questions, “If I’m presently in a state of faith, if I’m presently embracing Christ, will that change? Will the status that I enjoy in the presence of God change? Can I lose my salvation?” (p. 8).

This booklet carries a personal and pastoral tone. Sproul mentions that he frequently receives correspondence from individuals concerned about the thought of losing their salvation.

He writes from a Reformed Presbyterian perspective, identifying eternal security with perseverance of the saints in TULIP (p. 5). He sees a tension within the Bible between passages that warn about losing salvation, and other passages that guarantee the saints will be preserved: “In the Bible itself, there are many passages that strongly suggest that people can indeed lose their salvation (e.g., Heb. 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-22).

And yet, on the other side there are also many passages that seem to be promises that God will preserve His people to the end.” Sproul seeks to address this tension.

In addressing apostasy, Sproul argues there is a “distinction between a serious fall and a total fall” (p. 14). He suggests believers can fall to some degree, but cannot totally fall away. David and Peter are set forth as examples that believers may fall terribly. The distinguishing mark between a serious fall and a total fall is whether one returns after a fall (p. 15). He writes, “The challenge, then, is to distinguish between a true believer in the midst of a serious fall (who will at some point in the future be restored) and a person who has made a false profession of faith” (p. 15). This view begs the question, what if Peter and David had died while in their sin, before being restored?

Chapter 3 deals with “the unforgivable sin” which Sproul believes someone commits “when he knows for certain through the illumination of the Spirit that Christ is the Son of God, but he comes to the conclusion and makes the statement verbally that Christ was demonic” (pp. 26-27). He says that if someone is concerned they may have committed this sin, they probably haven’t.

Sproul interprets Heb 6:1-6 as a hypothetical argument which amounts to an argument *ad absurdum*. This passage should strengthen our confidence in perseverance as the falling away spoken of is not possible for the believer.

In the final chapter Sproul argues the elect will not fall away because Jesus preserves them.

Sproul’s booklet is easy to read and concisely portrays a pragmatic Reformed view of perseverance of the saints. It is pragmatic in that it does not go into detailed theological discussion, but rather sets forth in accessible language the Reformed basis of assurance and security. It’s tone is “less” introspective than similar works.

Sadly, it leaves certainty of one’s eternal destiny inaccessible as one cannot know whether he may suffer a total fall in his life.

Brad Bell
Social Media Coordinator
Grace Evangelical Society

***Getting Grace Daily: A Daily Devotional.* By Brad Bird. Columbia, SC: MarketLife Ministries, 2014. 366 pp. Paper, \$15.00.**

This book caught my eye because I have often been asked by people if there is a good daily devotional available for Free Grace people. In the military, I saw that soldiers often read *Our Daily Bread*. They enjoyed having a daily verse of the Bible to read along with some discussion on it. It was a way to spend at least a little time each day in the Word of God.

My experience with devotionals like *Our Daily Bread* is that they usually do not deal with how to obtain eternal life. Instead, they give short inspirational messages such as the importance of forgiving others, the power of God in creation, and similar matters. These types of things can certainly be beneficial.

I have never found a daily devotional from a Free Grace perspective and I wondered, due to the title, if this one might be. The ministry that publishes it says that the ministry wants to put out the message of the “finished work of Christ.” This was a good sign for me.

As one would expect, for each day of the year there is a Bible verse (or verses) given with a one-page discussion. The verses come from both the Old and New Testaments and there is a wide variety of books of the Bible that are used. The book is not written for a particular year so it could be used for any year and, I suppose, for multiple years if desired.

In some cases, it is very much like other devotionals that I have seen. On the message concerning Gen 1:1, for example, the message is that God is all-powerful. He can meet any need and save any sinner.

In referring to Eccl 5:10-15, Bird points out that money cannot bring satisfaction in our lives. There is no true enjoyment in the pursuit of wealth. That can only come from God (p. 321).

Some devotions seem to indicate that a believer can choose to live an ungodly life. In one, Bird cites Jas 4:1-4. These verses discuss being a friend of the world. Bird says that the Christian must choose with whom he will be friends. Believers are called to live their lives in friendship with God and give glory to Him (p. 164). The devotion ends with the questions: What is your allegiance? Where do you find your satisfaction? What is the driving purpose of your life? At first glance it seems that Bird believes a true Christian can make the wrong choices in these areas.

