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# REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN ACTS 20:21

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

## I. INTRODUCTION

On his third missionary journey, Paul spent over two years in the city of Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). He then went to Macedonia and Greece, before passing back through Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, as that third journey came to an end.

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul spoke to the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:18-35), reminding them of a major part of his ministry when he was with them. He said that his ministry involved, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, *repentance* toward God, and *faith* toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).

This verse is significant because it combines the words *repentance* and *faith*. What is the relationship between the two? First, this article will look at how some scholars understand the relationship, based on this verse. Second, it will evaluate the grammatical issues involved. Third, it will look at the context of the passage. And finally, it will offer a Biblical interpretation of the role of repentance and faith in Paul’s ministry in Ephesus.

## II. DIFFERENT SCHOLARLY VIEWS

When NT scholars look at Paul’s statement concerning repentance and faith in Acts 20:21, they take different views of the relationship between the two terms.

### A. A Chiasmic Structure

Some scholars see a chiasmic structure to this verse.

A chiasm is a “stylistic literary figure which consists of a series of two or more elements followed by a presentation of corresponding

elements in reverse order.”<sup>1</sup> An example is ABB'A'. Some see a chiasm in Acts 20:21. The A represents the word *Jews*, the B represents *Greeks*, the B' represents *repentance*, and the A' represents *faith*. If there is a chiastic structure here, Paul is saying he testified to the Jews that they needed to have faith (AA') and that the Greeks (Gentiles) needed repentance (BB').

The point here would be that the Jew simply needs to believe in Jesus, while the Gentile would need to repent, either of his idolatry or his pagan lifestyle.

A problem with this view is that it makes unbelieving Gentiles worse sinners than unbelieving Jews. It could even be argued that it demands from different kinds of people different requirements for receiving eternal life.

It is interesting to note that a few scribes recognized this problem and changed some manuscripts to say “repentance and faith towards God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ.” This would say that repentance and faith are both directed towards God, which is possible through the Lord.

Both I. Howard Marshall and C. K. Barrett discuss this view even though neither adopts it. They maintain that both Jews and Gentiles need to repent and believe.<sup>2</sup>

Richard Pervo says there is a chiastic structure. Instead of declaring that the Jew had one requirement and the Gentile another, he maintains that repentance is directed towards God, and faith is directed towards Christ. However, he also seems to weaken the importance of the chiastic structure when he says that faith and repentance practically form a hendiadys.<sup>3</sup> This would mean that both Jew and Gentile need a repentant faith, whatever that is.

William Larkin does not call it a chiastic structure. However, when it comes to repentance, he does see a difference between the Jew and

<sup>1</sup> James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 178.

<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale NT Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 331; C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol 2, ICC, (New York, NY: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 520-21.

the Gentile. Larkin believes repentance is necessary for salvation and involves turning to God “with all one’s being.”<sup>4</sup>

## **B. Faith and Repentance Are Synonymous**

Some take the position that repentance and faith mean the same thing. Often the argument is given that the Greek word *repentance* has as its root two words that mean *after* and *mind*. The word would then mean that there is a change of mind. A person who did not have faith in Christ before now does. He has changed his mind about Christ (repented) and now believes in Him (faith). With this understanding, the word *repentance* does not involve any change in behavior.

Some Free Grace advocates understand Acts 20:21 in this way.<sup>5</sup>

So do F. F. Bruce and Stanley Toussaint.<sup>6</sup> Although Bruce sees repentance and faith as synonymous, he seems to change the meaning of faith to include costly action. With this new definition, faith and repentance are interchangeable. He quotes C. F. D. Moule, who says that faith demands a costly action.<sup>7</sup>

## **C. Repentance as a Change of Attitude**

It is common to see a difference between believing and repentance in that repentance is seen as a change in attitude. Some hold this because they see Acts 20:21 as describing what is necessary for eternal salvation. Turning from sins would involve works, and it is recognized that such actions would mean that one is eternally saved by works, and this clearly contradicts the teachings of the NT.

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<sup>4</sup> William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 294.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Richard A. Seymour, *All About Repentance* (Hollywood, FL: Harvest House, 1974), 126 (cf. 13, 66, 109).

<sup>6</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NINCT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 389; Stanley Toussaint, “Acts,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 413.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Moule, says that “faith involves a response to the finished work of Christ, involving the believer in the cost and pain of repentance.” See C. F. D. Moule, “Obligation in the Ethic of Paul,” *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 271-72.

William Barclay defines repentance as a new attitude towards the unbeliever's previous sinful actions. This involves becoming aware of one's sin and having regret and sorrow for those actions.<sup>8</sup>

Eckhard Schnabel also sees this aspect of repentance: it is necessary for all people because all people have sinned and face God's wrath. Repentance is directed towards God because the unbeliever must acknowledge his rebellion against God both in his lack of faith and in his life. Repentance is the feeling of regret one has for that rebellion. Schnabel is somewhat unique in that he sees faith, and not repentance, as describing actions. He says that believing in Jesus involves turning away from everything that displeases God.<sup>9</sup>

## **D. Repentance Demands Actions/Works**

It is common to find in the literature the idea that repentance involves changing one's actions and therefore involves works. This is found even among those who say repentance is necessary to obtain eternal life. Clearly, this contradicts the idea that we are saved by grace apart from works.

John Polhill, for example, holds the view that repentance means to turn from one's former life to God.<sup>10</sup>

William Larkin says that repentance is different from faith. It denotes a total surrender to God with all one's being, recognizing that He is God when it comes to the decisions we make. Larkin says that repentance is proved by our deeds, according to Acts 26:20.<sup>11</sup>

Everett Harrison also maintains that faith and repentance are distinct. Both, however, are needed to obtain eternal life. Repentance is needed by unbelievers "because of their sin." This repentance makes them "candidates" for salvation, which can only be achieved afterward through faith.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Barclay, *Turning to God* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 18-23.

<sup>9</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 840-41.

<sup>10</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 425.

<sup>11</sup> Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, 294.

<sup>12</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), 314.

Regarding repentance, David Peterson places more emphasis on works. He says repentance is a turning away from every form of rebellion and serving God. There is also a difference between Jews and Gentiles in the area of repentance. For the Jew, it means turning to Christ. For the Gentile, it means a *continual* turning away from everything that displeases God. Genuine faith demands repentance, and this repentance will continue to flow from saving faith.<sup>13</sup>

### E. Two Sides of the Same Coin

It is also common to find the view that repentance and faith go hand in hand, as intimately connected.

C. K. Barrett asserts that faith and repentance are two elements of conversion, and since they share one article in the original Greek, they are bound together.<sup>14</sup>

Darrell Bock argues they are two sides of the same coin. Paul uses both words to describe conversion, and either can be used: he uses the word *repentance/repent* in Acts 17:30; 26:20; he uses the word *faith/believe* for the same purpose in Acts 11:17; 14:23; 16:31; 20:21; 24:24.<sup>15</sup> It is understood that when one word is used, the other is also part of the transaction.

Larkin says that the two go together to tell us what is necessary to become a Christian.<sup>16</sup>

Wallace, as will be discussed below, also contends that faith and repentance go together. One can be used as “shorthand” for the other. Faith includes repentance.<sup>17</sup>

### F. For Unbelievers or Believers?

Perhaps a more basic question is whether the need for repentance and faith is addressed to believers or unbelievers. In other words, are

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<sup>13</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 564-65.

<sup>14</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publisher, 2007), 627.

<sup>16</sup> Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, 294.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 289.

both requirements for obtaining eternal life and becoming a believer, or is one or both of them something that a believer needs to do?

All of the scholars discussed in this paper believe that both are addressed to unbelievers. Faith and repentance are part of the gospel of eternal life. Marshall is a typical example. He acknowledges that repentance is not a word commonly found in the writings of Paul. But Marshall says that the Apostle does use the word in 1 Thess 1:9 as a requirement for Christian conversion—even though the word is not found there.<sup>18</sup>

Luke Johnson also says that Acts 20:21 reminds us of 1 Thess 1:9-10 and that the word *repentance* in the NT frequently refers to Christian conversion, but that this is found in Luke's writings (Luke 3:3, 8; 5:32; 10:13; 11:32; 15:7; 16:30; 17:3-4). He acknowledges as well that it is a word rarely found in Paul.<sup>19</sup>

However, some point out that repentance is also enjoined upon believers. Ben Witherington points out that Paul speaks of the need for Christians to repent of their sin (2 Cor 7:9-10).<sup>20</sup> Peterson says that repentance is necessary for the “nurture” of believers.<sup>21</sup> Pervo also acknowledges that *repentance* is not a word Paul would normally use for Christian conversion, even though it is a favorite word for Luke.<sup>22</sup>

Bruce agrees with this assessment; he says that repentance is not usually used by Paul in soteriological messages and that here in Acts 20 it includes admonitions to believers.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 331. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss repentance in 1 Thess 1:9. However, it can be said that in 1 Thess 1:7-8, Paul declares that faith is what made them believers. Their “turning” (v 9) allowed them to “serve” God. It is worth noting, however, that the word “repentance” does not occur in the verse at all. In any event, there is a difference between believing for eternal life and serving God.

<sup>19</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 361. As in the previous footnote, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss repentance in Luke's writings outside of Acts 20:21. However, it would be appropriate to question whether Luke included repentance in the gospel but Paul did not.

<sup>20</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 617.

<sup>21</sup> Peterson, *Acts*, 565.

<sup>22</sup> Pervo, *Acts*, 520.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 389.



Bock perhaps suggests the same thing when he says that even though he thinks this is a soteriological verse, repentance is part of the “full scope” of the good news and includes all that is beneficial.<sup>24</sup>

Schnabel says that the gospel includes repentance (v 20) and that repentance is also useful for the everyday life of the believer since it gives knowledge of God’s will concerning holy living in an unholy world.<sup>25</sup>

The idea that the message of repentance can be commanded of believers is a very significant observation for understanding Acts 20:21. More on that later.

## **G. Summary**

Paul mentions both faith and repentance in Acts 20:21. There are many different opinions as to how these words are related. There are also disagreements about the meaning of repentance. Does it involve works or does it refer merely to a change of mind about Christ? More basically, the question must be asked whether Paul is talking about his message to believers, unbelievers, or both.

The grammar of Acts 20:21 will provide the key to understanding these issues. It will help us interpret the meaning of repentance and its relationship to the gospel of eternal life.

## **III. THE GRAMMAR OF ACTS 20:21**

When Paul says that he testified “both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,” he used a grammatical phrase that is related to what is commonly called the Granville Sharp Rule.<sup>26</sup> Specifically, this rule relates to the words in question: repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word *repentance* and the word *faith* are nouns in the accusative case. The word *and* (*kai*) is a connective that joins the two nouns. Even though it is not translated in English, there is a word that

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<sup>24</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 627.

<sup>25</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 840-41.

<sup>26</sup> Wallace, *Grammar*, 270-90.

appears in Greek immediately before *repentance*. It is the article (*tēn*) which is often translated as *the*.

It is common to refer to this as a TSKS construction.

The “T” represents the first letter of the article (*to*). The first “S” represents the first noun (or substantive). The “K” stands for the first letter of the conjunction *and* (*kai*). The second “S” stands for the second noun (or substantive).

In Acts 20:21 we see the TSKS construction in the words *repentance and faith*. There is an article that is not translated (T). *Repentance* is the first “S.” This is followed by the word *and* (K), followed by *faith*, the second “S.”<sup>27</sup>

In Greek, when there is a TSKS construction, the two nouns have a close connection. There is some kind of unity between them. The Granville Sharp rule says that this unity is at its highest level when the two nouns refer to the same person or thing.<sup>28</sup> However, this highest level of unity, when both words refer to the same person or thing, *only applies if neither of the nouns is impersonal*, neither is plural, and neither is a proper name.<sup>29</sup>

An example of this rule is found in Heb 3:1. It calls Jesus “the Apostle and High Priest” [*ton* (T) *apostolon* (S) *kai* (K) *archiereia* (S)] of the Christian confession. There is only one article (T) and two nouns. The words *apostle* and *high priest* refer to the same Person, Jesus Christ.

The problem with Acts 20:21 and the TSKS construction is that *both of the nouns (repentance and faith) are impersonal*. That means they cannot have the highest level of unity. Therefore, some other option must explain the relationship between the two nouns.

## A. TSKS Constructions and Four Options

Wallace says that there are about fifty TSKS constructions that have impersonal substantives, such as occurs here in Acts 20:21.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The words *towards God* and *towards our Lord Jesus Christ* do not affect the construction. In the original it says, *tēn* (T)...*metanoian* (S) *kai* (K) *pistin* (S).

<sup>28</sup> Participles and adjectives can function as nouns in these constructions.

<sup>29</sup> Wallace, *Grammar*, 270-71.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 286-88. Wallace discusses the different types of these constructions. He includes five options, but one of them is extremely rare (it only occurs once in the NT), and it has no bearing on this article. He calls it “overlapping” nouns.

When they occur, there are basically four options when it comes to the relationship between the two nouns (S). They always are united in some way.

First, the nouns can be completely distinct things. An example would be Luke 21:12, in which the Lord tells of persecution that His followers would face. He says that their enemies would be involved in, “handing you over to the *synagogues* and *prisons*.” The nouns are *synagogues* and *prisons*. They are different, but they are united in the sense of being places where the disciples will be taken when persecuted. This TSKS option is very common in the NT.

Second, the first noun can be a subset or type of the second. An example of this is Col 2:22: “the *commandments* and *teachings* of men.” The first noun (*commandments*) is a type of the second noun (*teachings*). There are many types of teachings, such as doctrine, history, encouragement, prophecy, etc. Commandments from God are one type of such teachings.

Third, the relationship can be reversed so that the second noun is a type or subset of the first. Both the second and third options are also very common in the NT.

Fourth, both nouns can be identical and refer to the same thing. This is very rare and only occurs once in the NT. In Acts 1:25, Luke talks about what Judas Iscariot lost when he betrayed the Lord. He lost his *ministry* and *apostleship*. Both of these refer to the same thing.

## B. Summary

Since the words *repentance* and *faith* in Acts 20:21 are in a TSKS construction, and they are impersonal nouns, we can make certain assumptions.

We can assume they are almost certainly not the same thing, since that would be the rarest option (occurring only in Acts 1:25), and hence the least likely possibility. In other words, repentance is likely not a synonym for faith.

The other three TSKS options are common in the NT. Each one is a type/subset of the other, or they are distinct things. Since nobody argues that faith is a type or subset of repentance, there appear to be two options left. Either repentance is a subset of faith, or repentance and faith are distinct. Whatever the case, they are conceptually united in some way.

## IV. REPENTANCE IS A SUBSET OF FAITH

After pointing out that *repentance* and *faith* almost certainly cannot be synonymous in the TSKS construction in Acts 20:21, Wallace argues that *repentance* is a subset of *faith*.<sup>31</sup> He gives two reasons. First, he believes Luke uses repentance in other passages that speak of the requirement for eternal life. Second, this is a common usage of the TSKS construction.

### A. Luke's Use of Repentance in Evangelistic Verses

Wallace says that Paul did use the verbiage of “turning” to God in his evangelistic presentation to Gentiles. He cites 1 Thess 1:9 in this regard even though the word *repentance* does not occur in the verse.<sup>32</sup> Wallace admits that the word *repentance* is fairly rare in Paul's writings. In fact, the noun only occurs four times (Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:9, 10; 2 Tim 2:25) and the verb only once (2 Cor 12:21).

These five occurrences are noteworthy, because none of them deal with what a person must do to be eternally saved. Four of them are addressed to believers. The other (Rom 2:4) deals with what a person must do to avoid the discipline of God in one's life. This at least raises the question as to whether Paul would use the word in Acts 20:21 to refer to what an unbeliever must do to obtain eternal life.

Turning to the writings of Luke, Wallace says that Paul's preaching in the Book of Acts includes the idea of repentance in order to receive eternal life. He cites five passages, even though only one of the five contains the word *repentance*.<sup>33</sup> Acts 19:8-9 is one such passage and is typical of the other four. In these verses Luke records Paul's teaching in the synagogue in Ephesus:

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and *did not believe*, but spoke evil of the Way before

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.; Cf. footnote 16 above.

<sup>33</sup> The exception is Acts 26:20. This verse says that Paul preached repentance among both the Jews and Gentiles. In the same verse, Paul says that they needed to do works in line with that repentance. This verse will be discussed below. The issue is whether this part of Paul's message was addressed to believers or unbelievers.

the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus (emphasis added).

It is hard to conclude from verses such as this that Paul taught that repentance was necessary to receive eternal life. Not only does the word *repentance* not occur, but the issue seems to be that they “did not believe” what Paul had told them (i.e., they did not have faith).

The other four verses Wallace cites in Luke-Acts in which he believes Luke includes repentance in the requirements for eternal life are Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; and 5:31.<sup>34</sup>

In Luke 24:47 the Lord says that repentance was to be proclaimed among all the nations. This is intimately connected with Acts 20:21. But is this a requirement for eternal life, or is this a message for those who have already believed? This will be discussed below.

The three verses Wallace cites in Acts are addressed to the nation of Israel. God was calling Israel to turn from their sins so that He would bring the kingdom of God to the nation. The conditions for Israel to receive the kingdom are not the same as the conditions for an individual to obtain eternal life. In Acts 2:38, for example, we see that the people Peter was addressing believed in 2:37 and already had eternal life. God now required that they repent of their sins and be baptized, but neither of these were necessary to be born again. They already were born again!

When one looks at the writings of Paul and Luke, there is not one clear verse that says that repentance is necessary for eternal life. Is Acts 20:21 an exception? Wallace says that the TSKS construction suggests it is.

## **B. A Common Use of the TSKS Construction**

After concluding that both Luke and Paul use repentance as a requirement for eternal life, Wallace points out that this is supported by a common use of the TSKS construction in Acts 20:21.<sup>35</sup> The grammatical point made by Wallace needs to be addressed.

He maintains that *repentance* and *faith* in Acts 20:21 are an example of the first noun (*repentance*) being a subset of the second (*faith*). This means that faith *includes* repentance. Repentance is the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

beginning of the entire process that is called faith. Spiritual conversion is not a two-step process, but a one-step process of faith that includes repentance.<sup>36</sup>

This means that when Luke uses only the word *faith/believe* as a requirement for eternal life, as in Acts 13:48, it is a “theological shorthand.” It is understood that this faith includes repentance. He does not have to make that explicit every single time.

Wallace reminds us that when the TSKS construction occurs with impersonal nouns such as *repentance* and *faith*, it is common that the first is a subset of the second. But it appears that Wallace has changed the definition of the terms here. As discussed above, Col 2:22 is an example of this use of the TSKS construction. Commandments are a type of teachings. You can have other types of teachings that are not commandments.

Wallace is not saying that repentance is a type of faith. He is saying that you cannot have faith without repentance. There are no other types of saving faith. In other words, in Wallace’s explanation of the relationship between repentance and faith in Acts 20:21, repentance is not a type of faith; it *defines* faith. Repentance is part of the definition. That is not the same thing as the first noun (*repentance*) being a subset of the second (*faith*).

More importantly, since Wallace says that repentance and faith are not synonymous, this means that simple belief in the promise of eternal life in Christ is not sufficient to receive that gift. Works (repentance) of some kind are also necessary for true faith to exist.<sup>37</sup>

However, there is another option.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of how others have added the requirement of works to faith by redefining faith, including by adding repentance to that definition, see Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Haysville, NC: Schoettle Pub Co., 2006), 273-84. Dillow also points out how the lexicon meaning of the word “faith” in Greek does not include the idea of repentance.

## V. REPENTANCE AND FAITH ARE DISTINCT

As mentioned above, another common use of the TSKS construction with impersonal nouns is that the two nouns are completely distinct things but are still united in some way. This makes the most sense here.

Faith does not include repentance. We can define faith without repentance. Faith is the conviction that something is true. Saving faith is thus the conviction that what God has said about eternal life in Jesus Christ is true.<sup>38</sup>

While most agree that this is the meaning of faith in a general sense, many maintain that saving faith is different—it must have other elements involving the will, emotions, or actions such as repentance. But these are artificial additions to the meaning of faith in the NT, as Gordon Clark has effectively pointed out.<sup>39</sup> These additions spring from theological systems, not the Scriptures.

Repentance means to turn from sins (Jonah 3:5-10; Matt 12:41). It involves actions. While attitude and emotions play a part, repentance does not take place unless one actually turns from his sins. That is, the person stops doing what he was doing previously. An example of this is found in 2 Cor 7:10 in which Paul writes to Christians in Corinth and states that, “godly sorrow worketh repentance.” Paul had written to them a hard letter in which he charged them with sin. Not only did they feel sorry for their sin, but they turned from it. That is, they repented of it.

This repentance on the part of the Corinthians did not have anything to do with gaining eternal salvation. They were already believers when they repented of the sin Paul charged them with.

In the letters in Revelation 2-3 to the seven churches (believers) in Asia Minor, Jesus repeatedly tells them that they need to repent (Rev 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19). In each case, the Lord tells these churches to turn from particular sins that they are committing.

Clearly, then, faith and repentance are different things. But in what way are they united since they occur in a TSKS construction in Acts 20:21? The answer is simple. Repentance and faith were both

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<sup>38</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 31.

<sup>39</sup>Gordon Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1983).

central to the message that Paul proclaimed while he was in Ephesus. They were both part of what he preached in that city. However, Paul did more than evangelize unbelievers in Ephesus. He also instructed believers.

## VI. PAUL'S MINISTRY IN EPHEBUS

When we look at Acts 19:8-10, we see that Paul ministered in Ephesus for well over two years. During that time he had a diverse ministry.

### A. Paul Ministered to Believers and to Unbelievers

There is an obvious aspect of Paul's ministry that is seldom addressed in discussions of Acts 20:21; namely, Paul's ministry in Ephesus *included teaching disciples*. In other words, Paul's ministry was not only evangelistic. A major part of it was directed towards believers.

For example, we see in 19:8-9 that Paul taught the disciples for two years. He did so on a daily basis.

In Acts 19:18-19 we are told that many who *had believed* came confessing their sins and burning their books of magic. Dr. Charles Ryrie pointed out they had been Christians for some time. (The word translated *had believed* is a perfect participle, which certainly suggests this.) In other words, believers in Ephesus were repenting of their sins, especially that of engaging in pagan magical practices.<sup>40</sup>

Paul's ministry to believers is also evident in 19:20. As a result of all that was going on in Ephesus, the word of the Lord "grew mightily." Believers understood what they needed to do to please the Lord.

These things should be kept in mind when interpreting 20:21. Paul is summarizing his ministry in that city. Bruce calls the whole section of Acts 20:18-35 a "retrospect" of Paul's ministry there.<sup>41</sup> A major part of that ministry was instructing believers on how to live. In this retrospect, Paul reminds them of this fact. He tells them that he "taught them house to house," and he told them "*all* the counsel of

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<sup>40</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974), 171-72.

<sup>41</sup> Bruce *Hebrews*, 389.



God” (Acts 20:20, 27). Surely the most natural understanding here is that Paul taught believers in their homes what God required of them.

## **B. Believers and Unbelievers Can Both Be Called to Repent and to Believe**

Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was directed to both believers and unbelievers. However, we should not make the mistake of thinking each category of person requires only one kind of ministry, as if only believers needed to be told to repent, and only unbelievers needed to be called to faith. On the contrary, it is appropriate to call both believers and unbelievers to faith and repentance.

Believers are frequently called to continue to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:2; Col 1:21-23). And if a believer strays from the Lord and lives an immoral lifestyle, he needs to repent of those sins. Hence, it is appropriate to preach repentance to believers.

An unbeliever clearly needs to have faith in the promise of eternal life. And in many cases an unbeliever may be living an obviously depraved lifestyle. He may recognize that even before he comes to faith. While repenting of such things will not bring eternal salvation, it will deliver the unbeliever from the negative effects of sin.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

During Paul’s long stay in Ephesus, he spoke of repentance and faith (Acts 20:21). Since these terms occur in a TSKS format, we can safely conclude that faith and repentance are not the same thing. While Wallace maintains that it means Paul preached a faith that included repentance, I have argued that this is a redefinition of what the TSKS construction means.

