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RACISM, SOUTHERN SEMINARY, AND THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

In December 2018, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, released its “Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary” (hereafter RSR).¹ As the title suggests, the RSR deals with how in its past Southern Seminary and its leaders were involved in the issues of slavery and racism. Specifically, the report tackles the problem of how Southern Seminary excluded black students and taught that such students were inferior to their white counterparts.

As an alumnus of Southern Seminary, this writer finds the RSR of great interest. But it is also of interest because the issues raised in this discussion relate to Free Grace concerns.

Southern Seminary is not a Free Grace institution; it is Calvinistic. However, it seems that the results of the self-analysis which the seminary subjected itself to challenges one of the central tenets of Calvinism, i.e., the perseverance of the saints.

In this article, I will discuss the findings of the RSR. My goal is to show there is a contradiction between holding three beliefs: first, that the founders were heroes of the faith; second, that they were guilty of gross sin; and third, that genuine believers persevere in faith and good works until death. After explaining the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, I will try to develop how this impacts the debate between Free Grace Theology and Calvinism on this important tenet.

¹ “Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” December 12, 2018, <https://www.sbts.edu/southern-project/>. Accessed February 8, 2019.

II. THE FINDINGS OF THE RSR

The RSR paints a very dark picture of Southern Seminary's past. The authors of the study are to be commended for their honesty.

A. The Authors of the RSR

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., is the president of Southern Seminary. He commissioned six present and past faculty members to write the RSR. Mohler contributed to the report, writing an introduction to their findings.

B. Mohler's Summary

Mohler is very blunt in his introduction as he summarizes the findings of the six faculty members. He concludes that the seminary has a long history of sin.

He acknowledges the sins of the founders and the need for Southern to repent for what these men and many who followed them did. But he goes even further. He says that the Southern Baptist Convention reported back in 1995 the same thing he is saying now. The Convention was guilty of the same things, and the seminary is following the Convention's example.²

For Mohler, the sins include the "horrifying realities of American slavery," as well as support for Jim Crow segregation. The founders were racists who advocated white racial supremacy. He admits that those who were guilty of these sins were the "cherished heroes" of the seminary.³ Mohler calls this the legacy of the school.

All four of the founding faculty of the school were deeply involved and complicit in these sins. And this legacy lasted for a hundred years. Many of the successors on the faculty proclaimed segregation and held to the inferiority of African Americans. Mohler admits, and it is painful for him to do so, that the school's faculty often supported the "Lost Cause." This was the view that the Confederacy was righteous and that white supremacy was a fact. It also maintained that blacks generally lacked the ability to learn, to study literature, or to govern themselves. The seminary continued supporting the "Cause" into the

² RSR, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

1950s and 1960s. Mohler says the institution is complicitly guilty of the same sins even today because of the lack of “historical curiosity.”⁴

1. Mohler’s Internal Struggle

The four founders of the seminary were James P. Boyce, John Broadus, Basil Manly, Jr., and William Williams. In Mohler’s view, these men were great defenders of the gospel of Christ and Biblical truth. They also held strongly to what the seminary teaches. They believed that repentance was an essential part of the gospel. They even preached to black American slaves a gospel of repentance and faith in Christ. They desired the salvation of these men and women. Mohler counts them as heroes of the faith, as the men and women of Hebrews 11 were.

At the same time, however, they had an unbiblical ideology of race which allowed them to defend racist views and slavery. He wonders how Christians could hold such right and wrong beliefs simultaneously.⁵

2. Are Societal Norms an Excuse?

Do the times in which men live excuse their sins? Can we argue that the founders of Southern Seminary only reflected the racist times of the South prior to and during the Civil War? Some may argue, for example, that Martin Luther could be excused for his anti-Semitic views because of the times in which he lived.

To Mohler’s credit he does not use societal norms as an excuse. He claims that Luther was a “great paragon of the Reformation” who taught glorious truths of the Bible. He was a creature of his own time and the society in which he lived, but he was still an anti-Semite. His views on race were “vile.” Mohler claims that neither Luther nor the founders of Southern Seminary can be excused for their long history of hatred and racism.⁶

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

3. Is Mohler Inconsistent?

Mohler claims that Boyce, Broadus, Manly, and Williams, as well as many who followed them at Southern, were great Christian men. They were the heroes of those who followed them. But at the same time, he says that these founders were vile racists. They never repented of these sins, even though, in Mohler's view, repentance is part of the gospel. In fact, they taught others to follow in their footsteps, and these sins continued for many decades.

In his introduction, he points out that these men were not perfect. "Total sanctification" does not occur for believers in this life. That only awaits the world to come.⁷ It is clear that Mohler believes that the four founders of Southern Seminary as well as the faculty who lived like these men and taught what they taught will all be in the kingdom of God. At the same time, Mohler believes in the perseverance of the saints. As this article will attempt to show, maintaining that these men will be in the kingdom, while holding to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, results in certain inconsistencies.

C. The Six Faculty Writers

The primary writers of the RSR discuss the long list of sins of which the founders of Southern were guilty. Those who followed these founders were likewise guilty. It is clear that this is a painful endeavor for them, just as for Mohler, as they point out that these sins continued among the leaders of the seminary for approximately a hundred years.