Another daily devotion deals with Eph 5:15-21. In these verses Paul talks about walking in a wise manner. By this he means being filled by the Spirit. Bird recognizes that in order for this to happen the Christian must continually “drink” of the Spirit and use the Word of God (p. 139).

It is possible, then, to read the book and conclude that Bird does not believe that a true Christian will automatically continue in good works but can instead live carnally. A believer can make the wrong moral choices. However, it appears that such devotions are in the minority. Far more indicate that if a person lives a sinful life he cannot be a believer. This leads me to conclude that I have misunderstood those devotions that at first glance seem to teach that the believer can live a sinful life but can still have assurance of salvation at the moment of faith in Christ.

It is interesting that when discussing the finished work of Christ on the cross (John 19:28-30), Bird says that we are saved by faith alone. However, even in this passage he says, based upon Phil 1:6, that if we have experienced salvation through this finished work we will continue to do good works.

Bird takes on the stern warning passage of Heb 6:4-8. He says that the passage teaches that every Christian will have struggles. But the true Christian will never leave the faith. If he does, he was never a Christian to begin with (p. 271). In a similar vein, the same point is made about Heb 10:26-31. The conclusion is that “true believers persevere...but false believers always look for other options” (p. 284).

Bird says on another day that based upon Heb 4:1-4 we must examine ourselves daily to see if we are truly saved (p. 263). Even on that great verse on God’s grace in Eph 2:8, Bird says that the following verses show that the true Christian will become more and more like Christ as time goes on (p. 122).

Even though in some of the devotions it is said that salvation is by grace, through faith, and cannot be lost, many more say that works are necessary to have assurance of that salvation. As most of the readers of the *JOTGES* know, such a theological perspective means assurance is impossible. How many works are necessary to have that assurance? Unfortunately, that is the theology adopted in this daily devotional book. It is most definitely not written from a Free Grace perspective, even though the title might suggest otherwise.

The devotions in this book that deal with only general Biblical truth are not worth the many devotions that distort the gospel of grace. Even if a person is well grounded in the faith, it is not worth his time. I do not recommend this book. If a person is simply looking for a daily devotion I would point them to *Our Daily Bread* or, even better, to daily log onto the GES website for new blogs and information at www.faithalone.org.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year.* By Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016. 595 pp. Paper, \$40.00.**

Sidney Greidanus is professor emeritus of preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. He is well known for advocating a redemptive-historical approach to preaching, and has a series of books showing how to preach Christ from the OT, including *Preaching Christ from Genesis*; *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes*; *Preaching Christ from Daniel*; and now, *Preaching Christ from Psalms*. These all grow out of the hermeneutic outlined in his book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.

Greidanus defines preaching Christ as “preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament” (p. 5). He warns against forced interpretations that eisegetically read Christ back into the psalms. Instead, he believes “from the message of a psalm we can certainly move forward to Jesus in the New Testament” (p. 5).

Preaching Christ from Psalms begins with 45 pages of general hermeneutical questions about interpreting the Psalms, and then gives an exposition of 23 Psalms, showing how to exegete the text and see how they can “move forward to Jesus.”

For each Psalm, Greidanus follows a systematic pattern of analysis, including doing literary and historical interpretations, and formulating the Psalm’s theme. Then Greidanus suggests several “Ways to Preach Christ” in each Psalm, and I found his comments in this area to be especially thought-provoking. The different ways in which he suggests we

can preach Christ from the text include looking for promise-fulfillment; longitudinal themes; redemptive-historical progression; analogy; typology; New Testament references; and contrast.

For example, in Psalm 72, Greidanus sees in the prayers for the reigning king an implied promise “of a great coming King—promises that are fulfilled in Jesus’ First and Second Coming” (p. 105).

In Psalm 146, Greidanus sees an analogy between the works of the Lord mentioned in vv 6-9, and Jesus’ works mentioned in Matt 11:3-5 (p. 126).

In Psalm 80, Greidanus understands the prayer for God to restore His people as pointing to the climax of redemptive history, when God sent Jesus to save His people from their sins (p. 145).

In Psalm 2, Greidanus sees a typology of the future Messianic kingdom, as supported by eighteen NT references (p. 224).