Since we know that faith and repentance are united in some way, the most obvious conclusion is that Paul is saying that they were united in his preaching in Ephesus.

Acts 20:21 need not be seen as a statement of Paul’s ministry to believers or to his ministry to unbelievers, *but as a summary of his ministry to both*. If we keep this in mind, a verse like Acts 26:20 becomes clear. Paul said that on his missionary journeys he told both Jews and Gentiles that they needed to repent. He specifically says that this would result in doing good works. Since eternal salvation is

not by works, this cannot be what is being addressed. Paul is simply saying that part of his ministry was teaching believers how to live.<sup>42</sup> If unbelievers repented, they would benefit from such repentance as well.

Paul preached both faith and repentance. We should follow his example. However, we must never confuse the offer of eternal life by grace through faith alone with the call to turn from one's sin. Believers need faith and repentance. So do unbelievers. However, repentance is not a part of faith.

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<sup>42</sup>The same thing could be said about the Lord's teaching in Luke 24:47 and the need of repentance. See Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 143-63.

# A RESPONSE TO J. PAUL TANNER'S “THE OUTER DARKNESS IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL”<sup>1</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The expression *the outer darkness* is found only three times in the Bible, all in Matthew’s Gospel (8:12; 22:13; and 25:30). In each case the Lord says that in the outer darkness there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The majority view among Evangelicals has been that the outer darkness is a reference to the lake of fire and eternal torment, and J. Paul Tanner adopts this position.<sup>2</sup> In this article I will examine and respond to Tanner’s arguments. It is my contention that the loss of rewards understanding better fits the particulars of the three outer darkness passages.

## II. TANNER’S THESIS: THE OUTER DARKNESS REFERS TO ETERNAL CONDEMNATION

In the Abstract, at the beginning of the article, Tanner does not mention eternal condemnation, Hades, or the lake of fire. Nor does he discuss eternal destiny directly or the outer darkness. Instead, he indicates “that the main persons in view in these passages are those

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<sup>1</sup> J. Paul Tanner, “The ‘Outer Darkness’ in Matthew’s Gospel: Shedding Light on an Ominous Warning,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October-December 2017: 445-59.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tanner wrote the commentary on Hebrews for Grace Evangelical Society’s two-volume *The Grace New Testament Commentary*. He has also written several excellent articles for our journal and magazine. He is a friend and colleague. I welcome the opportunity for friendly interaction.

among the Jews who were resisting Jesus as Messiah.”<sup>3</sup> Implicitly he suggests at the outset that the outer darkness refers to eternal condemnation and that the people cast there are unbelievers.

Throughout the body of the article, Tanner generally avoids direct statements as to what the outer darkness is.

He starts with Matt 22:1-14 and the Parable of the Wedding Feast (which he calls “the Parable [of] the Improperly Dressed Wedding Guest at the Wedding Feast”).<sup>4</sup> After suggesting that the improperly dressed man is unregenerate, he says that “the outer darkness imagery must have been a commonly understood way of speaking of eternal condemnation.”<sup>5</sup> That is the only place in the body where he specifically says that the outer darkness refers to eternal condemnation.

His discussion of the healing of the centurion’s servant (Matt 8:5-13) does not explicitly identify what the outer darkness is. Tanner ends that brief section in his article by saying that “the expressions in Matthew 8 carry the same meaning as those in Matthew 22.”<sup>6</sup>

Tanner’s discussion of the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30) follows the pattern already set. He does not explicitly identify what the outer darkness is. Instead, he identifies the first two servants as believers and the third servant as an unbeliever (“a strong case can be made that the third slave does not represent a true believer”).<sup>7</sup>

In the conclusion he says that the outer darkness is “a place of eternal damnation.”<sup>8</sup>

Presumably Tanner believes that the outer darkness will be the lake of fire which is said in Rev 20:15 to be the eternal abode of all whose names are not found in the Book of Life. Possibly the reason he never says that is because he thinks that Jesus “was clearly drawing upon a commonly understood idiomatic expression that his audience would have understood.”<sup>9</sup> He suggests that 1 Enoch 10:4-6 is “strikingly similar” to the Lord’s choice of words in Matt 22:1-14. Since that idiomatic expression was not identified as Sheol or the lake of fire

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 452-53.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 455.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 457.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

in Jewish apocryphal works like 1 Enoch, Tanner does not specify either.

Possibly a second reason why Tanner does not identify the outer darkness is because he assumes that his readers are familiar with the three parables and with this issue.

### III. TANNER'S EVIDENCE EVALUATED

#### A. References to the Outer Darkness and to Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth Outside the New Testament

The expression *the outer darkness* is not found in the OT. Nor is it found in Jewish apocryphal works. Tanner feels that the word *darkness* is close enough. He cites the use of *darkness* in 1 Enoch 10:4-6.<sup>10</sup> He also cites Jubilees 7:29 and Psalms of Solomon 14:9. In all three places darkness is associated with judgment.

It should be noted that if Jesus were alluding to 1 Enoch 10:4-6, then this would be the only place in which He refers to non-canonical writings. It has long been a major apologetic point that Jesus affirms the authenticity of the OT canon by only citing from canonical writings, never from apocryphal ones. While that does not prove that Tanner is wrong in suggesting this is likely (the other option he considers is that binding hand and foot and being cast into darkness “was commonly understood in the first century AD as eternal punishment of the wicked”<sup>11</sup>), it should cause some reservations.

If we look at 1 Enoch 10, we find that the context is the Noahic flood and salvation *from temporal judgment*. Then the Lord commands that a fallen angel, Azazel—reported to be one of those in Gen 6:2-4 who married and fathered children—should be bound hand and foot and cast into a hole dug in the desert. This hole was to be covered with rocks, and Azazel was to remain there until the time of his ultimate judgment. Then he would be cast forever into fire.

Here is the text in question, 1 Enoch 10:4-6, according to Tanner:

The Lord said to Raphael, “Bind Azaz’el hand and foot  
(and) throw him into the darkness! And he made a hole

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 448.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 449.

in the desert which is in Duda'el and cast him there;...in order that he may be sent into the fire on the great day of judgment."<sup>12</sup>

So the darkness of 1 Enoch 10:6 refers not to Sheol or the lake of fire, but to temporal judgment of some fallen angels prior to the lake of fire.<sup>13</sup> When the author of 1 Enoch wishes to speak of the final destiny of fallen angels (and fallen humans) he calls it "the fire on the great day of judgment." Compare 1 Enoch 16:1ff. which refers to the final judgment of the fallen angels (called "the Watchers").

When reading Tanner, who cites a slightly different translation of 1 Enoch 10:4-6, I had the impression that 1 Enoch 10:6 said that one bound hand and foot was cast into eternal torment. But that is not what it says. It is hard to see how 1 Enoch 10:4-6 supports Tanner's point.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Tanner does not discuss how the word *darkness* was used in the OT or in other Jewish apocryphal works. The truth is that *darkness* (Heb. *hasak*; Greek *skotos*) is a very common word and that it

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 448. For a slightly different translation see *The Book of Enoch*. Translated by R.H. Charles [1917] at sacred-texts.com: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/boe/boe013.htm>. Other versions of 1 Enoch find the words in question in verses 6-9 of chapter 10.

<sup>13</sup> Actually, if 1 Enoch 10:6 is related to a NT text, I would say that text would be 2 Pet 2:4 which speaks of the angels who sinned (Genesis 6?) being "cast down to hell and delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment."

<sup>14</sup> His argument, though not laid out like this, is as follows. First, a fallen angel—not a human—is bound hand and foot and cast into a hole in the desert. He is not cast into the outer darkness. Second, because the hole is covered by rocks, the angel is then in darkness. Third, at the end of the age, the angel will be finally judged and sent "into fire," a reference to the lake of fire. Fourth, since the initial binding and putting into a hole eventually leads to being sent to the lake of fire, the binding and casting into a hole are connected with eternal condemnation. Thus Jesus does not need to mention being cast into fire or even cast into a hole in the desert. By Jesus' reference to being bound hand and foot and cast into the darkness which is outside, His listeners and Matthew's readers would understand that He was talking about Azazel and they would have inferred that the humans in question would ultimately be sent to the lake of fire. That seems like a stretch to me.

never refers to eternal condemnation in the OT and rarely in Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>15</sup>

Tanner was unable to come up with any evidence concerning the expression “the outer darkness” prior to the time of Jesus. It would probably be best to suggest that Jesus coined this expression.

The expression “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is doubly new. In the first place, that expression is not found in the OT or Jewish apocalyptic literature. In the second place, Tanner shows that Jesus uses the limited expression *the gnashing of teeth* in a way different from how it was used in the OT.<sup>16</sup> In the five OT uses, it refers to an expression of anger.<sup>17</sup> In Jesus’ usage it seems to refer to an expression of grief.<sup>18</sup>

Since there is no use of either *the outer darkness* or *weeping and gnashing of teeth* in the OT, this first line of evidence is flimsy. Of course, context determines meaning, and that is mostly what Tanner cites.

## B. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14)

Tanner does not start with the first reference to the outer darkness in Matthew. He says, “the parable in Matthew 22:1-14 is perhaps the clearest passage [of the three] and the key to interpretation.”<sup>19</sup> While I disagree that this is the clearest of the three, I think he is wise to start here since this one probably is the best of the three to use to support his contention that eternal condemnation is in view.

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<sup>15</sup> It is true that in 2 Pet 2:17 and Jude 13, “blackness of darkness” refers to the lake of fire. So there is some potential NT support for his view. Surprisingly, however, Tanner never mentions either of those texts. Of course, even in the NT *darkness* normally refers to literal darkness or figuratively to unrighteousness. Only in these two texts does it clearly refer to eternal condemnation.

<sup>16</sup> Tanner, “The ‘Outer Darkness,’” 449.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, if the OT background is in view, then weeping and gnashing of teeth might refer to grief *and to anger*. Maybe those cast into the darkness outside are grieved and angry. If so, the question would be, are they angry at the Lord Jesus, or are they angry with themselves for failing to endure in their walk with Christ? If the darkness outside refers to believers who miss out on ruling with Christ, then possibly they experience grief and anger with themselves at the Bema.

<sup>19</sup> Tanner, “The ‘Outer Darkness,’” 449.

Tanner thinks the improperly dressed man represents an unbeliever who will be sent to the lake of fire. Since Tanner already sees in the outer darkness imagery reference to eternal condemnation, he would need to find something in this parable to move him away from his lexical conclusion in order to change his view. He does not. Hence he argues that the Lord is talking about an unbeliever who ends up being eternally condemned.

As far as he goes, this discussion is somewhat persuasive. For the person who agrees with Tanner, no more needs to be said. However, for a person such as myself who disagrees, more is needed.

A problem with Tanner's discussions of the key passages is that he fails to explain what judgment is in view. If the wedding banquet represents the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15)—and that is clearly what he is suggesting—though he never says so directly, why are there people present at the banquet who are properly dressed? Will OT believers or Church Age believers be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment? No. The Lord promised that we “shall not come into judgment” regarding everlasting life (John 5:24). Church Age believers will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which occurs a thousand years before the Great White Throne Judgment, that is, before the Millennium (2 Cor 5:9-10). We know that millennial Gentile believers will be judged before the Millennium as well (Matt 25:31-46). While we are not told directly, it seems clear that OT saints and Jewish believers from the Tribulation will also be judged before the Millennium so that they have their rewards in it.

Are we to see this parable as merging two disparate judgments into one—the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers and the Great White Throne Judgment for unbelievers? Evidently. But Tanner never discusses this key question. And if so, why would the Lord do that? Why would the Lord lead us to think that believers will be judged to determine our eternal destiny if He promises elsewhere that we will not (John 5:24)?

In addition, Tanner points out that the people at the banquet were people who had been called, or invited, to the wedding banquet *and who accepted the invitation*. But the improperly dressed man was one of those very people. He was invited, *and he accepted the invitation*. The problem is not that he rejected the invitation, as most did. Tanner



says, “most despised the opportunity and refused the invitation.”<sup>20</sup> But that man did not. Instead, the problem is that he was not dressed properly at the wedding which he is attending.

While Tanner attempts to use the final statement, “many are called, but few are chosen” to support his view, it actually contradicts it. In his own discussion, Tanner shows that the improperly dressed man was invited *and that he accepted the invitation and was present at the banquet.*

### **C. The Healing of the Centurion’s Servant (Matthew 8:5-13)**

According to the Lord Jesus, the ones who are cast into the outer darkness in this account are “the sons of the kingdom.” This creates a problem for Tanner’s view. There is only one other use of that expression in Matthew, and those are the only two NT uses. In the other use in Matt 13:38, the sons of the kingdom are the wheat in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Believers. Born-again people.

Tanner says, “The only way these passages can be harmonized is to conclude that in 8:12, Jesus was speaking figuratively with sarcasm... Jesus was pointing out that they were not ‘sons of the kingdom’ at all but only thought of themselves as such.”<sup>21</sup> I have not read this view before. Tanner does not cite anyone as holding it. I appreciate the creativity. However, I have to wonder. *They do not call themselves sons of the kingdom; Jesus calls them that.* While it is possible that Jesus said this with sarcasm in His voice, there is no hint of that in the narrative. Why would the Holy Spirit allow this expression *sons of the kingdom* to occur twice in Scripture, and yet in one it refers to born-again people and in the other it refers to people who are not? That seems unlikely. Tanner’s view requires us to understand that when Jesus says “sons of the kingdom” He means “*not* sons of the kingdom.” This view seems like special pleading.

The suggestion that “the only way these passages can be harmonized” is by recognizing that sarcasm is in play is not true. There other ways to harmonize, one of which is much simpler.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 453.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 454-55.

Another way is to see both texts as referring to regenerate people. In Matt 8:12 the Lord is saying that there will be born-again people who miss out on the joys associated with ruling with Christ. Michael Huber argued that very point in his Th.M. thesis at Dallas Theological Seminary. Unfortunately, Tanner does not discuss Huber's arguments for this or the other passages, though he does mention in a footnote an article that Huber wrote in *JOTGES* about the outer darkness.

What Tanner does is reject the obvious meaning of "the sons of the kingdom" because that meaning does not fit his understanding of the expressions *the outer darkness* and *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

### **D. The Outer Darkness in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 25:14-30)**

Missing from Tanner's discussion of Matt 25:14-30 is the judgment of the first two servants. That is odd. Since three servants are being judged, all three servants should be considered.

Tanner evidently understands the first two servants to be believers, though he does not discuss them. Why then are believers being judged at the Great White Throne Judgment with an unbeliever? Are not all believers, OT, Church Age, and Tribulation Age, judged before the Millennium? If so, how could they be judged with unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment after the Millennium?

Or are we to understand that the Lord is blending two different judgments, one for believers before the Millennium, and one for unbelievers after the Millennium, into one hypothetical, but not actual, judgment? That does not make sense.

In addition, Tanner fails to discuss the parallel parable in Luke 19:11-27. Both parables are related. Both follow three servants of Christ who are given money to invest. In both of the parables the first two servants are rewarded, and the third servant is rebuked and stripped of reward. The third servant in each parable represents the same sort of person: either both of the third servants represent believers or both unbelievers.

One thing simpler about Luke 19:11-27 than Matt 25:14-30 is that the three servants are contrasted with the enemies of Jesus who did not want Him to reign over them. Indeed, the judgment of the three servants ends before the enemies are brought in and judged (Luke

19:27, “But bring here those enemies of mine...”). The enemies are slain (Luke 19:27). The third servant is not.

Comparing the two parables, which Tanner does not do, shows that the third servant in each parable represents believers. Besides, would it not be odd to consider an unbeliever as one who is entrusted with a stewardship by Christ? Is it not odd for the Lord Jesus to refer to an *unbeliever* as one of *His own servants* who knows that He will return soon and who is awaiting His return?

Certainly the Jewish religious leaders did not think of themselves as servants of Christ. They saw themselves as His enemies. They did not believe He was coming again. They were not awaiting His return. They did not believe that they would be judged by Him. None of the particulars fit Tanner’s view.

### **E. Tanner Does Not Consider Binding Hand and Foot in the OT**

There is no specific reference to *binding hand and foot* in the OT. However, there is one famous passage in Daniel in which three men were bound, presumably hand and foot, and cast into a fire.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were bound before they were cast into the fiery furnace (Dan 3:22, 23). At the very least, their hands were bound. However, since they fell down when cast into the furnace, this strongly suggests that they were bound hand and foot. Afterwards they were seen walking in the fire and not bound (Dan 3:24-25).

This incident is not discussed by Tanner, though it is the only actual Biblical example of binding hand and foot. It shows that what men bind, God can unbind. But what God binds, men cannot unbind.

If we applied Daniel 3 to Matt 22:1-13, we would understand that the servants bound hand and foot are believers who will not be given authority to rule with Christ in His kingdom. They will be in it, for they are believers. But they will not rule, since rulership requires perseverance in good works.

*Binding* is very common in the OT, occurring 59 times. Sheaves of grain are bound (e.g., Gen 37:7). A donkey is bound to a vine (Gen 49:11). Boards of the tabernacle were bound together (Exod 26:17). The high priest’s breastplate was bound with rings (Exod 28:28). People would bind themselves with oaths (Num 30:2-14).

Binding in the OT often refers to God's sovereign control over man and beast and nature. God binds the stars in place (Job 38:31). He binds the wild ox (Job 39:10). God also binds princes at His pleasure (Ps 105:22). He has bound kings with chains (Ps 149:8).

Would not the binding of the unfaithful servant suggest that he had displeased His Master, that His Master is in control, and that the servant's activities in the kingdom will be restricted over what he would have been if he had pleased his Lord?

It is telling that the bound servant is not cast into everlasting fire. If that were the case, Tanner's argument would be strong. Instead this bound servant is cast into outer darkness, or, more literally *the darkness outside*, an expression we will next discuss.

Tanner does not consider binding in the OT. His only point in this regard is that binding hand and foot is linked with temporal judgment in an apocryphal work.

## **F. Tanner Does Not Discuss Why Jesus Spoke of the Darkness Outside**

The Greek of Matt 22:13 says, "*ekbalete eis to skotos to exōteron.*" A literal translation of that would be, "cast [him] into the darkness which is outside" (author's own translation). Tanner does not discuss why Matt 22:13 does not say what 1 Enoch 10:6 does, *cast him into a hole in the desert*. Why did the Lord say "the darkness *which is outside*"? There must be a reason to add that detail. Outside of what? There are three different contexts.

In Matt 8:12, the darkness is outside the feast where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are eating in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 8:11).

In Matt 22:13, the darkness is outside the wedding banquet (Matt 22:4-13).

And in Matt 25:30, the darkness is outside the place where the two honored servants are rejoicing. While a feast is not specifically mentioned, the word for joy, *chara*, may imply a feast. BDAG says, "of a festive dinner or banquet...so perhaps Mt 25:21, 23 (but would this have been ineligible to Greeks? S. 1b)."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>BDAG, 1077 C.

When one is discussing the darkness outside, it is requisite that he discuss both *darkness* and *outside*. To leave off the latter discussion is to miss the point.

### **G. Tanner’s Understanding of “Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen” (Matthew 22:14)**

Tanner says, “In this context, ‘called’ (*klētoi*) is used of being invited to the wedding feast, not in the Pauline sense of ‘called’ of God (Rom. 1:6)...Many were ‘called,’ that is, invited; but most despised the opportunity and refused the invitation.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on to say that the man cast into the outer darkness “was not one of God’s ‘elect’ (his covenant people).”<sup>24</sup>

Tanner is evidently arguing for the Calvinist view of election here. He understands the Lord to be saying that many are invited to spend eternity in the kingdom, but few are actually chosen to be in the kingdom.

The problem is, that view does not fit the context.

The improperly dressed man not only was invited, he *accepted* the invitation. In Tanner’s way of viewing things, the acceptance of the invitation is saving faith. And Tanner sees the wedding banquet as representing “the banquet to inaugurate the messianic kingdom.”<sup>25</sup> The man without a tuxedo attends the wedding banquet to inaugurate the Messianic kingdom!

According to Tanner’s own interpretation, the man in question was in the kingdom, at the wedding banquet, at the start of the Millennium. How does this relate to the Great White Throne Judgment?

Tanner specifically rejects the suggestion by Sapaugh and others that the Judgment Seat of Christ is in view in this parable.<sup>26</sup> According to Tanner, the man in question is present during the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom. If the Judgment Seat of Christ is not in view, then this refers to the Great White Throne Judgment. If so, how does this parable line up with the details of the Great White Throne Judgment as found in Rev 20:11-15?

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 453.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 452.

Tanner is implying the Great White Throne Judgment will occur at the start of the Millennial kingdom. At the judgment, the Jewish leaders who rejected Christ will be raised and judged and sent to the lake of fire.

There are multiple problems with this view.

First, the Jewish religious leaders did not accept the Lord's invitation to come to the banquet. They clearly rejected Him and whatever He was offering. By contrast, the improperly dressed man in the parable did accept the invitation. How can the improperly dressed man represent those who rejected Christ and even had Him crucified, if he accepted the invitation?

Second, the only judgment at which people are cast into the lake of fire is the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15). Yet the Great White Throne Judgment does not occur at the *inauguration* of the Millennium, which is when Tanner says this judgment occurs.<sup>27</sup> The Great White Throne Judgment occurs *after* the Millennium (i.e., after Rev 20:1-10).

Third, the basis for being sent to the lake of fire, according to Rev 20:15, is not having one's name in the Book of Life. But this man is excluded for having improper clothing. Tanner does not clearly explain what he thinks the improper clothing represents, though he does deny it represents insufficient good works.<sup>28</sup> He seems to think it points to something in his appearance that shows that he was not chosen to be in the kingdom.<sup>29</sup> That does not find any corresponding details in Rev 20:11-15.

Zane Hodges suggests a different interpretation. He sees it as a metaphor for missing out on the joys associated with ruling with Christ forever. Those at the Judgment Seat of Christ who are not chosen to rule with Christ will experience shame and grief (1 John

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<sup>27</sup> Tanner is writing in *BibSac*, a Dispensational journal. Thus when he refers to "the banquet to inaugurate the messianic kingdom," it is reasonable to understand him to mean the banquet which inaugurates the millennial kingdom. Possibly Tanner is no longer a Dispensationalist and no longer believes that there is a Millennium. If so, he should have made that clear in this article to avoid this confusion. But even if that is so, according to Rev 20:11-15 the Great White Throne Judgment is not part of the inauguration of the kingdom.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 452, n. 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

2:28). They will miss out on the superlative joys that the brightly lit wedding hall presages.

Hodges suggests that “many are called, but few are chosen” is linked with 2 Pet 1:10, “make your calling and election sure.”<sup>30</sup> In Matt 22:1-13 the Lord is judging the wedding guests, and one was not ready for the evaluation: “the man in the parable of the wedding feast has not prepared himself for the host’s review and represents a believer unprepared for the Judgment Seat of Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

The interpretation by Hodges fits the context. The Judgment Seat of Christ occurs just before the Millennium begins, as does the setting of this parable. The invitation is to rule with Christ, not merely to be in the kingdom. The man without the tux accepted the invitation and was present at the Bema. But he was not chosen to rule, because his garments were lacking (cf. Rev 19:8).

#### IV. EVALUATING THE THREE PASSAGES IN LIGHT OF JOHN’S GOSPEL

Tanner does not discuss how his conclusion relates to the Lord’s evangelistic teaching in John’s Gospel. I believe that discussion also tips the scales to the view that the outer darkness refers to missing out on the joys associated with being chosen to co-reign with Christ.

John’s Gospel has been called *the Gospel of Belief*. Because of its strong emphasis on everlasting life, it might also be called *the Gospel of Life*. Repeatedly the Lord says that whoever believes in Him has everlasting life, shall not come into judgment, shall never perish, shall never hunger, shall never thirst, shall never die, and so on (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35; 11:26).