1. The Denomination Was Guilty of These Sins

The RSR points out that the Southern Baptist Convention, which established Southern, was also racist, supporting the "morality of slaveholding and the justness of the Confederate effort to preserve it." As part of the denomination, the donors to the seminary as well as trustees held positions of leadership in society. They used these positions to promote the superiority of the white race and the inferiority of the black race. Instead of combating racial injustice and

⁷ Ibid.

oppression, they promoted both. Because, in their view, the black race was inferior, they argued that slavery was righteous.⁸

At the same time, they desired the eternal salvation of the black race. They called upon slaves to repent of their sins and to “entrust themselves to God’s mercy through faith in Jesus Christ.”⁹

Early trustees of the school often argued that God had determined that blacks should be slaves. To oppose slavery was to rebel against God. They also argued that slavery was good for the slaves. They were better off under the rule of whites than they would be as free men and women.¹⁰

The RSR maintains that the denomination as a whole held on to their racist views for many decades. When Southern Seminary began to integrate, most churches in the South resisted such changes. For example, they demanded that visiting prospective black students not be allowed to eat in the cafeteria with white students.¹¹ Due at least in part to the pressure of these churches, the first black students were taught in separate classrooms.

2. The History of Southern Seminary

The faculty and leadership of the seminary also promoted white supremacy and the inferiority of the black race. It was common for the faculty to support the “Lost Cause” of the Confederacy until the 1940s. The school was completely segregated until the 1940s as well. Even when black students were admitted, they had to be taught in separate rooms from white students and have separate graduations. Many called for society to be governed with this philosophy. One leader of the seminary in the 1880s wrote that it was “immoral and wrong to demand that negro civilization should be placed on par with white.”¹²

Not only did all four founders of the seminary own slaves, they became wealthy off slave labor. For example, they were able to hire out their slaves to white farmers.¹³ Basil Manly, Jr., agreed with many

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

trustees by saying that black slaves in America were better off as slaves of white owners than living free in Africa.¹⁴

The founders and faculty of the seminary often used the curse of Cain in Genesis to show that God approved of and established slavery. They argued that slavery was to be a permanent institution. The intellectual inferiority of the black race was seen as a proof of their theological views.¹⁵ Boyce called himself “ultra pro-slavery.” He argued against secession from the North prior to the Civil War because he felt it would spell the end of slavery, and the end of slavery would dishonor God.¹⁶

The RSR suggests that the founders, as well as some trustees, held to their racist views for very practical reasons. The seminary was originally located in South Carolina. Prior to the Civil War, it would not have been possible to obtain funding for the seminary without supporting slavery. Slaveholding affected nearly all aspects of life in the South. It allowed the founders and others to secure stability and prosperity for themselves and their families. At least one trustee of the seminary was anti-slavery in his younger days, but was soon proclaiming the inferiority of the black race and the righteousness of slavery.¹⁷

These considerations put these men in an even worse light. The suggestion is they treated black human beings badly, at least partly, for monetary reasons. They used the Scriptures to support their racist views but were also motivated by greed. Instead of speaking the truth of Scriptures, they were conformed to the philosophy of the age in which they lived (contrary to the teaching of Paul in Rom 12:1-2).

Even darker, the writers relate the history of a leader at Southern after the Civil War who had political connections and used them to get black convicts to work in his coal mines for little or no pay. He was notorious for his mistreatment of these men. His view was that one had to mistreat blacks because that is the only way to get them to work. Many of them died in his employment due to their mistreatment. Through their loss, he became extremely wealthy.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 34-36.

The list of racist actions and teachings by the faculty enumerated in the RSR is long. William Carver, a long time faculty member, wrote that he was upset that a black man was allowed to eat at the White House. He maintained that the majority of black citizens were simply not capable of being educated. The school adopted this attitude. Native Americans could attend Southern as long as they could prove there was no black blood in them.¹⁹

Leaders at Southern also appealed to science to defend their view that the black race was inferior to the white. Once again appealing to genetics, long time faculty member Charles Gardner said that the only reason some blacks gain even a measure of academic success is because they must have a measure of white blood in them.²⁰ One is reminded here of the “scientific” studies and blood laws of Nazi Germany.

The statement by Broadus in this regard also reminds us of how the Nazis thought of and depicted Jews:

The typical Negro, with thick lips, flat nose, protruding jaws, narrow and retreating forehead, is entirely distinct from the other two races, and vastly inferior in point of intelligence. For my part, I never saw one of these who could be regarded as very intelligent.²¹

3. Political Effects

The RSR holds that the leaders of Southern Seminary were not content to promote their views only on campus. They wanted their racist views to impact politics.

Manly was from South Carolina. After the Civil War, he called for the removal of blacks from certain towns in his state. Boyce said that whites must take political control of South Carolina. These views were shared by the faculty of the school. Government was meant to be run by white men only. Boyce fought to remove the right to vote for black citizens.²² In the 1876 election in South Carolina, Broadus was

¹⁹ Ibid., 43-44, 48.

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Ibid., 55.

²² Ibid., 25-27.

a particularly vocal supporter of the Democrat party. The Democrats called for restoring complete white rule in the state.²³

The writers of the RSR said these political views caused the leaders of Southern to have to walk a delicate line after the Civil War. They needed the money of rich northern Baptists in order for the seminary to survive. So when in the North, men like Broadus and Manly said they loved and respected blacks. But when in the South, they argued for the inferiority of blacks and called for refusing them equality before the law as well as the right to vote. This led to many of the faculty ministering to the black community while at the same time viewing them as inferior.²⁴ The reader of the RSR will probably cringe at the hypocrisy of these Christian leaders.