Whether it is examining the structure of a Psalm, determining its theme, or suggesting ways of preaching Christ from the text, Greidanus provides so many excellent comments and insights that I happily recommend this book, especially for pastors and people engaged in a teaching ministry. *Preaching Christ from Psalms* is an excellent resource for helping those Scriptures come alive.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John.* Edited by Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. 724 pp. Hardcover, \$219.00.**

Most *JOTGES* readers will experience sticker-shock at a \$219.00 price tag. However, this book is a gold mine. You may (as I did) want to test-drive a library copy before taking the plunge.

Character Studies examines seventy characters who appear in John. They are examined in sixty-two of sixty-four chapters, a list approaching completeness. The forty-four authors (a few famous ones) differ somewhat in their methodologies. They reflect varying degrees of liberalism, not conservatism. None of the authors seems attuned to the freeness

of grace. Sixteen authors mention John 20:31 as the book's purpose; twenty-eight do not. Those mentioning the purpose do so merely in passing. Even so, eye-opening insights appear with some regularity within the 724 pages.

What is the benefit of such a book? Commentaries generally limit themselves to snapshots of characters from individual contexts. Biographical articles in Bible encyclopedias do not limit themselves to information contained by a single book. By contrast, this book allows us to consider each character (whether an individual or a group) throughout John's Gospel.

Here and there, an author in *Character Studies* offered a different angle on a person than had crossed my mind before. Sometimes, the case was persuasive, sometimes not. However, it was valuable to consider John from a different vantage-point, the tapestry of characters with whom the Lord interacted in presenting the message of life to Israel and (through John) to the readers.

Why is it important to consider characters specifically? Our focus upon passages within a book tends to lose sight of the characters themselves. When we think of (for example, Peter) our minds do not narrowly focus upon how John presents him. Yet, as an evangelistically-focused book, John would be (for many) the first acquaintance with these characters. It is valuable for us to step back and see these characters as if for the first time. A number of the authors in *Character Studies* offer fresh glimpses through a consideration of what John alone says about individuals or groups appearing in his book.

This volume investigates the role of figures in John's Gospel, both for individuals and group characters. The seventy appear in order of presentation (generally one character per chapter). Pages 34-45 serve as a handy concordance to the passages where each character appears. For characters with multiple designations (e.g., the NT calls Peter: Simon, Peter, Simon Peter, or Cephas), the passages are broken down between Peter and his other names.

The list of seventy is fairly complete: John 1: John (the Baptist), the world, the Jews, the priests, the Levites, the Pharisees, the disciples of John (Baptist), an anonymous disciple, Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathaniel; John 2: Jesus' mother, the twelve, the servants, the master of ceremonies, the bridegroom, Jesus' brothers, the animal sellers/moneychangers; John 3: Nicodemus, a Jew; John 4: the Samaritan woman, her husbands

and non-husband, the men of Sychar, the Galileans, the royal official, his son, his slaves/household; John 5: the ill people who were healed and those who were not, the lame man, the crowd; John 6: the boy with loaves and fish, Judas Iscariot; John 7: the authorities, the chief priests, the temple police; John 8: the Greeks, the scribes and the elders, the adulterous woman, the elders, the Devil; John 9: the man born blind, his neighbors, his parents; John 10: the Trans-Jordan believers; John 11: Lazarus, Mary (of Bethany), Martha, Thomas, Caiaphas; John 13: the beloved disciple; John 14: Judas (not Iscariot); John 18: Annas, the soldiers at Jesus' arrest, Malchus, those in the courtyard, Pilate, Barabbas; John 19: the soldiers who crucified Jesus, the co-crucified men, the women by the cross, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea; John 20: the angels; John 21: Zebedee's sons, two others of His disciples.

This book is for those willing to wrestle with the text. It is not for the undiscerning, but a steep price-tag means that only specialists will purchase it. However, pastors and others wanting to delve deeply into John's Gospel should consider seeing the inter-library-loan (ILL) librarian at a local library. This book has some character; it is worth a long look.

John H. Niemelä
President
Message of Life Ministries

***The Case for Grace: A Journalist Explores the Evidence of Transformed Lives.* By Lee Strobel. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015. 230 pp. Hardcover, \$22.99.**

Lee Strobel is a former pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois. He is today known as a New York Times best-selling author and an apologist for the Christian faith.

The emphasis of this book is about how God's grace reaches the most sinful of people. In each chapter of the book Strobel discusses how that grace transforms the lives of people. Grace changes people (p. 9).