Certainly in the Parable of the Talents (and the related Parable of the Minas) the issue is works, not faith. The same can be seen in the Matthew 8 and Matthew 22 references to the outer darkness. But the Lord specifically said in John 6:28-29 that the eternal destiny issue is not one of works, but of believing in Him.

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<sup>30</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “Make Your Calling and Election Sure: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:5-11” (*JOTGES*, Spring 1998: 21-33).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

## V. EVALUATING THE THREE PASSAGE IN LIGHT OF PAUL'S TEACHINGS

The Apostle Paul does not mention the outer darkness. Nor does he ever equate darkness with eternal condemnation. However, there are aspects of Paul's writings that call into question Tanner's conclusion that the outer darkness refers to the lake of fire.

First, Paul said that we must endure to reign with Christ and that if we deny Him, He will deny us the privilege of ruling with Him (2 Tim 2:12). That fits with the view that the outer darkness refers to missing out on ruling with Christ.

Second, Paul indicates that the carnal believers in Corinth were nonetheless brothers in Christ and recipients of the Spirit. He clearly shows that most of them were not faithful servants of Christ. Some even died for abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:30). They do not sound anything like the first two servants in the Parable of the Talents or in the Parable of the Minas. They sound a lot like the third servant in both parables.

Third, the Apostle Paul says that salvation is by grace through faith and apart from works (e.g., Eph 2:8-9). This apart-from-works salvation suggests that Tanner's understanding of the three outer darkness passages is suspect. Tanner does not discuss Lordship Salvation and how it handles these passages. Those who hold to Lordship Salvation take the passages as he does, but go further and draw the conclusion that perseverance in good works is necessary in order to win what they call *final salvation*.<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, the Judgment Seat [Bema] of Christ is prevalent in Paul's epistles (e.g., Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; 2 Tim 2:12, 15; 4:6-10). The Parable of the Talents sounds exactly like what Paul envisions at the Bema, where believers' works done in the body are evaluated, "whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10).

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Wayne Grudem, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 138-140; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 142; John Piper, "What Is God's Relationship to People Who Are in Hell," June 24, 2009 blog at [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org); James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 119.



## VI. CONCLUSION

I appreciate Tanner's discussion of the three outer darkness texts, his creativity in coming up with new interpretive options, and his commitment to faithfully handle the Word of God. However, there are a number of compelling reasons why I find his arguments to be inadequate.

The expression "the sons of the kingdom" only occurs one other time in Matthew (or the NT), and there it clearly refers to those who get into the kingdom, i.e., the wheat (Matt 13:38). Tanner's suggestion that in Matt 8:12 when Jesus speaks of "the sons of the kingdom," He means those who are *not the sons of the kingdom*, while creative, is literally turning the text upside down. It seems to be special pleading.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt 22:1-14) concerns a man who, unlike unbelieving Israel, accepts the king's invitation to the wedding of his son. He is a believer, but he is improperly dressed. Tanner's view is that the man represents an unbeliever, despite the fact that he accepted the invitation and is at the banquet that inaugurates Jesus' kingdom. Tanner has no explanation for what the improper wedding garments represent. His understanding of the second of the three outer darkness passages fails to deal adequately with the context.

The Parable of the Talents, the third outer darkness passage, and its parallel, the Parable of the Minas, are clearly dealing with evaluation of works. Neither is trying to ascertain who believes in Jesus and who does not. That Tanner suggests that the Parable of the Talents is actually about determining who has faith in Jesus is inconsistent with both the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Minas.

All three outer darkness passages are calling the listeners and readers to be watchful since the Lord will return soon and will then judge His servants. This is clear in the two parables that precede the Parable of the Talents (cf. Matt 24:45-51; 25:1-13). The issue is being found faithful (1 Cor 4:1-5). The issue is *not* who is a believer and who is not.

Comparing these three passages with John's Gospel and Paul's writings shows that Tanner's view is questionable at best.

A consideration of why the Lord spoke of the darkness *which is outside*, something not done by Tanner, strongly suggests that the Judgment Seat of Christ and eternal rewards are in view.

We should certainly be open to new views on the meaning of passages. However, unless the evidence for a view successfully handles all of the particulars, the view should be shelved. Tanner's view relies heavily upon an apocryphal work and on taking Jesus as meaning exactly the opposite of what He actually says. Therefore, it should be rejected.

# WHEN IS THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST?

JOHN CLAEYS

## I. INTRODUCTION

**M**ost *JOTGES* subscribers immediately recognize the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema) as an eschatological event—a significant, future event foretold by Bible prophecy. It is the public examination, by Jesus Himself, of the past faithfulness of every believer in Christ (OT saints included). Thus, it is a valuation of the works<sup>1</sup> of all believers who have lived prior to this dramatic assessment. Since this great, eschatological event will determine each believer’s eternal experience,<sup>2</sup> it should be viewed as an enormously important event. We should seek to understand all that we can discover about the Bema, including its timing: when will the Judgment Seat of Christ occur?

## II. MAJOR VIEW: THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST WILL OCCUR DURING THE TRIBULATION

Many Evangelicals believe the Judgment Seat of Christ will transpire in heaven, between the occurrences of the Rapture of the Church and the return of Christ to the earth. J. Dwight Pentecost represents this view by asserting that this appraisal of believers “takes place immediately following the translation of the church out of this

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<sup>1</sup> See 2 Cor 5:10 for the clearest pronouncement of this, though many other Biblical statements and descriptions allude to this judgment of the works of believers. See John Claeys, *A New World Coming* (Longview, TX: 289 Design, 2015), 53-73.

<sup>2</sup> For evidence of this contention, again see Claeys, *A New World Coming*, Chap. 3.

earth's sphere.”<sup>3</sup> This appears to be the generally accepted viewpoint among pre-tribulation, premillennial Bible teachers.<sup>4</sup>

## A. Evidence for the Bema Occurring During the Tribulation

Some who hold this view make the case that the pronouncement of Rev 5:10 demonstrates that “the Bema Seat has already occurred” prior to the Tribulation judgments being poured out upon the earth.<sup>5</sup> Revelation 5:10 declares that the twenty-four elders “*will reign on the earth*” (emphasis added). The argument declares, by implication, these elders have already received their reward to rule at the Judgment Seat. And since the events of Revelation 5 allegedly occur after the Rapture of the Church and prior to the outpouring of judgments during the Tribulation period, the Bema must, therefore, occur in a timeframe between the Rapture and the Tribulation.

This position rests on two pieces of evidence. The first is the declaration of Rev 5:10 that the twenty-four elders “will reign upon the earth,” and the second is the elders’ possession of their crowns of rule (cf. Rev 4:10).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964), 220. As per Pentecost, many believe that following the Rapture, Jesus will return to heaven with believers; however, see John Claeys, *The Impending Apocalypse* (Sisters, OR: Deep River Books, 2014), 14-15, 242-243 (especially, endnotes 10-14) for the view that Jesus and believers remain in the air (out of sight of people living upon the earth) throughout that seven-year timeframe.

<sup>4</sup> See also: Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, 1984), 107; Mark Bailey, “The Judgment Seat of Christ,” *Countdown to Armageddon*, eds. Charles Ryrie, Joe Jordan, and Tom Davis (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 97; Joe Wall, *Going for the Gold* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 18; Arno Clemens Gaebelien, *The Prophet St. Paul* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1939), 89; and Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co., 2002), 515-520.

<sup>5</sup> John Niemela, “Revelation 5, the Twenty-Four Elders, and the Rapture.” See <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/revelation-5-twenty-four-elders-and-rapture>. Accessed May 14, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> This paper is not dealing with the assertion that the Rapture will occur chronologically prior to the scene depicted in Revelation 5. For the argument that the Rapture does *not* chronologically occur until Revelation 6, see Zane C.

## **B. Evidence Against the Bema Occurring During the Tribulation**

Regardless of whether the twenty-four elders of Revelation 5 represent all faithful believers throughout history<sup>7</sup> or a specific group of faithful believers, they will experience kingdom rule in the future. But the possession of their crowns in Revelation 4 and 5 does not prove the Bema has already occurred.

For example, the Lord Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father, awaiting His future reign.<sup>8</sup> Being seated on His Father's throne represents Jesus' experience of kingdom reward prior to His full realization of that remuneration.<sup>9</sup> There is no doubt that He will reign, yet He is not ruling now. Instead, this is a pre-rewarded experience for our Savior, since His reward will not be *realized* until the arrival of the kingdom upon earth. Based on the example of Jesus, the elders' possession of crowns does not necessarily imply the Bema has already occurred by the time the scene in Revelation 5 transpires.

If the scene in Rev 5:10 occurs chronologically prior to the Bema, then the elders's possession of crowns certainly indicates they know ahead of time how they will be assessed at the Judgment Seat, but Scripture indicates this is not an unusual experience. Examples of this prescience are: King David has known for *many* centuries that he will rule, as have careful readers of Ezek 37:21-28; the Apostle Paul knew shortly before his death that he would rule in the kingdom (cf. 2 Tim 4:6-8 and 1 Cor 9:27);<sup>10</sup> when Stephen saw Jesus stand to welcome him into heaven, he, too, knew he would rule in the coming kingdom;<sup>11</sup> and nearly two thousand years ago, God revealed that

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Hodges, "The First Horseman of the Apocalypse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October 1962): 324-34.

<sup>7</sup> This representation could be seen based on the sum of twelve plus twelve which is utilized later in Revelation as representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles—cf. Rev 21:12, 14. Thus, this number *could* represent both OT (twelve tribes of Israel) and NT (twelve apostles) believers.

<sup>8</sup> See Luke 22:69; Acts 2:23-25, 30-33; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 1:13; 10:12.

<sup>9</sup> See Rev 3:21.

<sup>10</sup> Note the twin concepts in these verses indicating future rule: 1) Paul finished his life faithfully for Christ; and 2) he will receive a "crown," signifying rule, at the Judgment Seat of Christ ("that Day").

<sup>11</sup> See Acts 7:55-56. Elsewhere, we do not see Jesus standing in heaven, but sitting, "at the right hand of God"—cf. Ps 110:1; Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36;

those listed in the famed Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 will rule in the coming kingdom. Therefore, it appears that many deceased, faithful believers already know that they will be rewarded,<sup>12</sup> which means that the proclamation the twenty-four elders “will reign upon the earth” does not demonstrate that the Bema has already transpired by this point.<sup>13</sup>

### **III. ALTERNATE VIEW: THE BEMA OCCURS DURING THE 75 DAYS AFTER THE TRIBULATION AND BEFORE THE MILLENNIUM**

#### **A. The 75-day Interlude Implies the Bema Occurs Then**

Jesus will *not* initiate the kingdom immediately after His return to the earth to vanquish the armies of the world.<sup>14</sup> Instead, there will be an intermission of time allowing for two key events to occur, one of which is the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The evidence for such an intermission begins in Dan 12:1: “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a

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16:19; Luke 20:42, 43; Acts 2:34, 35; Col 3:1; Heb 1:13. That Jesus would stand to welcome Stephen “home” demonstrates the kind of honor that will only be accorded to those who will rule with Christ.

<sup>12</sup> In addition, it could be argued that faithful, deceased believers are already experiencing a “pre-rewarded” experience for their faithfulness. Perhaps Jesus’ reception of Stephen (which can be seen to be His confession of Stephen before others, as in Luke 12:8) presents this concept, along with the white robe dispensed to the Tribulation martyrs during the Tribulation Period (Rev 6:9-11), the attire of “fine linen” worn by faithful believers prior to the return of Christ (Rev 19:8), and even Lazarus’ experiences of being welcomed and carried by angels to Abraham’s “bosom,” a place of privileged seating next to one of the greats of the OT. Jesus’ present session “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3) could also lend itself to this discussion.

<sup>13</sup> If it did, then it follows that the Bema had already occurred when Jesus declared to the apostles that they will rule upon the earth (cf. Matt 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). But, of course, it had not.

<sup>14</sup> These armies of the world will invade Israel prior to Christ’s return in a paltry attempt to halt Jesus from ascending the throne of David to begin His millennial rule. See Claeys, *Impending Apocalypse*, 171-77.

nation, even to that time. And at that time your people [the Jews] shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.”<sup>15</sup> Clear similarities between this statement and one made by Jesus (Matt 24:21) connect them to the very same occasion. Both speak of *trouble* or *tribulation* which will be worse than any in the history of mankind, experienced by Jewish followers of Jesus during the Great Tribulation.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the angel promises to Daniel the deliverance of these Jewish followers of Christ,<sup>17</sup> while Jesus indicates this liberation will occur at His return, culminating the Tribulation period.<sup>18</sup>

The angel continues in vv 6-10 of Daniel 12 his reference to this time of *trouble*. Then in vv 11 and 12, this messenger of God explicitly presents two intervals forming the time gap between the return of Christ and the inauguration of the kingdom of God upon the earth: “And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be *one thousand two hundred and ninety days*. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the *one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days*” (emphasis added).

Surprisingly, Dan 12:11 references 1,290 days—an extra thirty days following “the time the daily sacrifice is taken away” (at the occurrence of “the abomination of desolation”). To make this enigma even more mysterious, v 12 discloses the period of 1,335 days following “the abomination of desolation”—an additional forty-five

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<sup>15</sup> This *book* most likely refers to the book mentioned in Rev 20:12—the *Book of Life*—which designates all who have received eternal life (by believing in Jesus Christ for it).

<sup>16</sup> This refers to the last half of the Tribulation period.

<sup>17</sup> He refers to these Jewish believers by the phrase, “your people.” Clearly, “your people” refers to Jews, as Daniel is Jewish. In addition, because *faithful* Jewish believers in Jesus will be the ones experiencing persecution during that period, this announcement specifically refers to that group. For more on this, see Claeys, *The Impending Apocalypse*.

<sup>18</sup> If we read Matthew 13 and 24-25 closely, we can see this deliverance will occur when Jesus returns to the earth. Furthermore, by noting the context of Dan 7:13-14 and Zechariah 12-14, from which the language of Matt 24:29 stems, we can more readily see that Jesus announces in Matt 24:29-31 that He will deliver Israel from its enemies at His return. Following His return, He will establish God’s kingdom, providing for the Jewish nation to be at peace from enemies henceforth.

days added to the 1,290 days of v 11! So, which is it—1,260 days, 1,290 days, or 1,335 days?

The answer is that all three periods of time are eschatologically correct. There will be 1,260 days—or three and a half years—from the abomination of desolation until Christ returns to the earth. The extra periods of time in vv 11 and 12 indicate two phases between the return of Christ to the earth and the inauguration of Christ's rule in the kingdom. Could these two prophetic periods signal two significant events transpiring between the return of Christ and the inauguration of the millennial kingdom?

We now look closer at these important intervals in their chronological occurrence.

## B. The Difference Between the Two Phases

The first of these phases of time lasts thirty days. While we do not learn in Daniel what is included in this span of time, we can deduce that it contains the judgment of the Gentile nations (Matt 25:31-46).<sup>19</sup> This judgment *must* occur during this interval, as it fits with the defined timeframe (as presented in Matt 25:31),<sup>20</sup> and it is the only event cited in the Bible occurring at this eschatological stage.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, if the judgment of the nations occurs during the thirty day timeframe, what will transpire within the forty-five day period which follows—the one immediately preceding the inauguration of the kingdom? While Daniel does not identify this eschatological event, we can use NT clues to solve the riddle.

It is likely that a significant occurrence, on par with the judgment of the nations, will occur during this second timeframe. Two reasons indicate this: the same attention is drawn to it in context as is placed

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<sup>19</sup> This is an adjudication of Gentile Tribulation survivors: both believers and unbelievers.

<sup>20</sup> For a presentation of this assessment and its timing, see Claeys, "Matthew 25:31-46: Salvation by Works?" *JOTGES* (Autumn 2017): 55-70.

<sup>21</sup> This judgment follows the return of Christ, as indicated by Matt 25:31. In addition, it is evident that this eschatological event occurs between the return of Christ and the initiation of the Millennial Kingdom based on the following: 1) the judgment shows the retribution of unbelievers (cf. Matt 25:41, 46) from all the nations; and 2) the contextual link with chapter 24 (e.g., cp. 24:29-31 with 25:31), shows that it follows the Tribulation period.



on the first event, and the second span of time is even longer in duration than the first, suggesting an event at least as momentous as the previous one.

Just as the first assessment—the judgment of the nations—provides an epilogue to the present age,<sup>22</sup> it would make sense for the second judgment to present a prologue to the next age, the millennial kingdom.

The only eschatological event mentioned in Scripture which *could* fit each of these criteria is the Judgment Seat of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

### C. Jesus' Return to Earth in the Parable of the Minas

There are other clues indicating the Judgment Seat of Christ will transpire within the forty-five day timeframe.

One such clue is presented in a parable displaying the Judgment Seat of Christ, found in Luke 19:12-27. Luke uses two Greek words to indicate Jesus has in view here His return to the earth to assess believers, namely *hupostrophō* in v 12, which means to “turn back, return,”<sup>24</sup> and *epanerchomai* in v 15, which denotes returning to the very place one has left.<sup>25</sup> These expressions portray Jesus returning to the earth to carry out this assessment of believers. According to this parable in Luke 19, it is *after* returning that Jesus will assess His servants at the Bema.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For a presentation of this assessment and its timing, see Claeys, “Matthew 25:31-46.” 55-70.

<sup>23</sup> The only other eschatological judgment mentioned in Scripture is the Great White Throne Judgment, which will be convened *after* the millennial kingdom. Thus, of the eschatological judgments cited in Scripture, only the Judgment Seat of Christ could fit this timeframe.

<sup>24</sup> See Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, Wilber F. Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), s.v., “*hupostrophō*,” 847.

<sup>25</sup> See James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: MI; Eerdmans, 1980), “*epanerchomai*,” 229.

<sup>26</sup> This is how Zane Hodges understood this chronology: “It is at the return of Christ to earth that rewards are dispensed for the kingdom which follows (cf. Luke 19:15; Rev 11:15, 18).” See Zane C. Hodges, “Do Not Be Ashamed (2 Timothy 1:1-18)” *Grace in Focus* (January/February 2018): 20.

## D. Jesus' Return to Earth in Matthew 16:27

Further evidence for placing the Judgment Seat of Christ after His return to the earth can be found in Matt 16:27. Following the reference to His Return in v 27, Jesus indicates He will reward His faithful followers *after* His coming. This sequence in time is signaled by the use of *tote* ("then"), the primary Greek term utilized in eschatological passages in Matthew to signal what comes next.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Matt 16:27 reveals that the Judgment Seat of Christ will take place *after* Jesus' return to the earth and *prior* to the inauguration of the kingdom on earth.

## E. Jesus' Return to Earth in 2 Timothy 4:1

Another indicator of the timing of the Judgment Seat of Christ can be found in 2 Tim 4:1 where we read this exhortation: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom." The phrase "His appearing and His kingdom" connects Christ's manifestation with the inauguration of His kingdom.<sup>28</sup> The Greek term for *appearing* refers to "a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity... in the form of a personal appearance."<sup>29</sup> J. N. D. Kelly points out that when this same Greek word is used in 2 Tim 1:10, it refers to "Christ's first appearance on the earth in the incarnation," while its use in 2 Tim 4:1, 8 and Titus 2:13 "denotes His future return [to the

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<sup>27</sup> For examples, see Matt 13:43; 24:9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 23, 30, 40; 25:1, 7, 31, 34, 37, 44, 45. See BAGD s.v., "*tote*," p. 824, where BAGD lists this use of *tote* in Matt 16:27 "to introduce that which follows in time." Thus, according to BAGD, *after* Jesus returns to the earth, *then* He will judge His followers.

<sup>28</sup> The two are connected by *kata tēn epiphaneian autou kai tēn basileian autou*) in the original Greek text. J. N. D. Kelly observes that "[Christ's] kingdom is naturally coupled with it [His appearing], for after the judgment He will consummate His kingdom for the elect [believers in Christ]" (J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983], p. 205).

<sup>29</sup> See BAGD, s.v., "*epiphaneia*," p. 304. (Though the full statement of BAGD is, "As a religious technical term it means a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity, either in the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power by which its presence is made known," clearly, in the context of the verse, Christ's "appearing" refers to the former—His "personal appearance"—as BAGD makes clear in the same article when 2 Tim 4:1 is specifically listed under the statement, "Of Jesus' coming in judgment.")

earth] in glory.”<sup>30</sup> This indicates that the “appearing” of Christ in 2 Tim 4:1 refers to “the Second Advent,”<sup>31</sup> which Paul links with the inauguration of the kingdom of God upon the earth.

In Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in this same verse (2 Tim 4:1), he connects the return of Christ (to establish God’s kingdom) with the judgment of believers. While Jesus will judge Gentile survivors of the Tribulation period, following His return to the earth,<sup>32</sup> this is not the judgment toward which Paul is pointing Timothy, for Paul’s “son” in the faith will not face that particular judgment. The only assessment that will affect Timothy is the Judgment Seat of Christ. Because Paul connected the return of Christ (to the earth) to the Bema, we can see he believed the Judgment Seat of Christ will transpire *after* Christ’s return to the earth.

## **F. Hebrews 10:35-38**

Another passage placing the Judgment Seat of Christ *after* Christ’s return to the earth is Heb 10:35-38. Verses 35-36 exhort Christian readers to endure faithfully for Christ in order to experience kingdom reward. The *reason*<sup>33</sup> believers should remain faithful to Christ is that in “a little while” Jesus will return to the earth.<sup>34</sup> In other words, if Christians remain faithful *till Christ returns to earth*, they will receive great reward. Thus, Jesus will reward believers *after* His return to the earth.

## **G. Revelation 11:15-18**

The post-return timing of the Bema can also be seen contextually in Revelation 11. Within the Apostle John’s vision of the future, the seventh angel announces the arrival of God’s kingdom in this way:

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<sup>30</sup> Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 205.

<sup>31</sup> See Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979), 203.

<sup>32</sup> See *A New World Coming* for more on this assessment.

<sup>33</sup> The reason is indicated by the use of the Greek term *gar* in v 37, as well as the explanatory presence of v 36, following the admonition of v 35.

<sup>34</sup> See Zane C Hodges, “Hebrews,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 806; see also F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 272-274.

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”<sup>35</sup> By proclaiming that the kingdom of God has now replaced the kingdom of the world, the angel essentially announces the return of Christ.<sup>36</sup>

In response to this dramatic declaration, the twenty-four elders of Revelation worship God, proclaiming the time has come for the Lord to reward His faithful servants.<sup>37</sup> Since this rewarding of Christ’s followers will occur at the Judgment Seat, the presentation of Rev 11:15-18 strongly implies that the assessment of Christians will convene *after* the return of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

## H. The Purpose of the Bema

As Merrill Unger declared, “The Judgment Seat of Christ is necessary for the appointment of places of rulership and authority with Christ in His role of ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ at His revelation [return] in power and glory.”<sup>39</sup> This is a critical understanding, for, if true, it reveals the Judgment Seat of Christ will be convened *after* Christ’s return to the earth. After all, as Rev 20:4-6 shows, those martyred for their faith *during* the Tribulation period will rule in the kingdom. Thus, if the Bema is necessary “for the appointment” of rule in the kingdom, this assessment must occur *after* the Tribulation period for these Tribulation saints to rule in the kingdom. Since Christ’s return ends the Tribulation period, the purpose of the Judgment Seat places its timing *after* Jesus’ return.

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<sup>35</sup> See Revelation 11:15 as per *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> See Hodges, “The First Horseman of the Apocalypse,” 329. In addition, this connection—between the kingdom(s) of the world becoming the kingdom of God *and* the return of Christ—can be seen in a comparison of Daniel chapters 2 and 7, as well as in the unveiling of Revelation where chapter 19 portrays the return of Christ, and chapter 20 describes the rule of Christ over God’s kingdom upon the earth.

<sup>37</sup> See v 18.

<sup>38</sup> See Hodges, “Do Not Be Ashamed,” 20.

<sup>39</sup> See Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), “Judgment Seat of Christ,” 622.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the Judgment Seat of Christ will occur during the forty-five day timeframe preceding the inauguration of God's kingdom upon the earth. This timing of the Bema makes sense on at least three levels.