4. Spiritually Mature Racists?

The faculty writers of the RSR clearly agree with Mohler that the founders and faculty of Southern Seminary were racists and taught the inferiority of the black race. However, they still saw these men as “spiritual.”²⁵ On more than one occasion, they mention that these men were concerned about the eternal souls of the slaves that lived in their midst.

5. What Caused the Change?

The RSR does not specifically state what caused Southern Seminary and the Southern Baptist denomination as a whole to change their views on race. But it at least hints that the reason was not from studying the Scriptures.

The change came about as society itself changed, particularly the South. The Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* took a big step toward integrating education. The views towards the black race were changing. The Civil Rights movement was based in the secular world. As these things were unfolding, and Southern was going through the process of integration, one faculty member wrote:

Our churches have tended to become conditioned more by our culture than by our Christ. So often our churches

²³ Ibid., 31.

²⁴ Ibid., 29.

²⁵ Ibid., 43.

merely reflect the standards, the folkways, and the mores of the community, rather than the ethical standards of Christianity.²⁶

One would think that this was particularly hard for present leaders of Southern Seminary to write. After admitting that the school had a long history of “vile racism,” they came to the conclusion that the world pointed out their sin instead of believers living righteously by demonstrating love towards even fellow Christians in the midst of a fallen world.

D. Conclusion

Some, no doubt, would claim that the RSR is too hard on the history of the Southern Baptist Convention and Southern Seminary. They might maintain that these churches and leaders were godly and sincere and that the men were simply products of the era in which they lived. Proof of these facts would include that these men who lived in the past cared about the souls of the slaves in their midst. They honestly, but mistakenly, believed that the way they treated these slaves was best for the slaves themselves.

That, however, is not the view of the RSR. For the purposes of this article it is simply to be noted that Mohler and the six writers freely admit that the denomination and Southern Seminary had a long history of racism and hatred towards their fellow man and even some fellow Christians. They were guilty of numerous sins and continued to live in these sins their whole lives.

In the conclusion to the RSR, the writers admitted that both Southern and the denomination as a whole were guilty of the “deplorable sin” of racism. This racism was both individual and systemic. Mohler said that the teaching of racial superiority was not only a heresy, it results in “getting the gospel wrong.”²⁷ The RSR leaves no doubt that, in the minds of the writers and Mohler, Southern Seminary had a very long history of sin, heresy, and distorting the gospel.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

But there is a very important point that the RSR does not discuss. How does this history align with Southern’s doctrine of the perseverance of the saints?

III. PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Free Grace Theology is often attacked by those who hold to the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Some mistakenly believe that the doctrine of perseverance is equivalent to “once saved, always saved.” But that is not the case. The doctrine of perseverance maintains that if a person is truly a Christian, he will persevere in faith and good works until the end of his life. That means a true Christian cannot “continue” living in sin. But the doctrine of eternal security (“once saved, always saved”) does not make that guarantee.

By contrast, Free Grace Theology—which believes in the doctrine of eternal security, not the doctrine of perseverance—affirms that Christians can indeed live ungodly lives to the point of death, and even die in a state of apostasy, and still be eternally secure.

While it is always dangerous to characterize an institution as a whole, it is doubtful that Mohler and most at Southern Seminary would object to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. They would also quickly reject the Free Grace view of Christian living and the possibility of a true Christian’s continuing in a life of disobedience to God.

A. Statements on Perseverance

While there are differences of emphases on the doctrine, a brief survey of certain theologians will demonstrate what those who hold to the perseverance of the saints teach. Grudem, for example, says it means one of the evidences that a person is truly born again is that he continues in the Christian life.²⁸ Palmer agrees and says that while believers are eternally secure (which emphasizes the activity of

²⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 788.

God), Christian perseverance in good works emphasizes the activities of Christians.²⁹

John MacArthur is another strong proponent of the perseverance of the saints. In commenting on 1 Pet 1:2, he says that obedience must be the direction of our lives. A person knows he is eternally saved by the marks of the new nature within him. This includes the practice of repenting of and confessing every sin. If a person does not do that, there will “be a dark cloud” over his assurance.³⁰

In a discussion that relates to the findings of the RSR, MacArthur says that a true Christian will do righteous deeds. He will love his fellow believers. An elect child of God manifests who he is by believing proper doctrine and by godly behavior. Those who are “false” believers will habitually practice sin. MacArthur says that a person cannot truthfully claim to be a Christian and keep on sinning. He admits that Christians do sin, but if they are truly saved, they will react to that sin with “grief and repentance.”³¹

B. Agreement Among Southern’s Faculty

While men like MacArthur and Grudem do not teach at Southern, their teaching on the perseverance of the saints would get a warm reception. Thomas Schreiner is a renowned faculty member and NT scholar and is the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at the school.

He comments that obedience cannot be separated from faith. Faith, obedience, and repentance are evident in the life of true believers because these things are the gifts of God. Perseverance is the mark of genuine faith. Perseverance is not only the maintaining of faith, and thus not apostatizing, it also includes living a life of godliness. The goal achieved is love for fellow believers. Only those who continue to live such a life will receive eternal life.³²

²⁹ Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism: A Study Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 68-69.

³⁰ John MacArthur, Jr., *Chosen for Eternity: A Study of Election* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 40-41.

³¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *Marks of a True Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), 49, 52.

³² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2003), 56, 79, 93, 363. Schreiner maintains that 1 Pet 1:2, 14, 22 and 2 Pet 2:20 all support his conclusions.