Strobel tells of his own spiritual journey from being an atheist, to becoming a Christian, and then serving the Lord. His own story is interspersed with the other people he discusses. He learned the same lessons as the others, which is that he is dependent upon the grace of God.

The best parts of the book are the human-interest stories. The book is very easy to read and I found myself wondering what would happen to each person he discusses. The stories are compelling.

In chapter two he tells of an orphaned girl in South Korea after the war that ravaged that country. She experienced extreme poverty, sexual abuse, and the ridicule of the citizens of her country because her father had been an American soldier. When she was around nine years old a Christian missionary couple adopted her from the orphanage where she worked. Her life is a beautiful illustration of God adopting the believer into His family.

Another story recounts the life of a drug addict that was at death's door. He became a Christian but then did not live by grace. He was judgmental towards those who did not appear to work as hard as he did. This is another strength of the book. It teaches that Christians are to live lives of grace as well. We need to avoid the dangers of legalism (p. 54). This ex-addict now pastors a church in Las Vegas where everyone is welcomed. Grace is extended to prostitutes, strippers, and anybody else who comes.

In chapter four, Strobel tells of an interview with a Christian world religions professor. It contains a good discussion on how the concept of God's grace is unique in Christianity. The other religions of the world do not have that concept.

Another heart-wrenching tale deals with a Cambodian who was an executioner under the Khmer Rouge of the 1970s. This man ordered the torture and death of many people, including babies. He later becomes a Christian and is befriended and even baptized by another Cambodian who had lived through the horrors of that regime. The man who befriended him did not know the other man's past, or that as an executioner he had even killed members of his family.

When he finds out who the other man is he forgives him. The book makes the point that Christ's death paid even for this ex-executioner's sins. It clearly holds to an unlimited view of Christ's atonement and that God's grace can reach anybody (p. 103), which is another good point about the book.

Others discussed in the book include a former drug dealer and addict, a well-known Christian pastor that has a long-term adulterous affair, and the wayward son of an internationally known Christian evangelist. In each of these stories we are told of others who intervene and minister

to those involved. They display grace towards them. We learn that God's grace, as well as God's grace working through us, can pierce whatever sin and darkness one encounters.

While the book has these positive attributes, there are some weaknesses. Some readers will feel uncomfortable with the idea that angels come and speak to these people on certain occasions. An angel appears to Strobel in a dream, and the orphaned girl is saved because an angel speaks to a visiting nurse to rescue the little girl.

The biggest drawback to the book is its presentation of the gospel. It is confusing to say the least. At various places people are spiritually saved when they realize that God loves them, when they surrender their lives to Jesus, after counting the cost of following Jesus and repenting, deciding to follow Jesus, and praying and committing oneself to God. We are told that a "simple prayer" is not enough, but faith, repentance and confession are necessary (pp. 42, 78, 94, 119).

In chapter eight, we find the story of a prodigal son who says a prayer to be saved, but it didn't mean anything because he didn't turn from sin and allow God to take over his life. We are told that one cannot be saved by "cheap grace." He was only saved when he spent "two or three hours" confessing all of his sins and repenting. This was accompanied by an appropriate amount of tears. It was obvious that he was not saved before this long session of confession because even though he had prayed for salvation, he soon slipped back into living a life full of sinful activities.

In other places, however, believers know they will go to heaven when they die (p. 39). Eternal life is given as a "pure gift" (p. 65). The pastor who commits adultery is still said to be saved, even though he does not live like it. The former executioner is also said to be a true believer even though he does not reveal his true identity for years to fellow believers. Strobel himself recounts how he had failed often and miserably after becoming a Christian. In none of these cases could somebody say they had committed their lives to Christ. How could they know, then, that they had eternal life?

The reader of this book will not find a clear presentation of the gospel. Different requirements and inconsistencies are found throughout. This is not a book for an unbeliever to find how to receive eternal life. It is not, in my opinion, a book for an immature believer. However, there are some good sermon illustrations and reminders for believers. These

illustrations show how we all are completely unworthy of God's grace. For those looking for these things, I recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

1 & 2 Thessalonians. By Andy Johnson, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016. 349 pp. Paper, \$26.00.

I was not familiar with the expression *missional hermeneutic* before I read this commentary. After reading it I'm not quite sure what that is.