First, this timing is compatible with the purpose of the Bema. A primary purpose for this judgment is to prepare for Jesus' administration. During His rule, Jesus will employ faithful individuals to help Him administrate the kingdom. Thus, He will utilize the Judgment Seat of Christ to determine positions of administration based on past faithfulness. This comports with the occurrence of this assessment just prior to the initiation of the kingdom.

Second, as shown in Rev 20:4-6, followers of Christ martyred during the Tribulation period will rule with Jesus in His kingdom. Scripture does not present the Judgment Seat as a series of events; instead, it is pictured as one grand occurrence. If so, the Bema needs to occur *after* the Tribulation period for the Tribulation martyrs to receive their appointment to rule in the millennial kingdom. This, of course, means the Judgment Seat of Christ will occur *after* the return of Christ and prior to the inauguration of the millennial kingdom.

Third, the occurrence of the Judgment Seat of Christ immediately prior to the initiation of the kingdom completes God's perfect pattern. We have seen that Daniel 12 reveals two important interludes of time between the conclusion of the Tribulation period and the installation of the kingdom. Since the first interlude (of thirty days) includes a significant judgment (the judgment of Gentile survivors of the Tribulation period) that wraps up the present age,<sup>40</sup> it is reasonable to believe that the second interlude of time (forty-five days) would also include a weighty, Scriptural judgment introducing the next age (the kingdom). The only judgment mentioned in the Bible which could fit the timing of this second interlude is the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The evidence indicates that this future assessment of Christians will occur in the forty-five-day era immediately preceding the coming kingdom, following the return of Christ to the earth.

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<sup>40</sup> Jesus indicated that the Tribulation period is part of our present age by terms such as "the end" or "the end of the age" in Matt 10:22; 13:39-40, 49; 24:3, 6, 13-14.



# GREEK AS THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE OF CHRIST

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The question “Did Jesus primarily speak Greek?” is crucial in its implications for the inerrancy of the Scriptures. If the only teaching language of Jesus was Aramaic, the Greek NT must be a translation from Aramaic to Greek. But translations by their very nature are mere approximations. As such they all but rule out the existence of the *ipsisissima verba* (the very words) of Christ.<sup>1</sup> In fact, only Aramaic quotes could remain exact. The independence view of the Synoptic Gospels is rendered precarious by this question, for as Tresham writes, “How likely is it that three independent witnesses would make the same translations from Aramaic into Greek?”<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, correctly estimating Jesus’ language preference involves almost a thousand years of language history. Historians have tried to solve this puzzle for over a century. In particular, the three languages, Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek, all have a claim to this distinction, each in its own way.

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Tresham, “The Languages Spoken by Jesus,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 72.

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

## II. THE ARAMAIC VIEW

One of the key events that shaped the linguistic world of first century Palestine was the Babylonian captivity. “[T]he deportation of Palestinian Jews to Babylonia in the early sixth century [BC] began a gradual but distinctive shift in the language habits of the people of Palestine.”<sup>3</sup> In Babylon, Aramaic began to replace Hebrew among the Jews and became “the *lingua franca* from Egypt to Asia Minor to Pakistan.”<sup>4</sup> Porter states,

The widespread use of Aramaic is substantiated, according to this hypothesis, not only by the Aramaic portions of the biblical writings of Daniel and Ezra and by noncanonical 1 Enoch, but also by a large amount of inscriptional, ossuary, epistolary, papyrological and literary evidence, especially now from Qumran but also from the other Judaean Desert sites (e.g. Murabba’at, Masada and Nahal Hever).<sup>5</sup>

The scholarly consensus of the first part of the twentieth century held that the dominant language of first century AD Palestine was Aramaic.<sup>6</sup> Thus Aramaic would be the language spoken and taught by Jesus. Porter adds, “While it is likely that Jesus’ primary language was Aramaic, this position is argued primarily by logical and historical inference, since Jesus is not recorded as using Aramaic apart from several odd quotations.”<sup>7</sup>

Two examples of such phrases are Mark 5:41 and 7:34. The first contains the words “talitha, cumi,” which mean, “Little girl, I say to you arise.” The latter contains the word “ephphatha,” which means “be opened.” Birkeland observes, following Abbott, that these examples disprove rather than prove the Aramaic hypothesis:

They were cited in Aramaic precisely because this was not the normal language used by Jesus. When Jesus spoke, as He

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Languages of Palestine in the First Century AD,” in *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Journal For the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 60 (Worcester: JSOT Press, 1991), 126.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1993): 199.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 201.



usually did, in Hebrew, His words were straightforwardly translated into Greek; when they did not translate into Greek this was for the special reason that His words were, exceptionally, in Aramaic.<sup>8</sup>

This criticism also supports the Greek hypothesis.

### III. THE HEBRAIC VIEW

According to the Aramaic view, Hebrew had become a dead language, understood for the most part only by scribes and rabbis. Among nineteenth century scholars, this view of Hebrew as a dead language was derived in part from observing in post-exilic Judaism the growing use of the Targums—Aramaic translations and interpretations of the OT—read in the synagogues to people who could not understand it in Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> It was believed that in order to write the Mishnah—the “great corpus of Jewish legal discussion”<sup>10</sup>—in the second century AD, “an artificial scholastic jargon, an artificial hybrid of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, was created.”<sup>11</sup>

However, after examination of its grammar, M. H. Segal found that Mishnaic Hebrew is dependent on Biblical Hebrew, not on Aramaic. It arose “through the spread of one spoken dialect or the mixture of several dialects.”<sup>12</sup> It is “rightly considered the linguistic evolutionary offspring of biblical Hebrew, and much in evidence in the rabbinic writings as independent of Aramaic.”<sup>13</sup> The view that

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<sup>8</sup> H. Birkeland, as quoted in James Barr, “Which Languages Did Jesus Speak?—some Remarks of a Semitist,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 53, no. 1 (Autumn 1970): 15. This paper, however, will argue that Jesus did not speak primarily in Hebrew.

<sup>9</sup> Shemuel Safrai et al., *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Ad Novum Testamentum*, section 1, vol. 2, *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974-76), 1022.

<sup>10</sup> Barr, “Which Languages Did Jesus Speak?,” 12.

<sup>11</sup> Tresham, “The Languages Spoken by Jesus,” 74-75.

<sup>12</sup> Safrai, *Compendia*, 1023.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Jesus and the Use of Greek in Galilee,” in *New Testament Tools and Studies: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, vol. 19 (Boston, MA: Brill, 1998), 127.

Mishnaic Hebrew continued as a spoken language is less contended today.

A minority of scholars believe that Jesus spoke and taught in Hebrew, even though Aramaic was the language of the common man in Galilee. One intriguing argument for this view is expressed by James Barr who challenges Aramaic expressions such as “talitha cumi,” “abba,” and the phrase rendered “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:46) as possibly being Hebrew. He admits the evidence tilts a bit more to the Aramaic view in this regard, however, “for some of them, such as ‘talitha cumi’ must be Aramaic, while those that are in some question can still probably be taken as Aramaic; there is none, so far as [he] can see, that can *only* be Hebrew and cannot possibly be Aramaic.”<sup>14</sup>

Regarding external evidence for the Hebraic view, Porter observes, “The Hebrew Judean Desert documents, including those from Qumran (which apparently outnumber those in Aramaic), but especially the Hebrew Bar Kokhba letters, have given further credence to the theory of vernacular Hebrew.”<sup>15</sup> The Bar Kokhba letters, fifteen in all, from the uprising of that name, “employ Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. They show that Bar-Kokhba’s officers understood these languages and suggest the use of these languages among the people of Palestine at large.”<sup>16</sup> James Barr was struck by the nature of Dead Sea Scrolls Hebrew:

Firstly, Hebrew of a kind akin to Biblical Hebrew was still in use for religious documents. Secondly, Hebrew was still also in use for secular documents such as letters and contracts, and sometimes documents of very similar content are found in Hebrew, in Aramaic and in Greek. Thirdly, some documents show linguistic characteristics very much akin to those of Mishnaic Hebrew. In general the Dead Sea Scroll evidence seems to have done for Mishnaic Hebrew what scholarship of those working directly on that language did not succeed in accomplishing, namely it

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<sup>14</sup> Barr, “Which Language?,” 17.

<sup>15</sup> Porter, “Use of Greek,” 127.

<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Gundry, “The Language Milieu of First-Century Palestine,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (1964), 406.

convinced many that Hebrew was still alive as a language in some kind of general use in the time of Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

## IV. THE GREEK VIEW

The Greek view of the spoken language of Palestine has a smaller burden of proof than either of the other two views. It attempts to prove that *some* Palestinians spoke Greek, not all. Aaron Tresham writes, “[e]vidence for the use of Aramaic in the areas where Jesus lived and taught is strong, but not necessarily strong enough to exclude His use of other languages.”<sup>18</sup> Certainly, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus taught in a language His audience would understand. Even a partially Greek-speaking audience, then, makes Greek a highly plausible teaching language.

### A. Greek as *Lingua Franca*

The argument for the view that Jesus spoke Greek rests, first, on the status of Greek as the *lingua franca* in the Roman Empire. “That Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire is acknowledged by virtually everyone who has considered this issue,” writes Porter.<sup>19</sup> The reason for this is partly because of its stability as a language, not degenerating into a series of related dialects, but into one standardized “common dialect.” Again, Porter states that during the spread of Greek across the empire, “startling consequences of foreigners speaking Greek [i.e. in corrupting the language] could have been expected, but these appear to have been ‘reasonably slight,’ virtually confined to enrichment of the lexicon and local variances in pronunciation.”<sup>20</sup>

This, in part, accounts for Greek becoming so widespread and pervasive. In fact, it functioned as a “prestige language” in Palestine. Of the concept of a prestige language, Porter observes that this means that there would have been cultural, social, and especially linguistic pressure to learn Greek in order to communicate broadly within the social structure. In addition, the available evidence clearly supports

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<sup>17</sup> Barr, “Which Language?,” 20.

<sup>18</sup> Tresham, “Languages,” 71.

<sup>19</sup> Porter, “Use of Greek,” 129.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

the idea that, besides there being a sizable number of first-language Greek speakers, there were a large and significant number of bilingual Palestinians especially in Galilee who had productive (not merely passive) competence in Greek and may even on occasion have preferred their acquired language, Greek, to their first language, Aramaic.<sup>21</sup>

Martin Hengel also stresses the influence of Greek:

The bond which held the Hellenistic world together despite the fragmentation which began with the death of Alexander and continued thereafter, was Attic Koine. Its sphere of influence went far beyond that of Aramaic, the official language of the Persian kingdom. Greek merchants dealt in it, whether in Bactria on the border of India or in Massilia...[o]utside of the sphere of Judaism the principle could probably very soon be applied that anyone who could read and write also had a command of Greek. Aramaic became the language of the illiterate, who needed no written remembrances.<sup>22</sup>

## B. Palestinian Geography and the Rise of Greek

Geographical factors also come into play in the Hellenization of Galilee. Matthew 4:15 calls it “the Galilee of the Gentiles,” and it was surrounded on all sides by Gentile cities. Sevenster writes,

There were many regions of the Jewish land which bordered directly on areas where mainly or almost exclusively Greek was spoken. The obvious assumption is that the inhabitants of such regions at least understood Greek, often spoke it and were thus bilingual. This can probably be said of people from all levels of society, not merely the top social or intellectual layer. In all layers of the population, then, the rule was probably a certain familiarity with Greek.

He reiterates the point: “Considering the close proximity to Greek-speaking regions in which large sections of the population of Galilee lived, it is scarcely conceivable that they remained hermetically sealed

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974, 1981), 58-59.

off from the penetration of the Greek language throughout the centuries.”<sup>23</sup>

Nazareth, the town of Jesus’ boyhood, was such a town. It was small in population (1,600 to 2,000), and agricultural in its economy, but it “was situated along a branch of and had a position overlooking one of the busiest trade routes in ancient Palestine, the Via Maris, which reached from Damascus to the Mediterranean.”<sup>24</sup> The town of Capernaum, where Jesus possibly had a home (Mark 2:1), was a prosperous fishing village. The fishermen among his disciples would have used Greek to conduct their business. Matthew, a tax collector there, would have done the same.

A large influx of Jews came often to celebrate various feasts in Jerusalem, traveling from surrounding cities and countries. As many as 2,700,000 are estimated by Philo to have attended one Passover.<sup>25</sup> Yet these probably included a large percentage of Greek speakers. Sevenster makes a logical inference:

That almost certainly also meant that Greek must have been spoken regularly in Jerusalem and its surroundings. For it is an established fact that, as a rule, the Jews outside Palestine spoke and wrote Greek and almost always thought in that language, particularly in the centuries around the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>26</sup>

There is also evidence of a resident contingent of Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem; in Acts 6:1, Luke writes, “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic (*Hellenistōn*) Jews against the native Hebrews (*Hebraious*) because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.” Porter explains that the term *Hellenistōn* refers to Jews who spoke mainly Greek, as opposed to *Hebraious*, Jews who “spoke mainly Aramaic or also Aramaic [i.e. as a second language].”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jan Nicolaas Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 99.

<sup>24</sup> Porter, “Use of Greek,” 135.

<sup>25</sup> Sevenster, *Greek*, 80

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>27</sup> Porter, “Use of Greek,” 136.

### C. External Evidence for the Greek View

Early evidence of Greek usage in Palestine dates to before the Babylonian exile. Mussies points to Greek pottery from the sixth century BC and Greek coins from the fifth. Ostraca (pottery used as writing tablets) occur from the third century at Khirbet el-Kôm.<sup>28</sup> Two of the eight ostraca there contain Greek messages, and one of the two is bilingual. Hengel observes that knowledge of Greek in aristocratic and military circles of Judaism can already be demonstrated on the basis of the Zeno papyri, around 260 BC, in Palestine.<sup>29</sup>

In 217 BC, a pillar was inscribed to honor Ptolemy IV Philopator in his victory over Antiochus III of Seleucia.<sup>30</sup> There is also “the fragment of an inscription from the Idumaeen town of Marisa in the same year, commemorating another victory of Philopator.” An inscription from the first century AD, probably before the year 70, bears witness to Theodotus, the builder of a synagogue. As Sevenster points out, “the *terminus ad quem* of 70 relates to the impracticability of building a synagogue in Jerusalem after the Roman destruction of that date.”<sup>31</sup> Another inscription involves the prohibition of non-Jews in certain parts of the temple. The significance of the message has been played down somewhat, because it is Jewish readers we are specifically interested in. Another inscription, however, is more apropos to the point. It is an edict against robbing tombs, posted in Galilee in the first half of the first century AD, and obviously pertains to persons of all religious affiliations.<sup>32</sup>

The available inscriptional evidence points very clearly toward Hellenization in Palestine. Porter points out, however, that “the quantity of material is simply too large to refer to in anything close to comprehensive terms.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Gerhard Mussies, “Greek as the Vehicle of Early Christianity,” *New Testament Studies* 29/3 (July 1983): 359, as cited in Tresham, “Languages,” 86.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Hengel, *The ‘Hellenization’ of Judea in the First Century after Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989, 2003), 64.

<sup>30</sup> Sevenster, *Greek*, 100.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-32.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-18.

<sup>33</sup> Porter, “Use of Greek,” 142. Porter lists additional sources: “For convenient reference to the variety of material, see Hengel, *Hellenization*, 64; Fitzmyer,

A number of papyri written in Greek have been found in Palestine. These include marriage contracts, commercial transactions, fiduciary contracts and philosophical writings. Two letters from Simon bar Kokhba, written shortly before the Bar Kokhba rebellion in AD 132, shed an interesting light on the question of language preference. He writes, “*εγραφή δ[ε] Ηελένιστι δια τ[ο]ν ἄνθρωπον μὲν ἕνεκα τῆς ἡβραϊστικῆς*” (“[the letter] was written in Greek because the desire was not found to write in Hebrew [or, possibly, ‘Aramaic’]”). In other words, it took a special effort to write in Hebrew or Aramaic which did not apply to writing in Greek. This letter is supplemented by another Greek letter regarding the everyday topic of maintaining a supply of vegetables. In both letters the unstated message is that the language of everyday affairs is Greek.

Jewish literature produced in Greek in roughly the time period of Jesus’ life includes certain parts of the deuterocanonical additions to the book of Daniel, such as the Prayer of Azariah, the Song of the Three Children, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. It also includes certain additions to the book of Esther, the apocryphal books of 1 Esdras and 2 Maccabees, and a number of books of the Septuagint, including Esther, 1 Maccabees, Chronicles, and more.<sup>34</sup>

The historian Josephus gives a window on his own study of Greek. He writes, “I have also labored strenuously to partake of the realm of Greek prose and poetry, although the habitual use of my native tongue has prevented my attaining precision in the pronunciation.”<sup>35</sup> He adds, “For our people do not favor those persons who have mastered the speech of many nations, or who adorn their style with smoothness of diction, because they consider that not only is such a skill common to ordinary freemen but that even slaves who so choose may acquire it.” This analysis incidentally confirms not only the production of Greek literature by the Jews, but the prevalence of Greek throughout the social strata.<sup>36</sup>

Bilingual coins minted in the first century BC have been found in Greek and Hebrew. Similar ones were minted by Mattathias

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‘*Languages of Palestine*,’ 135-36 and passim; Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 79-84; and Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?*, 115-38.”

<sup>34</sup> Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” 215-16.

<sup>35</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX: 262-65.

<sup>36</sup> Sevenster, *Greek*, 65.

Antigonus, the last king of the Hasmonean dynasty, in 40-37 BC. The Herodian dynasty also saw the minting of coins in Greek, including by Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee in Jesus' day.<sup>37</sup> During the two Jewish revolts (AD 66–70 and AD 132–35), Greek was not used on coins minted by the rebels. This, however, was not because they could not read Greek or for other mundane reasons. "To the contrary, their use of Hebrew on the coins indicates that they were attempting to make a political statement that the populace would understand, not abandoning their linguistic ties to Greek."<sup>38</sup> Thus, the language of coins was a significant cultural element, not chosen lightly, and a clear indicator of language preference.

In ossuaries throughout Palestine, funeral inscriptions indicate a preference for Greek. In Jerusalem, approximately 50% of Jewish burials have Greek inscriptions. At Beth She'arim, in western Galilee, the number is closer to 80%, with 100% of the earliest tombs inscribed in Greek. The overall number for Palestine is 55–60%. Porter writes,

These data are not to be underestimated. Since Hebrew may still have been the predominant Jewish religious language, at least of the devout, it is easy to account for the Semitic inscriptions. But it is less easy to account for the Greek ones unless Greek was simply a commonly used language by many Jews.<sup>39</sup>

The ossuary evidence for Greek in Palestine, so significant as an indicator of language, is not without its detractors. However, the dating of the Palestinian ossuaries, as explained by Sevenster, is clearly determined to be early by factors such as the type of earthenware used and the shape of the Greek characters. Further evidence for this is found in the mortuary at Talpioth, where a coin of Herod Agrippa I dates from the sixth year of his reign as king, (AD 42-43).<sup>40</sup> This evidence, dating from the mid-first century, qualifies as representing Palestine during the life of Christ.

This key point is challenged by Chancey. Sevenster's main source for this data, *Archaeology and Rabbi Jesus*, by Meyers and Strange, is faulted for dating the Beth She'arim tombs to the late first or early

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<sup>37</sup> Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?," 213.

<sup>38</sup> Sevenster, *Greek*, 138.

<sup>39</sup> Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?," 222.

<sup>40</sup> Sevenster, *Greek*, 153-55.



second-century. “In the excavation report itself,” Chancey writes, “the sole inscription in Catacomb 6 is undated, and those in Catacomb 11 are dated to the third century.”<sup>41</sup> It seems a valid point. However, the ossuary evidence Sevenster gives is not just based on a pronouncement by Meyers and Strange. It has to do with the three criteria mentioned: pottery type, writing analysis, and a coin. Chancey himself bases one of his main refutations of Sevenster on just such coin evidence.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the ossuary evidence for the Greek view is so widespread over such a long time frame that it appears to dwarf specific criticisms such as this one by Chancey.

Horsley makes another criticism, finding it noteworthy on the one hand that so many of the ossuary inscriptions are in Greek, but insisting they are only people in the wealthy class. He writes of Beth She’arim, for example, that it “became a privileged burial site where the bones of thousands of (presumably well-off) Jews from the diaspora were taken for reinterment.”<sup>43</sup> Sevenster maintains, however, that,

the often very poor Greek [writing]...very obvious in the numerous Greek funerary inscriptions of Jaffa and Beth She’arim, does not support the theory of craftsmen being commissioned by the relatives who themselves were entirely ignorant of the language, so much as the formulation of that Greek by the relatives themselves, who had some command of the language.<sup>44</sup>

(Horsley’s contention fails to mention the quality of the inscriptions themselves.)

Sevenster observes,

[s]ome of these inscriptions were probably made by members of the family. Many of them are executed technically in such a clumsy and primitive manner that they could easily have been made by persons not skilled in this craft, but if they could afford little expense and the

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<sup>41</sup> Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 134 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1996), 168.

<sup>44</sup> Sevenster, *Greek*, 182.

work had to be carried out as cheaply as possible, then the persons employed would certainly have been unable to correct the Greek in the text ordered or to formulate it flawlessly themselves.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, he maintains, “the simultaneous occurrence of tidy, correct and clumsy, primitive inscriptions in Greek proves that this language was used in widely divergent layers of the Jewish population in Palestine. In any case it was not restricted to the upper classes.”<sup>46</sup>

Porter also makes an observation about the significance of the ossuary evidence:

At the most private and final moments when a loved one was finally to be laid to rest, in the majority of instances, Jews chose Greek as the language in which to memorialize their deceased. Greek was apparently that dominant, that in the majority of instances it took precedence over the Jewish sacred language, even at a moment of highly personal and religious significance.<sup>47</sup>

A final word should be addressed to another argument of Horsley, namely an extremely low literacy rate in Galilee, as in the entire Roman Empire, which negates most if not all epigraphic evidence. One contrary bit of evidence among many might be this quote from Mark Antony as recorded by Josephus:

M. Antony, imperator, to the magistrates, senate, and people of Tyre, sendeth greeting. I have sent you my decree, respecting which I will that ye take care that it be engraven in the public tables, in Roman and Greek letters, and that it stand engraven in the most conspicuous places, so as to be read by all.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, if there was a study on low literacy rates in Tyre (and by extension, Palestine), Antony had apparently not heard of it.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” 222.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Antony, as quoted in Josephus, *Antiquities*, xiv. 12.5, in Alexander Roberts, *Greek: the Language of Christ and His Apostles* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888), 149-50.

## D. Internal Evidence for the Greek View

An obvious piece of evidence in considering Jesus' spoken language is the fact that the NT itself is written in Greek.<sup>49</sup> If the book is in Greek, surely its main character can be assumed to speak the language. As Alexander Roberts put it:

Here we possess, in the volume known as the New Testament, a collection of writings, composed for the most part *by* Jews of Palestine, and primarily intended to some extent *for* Jews of Palestine, and all of them written...in the *Greek* language. Now what is the natural inference? Is it not that Greek must have been well known both to the writers and their readers, and that *it* was deemed the most fitting language, at the time, in which for Jews of Palestine both to impart and receive instruction?<sup>50</sup>

One would certainly think so. At the very least, the burden of proof is on the scholar who attempts to prove differently.

A second very strong piece of evidence is the fluency of James, the half-brother of Jesus. The book of James was written less than two decades after the death of Christ, and yet is a fine example of Greek writing. It seems unlikely James could gain such fluency in those few years. Rather, it appears to demonstrate “the advanced knowledge of Greek in the family.”<sup>51</sup> Abbott writes, “James’s knowledge of Greek and even his use of the Septuagint shown in his epistle are confirmed by the report of his behavior in the Council of Jerusalem, where he bases an argument on the Greek version of Amos, where it differs from the Hebrew.”<sup>52</sup>

Peter and John were called “uneducated and untrained men” (Acts 4:13), yet they too wrote parts of the Greek NT. This certainly argues

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Thomas, “Impact of Historical Criticism on Theology and Apologetics,” in Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism Into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 368.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Roberts, *Greek: The Language of Christ and His Apostles*, 82 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>51</sup> Thomas, “Impact of Historical Criticism,” 368.