When it comes to the assurance of salvation, Schreiner agrees with MacArthur. He claims that if a professing Christian lives contrary to the will of God, there is no warrant for such assurance. While believers are not sinless, the true believer will see a dramatic change in how he lives. Believers' lives will not be "characterized by sin." Those who continue to do evil will not be in the kingdom.³³

Mohler himself agrees with these sentiments. He discusses the problem of assurance of salvation. For him, true saving faith is demonstrated in a transformed life. Like Schreiner, he appeals to the writings of Peter (2 Pet 1:10). This transformed life is the evidence of a "new heart" and the "salvation experience." True believers have a faith that is accompanied by repentance from sin and an eagerness to follow Christ. Even though they sin, they can never "remain" in it.³⁴

In a recent book, Mohler applies this theology to the culture in which he currently lives.³⁵ He speaks about the sexual revolution of our day and the many sins associated with it. In particular, he speaks of the sin of homosexuality and support for homosexual marriage. He points out that even most millennials who attend church do not oppose such unions.³⁶ This is not just impacting Christian ethics; the gospel itself is at stake. If we do not call sin *sin*, we cannot proclaim the Biblical gospel, because in order to be saved, an unbeliever must understand the seriousness of sin.³⁷

Mohler's view on the relationship of sin to the proclamation of the gospel is also related to his belief in the perseverance of the saints in good works. He says that all true Christians seek to live in obedience to God. In applying this doctrine to the homosexual, Mohler maintains that a practicing homosexual cannot be a Christian. They can only claim to be a Christian "insofar as they are *fellow repenting believers* in the Lord Jesus Christ."³⁸ If they are truly saved, they will obey and submit to Christ by walking in obedience to what the Lord

³³ Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 55, 286, 296.

³⁴ <https://albertmohler.com/2006/07/17/guarded-through-faith-assurance-and-the-doctrine-of-perseverance>. Accessed July 23, 2019.

³⁵ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13, 138-39.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

commands. If they fall into sexual sin, they will soon repent as a result of the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit.³⁹

IV. SOUTHERN'S DILEMMA

With the publishing of the RSR, Southern finds itself in a dilemma. Since Mohler sponsored and contributes to the RSR and is the current president of the institution, his words are an appropriate illustration of the problem the school faces.

On the one hand, Mohler claims that the founders of the school committed *the vile sin of racism*. The school as a whole followed in those footsteps. They were filled with hate, even towards some fellow Christians. By their actions, they denied the gospel they claimed to preach. They were guilty of heresy. They used such teachings for their own financial gain. They sought the approval of the world. It appears that the school only changed because the views of the world changed. Perhaps most importantly of all, according to the RSR, the founders *never repented*. They remained in these sins. They continued in them. They did not call such actions *sin*. Instead they appealed to the Bible to support their sinful conduct. These sins went on for well over a hundred years.

On the other hand, Mohler and the RSR say these men were *heroes of the faith*. They are in the same category of great men and women of faith in the Bible. The founders, for example, are held in high esteem at the institution. Their portraits hang in the halls. The undergraduate school is named after one of these slave owners. A major chapel is named after another one of these heroes.⁴⁰

And yet, Mohler says that true Christians *cannot continue in sin until death*. For example, because of their doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, Mohler and many of the faculty say that a practicing homosexual cannot be a Christian. A true Christian cannot continue in such sin and will repent of it. He *will* walk in obedience.

But if homosexuals are held to that standard, why not racists? The RSR and Mohler are inconsistent. When it comes to the founders of the school, they evidently believe that mature believers *can* continue

³⁹ Ibid., 142, 173.

⁴⁰ <http://www.sbts.edu>. Accessed June 25, 2019. The undergraduate school is called Boyce College. The chapel is Broadus Chapel.

in disobedience (i.e., in the sins of hatred and racism) until the end of their lives. In the case of those men, repentance is *not* necessary to be in the kingdom of God. Why the inconsistency?

It is easy to understand why the RSR and Mohler claim these men were believers. Those past leaders formed the foundation of who they are today—both at the seminary and the denominational level. In some cases, they were the physical ancestors of Christian leaders. They were their spiritual mentors. The notion that they were not even Christians is unthinkable. But if one both believes in the perseverance of the saints and accepts the findings of the RSR, the unthinkable is the only conclusion possible. To say that a lifelong practicing homosexual cannot be a Christian, but that a lifelong practicing hateful racist can, is glaringly inconsistent.

Not surprisingly, some at Southern see this inconsistency. Andrew Smith, writing for the seminary, agrees with Mohler that the lives of the founders leave an unsettling question. How could people who passionately taught the Bible be racists and own other human beings? He admits that there should have been repentance long ago. Sadly, Southern can do it today, but the dead founders cannot.⁴¹

But there is an even more unsettling question: if all true believers repent of their sins while living, and this is a part of the gospel itself, why did these men never do so?

These troubling questions point out a problem with Calvinism in general and the perseverance of the saints in particular. One cannot hold to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and the findings of the RSR at the same time. A person who accepts the findings of the RSR and believes in the perseverance of the saints, as Mohler does, must conclude that many of Mohler's spiritual heroes will be eternally lost.

⁴¹ Andrew J. W. Smith, "The Baptist Courier: Informing and Inspiring South Carolina Baptists," Vol. 150, Greenville, SC, Jan 2019, 10.

V. FREE GRACE THEOLOGY IS CONSISTENT

Free Grace Theology does not have the same problem as Calvinism. It recognizes that Christians can continue in sin and hatred and still be eternally secure children of God. Like the founders of Southern Seminary, and many who followed in their footsteps at the school, Christians can live lives which deny the very Word of God they teach.