Johnson, Professor of NT at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, is not writing a typical commentary. For one thing, he does not discuss individual verses. Rather, he discusses a group of verses, typically five to ten verses, at a time. That makes it hard at times to find where he discusses a given verse or phrase.

In his discussion he does not present studies of words or phrases as is commonly seen in other commentaries. Rather, he discusses various interpretive options and decides on the basis of theological concerns (e.g., the meaning of *skeuos* in 1 Thess 4:4 (p. 109).

He is evidently attempting to read the Thessalonian epistles within a context of what God is doing in the world, that is, God's mission. However, in order to do that, one must have an accurate view of what God is doing in the world. That view should arise from Scripture, not be imposed upon it.

Johnson clearly rejects a Dispensational view of God's mission in the world (see pp. 130 note 405, 288-305). That in turn greatly skews the way he views passages like 1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Thess 5:9-10; Dan 9:24-27; and a host of other texts.

For example, when the author comes to 1 Thess 5:1-11, he admits that a different Greek word for sleep, *katheudō*, is used in these verses, than Paul used in 1 Thess 4:13-18 (*koimaō*). However, Johnson suggests that Paul was still "using *katheudō* euphemistically to refer to being dead in 1 Thess 5:10" (p. 146). Thus he explains 1 Thess 5:10 in this way, "Christ died for us so that whether we are asleep in death or awake (*grēgorōmen*)—which does not mean merely being alive as opposed to

being dead, but being alive *and* living self-controlled lives as we participate in the *mission Dei*—we will live with Christ” (p. 146).

Actually both *katheudō* and *gregoreō* were used by Paul four verses earlier, in 1 Thess 5:6. There they clearly mean, “*let us not sleep* [morally] as others do, but *let us watch* and be sober.” Johnson admits that is what both verbs mean in v 6 (p. 145). But then four verses later his theology leads him to postulate that the words then mean “asleep in death” and “awake...alive *and* living self-controlled lives.”

The natural understanding is that in v 10 Paul is saying that whether we are morally asleep or watchful at the time of the Rapture, we will live together with Him. Indeed, Johnson even admits as much, saying that if the words carry the same meaning in v 10 as in v 6, then “the sense could be that, because Christ died for us, we will live with him, even if our whole pattern of life is the same as that of those belonging to the night/darkness” (p. 145). He cites Edgar who explains, “Whether we live properly or not, we will be with him” (p. 145 note 456). I find it refreshing that Johnson accurately covered this other view, one which best fits the context.

JOTGES readers who hold to Dispensationalism will not find much that is consistent with a Dispensational perspective in this commentary. But that does not mean that there is nothing of value here for Dispensationalists. Let me give a few examples of gems I found in this commentary.

Johnson sees the shouting in 1 Thess 4:16 as the voice of Jesus and makes a fascinating connection with the creation account. He says, “the Son releases the breath/Spirit he receives from the Father to go forth in hopelessly dead bodies to permeate and transform them into bodies for the new creation, bodies that Paul calls elsewhere ‘spiritual bodies’ (1 Cor 15:44) (p. 129).

Even more impressive was an observation Johnson made about the repetition of *parousia* (coming) in 2 Thess 2:8 and 9. I don’t recall noticing this before. In v 8 Paul speaks of “the brightness of His [the Lord’s] coming [*parousia*].” Then in the very next verse Paul says, “The coming [*parousia*] of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan...” Johnson makes this great point: “In vv. 9-12 Paul describes the *parousia* of the ‘lawless one’ and its results. The fact that he can use the same term [*parousia*] to refer to the coming of the lawless one as he does to refer to the Lord’s royal coming colors the confrontation of v. 8 as that of the

true king deposing a false claimant to the throne” (p. 195). That is good stuff.

Readers should be aware that Johnson is open to annihilationism and seems to hold to universalism, that all will ultimately get into Christ’s kingdom (p. 174).

I recommend this commentary for those who teach the NT and for Pastors and others who are willing and able to dig to find the gold buried here. I do not recommend this commentary for most believers since I’m concerned that most would be more confused than helped by it.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters.* By Sinclair B. Ferguson. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 256 pp. Hardcover, \$24.99.**

This book is about the Marrow Controversy. It began in 1716, when William Craig, a candidate for ordination in the presbytery of Auchterarder, Scotland, could not agree with the following statement: “I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God” (p. 28).