<sup>52</sup> T. K. Abbott, “To What Extent Was Greek the Language of Galilee in the Time of Christ?,” in *Essays Chiefly On the Original Texts of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1891), 129.

for the kind of familiarity we should expect from the external evidence. Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost most likely was delivered in Greek, because of the mixed nature of the holiday crowd—people “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5).

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered to a large crowd of people who “were amazed at His teaching” (Matt 7:28). This crowd, however, we find (in Matt 4:25) had “followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.” But as we have seen, these cities were probably primarily Greek-speaking. Jesus would likely have to teach them in Greek to be understood. He probably also spoke Greek with the Syrophenician woman in Tyre (Mark 7:24-30). She is called a “Hellēnis” by Mark. This is a form of the word we saw earlier, which refers to “someone who speaks mainly Greek.”

Another example of likely Greek usage is Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate. It occurred just before the Feast of Passover, when the crowds would include those visiting Israel for the holiday. Yet in such a diverse group, a common language beyond even Aramaic was necessary, for Pilate probably did not speak it. Regarding this, Roberts writes:

No one will venture to maintain that the Roman governor either understood or employed Hebrew, nor will many be inclined to suppose that Latin was used by our Lord or the Jews in their intercourse with Pilate. The only other supposition is that *Greek* was the language employed by all the parties in question; unless, indeed, it be assumed that an interpreter was employed between them. And it must be allowed by all who are inclined to adopt this view, that it involves, at least, quite a gratuitous assumption. There is not the slightest trace of any such personage in the narrative.<sup>53</sup>

Instead, we have clear exchanges between Pilate, Jesus, the chief priests, the rulers and the people, with repeated phrases such as “he said to him.” So Jesus and Pilate do converse directly and at length, as in their extended dialogue of John 18:33-38. The knowledge of Greek, once again, is required.

A final example is John 7:35, “Then the Jews said among themselves, ‘Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He

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<sup>53</sup> Roberts, *Greek: The Language of Christ*, 158.

intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"<sup>54</sup> The question implies knowledge that Jesus spoke Greek.

### E. Implications of the Greek View

If Christ did indeed speak Greek, certain implications arise. First, the possibility of *ipsissima verba* of Christ in the NT increases significantly.<sup>54</sup> Second, the need for an underlying Aramaic version of Jesus' teachings diminishes.<sup>55</sup> In view of a body of teaching at least partially in Greek, it becomes more probable the Gospel writers simply selected, word for word, passages from the actual teachings in Greek, even if these were outnumbered numerically by teachings in Aramaic.<sup>56</sup> Third, the source of inspiration in the NT documents themselves is not relegated to a more deeply inspired Aramaic version behind it. Fourth, the independence view of Synoptic Gospel origins is vindicated,<sup>57</sup> since the likelihood of the three Synoptic Gospel witnesses agreeing on the wording of an identical set of teachings is high.

## V. CONCLUSION

Stanley Porter observes regarding the *lingua franca* status of Greek in the first century Greco-Roman empire:

I find it interesting, if not a bit perplexing, that virtually all biblical scholars will accept that the Jews adopted Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the Persian empire, as their first language, with many if not most Jews of the eastern Mediterranean speaking it in the fourth century

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<sup>54</sup> Tresham, "Languages," 72.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?: Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 169. For example, if Jesus spoke four occasions in Aramaic to every one occasion in Greek, it would still leave hours and hours of teaching in Greek. Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem*, calculates at 2 hours per day of public teaching, 2,000 hours of total such teaching during Jesus' ministry. At even a 20% ratio, that would yield 400 hours in Greek, which, at 7.5 single-spaced typewritten pages per hour (her metric), is 2800 pages. That is certainly enough from which to draw the Gospel writings.

<sup>57</sup> Tresham, "Languages," 72.

BCE. Many of these same scholars, however, will almost categorically reject the idea that the Jews adopted Greek, the *lingua franca* of the Greco-Roman world, as their language, even though the social, political, cultural and, in particular, linguistic contexts were similar in so many ways, and the evidence is at least as conclusive.<sup>58</sup>

The benefit of the doubt Porter argues for should be extended to this study for the same reason. In fact, a goal of this article has not been to prove that Greek is the sole language of Palestine, just that it is one of three, alongside Aramaic and Hebrew. The argument is not that Jesus spoke or taught only in Greek, but that He both could and did on occasion. Having established this plausibility, it appears beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus both spoke and taught in Greek.

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<sup>58</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series*, vol. 191, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 169.

# ETHICAL INCONSISTENCIES IN CALVINIST PASTORAL MINISTRY

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The primary responsibility of the pastor is the ministry of the Word, i.e. preaching.<sup>1</sup> This includes a moral obligation to preach what he believes to be true. However, what a pastor says in public should be consistent with what he says in private. If he publicly teaches a doctrine he believes to be false, he is guilty of dishonesty. The reverse is also true. The preacher must not give advice to others or evangelize in a way that contradicts what he believes and preaches. The ethics of preaching requires doctrinal consistency.

Is Calvinist pastoral ministry especially prone to this kind of ethical inconsistency? Are Calvinist pastors especially tempted to misrepresent, or even change, their theology because elements of Calvinism are “unpreachable?”<sup>2</sup> Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell have asked this question: “[Do] Calvinists forthrightly and consistently apply their theology in the rough and tumble of daily life and ministry or...[do] they tend to cloak their distinctively Reformed commitments in those contexts?”<sup>3</sup> They believe the answer is “no” in the first regard and “yes” in the second, claiming that, “Calvinists are inclined

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2005), 163.

<sup>2</sup> James Daane, *The Freedom of God: A Study of Election and Pulpit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004), 188.

to shroud and even misrepresent their central theological convictions at some of these crucial junctures where theology meets life.<sup>4</sup> Is that true? This article will examine five problem areas where Calvinist preachers are likely to compromise their message.

## II. INCONSISTENCIES INVOLVING ASSURANCE AND DEATH

First, Calvinist pastors can demonstrate inconsistency between their doctrine concerning the assurance of salvation and what they say to the bereaved.

In Calvinistic spirituality, the church-goer is encouraged to question his salvation and to examine his behavior in an endless search for assurance. Calvinist David Engelsma criticizes Puritanism regarding assurance: “Puritan preaching...is forever questioning your assurance, forever challenging your right to assurance, forever sending you on a quest for assurance, and forever instilling doubt.”<sup>5</sup>

The reason this is the case is because Calvinism teaches what is commonly called the perseverance of the saints. By that Calvinists do not simply mean that once a person believes in Jesus for eternal life he can never lose that life. They also mean that a professing believer must continue (persevere) in good works in order to prove to himself, and others, that he has indeed believed.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Calvinism really has six points: “One could almost speak of the six points of Calvinism, the *fifth* point being the *preservation* of the saints and the *sixth* point being the *perseverance* of the saints.”<sup>7</sup> The “P” in TULIP has two parts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>5</sup> David J. Engelsma, *The Gift of Assurance* (South Holland, IL: The Evangelism Committee of the Protestant Reformed Church, 2009), 53.

<sup>6</sup> If the reader is interested, GES has done more than one regional conference that deals with this topic. The conferences can be accessed online at [www.faithal-one.org](http://www.faithal-one.org). See also Robert N. Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> David W. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, Second Edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1963, 2004), 148-49.

<sup>8</sup> The letters stand for: total depravity (T); unconditional election (U); limited atonement (L); irresistible grace (I); the preservation of the saints (P1); and the



For the Calvinist, then, assurance of salvation is not certainty. One cannot be sure that he has everlasting life because the basis of assurance is not simply the promise of everlasting life to the believer, but it also includes his works (the works of the Spirit in his life). Therefore, any degree of assurance involves works. A believer can gain a measure of assurance by looking at his works and feelings. But if persevering in good works is necessary for eternal salvation and assurance, then works become a condition for salvation.<sup>9</sup> This leaves the believer always wondering if his works are sufficient to “prove” that he is a child of God or not.

It is no wonder, then, that assurance (i.e., certainty) is rarely found in the teaching of Calvinists. Since a believer can never know if he will persevere in good works until the end of his life, Calvinism makes the assurance of salvation impossible. For this reason, Calvinism, with its emphasis on Lordship Salvation, has been called “a gospel of doubt.”<sup>10</sup>

For example, Jonathan Edwards wrote a book intended to help readers figure out if we are truly converted or not. In the final analysis, Edwards does not provide any assurance of eternal salvation. His writings lead to a lifetime of doubt if the reader adopts what he says.<sup>11</sup>

When one reads the writings of Calvinist and Reformed teachers, this is what he finds. One writes in regard to 2 Cor 13:5 that there will always be unbelievers in the Church, but it can never be true for the *whole* Church. There are those within the Church that are reprobates.<sup>12</sup> That begs the question of each believer: Am I a reprobate?

In discussing the same passage, MacArthur states that “doubts about one’s salvation are not wrong, so long as *they are not nursed and allowed to become an obsession.*”<sup>13</sup> The believer who continues to live

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perseverance of the saints (P2). This article will address some of these six points.

<sup>9</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1982), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, *The Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur’s The Gospel According to Jesus* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2016). See also, Engelsma, *The Gift of Assurance*, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007). Originally published in 1746.

<sup>12</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 481.

<sup>13</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, “Follow Me”?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 190, emphasis

in sin should examine himself to see if he is really saved: “Those who think they can live any way they please should examine themselves to see if they are really in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).”<sup>14</sup> But how does such theology grant assurance to people when they *all* continue to sin (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10)? None can have assurance under such teaching. How can such a belief *not* result in being obsessed about one’s status before God? Isn’t the very essence of being a Christian the idea that the Christian is a child of God and has been born again/ from above into the family of God?

Nineteenth century author F. L. Godet suggested that even the Apostle Paul did not have assurance of salvation. He wrote concerning 1 Cor 9:27 that Paul needed to keep his body under control because “his salvation” was “at stake.” Paul is encouraging believers to have “fear” and maintain a “serious watchfulness” in regards to their eternal salvation.<sup>15</sup> If Paul lacked assurance, shouldn’t we?

Schreiner says there is another thing to consider if the believer wants to have some measure of assurance. In order to be in the kingdom—to experience “future glorification”—the believer must suffer with Christ (Rom 8:17). This involves “actual” suffering and not just “suffering in God’s sight.”<sup>16</sup> Schreiner does not say what this involves, but once again the vast majority of believers today would question whether they meet this criterion. Particularly those who have lived in the West might wonder if they have actually suffered for the Lord.

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added. In the 2008 edition this was slightly softened: “Periodic doubts about one’s salvation are not necessarily wrong. Such doubts must be confronted and dealt with honestly and biblically. Scripture encourages self-examination” (p. 213).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 197 (p. 220 in the 2008 edition). MacArthur adds, “A Christian is one who follows Christ, one who is committed unquestionably to Christ as Lord and Savior, one who desires to please God. His basic aim is to be in every way a disciple of Jesus Christ...It is full commitment, with nothing knowingly or deliberately held back. No one can come to Christ on any other terms.”

<sup>15</sup> Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1889, 1977), 476-77. Godet was associated with the Swiss Reformed churches of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and one of their leading theological scholars. However, many Arminians are drawn to his writings. I once heard a speaker suggest Godet was perhaps Arminian. A better perspective is that both Arminian and Reformed writers have something in common. Neither believes assurance of salvation is possible in this life.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 428.

Also commenting on Romans 8, Stott says that the believer will experience an “hourly putting to death of the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh.” If a professing Christian does that and suffers with Christ, he can gain “absolute assurance.” He goes on to say, however, that absolute assurance is not really absolute. There are, after all, “differing degrees of intensity” when it comes to assurance.<sup>17</sup>

Despite this emphasis on doubting one’s salvation, it often happens that the Calvinist preacher will tell the family of a dying loved one that their family member will soon be with the Lord. I have attended numerous funerals presided over by such preachers. I have never heard a word of doubt about the eternal salvation of the deceased. In fact, the opposite is the case. The family and friends are told that the deceased is with the Lord.

A fellow pastor once related to me the story of when he was presiding over a military funeral. A Calvinist preacher was asked by the family to assist in the funeral. The preacher told my friend that there was no way the deceased was with the Lord. He simply had not done enough works, and he was sure the man was not saved. However, in his funeral message the Calvinist preacher gave assurance to the family saying that the man was now with the Lord. That sort of ethical inconsistency is more common among Calvinist ministers than we might think.

R. C. Sproul was a famous Reformed scholar. He had a magazine called *TableTalk*. In one issue he plainly said that he was not sure he was saved.<sup>18</sup> He was being consistent with his Calvinistic theology. However, after his death those involved in ministry with him have assured us he is with the Lord.<sup>19</sup> The inconsistency is glaring.

No doubt this is done to “minister” to the family. It would be cruel to say that a deceased family member will be assigned to the lake of fire for eternity. However, this is inconsistent with Calvinist theology. At the very least, the Calvinist should say that we do not know where the deceased will be for eternity because we do not know where *any* of us will be. None of us have assurance that we are God’s children.

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<sup>17</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 230-36.

<sup>18</sup> R. C. Sproul, “TableTalk,” Nov 6, 1989, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, [www.challies.com/articles/remembering-dr-r-c-sproul](http://www.challies.com/articles/remembering-dr-r-c-sproul). Accessed Jul 1, 2018.

If we cannot know whether a person is a believer during his life, how can we know it when he is at the point of death? Are we being dishonest with the family members and giving them a false sense of security in regard to their loved one?

If the Calvinist were being consistent in his theology, he could not give such comfort to the bereaved. At best, he could offer hope, but not certainty, that the dying person will be with the Lord.

The fact that Calvinist preachers contradict their theology is not only inconsistent but may also reflect a troubled conscience about the implications of their theology. As Austin Fischer points out, "It is often said that one's theology is not tenable unless it can be preached at the gates of Auschwitz."<sup>20</sup>

### III. INCONSISTENCIES INVOLVING PROVIDENCE AND SUFFERING

Second, Calvinist pastors can demonstrate inconsistency between their doctrine of providence and what they say to people who have experienced suffering and tragedy.

Ministry does not exist just in the pulpit. It also happens by the bedside of a gravely ill church member or in a hospital during a sudden tragedy. These are the frontlines of ministry. What is a pastor ethically empowered to say in such a situation? How the pastor will respond and minister to the families in such times will stem from his theology.

The fact of sickness, suffering, and evil raises special problems for the Calvinist pastor. It is a well-known criticism that Reformed theology holds to a troubling view of God's providence. Grudem, in his definition of God's providence, includes the idea that God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.<sup>21</sup> He acknowledges that many have problems with this view because it can be used to argue that God is then the cause of evil. Grudem himself says that God does indeed cause evil events to come about but that He does not *directly*

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<sup>20</sup> Austin Fischer, *Young, Restless, No Longer Reformed: Black Holes, Love, and a Journey In and Out of Calvinism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 315.

do anything evil.<sup>22</sup> Grudem also acknowledges that the Calvinist doctrines of providence and election can lead to a fatalistic view of life. If everything has been ordained by God, then what we do and believe makes no difference.<sup>23</sup>

Osborne, however, points out that there are many verses in the NT which point out that men and women are indeed involved in decisions that impact their lives.<sup>24</sup> Grudem maintains that God simply ordains that we choose the things we choose.<sup>25</sup>

Calvinism, then, teaches that God determines everything before it happens and men and women have no part in anything that happens. Since sickness, suffering, and evil happen, God must determine them to happen.

However, as Walls and Dongell write, “For if God determines everything that happens, then it is hard to see why there is so much sin and evil in the world and why God is not responsible for it.”<sup>26</sup>

If God is responsible for sin and evil, then He cannot be good. Grudem’s view that God causes these things, but does not *directly* do so does not remove the problem. As Roger Olson has claimed, the Calvinist view of providence makes God “a moral monster.”<sup>27</sup> God’s goodness is smeared with evil, and the responsibility for sin is put on the Creator instead of the creature.<sup>28</sup>

How does that theology apply in a pastoral setting? For example, how does it apply when the pastor is faced with someone who has suffered a personal tragedy?

If a Calvinist pastor is honest, what he believes about God’s providence will be consistent with what he tells people who are suffering a tragedy.

What should or can a pastor say to a recent widow whose husband was murdered? The consistent Calvinist pastor should say her husband’s murder was predetermined before the foundation of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 322-23.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 674-75.

<sup>24</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts,” in *Grace Unlimited*, Charles H. Pinnock, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1975), 167-89.

<sup>25</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 680.

<sup>26</sup> Walls and Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, 133.

<sup>27</sup> Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 85.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 92-94.

world, and God never had any intentions of giving her a long and happy marriage.

What can a pastor say to a mother whose baby died in childbirth? The consistent Calvinist should tell her that God chose the baby to die or that the child deserved to die because she was totally depraved. In fact, consistency would also dictate that in all likelihood the baby will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

The Calvinist view that God determines all these things is too simplistic. The Bible teaches us that suffering is often the result of decisions that people make. While God does allow Satan to inflict suffering, as in the case of Job, in many other instances even God's people bring the suffering upon themselves. Ananias and Sapphira died because of their decisions (Acts 5). In Matt 23:37, Jesus cries over Jerusalem and says that the destruction of that city in AD 70 would come about because they willingly rejected Him. While there are things that we do not understand about certain instances of suffering, we can be certain that God did not determine in eternity past all the things that people experience and decide.

It also must be recognized that we live in a world that has been affected by the fall of man and sin. In Romans 1, Paul tells us that this brings all kinds of negative consequences in the world. If we do not make God the author of sin we cannot say that God has predetermined all these things to happen.

I have often shared the responsibilities of funerals with fellow pastors that I knew through private conversation were Reformed. However, when it came time for them to deliver their message, there was nothing about divine determinism in their sermons. They did not even speak of the person's death as a step in the ladder of God's glory. They were apparently too afraid to make their private theology public.

Thomas Oden axiomatically states that, "Pastoral care is always wrong to try to console sufferers that God directly sends suffering upon us, as if it were God's absolute, unambiguous, original will for us."<sup>29</sup> Oden is correct. Using a verse like Rom 8:28, "that all things work together for good," to tell believers that whatever happens to them was simply God's eternal determined will for them is to offer

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1983), 230.

unbiblical advice. As Hodges points out, that verse only applies to those who “love” the Lord and are suffering with Christ.<sup>30</sup> God indeed uses suffering in the life of such a believer for good, but only that kind of believer can see his suffering as part of the process of being conformed into the image of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

At face value it seems that Calvinist pastors who offer counsel which contradicts their theology agree with Oden’s assessment. If you fail to publicly proclaim what you believe privately, then you must be ashamed of your beliefs and know deep down that they are wrong.

When it comes to the providence of God, the Calvinist seems to be in an ethical conundrum. The pastor will be forced to propagate doctrines that his church is not comfortable with, or he will be a theologian with a mask.

Theology should be an honest enterprise. The pastoral office must be one that bleeds integrity. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have any respect for someone who honestly believes God controls everything but does not preach that to all people at all times. Does this fit the requirement of a pastor being above reproach (1 Tim 3:2)?

#### **IV. INCONSISTENCIES INVOLVING ELECTION AND EVANGELISM**

Third, Calvinist pastors face an inconsistency between their doctrine of election and making a free offer of the gospel when doing evangelism.

Calvinism teaches that divine election is “God’s determinative initiative in human salvation.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, God before the foundation of the world chose some people for salvation and others for damnation. As Olson notes, this doctrine is “crucial to all true

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<sup>30</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 235-38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Hodges opines that “all things” in this verse refers to creation. Creation “longs” for the return of the Lord. The suffering, faithful believer does as well. The believer who suffers as he follows in Christ’s footsteps will share in Christ’s rule over that creation in the kingdom of God.

<sup>32</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, “Divine Election in the Gospel of John” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995, 2000), 47.

Calvinists; it is the heart of their soteriology.”<sup>33</sup> Alister McGrath concurs: “the doctrine of predestination is often thought of as being the central feature of Reformed theology.”<sup>34</sup> Given this doctrine, Calvinism says that not everyone can be saved because not everyone has been chosen for salvation. In fact, since few will be saved, the Calvinist believes that most people he meets cannot be saved spiritually. “Election is to be looked upon as only a particular application of the general doctrine of predestination or foreordination as it relates to the salvation of sinners.”<sup>35</sup>

Theologians attempt to put a positive spin on the Reformed doctrine of election.<sup>36</sup> Ware, for example, says that the Reformed doctrine of election is correct because it results in the salvation of the few who are saved as being *all of God* and *all of grace*.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the doctrine of election to eternal life in eternity past properly gives all glory to God. Only in this way can God be properly glorified. Sproul adds that the Reformed doctrine of election allows us to understand the fall of man. It “renders man morally unable, dead in sin, and enslaved to sin.” To deny such facts is to soften the impact of the fall. He says that while a fallen sinner retains the *capacity* to believe, in the final analysis he cannot because he is enslaved to the power of sin.<sup>38</sup> God must grant freedom from this power in order to believe. This, too, gives all glory to God, according to the Calvinist.

While giving a sample of definitions of election, Lance notes that “in defining unconditional election, all Calvinists, whether Baptist, Reformed, or ‘other,’ say basically the same thing emphasizing different aspects.”<sup>39</sup> The hard pill to swallow, however, is that “Reformed

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<sup>33</sup> Olson, *Against Calvinism*, 103.

<sup>34</sup> Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 132.

<sup>35</sup> Loraine Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1991), 83.

<sup>36</sup> See especially Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 673-74.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election: 5 Views*, Chad Owen Brand, ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 58.

<sup>38</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 204.

<sup>39</sup> Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, (Orlando, FL: Lance Publications, 2014), 244.



theologians say that God deems *his own glory* more important than saving everyone.<sup>40</sup> One could add to that. Calvinism deems the glory of God more important than everyone's being savable.

How does this impact evangelism? By evangelism we mean the sharing of the Christian gospel for the purpose of the eternal salvation of the hearer. Chafer defined evangelism as, "the act of presenting to the unsaved the evangel or good news of the gospel of God's saving grace through Christ Jesus."<sup>41</sup>

If he is consistent, the Calvinist pastor will not make a gospel offer to any particular individual. He can proclaim what Christ did for the elect, but he cannot say to any one person what Christ has done for that person, because he does not know whom God has elected for eternal life and who is reprobate. Spurgeon, a self-professed Calvinist, wrote and spoke much of evangelism.<sup>42</sup> However, such evangelists have confidence that is misplaced. Their confidence in evangelism is in the election of certain sinners rather than the gospel itself. They preach to all, but they do not know who the elect are. But when they evangelize do they announce that salvation is entirely dependent on whether or not an individual has been chosen? Do they explain that God's choice was made long before they were born and they can do nothing to change it? If the Calvinist evangelist does not explain these points, he risks being ethically inconsistent.

As a matter of fact, Calvinist pastors are often inconsistent in this area and do make a gospel offer to particular individuals. If he is consistent and honest with his theology, a Calvinist cannot tell a random person on the street: "Christ died for you!" Indeed, a Calvinist cannot even tell his own son or daughter that Christ died for him or her!

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<sup>40</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 684.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Doctrinal Summarization*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993), 143.

<sup>42</sup> See C.H. Spurgeon, *The Soul-Winner or How to Lead Sinners to the Savior*, (New York, NY: Marshall Brothers, n.d.).

## V. INCONSISTENCIES INVOLVING THE ATONEMENT AND EVANGELISM

Fourth, Calvinist pastors face an inconsistency between their doctrine of the atonement and making a free offer of the gospel when doing evangelism.<sup>43</sup> Calvinism teaches limited or definitive atonement. This is the belief that “Christ actually saves to the uttermost every one of those for whom He laid down His life.”<sup>44</sup> Since not all will be saved, there was no reason for Christ to die for all. Christ died for some to save them completely.<sup>45</sup> For the Calvinist who embraces limited atonement, will he or she really “do the work of an evangelist”? How does this doctrine involve the Calvinist pastor in an ethical inconsistency?