Based on their writings, it is impossible to know which of these men were born again. The RSR tells us the gospel these men preached, namely, that they called for repentance when they told people how to be saved from hell. Clearly, they did not listen to their own message.

But repentance, while important, is not a part of the saving message.⁴² It is not a co-condition with faith to be born again. Repentance is turning from sin, which is a work. But eternal salvation is by faith apart from works of any kind. The saving message is simple. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life receives that life. It is a life that can never end, thereby implying eternal security. If Broadus, Manly, Williams, or Boyce ever believed that simple message, they will be in the kingdom of God. Their eternal destiny will not change, regardless of the damage their examples and teachings caused millions of people.

Since the founders mentioned in the RSR taught that salvation also depended on repentance, we could add another sin they committed: they preached a confusing (if not false) gospel.⁴³

⁴²See Robert N. Wilkin, *Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019).

⁴³ It is beyond the scope of this article to address the verses that Mohler and others use to support the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. As a general rule, they take these verses out of context by applying verses that deal with eternal rewards to the requirements of receiving eternal life. For example, 2 Pet 1:10 is clearly addressing “true” believers. Peter calls them “brethren.” By doing good works, these believers make their calling sure by demonstrating to *others* who they are. They are called to be great in the kingdom of God (v 11). These verses are a call to be greatly rewarded when Christ returns. For a good discussion of all five points of Calvinism see, Robert N. Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017).

VI. CONCLUSION

Oftentimes, theological discussions are thought to be dry and philosophical and not relevant to men and women in their daily lives. That is not the case with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Our churches are filled with people who do not know if they will spend eternity in the kingdom of God because they believe in the doctrine of perseverance, yet also freely admit they continue to struggle with sin every day.

The RSR illustrates this problem. According to the RSR, a major denomination, seminary, and many heroes of the faith had a long history of sin and hatred and the founders of those institutions did not repent of their sins before death. In fact, they gloried in, and justified, their sins. But these same men (along with their spiritual descendants) also taught that true Christians cannot persist in sin until death. And yet, that is what they did. So what is the conclusion? If we adopt their Calvinist theology of perseverance, the only consistent conclusion is that these “heroes” of the faith were actually false Christians.

But the problem for Calvinist theology is wider than that. Every believer sees sin in his or her life. Nobody is guaranteed that he will continue in the faith until the end of his life. If perseverance of the saints is Biblical, and no one can know if they will persevere, then assurance of salvation becomes impossible for *any* believer.

But the saving message produces assurance, not doubt (John 11:25-27; 1 John 5:9-13). The answer to these doubts and inconsistencies is to reject the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance and simply believe the saving message of everlasting life through faith in Christ. If the men mentioned in the RSR ever believed in the saving message, they were eternally secure, and will be in the kingdom, even if they died in the sins of hatred and racism.

A REVIEW OF MATTHEW C. HOSKINSON'S *ASSURANCE OF SALVATION: IMPLICATIONS OF A NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY OF HOPE*

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I. INTRODUCTION

There have not been many books written on assurance of salvation. *Assurance of Salvation* (hereafter AOS) is a revised version of Hoskinson's 2005 doctoral dissertation at Bob Jones University.¹ Most of AOS fails to examine NT texts dealing with assurance of salvation, with Hoskinson focusing primarily on "a New Testament Theology of Hope."² However, *hope* in the NT rarely refers to assurance of everlasting life. Therefore, in this review I will focus primarily on chapter 2, "Contemporary Views on Assurance."³

II. TWO ASSURANCE VIEWS WHICH HOSKINSON REJECTS: FREE GRACE AND ARMINIAN

Hoskinson coins expressions for what he considers to be the three main views of assurance of salvation today. He calls them "the present only view"⁴ (i.e., Arminian), "the time of conversion view"⁵ (i.e., Free Grace), and "the composite view"⁶ (i.e., Reformed Lordship Salvation).

¹ Matthew C. Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation: Implications of a New Testament Theology of Hope* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2010).

² That is the subtitle of the book (minus the words *Implications of*).

³ Since he discusses the contemporary views in his conclusion (pp. 196-213) and in his appendix (pp. 214-18), those sections will receive primary attention as well.

⁴ Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 52-57, 70-72, 196-200, 205-208, 211-12, 214-18, *passim*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-63, 70-72, 196-200, 205-207, 209, 211-12, 214-18, *passim*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-72, 196-200, 205-207, 210-12, 214-18, *passim*.

A. The Present Only View (Arminian)

Hoskinson's discussion of the present only view is a bit misleading. He suggests that Arminians are sure they are saved now, but are unsure that they will remain saved: "adherents of this position affirm the possibility of assurance of only present salvation, denying that believers can have assurance of final salvation."⁷ He also says that they teach that, "All believers may enjoy a present assurance of their present salvation" and that "While assurance of present salvation is possible, assurance of final salvation is not."⁸

This is misleading because Arminians, like Calvinists, cannot be sure that they are saved now or that they will be saved at the end of their lives. (And most Calvinists, like Hoskinson, believe it is impossible to be sure of "final salvation.") Present certainty would mean that an Arminian was sure he was currently doing enough good works and avoiding enough bad works to qualify for salvation if he died. Since there is no Biblical passage explaining how to quantify one's good and bad deeds, no Arminian can be sure he had done enough to be presently saved. All the Arminian can do is have some level of confidence that he has a chance.