In other words, Craig was asked if he agreed that forsaking sin was not a condition of receiving eternal life.

Craig could not agree. His refusal raised wider questions about the nature of salvation. “At the root of the matter lay the nature of the grace of God in the gospel and how it should be preached,” Ferguson explains (p. 35).

The Marrow Controversy eventually exposed a theological divide in the Scottish Presbyterian Church. Many of the staunch Calvinists did not believe the gospel should be offered to all (Ferguson calls it “deformed Calvinism,” p. 51). Since God only elected some to salvation, only those who show signs of regeneration, and hence of election, ought to be offered the gospel.

By contrast, the Marrow Men (as they came to be known) believed that “Christ is to be offered to all men everywhere without exception or qualification” (p. 39). In particular, according to the Marrow Men, works were not a condition of salvation: “The offer of the gospel is to be made not to the righteous or even the repentant, but to all. There are no conditions that need to be met in order for the gospel offer to be made” (p. 42). Whereas the other Calvinists made repentance “a qualification for grace,” according to the Marrow Men,

This puts the cart before the horse. It stands the gospel on its head so that the proclamation of the gospel, with the call to faith in Christ, becomes conditional on something in the hearer. The gospel thus becomes a message of grace for the credentialed, not an offer of Christ to all with the promise of justification to the ungodly who believes (p. 43).

As Ferguson goes on to explain, what the Marrow Men were reacting against was a theology of “preparationism” which had become an obstacle to the free offer of eternal life. Preparationism taught that a person needed to sufficiently forsake sin and experience a sufficient degree of conviction of sin (p. 56) before being offered the gospel. To borrow an image from John Bunyan, according to preparationism the sinner must first go through the Slough of Despond before coming to the cross. By contrast, the Marrow Men taught we should go to the cross first, so we won’t have a burden to carry when we eventually do go through the Slough of Despond (pp. 58-59).

JOTGES readers will immediately see the relevance this book has to the Free Grace movement. In many ways, the Marrow Controversy anticipated the debates between Free Grace and Lordship Salvation.

When Ferguson is explaining the position of the Marrow Men, he makes numerous excellent observations, some of which were mentioned above. However, when Ferguson offers his own reflections, their usefulness is mixed. It is as though he is very sympathetic to the Marrow Men, but cannot quite let go of his traditional Reformed theology. And I often wondered if this prevented Ferguson from presenting the strongest arguments for, and the implications of, Marrow theology.

To give just one example, Ferguson notes the Marrow Men were accused of teaching “that assurance is of the essence of faith” (p. 183), because when you believe in Jesus for eternal salvation you believe “Christ

Jesus is mine, and that I shall have life and salvation by his means; that whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for me” (p. 184). If you believe Jesus is yours, and that salvation is yours, then you must be assured of your salvation. I wanted to read more about that.

But Ferguson disagrees with the Marrow Men on that position. He distinguishes between believing in Christ (the “direct act”), and believing that you have believed in Christ (the “reflex act,” pp. 186, 196). You can be certain of the former by faith apart from works, but you cannot be certain of latter without some form of the “practical syllogism” (p. 201). This is an example of where Ferguson falls into the familiar trap of Reformed spirituality where assurance of salvation is based, not on Jesus’ promise of eternal life, but on “the evidence of a life that really is being saved” (p. 204). However, basing assurance on behavior can only lead to doubt since we all sin and have no way of knowing how we’ll live in the future.

JOTGES readers should be aware that this is not strict history of the Marrow Controversy, and was not meant to be. Ferguson mixes explanations of the Marrow Men’s views with his own opinions, and it is not always clear which is which.

Still, the book is valuable because there are many places where both Ferguson and the Marrow Men either hold, or come close to holding, Free Grace positions.

As an exposition of the Marrow Controversy, I recommend this book. It is easy to read, very informative, and shows there is nothing new under the sun when it comes to debates over the conditions of salvation. I would not say this is the definitive account of the Marrow Controversy, but it will prove helpful to interested readers.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***The End of the Pilgrimage: Your Judgment Seat Verdict and How It Determines Your Place in His Kingdom.* By James S. Hollandsworth. NP: Holly Publishing, 2015. 167 pp. Paper, \$12.99.**

James Hollandsworth is Pastor of Tri-City Baptist Church in Forest City, NC. The back cover of *The End of Your Pilgrimage* indicates that

“He is burdened to equip saints to reign with Christ.” *JOTGES* readers would surely be moved to consider this book both because of that statement and because of the title and subtitle of the book.