I have often heard preachers who are Calvinists tell the unbelievers they are speaking to that Christ died for them. Other non-Calvinists have heard Calvinists make similar claims, much to the surprise of the non-Calvinists.<sup>46</sup> How can they make such a claim? They do not have definitive knowledge of that. Their theology says that Christ died for some, and the number of people for whom Christ died is few since few will be saved. Therefore, when Calvinists evangelize they should say to their audience that Christ probably didn’t die for them!

However, Calvinists find other ways to comfort themselves, especially about their own children. Lutzer writes:

God’s choice of those who will be saved appears to be neither random nor arbitrary. He planned the *context* in which they would be converted. That is why I have never wondered whether my children are among the elect. Since they were born into a Christian home, we can believe that the means of their salvation will be the faithful teaching of God’s Word. God’s decision to save us involved planning

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<sup>43</sup> “But you be watchful in all things, enduring afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim 4:5).

<sup>44</sup> L. Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1939, 1999), 216.

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed defense of the Calvinistic view of limited atonement, see John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959). Many, including myself, have found Owen to be unconvincing.

<sup>46</sup> <http://evangelicalarminians.org/calvinism-vs-arminianism-should-we-tell-unbelievers-that-god-loves-them>. Accessed June 28, 2018.

where we would be born and the circumstances that would lead us to Christ. Election is part of a total picture.<sup>47</sup>

I find it so strange that he can be so sure his children are elect. Isn't this simply wishful thinking? For example, what if they fail to persevere in good works?

Consistency is what is needed to dig themselves out of the ethical dilemma they find themselves in. A Calvinist once stated to me that he would not tell anyone, even someone who professed Christ, that Christ died for him. He would not do this because he said he could not be certain. While this sounds ludicrous to most, at least he was being honest and consistent in his theology.

Baggett and Walls summarize the issue well by arguing if election and limited atonement are true, then "there is no intelligible sense in which God loves those who are lost, nor is there any recognizable sense in which he is good to them."<sup>48</sup> In the Reformed system, God does not love everyone, and the pastor cannot honestly proclaim that He does. He also cannot claim that Christ died for someone.

How many souls would believe the message preached if pastors honestly communicate the gospel according to Calvinism? If they are honest, the invitation will mirror this:

"Excuse me, may I speak with you? God the Father may have chosen you before the world to be saved or damned. To be honest, in all probability He did not choose you to be saved. But, can I help you find out which group you might possibly belong to? If He chose you to be damned, then Christ did not even die for you. You were created for hell. But if you were one of the fortunate few, you will be a part of God's family and have eternal life, even though you won't know it until you see Him after you die. Isn't that good news?"

This, of course, is not good news at all. In fact, one could say that this paints a picture of God that is cruel. Even though this is what their theology proclaims, I have never heard a Calvinist share the Gospel in this way. This points out their inconsistency. Theology does

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<sup>47</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines that Divide: A Fresh Look at the Historic Doctrines that Separate Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 217.

<sup>48</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 71.

more than inform us. It motivates us in how we serve the Lord. A wrong system of belief can certainly lead to the wrong application.

## VI. INCONSISTENCIES INVOLVING SOLA SCRIPTURA AND TRADITION

Fifth, Calvinist pastors face an inconsistency between their doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* and their defense of Calvinism as a traditional system. The real question is what is primary for them: Scripture or their theology?<sup>49</sup>

Calvinist pastors, as well as all Protestants, are supposed to be committed to *Sola Scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura*, or Scripture alone, is among the five standing pillars of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>50</sup> In fact, several major Protestant systematic theologies begin, not with theology proper, but with bibliology.<sup>51</sup> Protestant preaching is meant to be Biblical preaching.

Calvinists, in their commentaries, consistently appeal to the Scriptures. They often loudly profess *Sola Scriptura*. Nevertheless, even though they habitually deal with the Biblical text, it is with TULIP colored glasses.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Moo states that any attempt to interpret Romans 9 except from a traditional Calvinistic interpretation will be “unsuccessful.”<sup>53</sup> The Reformed commentary conversation

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<sup>49</sup> The major issue with Calvinism is not whether it is logical or reasonable, rather is it Biblical. This issue has been covered recently in Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical?*

<sup>50</sup> See especially: James R. White, *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority, and Authenticity* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> See Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 71-125; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:21-124; Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 1:229-541.

<sup>52</sup> See especially William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 434. Mounce does not deal with Lordship salvation at all in the entire section. However, as he concludes the unit, he dictates that there “can be no salvation apart from discipleship.” He does this with no textual support nor any citations of literature to the contrary.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary, Gordon D. Fee, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 587.

quickly becomes how this certain Biblical passage supports a particular Calvinistic doctrine.<sup>54</sup> To the neutral observer it certainly appears that they often are trying to fit their theology into the Biblical passage.

It is good advice to say that the Bible is able to shed much light on commentaries! It should not be the other way around. We should not go to a theological system to shed light on the Bible. Anything unbiblical has no place in pastoral theology, whose very foundation is laid in Scripture. It is unethical for a pastor, in a desire to hold to a theological system, not to uphold his chief text, which is the Bible.

The ethical ramification for Reformed pastoral ministry, at least the one that proclaims *Sola Scriptura*, is that the pastor must state his theology or the Scripture. He will either be dishonest or inconsistent. The same ethical ramifications hold true in the evangelism of the Reformed pastoral ministry. The Christian faith is already under attack from the culture, and the last thing the world needs is an unethical representation of Christ from those who claim to represent Him.

## VII. CONCLUSION

At its heart, “Calvinism deprives those struggling with their faith of the single most important resource available: the confidence that God loves all of us with every kind of love we need.”<sup>55</sup> How can a pastor ethically adhere to that which deprives his sheep from that which they need most as well as what the Bible provides? Walls and Dongell summarize the point of this article well by noting that sooner or later Reformed pastors will be, “inclined to shroud and even misrepresent their central theological convictions at some of the crucial junctions where theology meets life.”<sup>56</sup>

The highest calling should have the highest integrity. Those that are called to be blameless should adhere to a theology that allows their ministry to be consistent and blameless as well. Instead of Calvinism constantly retreating to a theology that can only be describes in many

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<sup>54</sup> See John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1986), 12-13.

<sup>55</sup> Walls and Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, 201.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

instances as a “mystery,” they would better serve the church by remaining true to the teachings found in the Scriptures.

We are to preach and teach in light of the coming Judgment Seat of Christ (Jas 3:1). Indeed, so much of the heavy doctrinal lectures and sermons of today may indeed be found to be wood, hay, and stubble on that great day. What a pastor believes should be proclaimed loudly and clearly from the pulpit and should be entirely consistent with every facet of pastoral ministry. His words in the counseling room, at the funeral home, and behind the pulpit, should be consistent with his private convictions. Above all, let pastors endeavor to be biblical at all costs. This is the case even if the costs may involve being libeled or slandered by many in the evangelical community. The consistent message of our preaching and pastoral ministry should be what the Bible says: Our freely offered to all salvation remains free and discipleship remains costly. Calvinism denies the clear teaching of Scripture and falls into all kinds of inconsistencies by combining salvation and discipleship together.

# I MEAN BOTH: DOUBLE MEANINGS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL<sup>1</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As we read through the four Gospels, we get to “listen in” on Jesus’ interactions with His disciples, the multitudes, and His opponents. Without a doubt, Jesus’ favorite teaching device is the parable. He uses it to teach His followers truths while hiding those truths from unbelieving listeners (Matt 13:11-15). In addition, He uses ambiguity. He loves to challenge men’s thinking, not only with His disciples but also with the multitudes coming to hear Him teach. He stretches the meanings of words and speaks in such a way that the listener is left puzzling over what He means. In this vein we find that Jesus loves to use words with double meanings, and He intends to mean both things at the same time.

Jesus’ influence on John is evident in that he, too, employs terms in ambiguous ways which force his readers to think long and hard about what he actually intends. Sometimes it becomes evident that he, indeed, intends his chosen term to mean two things at once. We can certainly see this in his Gospel. However, we should also be cautious and not get carried away, finding double meanings where none were intended.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the 2016 GES National Conference.

## II. DOUBLE MEANING DEFINED

E. W. Bullinger defined the figure of speech *amphibologia* as “a word or phrase susceptible of two interpretations.” An author or speaker employs it in order to communicate two meanings that are both true and intended. This is in contrast to *equivocation* which also involves the use of a word with two meanings, but only one of its meanings is true.<sup>2</sup>

*Amphibologia* may be accomplished by employing a word that has two or more meanings contained within its range of meaning and use, or through a word that has a single literal meaning but that naturally carries a second figurative sense as well. Andreas Köstenberger adds that the employment of this literary device “often involves misunderstanding and taking a word’s figurative meaning literally.” Further, it “encompasses the notions of misunderstanding, irony, and symbolic or allusive ambiguity.”<sup>3</sup>

## III. PURPOSE OF JESUS AND JOHN’S USE OF DOUBLE MEANING

Both Jesus and John give words and phrases double meanings in order to accomplish rhetorical purposes. Jesus is forcing His listeners to think about what He has said and to attempt to figure things out. He often uses plays on words to accomplish this. He taps into His listeners’ imaginations and redirects their thinking as they puzzle over His words. This often does lead to misunderstandings that move them to ask the right questions. For example, in John 6 the multitude is headed to Jerusalem for the Passover, and so they have Moses and the wilderness wanderings at the forefront of their thinking. They

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<sup>2</sup> Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (New York, NY: E. & J. B. Young & Co., 1898), 804. Emphasis his.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 132. His examples include *anōthen* (above, again), *pneuma* (spirit, wind), and “lifting up” (crucifixion, exaltation) in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, as well as *akoloutheō* (follow), *menō* (abide), *kathairō* (prune, cleanse), *telos/teleō* (completion, death) and *tuphos* (blind) elsewhere. Figurative terms given literal meanings would include “night,” “light,” “darkness,” and “water.”



have just been miraculously fed, and they are thinking of manna as well. Jesus tells the multitude to “labor” for food that “endures to everlasting life” (6:27). Their question about what “work” to do enables Him to declare that eternal life can only be gained by believing in Him (6:29). He takes the wilderness imagery and identifies Himself with the manna. Though most of the figurative terms He uses do not fit into the category of double meaning, some may. However, His use of figurative language throughout the discussion with the multitude ends in their misunderstanding and rejection of Him by most other than His disciples. They were more focused on their stomachs than on understanding spiritual truths.

Like Jesus, John also utilizes figurative language and double meaning to develop themes and express deep spiritual truths. He likely learned it from listening to Jesus. His utilization of it creates a depth of meaning that can only be discovered by meditating on each conversation and event recounted until its import can be discerned. Often its significance and meaning goes beyond the immediate context as it serves as one step in the development of a theme that traces its way through the Gospel or one of its sections.

#### **IV. EXEGESIS OF DOUBLE MEANING**

How do we discover and properly interpret those words and phrases that are intended by Jesus and John to have double meanings?

First, our discovery must grow out of solid exegesis that includes recognizing rhetorical and literary devices. It must fit within the flow of thought and clearly contribute to the development of the scene or Gospel as a whole. In John’s case, this requires an awareness and appreciation of his literary skill as well as recognition of his theological focus. As his message is discerned and themes identified, the interpreter will begin to notice those instances in which Jesus or John clearly wishes to be understood as intending two meanings. The following steps will aid the interpreter in this task.

Second, determine the possible meanings of the word or phrase. Begin with foundational tools such as the Greek-English lexicon BDAG.<sup>4</sup> This will provide the range of meanings of a term and a few

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed.

examples of its use. Make use of more extensive tools such as TDNT for a more developed understanding within the Greco-Roman context as well as its use in the LXX, and thus Jewish, cultural background.<sup>5</sup> Is there a similar Old Testament wordplay with which Jesus or John would be familiar? Cultural background sources may help, but not often.

Third, place the word or phrase within its context. Would the use of a double meaning advance Jesus' or John's teaching point? Does the flow of Jesus' conversation or of John's message indicate that a double meaning could be intended? Or does the context of what is said before and after indicate otherwise? In other words, does nothing that follows develop or depend on more than one meaning, even if two or more are possible?

Fourth, identify how each intended meaning is developed within the context of its use. What is said or done that "fleshes out" one or the other meaning of the term? Can I demonstrate how its introduction enables John or Jesus to develop more than one idea? What subsequent elements in the narrative flow from one or the other meaning, whether literal or figurative?

Fifth, identify the truth(s) being taught through the two meanings intended by Jesus or John. To miss this step is to completely miss the point or points of the passage or passages in which the term occurs or which develops it in some way.

## V. TWO WORDS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL WHERE DOUBLE MEANING IS CLEARLY INTENDED

In John's Gospel there are at least two words that are intended to convey two meanings at the same time. The first occurs in the Gospel's prologue, while the other is used by Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus.

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Frederick Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–).

## A. Understand or Overcome (*katalambanō*) in John 1:5

The clearest example of double meaning as used by John is found in the prologue of his Gospel and introduces two themes that he develops afterward. In John 1:5 we are told that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not *katalaben* it.” This Greek verb, *katalambanō*, is intended by John to mean both “to understand” and “to overcome.”<sup>6</sup> This double sense introduces two subthemes under the larger theme of light and darkness, which are developed through the narrative of John’s Gospel.

The theme of darkness not *understanding* the light is developed through the reactions and statements of those people who reject Jesus. It is introduced in the first confrontation Jesus has with the Jews (John 2:18-22). They ask for a sign, and Jesus uses the term “temple” to refer to His body, while they misunderstand Him to mean the temple proper in Jerusalem.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus, the Light, out of the darkness, “by night,” representing the Sanhedrin, and misunderstands what Jesus means by, “You must be born *anōthen*.” He understands Jesus to mean “again,” but soon learns He means both “again” and “from above.”

In John 6 the unbelieving crowd (6:64) misunderstands Jesus’ origin (6:41-42), as well as the figurative sense He intends when He speaks of their eating His flesh and drinking His blood (6:53).<sup>7</sup> When Jesus warns the Jews that He is departing somewhere they cannot follow, they misunderstand where He is going, thinking He is referring to the Gentiles (8:19-27). John tells us plainly that they do not understand Jesus.<sup>8</sup> In John 10:6 we are reminded again that those

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<sup>6</sup> The verb *katalambanō* has four possible meanings: (1) “to make something one’s own;” (2) “to gain control of someone/something through pursuit,” and so, “to overcome;” (3) “to come upon someone,” often by surprise; and (4) “to process information, understand” (BDAG, 520).

<sup>7</sup> The crowd disagreeing with Jesus in 7:19-20 would not be an example of misunderstanding. They understood perfectly well what Jesus meant. They simply did not believe it was true.

<sup>8</sup> However the argument that follows about slavery and being children of Abraham does not result from misunderstanding what Jesus says, but from disagreeing with what He says. Further, the question asked by the Jews after Jesus accepts the worship of the man born blind is not a case of confusion but a denial of personal spiritual blindness on their parts (John 9:40). This is reflected in their use

Jews not believing in Jesus also could not understand Him. This leads to their confusion in the following verses that culminates in a debate among themselves in vv 19-21.

Jesus' trial serves as the climax of the theme of darkness's failure to understand Jesus (John 18:33-38). Though Pilate seems to understand that Jesus sees Himself as a king, he fails to recognize Jesus as the Messianic King of Israel. He only sees an innocent man and thus accedes to the wishes of the crowd and kills Him.

Parallel to the theme of understanding is the theme of *overcoming*. This is introduced in John 5 with the reaction of the Jews to Jesus' healing on the Sabbath. They not only persecute Jesus but seek to kill Him (5:16-18; also 7:1). In the latter part of chap. 7, the Jews attempt and fail to arrest Jesus in order to kill Him. The incident with the woman caught in adultery (8:1-11) is another failed attempt to trap and destroy Jesus. Though they think they have devised an inescapable trap, Jesus turns it on them and "defeats" them. At the end of chap. 8, the Jews seek to stone Jesus after losing their argument with Him about His relationship to Abraham. However, once again they fail to overpower Him either rhetorically or physically.

In the latter part of chap. 10, the Jews want to stone Jesus because of what He says about His relationship to God the Father. In chap. 11 the Jews respond to Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead with a plan to kill Him (11:53). This plot initially succeeds with the aid of Judas and the subsequent trials. Even so, darkness's failure to overcome the light is hinted at in Jesus' declaration of the defeat of Satan (John 12:31). The attempt of darkness to overpower the light is climaxed in Jesus' trials and crucifixion. Its failure is then climaxed in Jesus' resurrection. Darkness cannot overcome Jesus Who is the Light of the world.

Thus, we can see the double sense of *katalambanō* worked out in detail through the length of the Gospel. Its double meaning is intended by John to introduce both themes and so should be interpreted accordingly. Along with his own use of this literary device, John recounts Jesus' use of double meaning as well.

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of a second class conditional clause to deny their blindness, "Are we blind also?" (*Mē kai hēmeis tuphloi esmen?*). Clearly they do not think they are blind.

## B. Again or From Above (*anōthen*) in John 3:3

When Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night and represents the Sanhedrin by saying, “We know that you are a teacher come from God,” Jesus replies to him that “unless one is born *anōthen*, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus uses a term that has two distinct meanings. Like *katalambanō*, this adverb has a range of meanings including: (1) “from a source that is above, from above”; (2) from a point in time, “from the beginning”; (3) with reference to the past, “for a long time”; and (4) “at a subsequent point in time involving repetition, again, anew.”<sup>9</sup> It is the first and last senses which Jesus employed in His response to Nicodemus.

In the conversation that follows, Nicodemus recognizes one of the term’s meanings while Jesus develops two. Jesus’ use of the term is intended to be ambiguous and to create misunderstanding.<sup>10</sup> Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus to be saying he had to be physically born a second time. Jesus clarifies the senses He intends in His explanation. The rebirth He speaks of is to be understood as spiritual as well as subsequent to one’s physical birth. It is connected to a work of the Holy Spirit, not one’s human mother. Some interpreters see Jesus combining the two senses in the single statement and translate it as “born again from above.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus’ explanation to Nicodemus easily fits within this blended meaning as well.

Not everybody sees that Jesus intended a double meaning with *anōthen*. For example, Henry Alford rejects the idea that Jesus intended a double meaning. He points to the conversation with Nicodemus and argues from the perspective that the word in Aramaic would not carry the double sense. He translates the term as “born afresh” and

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<sup>9</sup> BDAG, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 123-24.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 11; Jack W. Hayford and William D. Watkins, *Living beyond the Ordinary: Discovering the Keys to an Abundant Life: A Study of John*, Spirit-Filled Life Bible Discovery Guides (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993); Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 434.; Robert Kysar, *Preaching John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 38.

sees Jesus' response as more clarifying the one meaning rather than developing two meanings or twin aspects of the term.<sup>12</sup> However, as discussed above, the context supports the double meaning.<sup>13</sup>

## VI. WORDS GIVEN A DOUBLE MEANING

Some words do not naturally contain two distinct meanings. However, they may be used in both literal and figurative ways which enable the speaker or writer to imply two things at once. This was a favorite teaching device used by Jesus and a rhetorical device employed by John as well. The context indicates that both senses are intended by Jesus or John and so should be addressed in one's study, whether for personal edification, or preparation of a lesson or sermon.

### A. Follow (*akalouthēō*) in John 1:37

After John the Baptist points his followers to Jesus, two immediately leave John and "follow" Him. Ed Blum says, "They followed Him in the sense of literal walking and also as His disciples, that is, they turned their allegiance to Jesus that day."<sup>14</sup> In the unfolding of the narrative, Jesus next finds and commands Philip to "follow" Him. Jesus' new followers then go to their relatives and testify about Jesus and bring them to meet Him.

In John 6:2 we find multitudes following Jesus. In John 8:12, Jesus uses the term to describe His disciples, whom He later calls His "sheep" (10:4, 27). He uses it with respect to those who serve Him (12:26) and uses it literally with the disciples in the Upper Room when talking about His departure (13:36).

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 713.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that many believe that the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus took place on a roof of a house. Jesus' use of the word "wind" and "spirit" in the conversation supports this. The wind would have been felt by the two men on the roof. As the wind comes from "above," so is the new birth. The new birth is being born again from above.

<sup>14</sup> Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 275.

John uses it with its literal sense in 18:15 and 20:6. However, in 21:19 Jesus uses it with its figurative sense one last time when He commands Peter to “follow” Him rather than worry about His treatment of the beloved disciple.

In most instances the term is used with one or the other sense rather than a double meaning. Further, it should be observed that John does *not* appear to intend to develop a theme around the term as he does with *katalambanō* in John 1:5. Proper interpretation, then, would recognize the one instance where a double meaning is intended while avoiding misinterpreting the subsequent uses of the same term. This is an example in which context can help illuminate the intended meaning within a range of possible meanings.

## B. Living Water (*budōr zōn*) in John 4:10 and 7:38

When talking with the Samaritan woman, Jesus uses the expression “living water” to communicate a spiritual truth, thereby giving it a double meaning. Donald Guthrie correctly notes, “This expression had a double meaning, either running water, (i.e. spring water), or spiritual water, (i.e. connected with the Spirit). The Rabbis thought of the Torah as living water, which shows its metaphorical use.”<sup>15</sup>

Charles Talbert identifies six OT uses of the term (Gen 26: 19; Lev 14:5, 6, 50, 51, 52). In addition, Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.16.2§246; 1.16.3§254) shows this was an understood double sense. Talbert interprets Jesus’ use to be an allusion to the “water of the Holy Spirit that he will give after his glorification.”<sup>16</sup>

These are good observations and demonstrate Jesus’ natural use of figurative language in His conversations as well as when He was teaching or debating with the Jewish leaders. We also see in this His use of images from the life of His listener. He does so in a context that communicates deep spiritual truths in much the same way as the parables. This was not just true with strangers, but also with His disciples.

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<sup>15</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. D. A. Carson et al., eds., (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1033.

<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*, Revised Edition, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 119.

### C. Bathed, Justified, or Sanctified (*katharos*) in John 13:10 and 15:3

In the Upper Room Jesus uses the term *katharos* to refer to the disciples as “clean” before declaring that one of them is *not* clean. He uses two terms for bathing. The first, *louō*, refers to the bath they took before coming to the Upper Room. This bathing included their whole bodies. The second, *niptō*, describes what He had just done in washing their feet. Next, he uses *katharos* to describe them as “clean.” The literal terms which precede set the stage for the double sense of *katharos*, which has a moral/ceremonial meaning familiar to them all, referring naturally to ceremonial, thus spiritual, cleanness.<sup>17</sup>

Later in John 15:3, Jesus uses the same adjective to describe the Eleven, following Judas’ departure. This use tells them that they are prepared and designated by God to bear much fruit as they abide in Jesus after His departure. Whereas in the Upper Room the double meaning is built on the imagery of bathing, in the vine/branch analogy, it is built around viticulture and pruning.<sup>18</sup>

### D. Spiritual or Physical Night (*ēn de nux*) in John 13:30

When Judas departs Jesus’ presence for the last time, he walks out into spiritual as well as physical darkness.<sup>19</sup> John writes that “it was night” when Judas left. This would seem to be a statement of the obvious, until one realizes its role in the development of the theme of light and darkness. In this instance a term that normally does not have a spiritual sense is given one and connects the reader back to Jesus’ earlier words in John 9:4 and 11:9-10.<sup>20</sup> In both places Jesus describes His pre-betrayal period as “day.” This is a time when He is

<sup>17</sup> Köstenberger *John*, 406.

<sup>18</sup> That Judas is not in view anywhere in the vine analogy is made clear in John 17:12. This is not an allusion to the removed branches of 15:6. Judas was never a believer in Jesus and so never a branch in the vine.

<sup>19</sup> Karelynn G. Ayayo, “Judas Iscariot,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> John 9:4: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (John 11:9-10).



present with the disciples and they are encouraged to take advantage of it.