Of course, since Hoskinson does not believe that assurance is certainty, he can speak of Arminians having present *assurance* of their salvation.

It should be noted that while Hoskinson often distinguishes between "present salvation" and "future salvation," for Free Grace people, there is no distinction. When someone believes in Christ for everlasting life, his salvation is final (e.g., John 3:16-18; 5:24; 11:26). Once saved, always saved. *Present salvation is final salvation*. There is no other kind.

However, for Arminians there is a present provisional salvation and a possible future final salvation. Even many Calvinists like Hoskinson speak of *final salvation* and distinguish it from present salvation.⁹

⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹ For example, see Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 52, 53, 54, 63, 64, 67, 69, 71, 93, 104, 107, 116, 138, 148, 151, 157, 158, 161, 200, 202, 203, 208, 211, 213, 218. He also uses the synonymous expression *ultimate salvation* (e.g., pp. 149, 150, 156).

B. The Time of Conversion View (Free Grace)

This is Hoskinson's name for the Free Grace view, or at least the view of many Free Grace people.¹⁰ This is the idea that at least at the time a person is born again, he is sure he has everlasting life.

Hoskinson correctly notes that in this view, God's promise of everlasting life to the believer is the sole means of assurance. And he rightly says this view teaches that assurance is of the essence of saving faith.¹¹

Though elsewhere Hoskinson is quite irenic toward views with which he disagrees (e.g., see his discussion of the present only view), here he is a bit more confrontational. He writes, "Supporters so meld saving faith with assurance that, in their minds, one who lacks the latter does not apprehend the former. Worse yet, one who professes faith in Christ without a sense of confidence has not truly believed in Christ."¹²

The Free Grace view does not say that if a person lacks assurance, then he is unsaved. Hoskinson misrepresents our view in the first sentence just cited. Instead, we teach that *at the moment of faith in Christ*, a person is sure of his salvation, but that later loss of assurance is possible. Hence, someone who lacks assurance now might have believed in Christ for everlasting life in the past. However, if a person has *never* believed Jesus' promise of everlasting life to the believer,

¹⁰ Not all Free Grace people agree that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. Indeed, outside of GES circles, the prevailing Free Grace view seems to be that assurance is not of the essence of saving faith.

¹¹ Hoskinson rejects the Free Grace understanding of assurance being of the essence of saving faith, that when one believes in Christ for everlasting life (1 Tim 1:16), then he is certain that he has that life now and forever. However, he is willing to accept the expression *assurance is of the essence of saving faith* if we define assurance as he does, as some degree of confidence that I'm saved now and that I'll make it into Christ's kingdom (cf. Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 31-39). If at the moment of faith, a person had no confidence at all that he was saved in the present, let alone confidence that he will be finally saved in the future, then Hoskinson would say that he had not yet truly believed in Christ. He writes, "Identifying a lack of confidence as one extreme and self-confidence as the other, Calvin charts a 'middle course' expounded in Philippians 2:12-13: 'Work out [your] own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God that worketh in [you] to will and perform'" (39).

¹² Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 59.

that is, if he has *never* been sure of his eternal destiny, then he has not yet been born again.

III. HOSKINSON'S ASSURANCE VIEW: REFORMED LORDSHIP SALVATION

Hoskinson calls the third view, the one he favors, the “Composite View.” He suggests that it is a combination of views one and two. While he doesn’t directly call the composite view *the Lordship Salvation view*, he refers to Lordship Salvation often while explaining and defending his view. For example,

Because of the current debate over Lordship Salvation and its integral connection with the doctrine of assurance, it is not surprising that much of the contemporary literature on assurance flows from this controversy. MacArthur’s first book on the subject emphasizes the necessity of good works for assurance of salvation.¹³

The evidence Hoskinson gives for seeing the Reformed Lordship Salvation view as a composite of the Arminian and Free Grace views is weak.

The Free Grace view of assurance was not widely held until the Marrow Controversy in the eighteenth century.

The Reformed view preceded the Arminian view historically. Arminius was a Calvinist, trained at the Geneva Academy under Theodore Beza. But while there, he began to feel that the system needed changes, leading to the development of Arminian theology.¹⁴

The Reformed view of assurance existed before the Arminian and Free Grace views. Hence, the Reformed view of assurance cannot be a composite of them, since it came earlier.

¹³ Ibid., 9-10. On pages 64 and 180 Hoskinson directly indicates that MacArthur holds to the composite view: “Representing the Composite View, John F. MacArthur, Jr. states...” (p. 170). Hoskinson cites MacArthur repeatedly in this book, citing from three of his books. Hoskinson also refers to Lordship Salvation on page 70. Throughout the book he favorably cites other leading Lordship Salvation advocates as well, including D. A. Carson, Thomas Schreiner, Ardel Caneday, Michael Horton, and Wayne Grudem.

¹⁴ See <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/jacob-arminius.html>. Accessed July 23, 2019.

Hoskinson says the Reformed view “affirms the primacy of the objective means of assurance, as does the Time of Conversion View.”¹⁵ But that is misleading. The Free Grace view is not that God’s Word is primary in assurance, but that it is *all we need for certainty* of our salvation.¹⁶

By contrast, the Reformed view says that God’s Word is one of three sources and that it is insufficient by itself to grant assurance.¹⁷ Indeed, even all three sources together (the Word, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and the works the Holy Spirit produces) are insufficient to gain certainty. The Reformed view offers varying degrees of confidence, but not certainty.