There are fifteen chapters. The chapters are not arranged in terms of logical connections. Rather, each chapter discusses an aspect of rewards theology. Those aspects include kingdoms in conflict (1), the difference between justification and sanctification (2), the nature of the salvation of the soul (3), the conditionality of ruling with Christ (4-6), judgment for sin (7), the New Jerusalem (8), wedding garments (9), the outer darkness (10), the last shall be first (11), the process of spiritual growth (12), rewards for overcomers (13-14), and a kingdom mindset (15).

While *JOTGES* readers might quibble here and there over minor points (e.g., the outer darkness as some actual place in Christ’s kingdom, pp. 101-113), they will find much to like in this book. While there is not much new information here that is not found in other rewards book by other Free Grace authors, the style is different and engaging. Those who’ve read *Grace in Eclipse*, *Going for the Gold*, *A Life God Rewards*, or *The Road to Reward* would surely find this a helpful addition to their library.

A Christian author tips off his emphases by how often he quotes various passages. That is certainly true with Hollandsworth. Here are some of the passages that he cites and discusses the most, with the number of pages on which he discusses a given passage put in parenthesis: 1 Cor 3:13-15 (x8), Matt 16:24-28 (x8), Rom 8:17 (x6), Heb 12:28-29 (x6), 2 Cor 5:10 (x5), Gal 2:20 (x5), 1 John 2:28 (x4), Rom 12:1 (x3), Gal 5:19-21 (x3), 2 Tim 2:12 (x3), and 2 John 8 (x3).

The author shows that the Bema will be more than an awards ceremony. He often mentions possible negative consequences at the Bema (e.g., pp. 37-39, 54-65, 70, 101-113, 118-23, 142-43).

The King James Version is the translation that Hollandsworth uses in this book.

I recommend this book. It is a strong presentation of the Free Grace understanding of eternal rewards.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith.* By Francis Watson. Second Edition. London: T&T Clark, 2016. 560 pp. Paper, \$39.95.**

Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith situates Paul in a metaphorical three-way conversation with Scripture and Second Temple Jewish interpreters.

As a Jew, Paul would not have abandoned his Pharisaic heritage of reading and learning from the Scriptures. Watson's careful exegesis of Pauline texts, as well as others from Second Temple Judaism, demonstrates how all interpreters come to the text from their own experiences. For Paul, this importantly includes his apostolic position as one who had the revelation of Christ (Gal 1:12). Watson argues that when Paul reads the text from this perspective, he learns from the Pentateuch itself that a tension exists between unconditional promises of blessing (Genesis and Deuteronomy) and conditional blessing based on law observance (Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers). Moreover, Paul's conclusion that judgment follows when blessing is predicated on the law comes not from a twisting of the OT texts, but from a genuine reading. However, Paul only sees this tension because of his experience with Christ. Thus, for Watson, the OT itself does not clearly witness to justification by faith. In this way, Paul's doctrine of justification by faith can be said to be "now revealed" and yet "witnessed by the Law and the Prophets" (Rom 3:21). In this second edition (2016), Watson includes a substantial forty page response to his critics, including Wright, Hays and Campbell.

While Watson does not share the same conservative viewpoints as most *JOTGES* readers, it is rewarding to see a mainstream scholar carefully conclude that justification is by faith and not by obeying the law. He successfully balances insights from both "Old" and "New Perspectives on Paul." Readers will especially benefit from his discussion of the definition of "works of law" being more than Jewish identity markers, but actual performance of the law's ritual and ethical requirements. Though Watson portrays faith as active, involving a way of life, his arguments against understanding *pistis* as faithfulness in Rom 1:16 are extremely helpful, especially in the second edition's interaction with Hays, perhaps the most well-known proponent of the subjective genitive view of *pistis christou*.

The "third member" of Watson's conversation, other Jewish interpreters, adds an important element to the work. By examining these

sources carefully, Paul's position as a Jewish reader in the same context as his contemporaries, is rightly highlighted. The comparisons also helpfully identify ambiguities in the Scriptural text and where Paul's own unique position as an apostle might explain why he comes to certain conclusions. However, the value of these long excursions into authors like Philo, Josephus, and the Habakkuk pesherist, may not be worth the commitment for busy readers looking to maximize their reading time. Also, Watson's exegesis of certain OT texts to show continuity with Paul is not always convincing and sometimes rests on an argument from silence. Still, the work from 2004 was a substantial contribution to understanding Pauline theology and the second edition is a useful update. Anyone interested in Pauline theology or the NT use of the OT will greatly benefit from it.