“Night,” on the other hand, describes their condition during the time of His betrayal and crucifixion when they will not have Him with them to guide and protect them. John alerts us to the significance of Judas’ departure by connecting the literal night with the spiritual night Jesus had already described. Jesus’ words were about to be fulfilled.

## VII. WORDS THAT COULD BUT DO NOT HAVE A DOUBLE MEANING

Sometimes words are used that allow a double sense, though it is not clear that Jesus or John intended it. These are worth exploring but should be taught with caution. One danger of recognizing double meaning as a rhetorical device is to overemphasize it and begin seeing it where it is not intended.

If an exegete goes down that road, he runs into the danger of allegorizing the text. He will find meanings of words that the original writer and Holy Spirit did not intend. This will change the meaning of the text itself.

How does the exegete determine if a double meaning exists? The easiest way is to look at the context. If the context does not support both meanings then we can conclude that the author did not want the word or phrase to have a double meaning.

Some examples of this possible misuse will now be examined.

### A. Spirit or Wind (*pneuma*) in John 3:5-8

In the same conversation with Nicodemus where Jesus gives two meanings to *anōthen*, He uses the term *pneuma* to describe both “spirit” and “wind.” Martin Manser correctly recognizes that *pneuma* can mean either and that Jesus uses it with both meanings when talking with Nicodemus.<sup>21</sup> However, though He uses it with two meanings, each use only involves a single meaning and never a double

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<sup>21</sup> Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009). BDAG identifies eight different meanings that include “air in movement, blowing” and “spirit” with several nuances, 832-36.

sense. Thus, this would not be an instance of double meaning nor of ambiguity.

## B. Lifting Up (*hupsoō*) in John 3:14

Jesus tells Nicodemus that He must be lifted up in the same way Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness. Gerd Lüdemann identifies Jesus' use as intending a double meaning, referring to His exaltation as well as crucifixion. He notes three other instances in which the term is used and attributes the double sense to all three (John 8:28; 12:32, 34).<sup>22</sup>

Kent Hughes sees Jesus intending a double meaning while His disciples, who are listening in on the conversation, misunderstand Him to refer to His exaltation rather than crucifixion.<sup>23</sup> Others see Jesus intending a double meaning that includes His exaltation.<sup>24</sup>

However, when Jesus uses it in 8:28, He could not intend the double sense. In this case it is the people's "lifting" Him up in crucifixion, not God's exalting Him. A double sense would not properly describe the intention of the people who crucified Him.

Similarly, in 12:32-34, John clarifies that Jesus was referring to His crucifixion and not exaltation. When we go back to the first instance, it is better to see Jesus referring only to His crucifixion and not alluding in any way to His exaltation. To read that into the passage is to read subsequent theology into the narrative. Since John does not develop a theme of exaltation, it is very unlikely that he or Jesus intended it here.

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<sup>22</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990–), 410.

<sup>23</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 241.

<sup>24</sup> John P. Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 387; Köstenberger, *John*, 128. Even so, Köstenberger recognizes the focus on faith and salvation as the connection with the incident in Numbers. He says correctly that "the primary analogy established in the present passage is not that of the raised bronze serpent and the lifted-up Son of Man; rather, Jesus likens the restoration of people's physical lives as a result of looking at the bronze serpent to people's reception of eternal life as a result of 'looking' in faith at the Son of Man." However, this does not keep him from giving it an additional theological meaning that requires Jesus to give it a double meaning.

Kenneth Gangel, after recognizing that John likes to employ double meaning, also notes that it is common among scholars to see John developing the crucified Christ's exaltation as a theological theme.<sup>25</sup> However, he places the concept of "exaltation" in the sphere of application rather than interpretation and notes that it would be inappropriate to read that theology into this passage.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, Andrew Lincoln argues for the double meaning of "lifted up" on the basis that Jesus may have spoken in Aramaic. In that language, the verb "to lift" (אִזְדַּקַּךְ) does contain both senses. He further points to the LXX version of Isaiah 52:13 as providing a possible backdrop to Jesus' statement.<sup>27</sup>

One key weakness of Lincoln's argument is the intended audience of John's Gospel. John's repeated explanation of Jewish customs would indicate a Gentile Christian audience who would not recognize an Aramaic connotation in Jesus' statements. Thus it is better to limit Jesus' use of the term to a single meaning.

### **C. Anointing (*epechrise*) the Blind Man's Eyes with Clay in John 9:6**

A. W. Pink's interpretation here is an example of mistaken double meaning which results in an allegorizing of the text. In this instance, Pink is interpreting an action of Jesus as having an intended double meaning. First of all, he interprets Jesus' anointing the blind man's eyes with clay as "dispensationally" symbolizing Jesus' incarnation before Israel. But there is also a "doctrinal" meaning because Jesus is "pressing upon the sinner his lost condition and need of a Saviour." For Pink, the clay emphasizes "our blindness."<sup>28</sup> This is an example of reading one's theology back into a word or phrase and creating a double sense never intended by either Jesus or John.

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<sup>25</sup> For example, see Roy B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), 194–95). Zuck considers Jesus' use of "lifted up" in John 12:30-32 to have the double sense of crucifixion and exaltation.

<sup>26</sup> Gangel, *John*, 65.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2005), 153.

<sup>28</sup> A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, electronic ed. (Escondido, CA: The Ephesians Four Group, 2000).

### **D. Seeing (*idontes*) in John 20:20**

Lewis Foster acknowledges what he calls the “surface meaning” of the text in John 20. The disciples “saw” Jesus. However, based on other examples of Johannine double meaning, he sees John indicating here that the disciples now *understood* the spiritual reality of Jesus’ resurrection after physically seeing Him.<sup>29</sup> However, rather than infusing a figurative sense into the word, it is better exegesis to read it literally. John does not provide any hints that it should be understood figuratively, nor does it add anything to the message of the text.

## **VIII. THESE DOUBLE MEANINGS ARE NOT FOUND IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS**

It is interesting that the Synoptic Gospels do not use these examples of double meaning. Those who do not hold to the high view of inspiration might conclude that John simply made these things up since the other Gospel writers did not mention them.

The simpler explanation is that these double meanings had particular significance for John’s purpose. John’s purpose in writing the Gospel of John was different from that of the authors of the Synoptics. He wanted to tell the reader how to receive eternal life. That is not the purpose of the other Gospels. The uses of words and phrases with double meanings were used by John for that purpose.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

The use of double meaning is a powerful rhetorical and literary device. It enables John to delve into deep spiritual truths which must be discerned by his readers as they discover his themes and explore the depths of his theology. John had heard the Lord use this literary device. It allowed the Lord to communicate deep truths with mental images that were readily recognized by His listeners. Jesus was also able to baffle His opponents or others with whom He interacted.

One of God’s desires is that His children think and discover truths about Him and their relationship with Him. We see this in Jesus’

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<sup>29</sup> Lewis Foster, *John: Unlocking the Scriptures for You*, Standard Bible Studies (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1987), 219.

teaching style and in how He inspired John to write with great profundity. John was not just a young fisherman who followed Jesus. He was a deep thinker and subsequently became a deep writer. He was a literary artist who enjoyed painting a picture of Jesus that was as profound and marvelous as He. As we study John's work, we can appreciate the depth of his artistry and must study it just as deeply to appreciate the full beauty of the masterpiece he has written. Discovering and understanding his use of double meaning is just one aspect of his artistry we can enjoy.



## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament.* Andreas J. Kostenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016. 550 pp. Hardcover, \$49.99.

This intermediate grammar, designed for the seminary classroom (though it would also be a great book for anyone who has been through first year Greek, even if studying on his own) is much more readable than most intermediate grammars.

For example, Chap. 1 is a fascinating and easy-to-follow account of the Greek language over time and of textual criticism (comparing Greek manuscripts of the NT to determine what the correct text is of every verse). While it is unfortunate that when the authors list critical editions of the Greek NT (GNT), they fail to mention any Majority Text editions. Of course, by the definition rooted in Westcott and Hort, the Majority Text cannot be a critical edition, no matter how carefully and accurately the edition is prepared.

The discussion of the canons of textual criticism shows some of the inherent subjectivity of the eclectic approach advocated by the authors. The shorter reading is to be preferred over the longer reading. But the harder reading is to be preferred over the easier reading. If the longer reading is the harder reading, the canons cancel each other out. The reading most consistent with the immediate context is to be preferred. However, that clashes with the canon which says that the harder reading is to be preferred. I ultimately adopted the Majority Text view because it is a view which has little subjectivity (and which expects that the Lord preserved His Word in the majority of manuscripts).

Chapters 2-4 deal with the five cases of the noun in the GNT: nominative, vocative, accusative (Chap. 2), genitive (Chap. 3), and dative (Chap. 4). They do discuss, in Chap. 2, however, the eight-case system, which has two types of genitives (genitive [description], and ablative [separation]) and three types of datives (dative [interest], locative [location], and instrumental [means], p. 51).

These chapters are very readable. The authors give the major category and then name and illustrate from the GNT various uses.

The nominative, for example, can be used as the subject of a verb, a predicate nominative (with the “to be” verb, as in “You are the light of the world,” Matt 5:14, in which *you* is the subject and *the light* is the predicate nominative, p. 55), apposition (a second noun further explains the subject, as in “Andrew, brother of Simon Peter,” John 1:40, in which Andrew is the subject and brother is appositional), address (e.g., Son of David, O God), appellation (e.g., “Teacher and Lord,” John 13:13), and absolute (e.g., “Simon Peter, a slave an apostle of Jesus Christ,” 2 Pet 1:1).

Each chapter ends with a summary of the various uses of the noun discussed and vocabulary lists, one to memorize and one to recognize. This is very helpful as well.

Chapter 5 deals with the article and adjective. Six begins a discussion of verbs, person and number, voice, (active, middle, and passive), mood (indicative, subjunctive, optative, and imperative), tense and aspect. Seven looks more closely at verb tense, and verbal aspect. Eight looks at present, imperfect, and future indicatives.

The authors are clear that “time is relevant only in the indicative mood” (p. 213), a point missed by many exegetes. They also helpfully point out that “aspect has to do with how the author/speaker views or portrays the actions” and that “aspect seems to be the more dominant or primary force [than time] of the verb’s tense” (p. 213).

I appreciated in Chap. 9 their discussion of the misunderstanding and abuse of the aorist tense (e.g., see p. 289). Too many preachers say that a given verb is in the aorist tense and hence it refers to punctiliar (once-for-all) action, when, in fact, the aorist merely presents “the action in its entirety or as a whole” (p. 289). Constativ aorists look at the action as a whole (pp. 290-91). Inceptive aorists “emphasize the beginning of a state” (p. 291). So, for example, they translate John 11:35 as “Jesus began to weep” (p. 291), or “Jesus burst into tears” (p. 292), not “Jesus wept.” Culminative aorists “emphasize the cessation of an action or state” (p. 292), as “I have learned to be content...” (Phil 4:11). The gnomic aorist “is used to communicate a timeless or universal truth” (p. 293). The epistolary aorist is used where an author says “I have written to you” (Gal 6:11), when in fact he is referring to what he is currently writing. But by the time readers receive it, “I have written to you” is appropriate (p. 294). Sometimes, however, the epistolary aorist is simply translated like a present often is, as in,



“I am sending [Tychicus] to you” (Eph 6:22, p. 295). A futuristic aorist “is used to describe events that have not yet taken place (i.e., future) as if they had already occurred” (p. 295, see John 15:8, “My Father will be glorified by this”). Finally, a dramatic aorist “refers to an event that recently occurred and that has present consequences”; “My daughter has just died” (Matt 9:18, p. 296).

Chapter 9 also includes excellent discussion of the perfect and pluperfect tenses in the indicative.

Participles, a vast topic, are considered in Chap. 10. “Participles... can serve as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, or verbs” (p. 319). The authors do an excellent job explaining and illustrating the various uses of participles in the GNT. They summarize with a helpful chart which, among other things, describes the fourteen different types of verbal participles.

Chapter 11 covers infinitives (verbs with “to” before them in English, as in *to lie*, *to cheat*, *to steal*, or *to hit*). The GNT uses infinitives in many different ways, and the authors explain and illustrate these clearly and in an easy to follow manner.

The main analysis ends with Chap. 12, “Pronouns, Conjunctions, Adverbs, and Particles.” The final chapters consider “Sentences, Diagramming & Discourse Analysis” (Chap. 13); “Word Studies” (Chap. 14, which I enjoyed, but I felt that much more should have been said about “Consider the Same Biblical Author’s Other Uses of the Word,” p. 485, just three short sentences, just forty-two words); and “Continuing with Greek” (Chap. 15, a super and oft neglected subject, getting students to play to keep on using their Greek for the rest of their lives).

I really like this book and recommend it for all who have at least a working knowledge of koine Greek.

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***Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XIII: Hebrews, James.*** Edited by Ronald K. Rittgers. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017. 341 pp. Hardcover, \$49.99.

This commentary series gives the reader the views of leading Reformed scholars “from the late 1400s to the mid-seventeenth century” (p. xxii). The reader should not expect to be overwhelmed with quotes from Luther and Calvin. While they are quoted, others appear more often, including Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Oslander, Spangenberg, Bugenhagen, Dirk Philips, Erasmus, Melancthon, and others.

Do not expect that you will find lots of quotes explaining what a given word, phrase, or verse means. Instead, Rittgers has given the reader the views of Reformed theologians on a short section of verses, or a concept within that section.

Say, for example, you want to get quotes about Heb 6:4-8. You find a chapter discussing Heb 6:4-20. In that chapter the discussion of Heb 6:4-8 is broken down into comments on Heb 6:4-6 (pp. 81-89) and Heb 6:7-9 (p. 89).

Here is a quote from Calvin on “repentance from God”: “The apostle warns us, that repentance is not at the will of human beings, but that it is given by God to those only who have not wholly fallen away from the faith. It is a warning to us, lest by often delaying until tomorrow we should alienate ourselves more and more from God” (p. 87). It sounds there like he does not believe in eternal security. Since no more is given here, it is hard to know fully what he meant.

Under the heading “Excommunicate False Believers,” Dirk Philips is quoted as saying, “He who wishes to reach life eternal with Christ must love him with true faith, cleave to him, suffer and die with him, i.e., to be with him one spirit, and to be one body with his church, persevering therein perpetually” (p. 82). This quote, though more extreme than modern Reformed theologians, is similar to some of the writings of Reformed Lordship Salvation advocates today. It shows that Lordship Salvation is also present in Anabaptist theology.

Looking at Jas 2:14-26, we find a chapter dealing with that section. One major section in that chapter concerns Jas 2:14-19. Balthasar Hubmaier, another Anabaptist, says, “Mere faith alone is not sufficient for salvation...Yea, I confess on the strength of this article that mere

faith does not deserve to be called faith, for a true faith can never exist without deeds of love” (p. 233).

Similarly Leupold Scharnschlager (Anabaptist Radical elder who died in 1563) says, “No one can claim that faith, which comes from the preaching of God’s word, is merely a historical or dead faith, without effect or fruit. No doubt that is what people held at the time of James...*Even today some understand Christ and Paul as ascribing righteousness and life to faith alone, as if a faith without deeds and fruit is enough for salvation.* For how can it be a barren, that is, a dead faith, when life—and much more—comes forth from it?” (p. 233, emphasis added). Notice the words I’ve emphasized. While we have no existing documents to show there were people who held to faith alone in Leupold’s day, his testimony is powerful. I’ve often said that there must have been people in every generation who proclaimed the faith-alone message. If they wrote, their writings were destroyed. But it is encouraging to see evidence of them.

At the end of the book are biographical sketches of the men and women cited (pp. 276-320). This is extremely helpful. See, for example: “Dirk Philips (1504-1568). Dutch Radical elder and theologian. This former Franciscan monk, known for being severe and obstinate, was a leading theologian of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement. Despite the fame of Menno Simons and his own older brother Obbe, Philips wielded greater influence over Anabaptists in the Netherlands and northern Germany where he ministered” (p. 308).

Even though it takes some work to find helpful quotes, I recommend this commentary for the wealth of useful information in it. It is worth the time, I believe, to mine it. Free Grace Pastors should be able to find many helpful quotes in it, though, of course, most of the quotes will illustrate where modern Lordship Salvation came from. In addition, the biographical sketches are worth the price of the book.

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***Heaven and Hell: A Biblical Guide.*** By Robert P. Lightner. Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, 2017. 112 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

This book is written by Robert Lightner, Professor Emeritus at Dallas Seminary. It is a collection of papers broadly related to the topics of heaven and hell.

Chapter 1, “Heaven,” only briefly addresses the nature of heaven. The bulk of the chapter is taken up with discussing the eternal fate of those who are incapable of believing in Jesus (pp. 7-25) and the ministry of angels (pp. 29-45). The discussion of the angels was helpful; the discussion about the fate of those incapable of believing (e.g., infants and the mentally disabled) was unconvincing.

Lightner claims those incapable of believing automatically get eternal life: “No one will spend eternity in the eternal punishment of hell who was not able to believe, to meet God’s one condition of salvation” (p. 8). His proof for that conclusion mostly consists of arguments from silence and personal incredulity based on the Bible’s description of God’s good character: “It is highly inconsistent with His goodness to believe any who die who cannot believe are doomed. Rather, I believe all such receive eternal life since Scripture nowhere teaches the contrary and since such belief is in perfect accord with God’s Person” (p. 11). Lightner’s arguments are made weaker given that he does not consider any other option (e.g., that they will be resurrected in the Millennium, or Molinism). Oddly, he does not even consider the Calvinist option—that people are unable to believe because God did not choose to bring them to faith—even though he later takes the Calvinist view of election (see pp. 75-76).

Reading this section made me wonder: in Lightner’s view, what happens to children who die five minutes, five days, or five months after they become capable of believing? Are they automatically doomed? Is that fair?

Chapter 2, “Hell,” seems to be some reflections on the first edition of the *Four Views on Hell* book published by Zondervan. Lightner only briefly overviews the evidence for eternal conscious torment (pp. 51-57). Given the title of this book (i.e., *Heaven and Hell*), and the amount of controversy over the nature of hell, this reviewer wishes Lightner had spent more time defending the traditional view. In fact,

that is why I bought the book—to see his defense of eternal conscious torment.

Chapter 3 concerns the issue of suicide. Lightner argues the Bible does not address whether suicide is right or wrong. He (correctly) denies that believers who commit suicide will lose their salvation (p. 61). And he counsels against suicide and for letting God be the one who decides the time of death.

Chapter 4 offers a helpful overview of the distinction between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment.

Chapter 5, “Where Will You Spend Eternity?” will be of particular interest to *JOTGES* reader. They may find, as I did, that while Lightner is *Free Grace friendly*, there are serious inconsistencies in his presentation of the saving message.

For example, Lightner says, “Man’s faith must have the proper object before salvation results” (p. 87). That is true. However, it is hard to determine what Lightner thinks that object is.

On the one hand, Lightner insists that Jesus Christ is “the *object* of our faith” (p. 86). On the other hand, he says that believing in our sinfulness is essential, too: “To be sure, there are essentials the sinner must know before he can be saved. He is a guilty sinner (Rom 3:23); sin’s wages is death (Rom 6:23); Christ died in the sinner’s place (Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3); and the sinner must trust Christ alone as his sin-bearer (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). These are the essentials of the gospel (p. 86).” Does that mean there are actually two objects of faith—Jesus and ourselves (i.e., our own sinfulness)?

Even though Lightner declares that one must acknowledge his sinfulness, he later denies you must *confess* your sins to be saved: “The unsaved are never told to confess their sins to be saved” (p. 95). So you must know but need not confess.

Lightner includes belief in the divinity of Christ as part of the object of salvation: “It is *always* faith in God’s Son as the Divine substitute for sin which brings life to the spiritually dead sinner” (p. 87, emphasis added). Elsewhere Lightner seems to contradict himself by saying the content of saving faith has not always been the same but has changed over time: “the complexity of that faith has not always been the same” (p. 88). People have only ever been saved through faith, but after Calvary, the content of saving faith has changed. Now it must include belief in the meaning of the substitutionary death

of Christ: “Since God has made known to man the meaning of the death of His Son, faith is now placed in His person and work” (p. 88). The implication is that people were saved by believing a different message during Jesus’ ministry. Is that true? Is Jesus’ evangelism obsolete?

In some passages, Lightner is strong that salvation is by faith alone (pp. 85-86). He correctly denies that water baptism (p. 88), prayer (p. 95), and confession of sin (p. 95) are co-conditions with faith for salvation. However, he thinks that repentance, “almost a synonym for faith,” is part of believing (p. 93). But if it is *almost* a synonym for faith, doesn’t that mean it is *not* a synonym for faith? And if it is not a synonym for faith, then why add it as a co-condition with faith for salvation? (In a footnote, Lightner references Robert Wilkin’s PhD dissertation in support of that idea that repentance is a change of mind, without indicating that Wilkin has since publicly rejected that view of repentance.)

Lightner denies that we need works to be saved or to stay saved (p. 87). However, he says that true believers will want to work and that this will eventually become manifest in doing good deeds: “The person who is truly born again will want to serve Christ. Life cannot be hidden very long” (p. 87). That kind of statement will undermine assurance by making it depend at least partly on the works we do, instead of wholly being based on the promise Jesus made.

Although Lightner believes in eternal security, I could not find any place where he says the eternality of salvation is part of the object of saving faith. He thinks we must believe in the person and work of Christ, but he is less clear on whether we must also believe the promise of Christ.

There is much to commend in this book. The author takes many strong Dispensational, Pre-Millennial, Pre-Tribulational positions that *JOTGES* readers will strongly appreciate. However, due to the uneven nature of the chapters, and given the unclear presentation of the saving message, this is not essential reading.

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***Was the Reformation a Mistake? Why Catholic Doctrine Is Not Biblical.*** By Matthew Levering, with Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017. 240 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

This book was “commissioned by Zondervan for the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses (p. 16).” Its intended audience is Bible-believing Christians who “continue to resonate with the concerns that have divided Protestant and Catholic Christians for five hundred years” and “deem the disputed Catholic doctrines to be biblically mistaken” (p. 29). It aims to “stimulate positive ecumenical conversation, in the context of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation” (p. 32).

Matthew Levering holds the James N. and Mary D. Perry, Jr., Chair of Theology at Mundelein Seminary, University of Saint Mary of the Lake, in Mundelein, Illinois. He is the author or editor of more than forty books, including a book defending the Catholic teaching of Mary’s bodily assumption into heaven. Kevin Vanhoozer is a noted evangelical author and research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Both men are members of Evangelicals and Catholics Together.

As the title of this book implies, *Was the Reformation a Mistake?* is primarily a book in defense of Catholic doctrine. The reply by Vanhoozer is only forty-one pages. After a twenty-page introduction, there are chapters on “nine issues raised by Luther at the outset of the Reformation that continue to divide Catholics and Protestants” (p. 16). These are Scripture, Mary, the Eucharist, the Seven Sacraments, Monasticism, Justification and Merit, Purgatory, Saints, and the Papacy. After Levering’s brief conclusion and Vanhoozer’s “mere Protestant response” (which also has a conclusion), there are subject and Scripture indexes. The book is enhanced by about 400 footnotes.

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction that includes reference to “the specific paragraphs of the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that treat the topic of the chapter,” with occasional references to “other relevant documents of the Catholic Church” (p. 21). Each introduction is followed by “a thumbnail sketch of Luther’s concerns about a specific issue” to “summarize in Luther’s own words why he rejected the Catholic positions on these nine issues” (p. 16). However, the book is not “a dialogue between *Luther* and Catholic

theology” (p. 16). Luther is being used to “raise the main concerns that Protestants have about Catholic doctrine” (p. 16) because he “nicely articulates doctrinal concerns that Protestants today share” (p. 17). Luther’s writings are employed “simply as a convenient way of presenting the nine areas of difference in the context of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation” (p. 34). Each chapter continues and concludes with Biblical reflections “addressing the specific area of concern identified in the first section of the chapter” (p. 17). The reflections “seek to address the doctrinal concerns of the Reformation” by offering the author’s “own contemporary reflection on Scripture aimed at conveying some Biblical grounds for why Catholics hold the doctrinal positions” (p. 17) that they do. But, as Levering emphasizes, they “are meant to be a preliminary sketch of Biblical reasoning rather than to prove the clear presence of Catholic doctrines in Scripture” (p. 33). He reiterates that the reflections “are not meant to stand as demonstrative evidence for the Catholic position” (p. 32). Naturally, though, in each chapter he arrives “at a conclusion favorable to the Catholic position” (p. 33). Levering seems to be going out of his way in his introduction to tell the reader that none of the book’s chapters make “a fully developed argument” (p. 33) for the doctrine at issue. He does the same thing in his conclusion, almost apologizing for the lack of space to “display the fuller context of Catholic biblical reasoning” (p. 187) and “advance full-scale arguments in favor of Catholic doctrinal judgments” (p. 189).