Hoskinson’s comparison of the Reformed and Arminian views is more accurate. He says both “leave room for the subjective means as a secondary source for assurance.”¹⁸ Both teach “that those who apostatize will not enjoy final salvation.”¹⁹ By *apostatize*, he does not simply mean a doctrinal falling away. Both Calvinists and Arminians say that in order to gain what they call *final salvation* one must persevere in both faith and good works. Falling away morally or doctrinally sends one to Hades and ultimately the lake of fire.

The Reformed and Arminian views of assurance of everlasting life are so similar that we might call them the same view.

It would be more accurate to say that there are two major views of assurance today: the Calvinist/Arminian view (some level of confidence, but not certainty) and the Free Grace view (certainty, not some level of confidence).

¹⁵ Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 63.

¹⁶ See Bob Wilkin, “Certainty: The Definition of Assurance” (<https://faithalone.org/magazine/y2004/04D1.html>); Zane C. Hodges, “Assurance: Of the Essence of Saving Faith” (<https://faithalone.org/journal/1997i/Hodges.html>); and Zane C. Hodges, “We Believe in: Assurance of Salvation” (<https://faithalone.org/journal/1990ii/Hodges.html>).

¹⁷ See Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 199. See also Joel R. Beeke, *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith* (London: Christian Focus Publications, 2017), 75-87. In his conclusion of a chapter on “Assurance from God’s Promises,” Beeke writes, “*subjective evidence, though necessary*, must always be regarded as secondary, for it is often mixed with human convictions and feelings even when it gazes upon the work of God” (87, emphasis added).

¹⁸ Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

In fact, we might even list different types of Calvinist-Arminian views of assurance. For example, in his 2017 book *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith*, Joel Beeke actually lists eleven views of assurance which he considers false (two of which, numbers 3 and 9, are decidedly Calvinistic views, and several others are held by some Calvinists; for example, number 4 is held by some charismatic Calvinists):

1. “*Automatic assurance* teaches that if you believe, assurance is automatic.”²⁰
2. “*External assurance* is usually assurance that is based on what others say about a person—such as an evangelist, a pastor, or a priest.”²¹
3. “*Hyper-Calvinistic assurance* is assurance that goes beyond Calvin’s teaching...One form places the promises of God and faith in the background and the marks of grace and mystical experiences...in the foreground. Another form of Hyper-Calvinism embraces antinomianism...which downplays obedience to the Ten Commandments as well as sanctifying marks and fruits of grace and instead relies primarily on spiritual, mystical experiences for assurance.”²²
4. “*Emotional assurance* gets its assurance out of a frenzied kind of feeling which has no objective basis in the Scriptures. Closely associated with this is ‘*charismatic assurance*’ based on a kind of second blessing, such as speaking in tongues. Nowhere does Scripture commend such emotion-based assurance.”²³
5. “*Minimalistic assurance* is assurance that easily excuses sin and a lifestyle that doesn’t aim to please God. It thrives on excuses and avoids bringing the soul to the bar of God’s Word.”²⁴
6. “*Legalistic assurance* says that if I can only do certain good deeds in my own strength I can be assured that I am saved. This kind of assurance usually substitutes a man-made list of do’s and don’ts for God’s commandments in order to reduce things to a manageable level, thus promoting a sort of man-centered holiness.”²⁵

²⁰ Beeke, *Knowing and Growing*, 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

²² *Ibid.*, 62.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

7. “*Temperamental assurance* is based on innate self-confidence. Some people are very self-confident by nature and they are naturally going to have much more confidence about their state.”²⁶
8. “*Presumptuous assurance* says, ‘I am saved, and I am sure of it, so it doesn’t matter how I live. I can do what I want; it doesn’t matter all that much if I sin, for my sins are forgiven; I am a son of God.’”²⁷
9. “*Hyper-covenantal assurance* is a form of presumptuous assurance that bases its presumption on membership in the church as a covenant community...Most commonly, this assurance is strongly promoted in those Reformed and Presbyterian churches that embrace some form of ‘presumptive regeneration,’ ‘dormant regeneration,’ or ‘covenantal regeneration’—that is, that the children of believers are deemed to have been regenerated in infancy, so believing parents are to rear them with the conviction that they are already saved, and hence do not need to tell them that they need new hearts (cf. John 3:3-8).”²⁸
10. “*Promise-only assurance* is assurance much like presumptuous assurance, only its focus is exclusively on the gospel promises of Christ as the all-in-all of assurance. Ministers who embrace this view often preach like this to their people: ‘If you believe in Christ and trust in His promises only for salvation, you can be sure that you are saved. Then you don’t need to examine your own soul and conscience for the marks and fruits of grace. Don’t look at anything inside yourself; look only to Jesus.’”²⁹
11. “*Unexamined assurance* refuses to allow itself to be inspected or examined to see whether it is real or not, contrary to 2 Corinthians 13:5.”³⁰

While four of those views are essentially the same view (1, 8, 10, and 11),³¹ Beeke does provide about nine different views, not counting his own (views 3 and 4 are each subdivided into two separate views).

Beeke calls his own view “True Assurance” and indicates that, “The essence of assurance is living in Christ.”³² “Do I have some measure

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ Ibid., 64-65.

³⁰ Ibid., 65.

³¹ View 8 is a caricature of the Free Grace view. The other three views (1, 10, and 11) are the Free Grace view, though Beeke is less than charitable in the way he phrases his explanations.