Bruce Henning
Adjunct Professor
Moody Bible Institute

***Saving Calvinism: Expanding the Reformed Tradition.* By Oliver D. Crisp. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 165 pp. Paper, \$18.00.**

This book has a fascinating title and subtitle. The dedication is even more fascinating: "To Robin Parry: Evangelical Universalist, Dear Friend."

Crisp is a Professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. And he considers himself a Reformed theologian. However, his views are rather shocking for this reviewer.

First, let's consider points I much appreciate in this book.

The author distinguishes between Calvinism, which is essentially agreement with the five points of TULIP, and Reformed, which is someone who not only believes the five points, but who believes that baptism (primarily for babies) and the Lord's supper are sacraments that convey grace and who believe that the government of the local church should be either episcopal (bishops) or Presbyterian (groups of pastors called presbyteries and sometimes even larger groups of pastors called synods) church government. Thus Baptists, Plymouth Brethren, and Nondenominational worshippers can be Calvinists, but not Reformed.

The idea that tradition and majority opinions are necessarily right is rejected by Crisp (e.g., p. 100). He does not believe that the torments in hell, if anyone is in hell (more on that in a moment) are not unbearable (p. 105).

He calls the Calvinist view of those whom God passes over (i.e., does not elect) as “the dark side”: “Its [election’s] dark side has to do with the eternal destiny of those not chosen” (p. 47; see also p. 58ff.).

Crisp admits that sometimes the Reformed tradition is found to be inconsistent with Scripture and in such cases there needs to be ongoing reformation (p. 44). I found this to be an outstanding statement: “[Reformed] confessions of the past...are theological guides. However, they too must be subjected to the Word of God anew each generation... Sometimes they will be found wanting. So it seems that there is reason to think that the reforming task is an ongoing one” (p. 44).

The author admirably rejects the idea that the majority must be correct: “The fact that the majority position on a given topic is one thing rather than another does not in and of itself make the majority right. Truth is not established by democracy; it is independent of the number of votes we give it. Indeed, the truth is sometimes held only by a tiny minority” (p. 100).

Second, let’s turn to those aspects of the book which are troubling.

The author appears to be an egalitarian, arguing that women should be in ministry, evidently including the role of senior pastors who proclaim God’s Word in church (p. 43). He repeatedly uses feminine prepositions like she and her when referring generically to someone (e.g., pp. 88, 119-20, 138, 148).

While Crisp is open to annihilationism (p. 106), his view is optimistic particularism (p. 107; see also pp. 65, 87, 88), the view that hopefully all be saved, but that most likely a small percentage will not. He even goes so far as to imply that nearly all who never hear the saving message will be visited by God and given a compelling personal witness that will lead all or nearly all of them to some sort of faith in Christ, which Crisp considers saving faith (p. 94).

The author is vague about what a person needs to believe about Jesus to be born again (e.g., p. 93).

There is no Scripture index, which is disappointing. I found no discussion of passages like Matt 7:13-14 and Luke 13:23-24 where the Lord specifically says that few will be saved and most will end up being

eternally condemned. If one argues for universalism or near universalism, he ought to at least discuss these texts.

His discussion of four Reformed views of the atonement: satisfaction (pp. 113-17), penal substitution (pp. 117-119), non-penal substitution (pp. 119-121), and penal non-substitution (pp. 121-23) are both helpful and disturbing. Crisp seems to be arguing that Calvinists and Reformed people should be open to views of the atonement other than penal substitution. He calls for “a healthy dose of intellectual humility” (p. 127). But if God has made an issue clear, as He has in this case, why is it humility to be open to false views?

There is much helpful material in this book. But the bottom line is that the author’s main goal is to expand Reformed thought to include the idea that all or nearly all people will ultimately be saved.

I can only recommend this book for mature believers who are extremely well grounded. Pastors might wish to read it. But I would definitely discourage most believers from reading this book as Crisp is a very good writer and is clever in the way he introduces his aberrant views.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