Regarding the title of the book, Levering holds that “the Reformers made mistakes, but that they chose to be reformers was not a mistake” (p. 31). The Reformation cannot be dismissed as a “mistake,” even if “it mistakenly deemed some Catholic doctrines to be unbiblical and church-dividing” (p. 31). He believes that “Luther and Catholics (then and now) are largely playing on the same side” because they agree on certain issues like the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension, “the priority of the grace of the Holy Spirit, the authority of Scripture, the centrality of faith, and many other such things” (p. 34).

Although it is certainly true that Catholics and Protestants agree on certain fundamentals of the faith, I would take issue with Levering’s inclusion of grace, Scripture, faith, and “many other such things,” and even with the Catholic conception of the Atonement.



As one would expect, Levering makes the case for the Catholic Church as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture, the exaltation of Mary, the celebration of the Mass, the efficacy of the Sacraments, monastic communities, justification by an infused righteousness, the existence of purgatory, praying to saints, and the authority of the papacy.

Vanhoozer's Protestant response is not a point-by-point refutation of the Catholic doctrine presented in each of Levering's chapters. It is more of a reflection than a refutation. Because he concentrates on Levering's "underlying assumptions and overall approach" (p. 201), Vanhoozer limits his response to what Levering says in the introduction and first chapter on Scripture in order to "evaluate his use of Scripture in arguing for a Catholic understanding of Mary in chapter 2" (p. 202).

Vanhoozer begins by calling Levering "Saint Matthew" in the "Pauline sense of a fellow believing Christian, a person set apart through faith in Christ" (p. 191). His response concentrates on what he takes "to be the three distinguishing marks of Levering's proposal: its charming *catholic spirit*, daring *Protestant strategy*, yet enduring *Roman substance*" (p. 193).

Vanhoozer applauds Levering's "catholic spirit"—his "admirable openness to friendship with and learning from Christians in other traditions than his own" (p. 198). But in the end he remains unconvinced that Levering's positions are Biblical options for Evangelicals. Vanhoozer considers Levering to be "a biblically literate Catholic thinker" (p. 209), but rejects as unbiblical "the idea that interpretive authority has been vouchsafed to the Roman Catholic Church only" (p. 205). And although Vanhoozer welcomes "Levering's exercises in biblical reasoning," he questions "some of the conclusions he draws regarding the place of the church in this redemptive history" (p. 218).

In spite of this book's promotion of Catholic doctrine and the weak response to it by Vanhoozer, I must still recommend to mature Protestants, Evangelicals, and fundamentalists *Was the Reformation a Mistake?* because of Levering's desperate attempt, in the words of Vanhoozer, "to show that the very same doctrines that the Reformers dismissed as unbiblical do indeed have biblical legs to stand on" (p. 193). It is important for those who are sound in the faith to study

the words and works of the opponents of real Biblical Christianity in order to better be able to defend the true faith.

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***A Defense of Free Grace Theology: With Respect to Saving Faith, Perseverance, and Assurance.*** Edited by Fred Chay. The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2017. 628 pp. Paper, \$23.99.

This book, edited by Fred Chay, is, for the most part, an apologetic against Reformed soteriology and Wayne Grudem's "*Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*." It has 628 pages, a Scripture index, but no subject index.

Chay wrote four chapters; Ken Wilson, one; Paul Tanner, one; David Anderson, five; and Joseph Dillow, thirteen (which makes up more than half the book).

Chay is so gracious toward Grudem in the first chapter that he seems to be suggesting that Grudem's Lordship Salvation evangelistic message may be sufficient to save. Several times he asks whether Grudem believes that the Free Grace message is a saving one (pp. 12, 16). Not once does he ask whether Grudem's message is a saving message. Why not? Does he believe it is? In the last paragraph in Chap. 1, Chay writes, "The authors of this book agree with Dr. Grudem that regarding this topic, as viewed from both sides, a '*family intervention*' is needed" (p. 30, emphasis added). Is Grudem part of the family of believers? Has he ever believed in Christ alone, or has his belief always been the addition of works or obedience as per Lordship dogma? Chay suggests that all the authors of *A Defense of Free Grace Theology* agree that he is a brother. But why? Is there any indication that Grudem ever believed the promise of life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47)? Nowhere in the book do any of the authors provide any such evidence. Evidently the authors think that Grudem's Lordship Salvation message is inaccurate but clear enough to be salvific. That, it seems to me, is a denial of the Free Grace message, since that message is the only saving message.

Chay does a great job in showing that Grudem is way off base when he says that the Free Grace movement started with Zane Hodges (pp. 21-29). In his discussion of Rom 2:1-13 (Chap. 17), he considers four different views, even though Grudem never discusses that passage.

Chay's discussion of three Free Grace views of 2 Cor 13:5 ("examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith") is helpful, though a bit hard to follow at times. However, Chay concludes the chapter, saying "The Reformed view of this passage is certainly an option" (p. 547). While he does not believe it is the best option, it is troubling that he thinks it is a viable interpretation.

In Chap. 20 Chay again discusses a verse that Grudem does not (i.e., Gal 5:6). Chay in this chapter seems to be responding to John Piper, not Wayne Grudem (see pp. 551-64). The first line of the conclusion, "Faith is only known before men by deeds and actions" (p. 564) seems an abdication to Lordship Salvation. Do we not know who is a believer and who is not by what he professes he believes (see John 11:26b-27)? Can we really see who is born again by deeds and actions?

The second chapter presents Wilson's finding concerning how Augustine's teaching developed at a time when infant baptism was thought necessary to remove original sin. This, combined with Augustine's exposure to three highly deterministic pagan systems (Manichaean Gnosticism, Stoicism, and Neoplatonism) affected his theology and led Calvin (a staunch disciple of Augustine) and his followers into the determinism expressed by five-point Calvinism. It was surprising to see this sentence lead the last paragraph of the chapter, "I appeal to my Calvinist brethren to research their Augustinian heritage with an open mind" (p. 65). Are Calvinists who hold to Lordship Salvation, like Wayne Grudem, to be considered brothers in Christ? If they are, they have certainly departed from the principles of the gospel of grace.

Many *JOTGES* readers will likely be bothered by Chap. 3, "The Faith That Saves" (pp. 69-87). Instead of refuting Grudem's view of saving faith, Anderson repeatedly indicates his agreement with Grudem's understanding (pp. 67, 69, 81, 85), though he does give a few areas of disagreement (e.g., he says faith is not a commitment to obey, and denies that repentance from sin is a component of saving

faith). Anderson wrongly says that Bob Wilkin is the only Free Grace person who believes that saving faith is being convinced that the promise of everlasting life to the believer is true. He also selectively and sparingly quotes Zane Hodges in a misguided effort to show that Hodges believed that faith is more than being persuaded, which he most certainly did not believe or teach.

In Chap. 4, Anderson considers three Free Grace views of repentance and opts for repentance being “[a] resolve to turn from sin,” rather than “remorse [and regret] for sin” or a “change of mind.” He says that repentance is not necessary for the *reception* of eternal life (a relation to God received through faith alone), but for the *enjoyment* of that eternal life (fellowship obtained by a resolution to comply with God’s standards). This discussion is excellent. Anderson, however, does not believe that Dillow’s remorse-for-sin view is inconsistent with Free Grace Theology.

Anderson in Chap. 18 explains Romans 7-8, saying that the “Law of the Spirit of life” releases us from slavery to the old sin nature and liberates the believer. This chapter is a positive statement on the spiritual life without any particular apologetic against Grudem.

In Chap. 21, Anderson demonstrates that being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) prior to salvation does not mean that people are initially spiritual corpses with no ability to believe. It speaks of the unbelievers’ spiritual state of existence as separated from God, thus “dead” to Him. This destroys the Calvinistic idea that one must be regenerated by the Spirit (born again) so as to make it possible to believe.

In Chap. 24, Anderson illuminates the passages in 1 John which give Reformed people problems (1 John 2:3-4; 3:6, 9). They think that obedience or law-keeping is a necessary result of “true” faith, but Anderson demonstrates that in each of these passages a closeness to, or fellowship with, the Lord is in view. First John was written to promote godly fellowship, not to create doubt of one’s salvation. He also deals with 5:1, showing grammatically that the passage does not teach that regeneration precedes faith as per most Reformed teaching.

Chapter 9 is outstanding. Paul Tanner considers Hebrews 6:4-6 regarding the believer’s perseverance and the possibility of falling away so as to exclude himself from the community of messianic believers. He reasons well that if a Christian rebels, he exposes himself to both

temporal judgment and loss of eternal rewards at the Bema. The audience would know about “cursings and blessings” in their covenant history and the first generation’s failure at Kadesh-Barnea.

Chapters 5-8 are by Dillow and are all excellent. In Chap. 5 he argues that the role of works in justification is not a *cause* for positional righteousness, but rather a *means* of obtaining holiness when joined with one’s faith in Christ. In Chap. 6, Dillow posits that James 2:14 means that a Christian who does not walk by faith is not “saved” from an unserviceable life or from other negative temporal consequences. Chapter 7 covers the meaning of “dead faith” in contrast to the Reformed view that dead faith equals nonexistent faith. Dillow explains that one’s work-less “*walk* of faith” is what is dead, not his actual faith in Christ. Chapter 8 opposes the Reformed idea that believers need a “healthy tension” or “wholesome fear” regarding assurance of salvation and adequately supports assurance for believers based on the immutable promises of God.

Chapters 10-16 are by Dillow. In Chap. 10—an excellent chapter—he identifies seven OT believers and six NT believers that turned from God, some permanently. Thus the Biblical warnings to Christians against apostasy and failure are real, not hypothetical. In Chap. 11, he defends the doctrine of eternal rewards, which is “a critical omission in Dr. Grudem’s recent book” (p. 311), and convincingly explains the Parable of the Vineyard Laborers (Matt 20:1-16), though he is interacting with Blomberg, not Grudem, here. The multifaceted nature of eternal rewards (for faithful, non-legalistic service) functions as a motivating factor for grace-living contra the dreadful Reformed position which threatens believers who lack adequate performance with hell. Dillow then discusses the doctrine of “Degrees of Glory” for the believer (Chap. 12).

Chapters 13-14 represent Dillow’s new thinking on kingdom entrance. Using Luke 18:18-30 and parallel passages, Dillow argues that the rich young ruler was probably already regenerate when he asked Jesus about inheriting eternal life (Chap. 13). He suggests that this account teaches that a believer who is *first* in the world would be *last* in the future kingdom unless he actually *follows Jesus in discipleship*. He thinks ranking and status are in view here, not the reception of everlasting life.

In Chap. 14, Dillow suggests that Matt 7:21-23 is actually about believers who are false prophets who would be excluded from closeness to the teacher and barred from the Lord's celebratory marriage banquet prior to His second coming (Rev 19:7-9; cf. Matt 22:1-14).

In Chaps. 15 and 16, Dillow demonstrates that the *branches* in John 15:1-2 are indeed *lifted up* by the Vinedresser, not taken away or cast out, so as to produce fruit. The *branches* in John 15:6 may represent the carnal Christian who is disciplined in life (and possibly by physical death), but not condemned to hell as a nonbeliever, per Grudem's Reformed dogma.

Dillow returns in Chaps 22 and 23, dealing first with the interpretation of Col 1:22-23 as it promotes faithfulness in believers. He shows that this passage does not condition one's assurance of salvation on works or deeds, but rather refers to the future presentation of believers to Christ, having a practical, relative holiness, which presentation is both desired and possible, in accord with the degree of one's growth and maturity into full-grown discipleship. In Chap. 23, he concisely overturns the Reformed view of 2 Peter 1:10-11 by showing that believers may attain a rich, welcome entrance into the future messianic kingdom by applying the virtues which Peter lists in vv 5-7. These chapters are excellent.

Some Free Grace proponents will rightly object to the caricature of Bob Wilkin and Grace Evangelical Society on pp. 69 and 81-82. Regarding the question of eternal security, a footnote states that Wilkin and/or GES teach that "if you do not believe in *eternal security* at the moment of faith, you are not justified" (p. 82, note 43, italics added). To clarify, when a person believes in Jesus for everlasting life, inherent in that faith is a simple understanding that it will last forever. To believe that you have everlasting life and to think it might not last forever is a logical contradiction. You may never have heard the expression *eternal security*. You need not have gone through the consideration of the pros and cons of the *doctrine* of eternal security to have absolute assurance that you'll "go to heaven when you die." But belief that you'll do so is to be sure of it.

*A Defense of Free Grace Theology* is, for the most part, an apologetic against those who would add the necessity of practical holiness, works, and obedience as conditions for regeneration and assurance of salvation. There is much to think about and consider in these pages,

although the discussion of saving faith is off the mark and the repeated impression that Grudem's Lordship Salvation is a legitimate saving message is quite troubling.

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***Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide.*** By Robert N. Wilkin. Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017. 280 pp. Paper, \$15.00.

Calvinistic theology is gaining popularity among Evangelicals today. I have been involved in Southern Baptist churches for much of my life, and this theology is becoming more and more prominent in the seminaries and the pulpits. The seems to be especially the case with young pastors.

Often when people defend Calvinism, they do so as a philosophical system. It is argued that the five points of Calvinism form a logical unit. In *Is Calvinism Biblical*, Wilkin does not look at Calvinism from logic but asks if the Bible supports it. The book is written so that the man or woman in the pew can read and understand it. However, the pastor will find it extremely helpful as well.

Wilkin addresses all five points of Calvinism. These five points are popularly known by the acronym TULIP. The letters stand for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Wilkin says the last point can, and has, been divided into two parts: the perseverance of the saints and the preservation of the saints (p. 15).

For each of these points, Wilkin discusses two passages from the Bible to show that each point is unbiblical.

Concerning total depravity, Wilkin shows that in John 6:35 we see that faith precedes the new birth. One does not receive eternal life and then is able to believe. Then, using the example of Cornelius in Acts 10, Wilkin demonstrates that an unbeliever can respond to the revelation of God (pp. 23-38).

Concerning unconditional election, Wilkin shows that the Jews in Acts 13:46 counted *themselves* unworthy of eternal life. God was not responsible for their unwillingness to believe. A similar thing can be said about the unbelieving Jews in John 5:39-40. Jesus specifically

says that they were unwilling to come to Him (believe in Him). He did not say they were predestined for eternal condemnation (pp. 39-56).

In John 1:29 we have a clear statement that Christ died for the sins of the whole world. In 2 Peter 2:1 Peter says that the unbelieving false teachers were bought, or redeemed, by Christ (pp. 57-76). Both of these passages are the “death knell” for the view that Christ only died for the people God elected for eternal life (the L of TULIP).

When it comes to irresistible grace, Wilkin appeals to John 12:32 and Matt 23:37-39 to argue against it. In John 12, Jesus says that He will draw all men to Himself. In Matthew 23 it is clear that the unbelieving nation of Israel (and the people in it) was able to resist the grace of God that was offered to it (pp. 77-96).

Using passages from the Parable of the Four Soils in Luke 8 and the account of the woman at the well in John 4, Wilkin shows that believers cannot lose their eternal salvation. From Rev 20:11-15 and John 11:25-27, he points out that the reason people are cast into hell has nothing to do with one’s work. We find our assurance of our salvation in the promise of Christ, not persevering in doing good (pp. 97-136).

Wilkin does an excellent job of getting to the heart of the matter in each point of Calvinism. He chooses verses which clearly show that these verses strongly argue against each point.

No doubt the Calvinist will question Wilkin’s exegesis. However, since Calvinism is a logical unit, if one point fails the whole system comes into question.

One of the values of this book is that if someone is being drawn to Calvinism, the weight of Wilkin’s arguments may very well cause one to question if the Bible supports that theological system. Even if one could argue against one or two of the passages Wilkin discusses, one realizes that he makes twelve separate and strong arguments. It is difficult to argue that he has misinterpreted all twelve.

The book ends with two appendices that are very helpful. The first is how Calvinists reply to the twelve verses Wilkin discusses in the book (pp. 137-57). This is important because often when we read verses that oppose a particular theological view, we wonder how those who hold that view would respond.



The second appendix addresses a particular issue concerning Calvinism. That issue is election or predestination. Wilkin uses Scripture and examples to show that election in the Bible does not mean that God chooses people to go to heaven or hell before they are born, but that God chooses people and even groups for service. He has a “job” for them to do (pp. 159-70).

This book addresses a very relevant topic in Evangelicalism today. Many people in our churches are not even aware of the issues. However, the five points of Calvinism rob people of the assurance of their salvation. It pictures God as a cruel God Who has chosen people for hell before they were born and there is nothing they can do about it. Its teaching is heard in many pulpits and is found in many popular Christian books. Wilkin wrote this book to help those who struggle or will struggle with these things. I highly recommend this book.

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***Replacement Theology: Critical Issues Concerning the History, Doctrine, and Dangers of Replacement Theology.*** By David Dunlap. Port Colborne, ON: Gospel Folio Press, 2012. 146 pp. Paper, \$10.00.

As the subtitle indicates, David Dunlap addresses historical, doctrinal, and practical concerns with Replacement Theology.

Dunlap defines Replacement Theology as the view that “the Church has permanently replaced or superseded Israel as the people of God. The Church will inherit all these Old Testament promises” (p. 16). Dunlap argues that Replacement Theology is a serious error.

As a Dispensationalist, Dunlap affirms God’s future plans for Israel. For example, he takes the New Covenant as evidence that Israel has a future: “[I]n a careful study of the New Covenant, it soon becomes obvious that many of its spiritual and material provisions can only be fulfilled by national Israel in the future millennium. By their very nature, it is impossible for these promises to be fulfilled today in the Church” (p. 58). *JOTGES* readers will heartily agree.

Doctrinally, Dunlap presents some Biblical reasons for why “God is not yet finished with Israel” (p. 43). For example, he surveys the unfulfilled promises and covenants made with Israel (pp. 72-78), the prophecies about her future re-gatherings (pp. 78-79), her special relationship to the land (pp. 87-103), and, most of all, God’s special love for Israel (pp. 105-113). Dunlap also addresses a number of “problem” passages used to challenge the Dispensational view (pp. 50-51).

Historically, Dunlap traces the roots of Replacement theology from the Church Fathers through to Reformation figures such as Martin Luther. And he also treats the rise of Zionism and the establishment of the modern state of Israel.

Practically, Dunlap explains how Replacement theology fueled anti-Semitism. For example, here is a vile quote from John Chrysostom (considered a saint by Catholics and Orthodox):

The Jews are the most worthless of all men. They are lecherous, greedy, and rapacious. They are perfidious murderers of Christ. They worshipped the devil; their religion is a sickness. The Jews are odious assassins of Christ, and for killing God there is no expiation possible, no indulgence or pardon. Christians may never cease vengeance, and the Jews must live in servitude forever. God always hated the Jews. It is incumbent upon all Christians (their duty) to hate the Jews (p. 63, Quoted from *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, vol 68, Fathers of the Church, trans. Paul W. Harkins [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979], p. 31).

Given this kind of evidence, Dunlap convincingly ties Replacement Theology to anti-Semitism.

Other practical concerns include Replacement Theology leading to errors such as Christian statism (e.g., Christian Reconstructionism, p. 28 ) and an allegorical reading of Scripture (pp. 24-25).

*JOTGES* readers will appreciate that the author affirms salvation by faith alone, the eternally security of the believer, and the pre-Tribulational rapture of the Church. They will not necessarily agree with how Dunlap defends the pre-Tribulational rapture, i.e., by denying that believers can suffer *any* judgment for sin, he argues therefore that they cannot experience the Tribulation: “The Bible teaches that once a person has been saved by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ, he will never again suffer judgment for his sins, neither in this age

of grace nor in the future tribulation period...If Christians are to bear, in some way, judgment and divine punishment for our sins, then the death of Christ on the cross was in some way insufficient and inadequate” (p. 119). By contrast, *JOTGES* readers will affirm that Christians can suffer God’s *temporal* judgment for sin, even if they will never experience God’s *eternal* judgment for sin (at the Great White Throne), and even if they will be raptured before the Tribulation begins. After all, there will be people who come to faith during the Tribulation (e.g., the sheep of Matt 25:31-46).

This book is easy to read and filled with good information. Each chapter has a clear topic and purpose (though it would help if they were numbered). However, the overall structure of the book can be haphazard, with chapters moving back and forth between topics in Biblical theology, church history, and modern history. It would have been better to present the Biblical issues first, then address the historical issues separately. It would also help if there were subject and Scripture indexes. But these are minor complaints about a worthwhile book. Recommended.

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***Spiritual Lessons from the Life of David.*** By Zane C. Hodges. Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017. 88 pp. Paper, \$10.00.

There are very few books written by Free Grace writers that deal with the OT. *Spiritual Lessons from the Life of David* is a welcomed exception.

The book deals with 1 Samuel 16–19. Hodges says that in order to understand the book we must know the theme of 1 Samuel. The theme is that when Israel insisted on a human king, they made a tragic mistake because they rejected the kingship of God. But the book is Christ-centered because it shows how much Israel needed the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of the kingship they rejected (p. 10). The lessons from the life of David are related to this theme.

These four chapters in 1 Samuel concentrate on the relationship between Saul, David, and Jonathan, and not the whole life of David. These were difficult times for David.

Hodges's book is divided into fifteen chapters that cover 1 Samuel 16-19. It starts with a lesson from the predecessor of David, King Saul. Of course, Saul disobeyed and rebelled against the Lord. Hodges says that the lesson we learn here is that a leader among God's people can drift far from the Lord. The NT parallel is the evil servant in the parable in Matt 24:48-49. He is a leader in the church but falls because he does not remember what the Lord told him (p. 12).

David is the one that replaces Saul, and Hodges points out that what set David apart from others, such as his brothers, was the "inner qualities of heart." Those things were lacking in Saul. Saul outwardly had all the attributes one would look for in a king, but God looks at the heart (p. 16).

But Saul gives us other lessons as they relate to the life of David. As is well known, Saul opposed David as his replacement and tried to kill him. Saul knew that God had chosen David, and Saul was faced with a choice. He could accept the discipline of God in his life and help David assume the role God had chosen for him, or he could resist the plan of God. Two lessons flow from Saul's decision to choose the latter. As Christians we can learn from Saul the importance of the discipline of God in our lives. The other lesson is that if we don't do so and continue to rebel against God we, like Saul, will continue to spiral downward (p. 23).

In the life of David, Hodges suggests many lessons. In his encounter with Goliath, we see that faith involves seeing God as bigger than any giant we might face (p. 28). In the example of David's friend Jonathan, and how Jonathan treated him, we have an illustration of how we ought to love others (pp. 50-52). As Saul tries to kill David, we see that even the relationships within his family are negatively impacted. Such is part of the price the child of God pays when he is not willing to submit to God and repent (pp. 77-81). Saul was tortured from both within and without. We see in the book of 1 Samuel that Saul was tortured from within because of the mental and spiritual madness he endured.

This book is not an exegetical commentary. Instead, it looks at events in a troubling time of David's life and applies them to

Christians. It is written for the layperson. It is easy to read. The only problem with the book is that it is too short. After reading it, I was wishing for more. However, it was very valuable because after reading it I found myself looking for ways to do what Hodges does in this book to other passages of the OT and to ask how they apply to my own life. I highly recommend this book.

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