³² Beeke, *Knowing and Growing*, 66.

of saving faith? Do I entrust my life with all my sins into the hands of Christ? Do I trust in the promises of God?”³³ “Assurance comes through diligent pursuit of godliness (2 Pet. 1:5-10) and prayer (Phil. 4:6, 7)...Even if you lack assurance, keep exercising love, faith, and obedience toward God.”³⁴

Beeke’s *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith* came out seven years after Hoskinson’s *Assurance of Salvation*. So, in one sense it is unfair to expect that Hoskinson could discuss all the views Beeke does. However, Beeke wrote his dissertation in 1988³⁵ and his book *The Quest for Full Assurance* in 1999.³⁶ While he does not lay out all eleven views, the roots of four of those views are found in his 1999 work.³⁷

Besides, Hoskinson certainly should have been able to examine the literature and find examples of many of Beeke’s eleven views, just as Beeke himself did.

IV. HOSKINSON’S FOCUS ON HOPE IS MISGUIDED

Four of the six chapters in this book have the word *hope* in their title: “Abraham and Hope” (Chap. 3), “Hope in the New Testament Historical Books” (Chap. 4), “Hope in Paul’s Writings” (Chap. 5), and “Hope in the General Epistles” (Chap. 6). Clearly Hoskinson believes that hope (*elpis* in Greek) is a NT synonym for assurance of everlasting life.

But it is not.

The word *hope* in the NT is used in two major ways: 1) an expectation or desire for something to occur and 2) an eager anticipation of something that is known will occur in the future.

³³ Ibid., 68.

³⁴ Ibid., 71.

³⁵ Joel R. Beeke, “Personal Assurance of Faith: English Puritanism and the Dutch ‘Nadere Reformatie’: From Westminster to Alexander Comrie (1640-1760)” (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1990).

³⁶ Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999).

³⁷ Beeke’s views 3, 4, 10, and 11 are essentially found in *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 280-84.

The first of those uses concerns things which are not certain. For example, “I hope to see you on my journey” (Rom 15:24); “He who plows should plow in hope” (1 Cor 9:10); “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly” (1 Tim 3:14).

The second of these uses concerns things which are certain, but which are yet future. For example, “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2);³⁸ “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13); “Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13).

There are very few uses of *elpis* (and the verb *elpizō*) that refer to anything akin to assurance of everlasting life. Even Titus 1:2 is looking at the fuller experience of eternal life that awaits us. 1 Peter 1:13 is similar. Titus 2:13 concerns assurance of the rapture.

But Hoskinson does not point out that *hope* in the NT sometimes refers to that which is certain, but future. Since for him assurance of everlasting life is not certain, whatever hope is cannot be certain either. In addition, Hoskinson does not focus on the few uses of *hope* which refer to something future yet certain that is related to our certainty of everlasting life (e.g., resurrection, glorification, and rapture).

For instance, when discussing John 5:45 (“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust [or *hope*, from *elpizō*]), Hoskinson says, “Truly believing Moses demands truly believing Christ.”³⁹ And how does one *truly believe Christ*? Hoskinson says that “those who have set their hope in Christ ensure that they have exercised saving faith.” He implies, but does not say here, that the way in which one ensures he has truly believed in Christ is by examining his works. See the section below on practical ramifications of his view for clear evidence that Hoskinson believes that one must examine his works to find evidence that he truly believes in Christ.

³⁸ While believers already have everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47), Paul is talking here of the fullness of everlasting life that the believer will have when Christ returns. Then we will put off our mortal bodies and gain glorified bodies. We will never sin again. Nor will we ever suffer pain, aging, or death again.

³⁹ Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 124.

What Hoskinson should have done was examine all the uses of the words *believe* (*pisteuō*) and *faith* (*pistis*) in the NT. To believe in Christ is to be assured or persuaded or convinced that He indeed guarantees everlasting life to all who believe in Him for it (cf. John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27; Acts 16:31; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16).

Hoskinson suggests we should be *hope-so Christians*. I hope I gain final salvation. I hope I don't end up being eternally condemned.⁴⁰

But the Bible says we should be *know-so Christians* (e.g., John 11:25-27; 2 Tim 1:12; 1 John 5:13). I know I have everlasting life that can never be lost. I know I will never be condemned. I am sure I will never come into judgment regarding my eternal destiny. I am certain that I am secure in Christ.

V. HOSKINSON VIEWS ASSURANCE AS LESS THAN CERTAINTY

If assurance can grow, as Hoskinson says or implies throughout the book,⁴¹ including being the second point in his appendix (“A Believer’s Assurance Grows over Time”), then it clearly is not certainty. If a person is certain, there can be no increase in certainty. Either one is certain or uncertain.

Hoskinson writes, “a believer’s assurance is dynamic, not static. In other words, one’s confidence concerning his standing before God may actually grow as time passes.”⁴² He ends his discussion on

⁴⁰ Hoskinson chastises Free Grace people, mentioning Hodges, me, and Keathley for “so meld[ing] saving faith with assurance that, in their minds, one who lacks the latter does not apprehend the former. Worse yet, one who professes faith in Christ without a sense of confidence has not truly believed Christ” (p. 59). He fails to point out that Free Grace people say that assurance can be lost. Our point is that in order to be born again one must believe the promise of everlasting life. When a person believes in Christ for everlasting life, he is sure. But if his certainty later departs, he remains eternally secure. Hoskinson counters that assurance is indeed possessed by true believers most of the time and that if it is lost, “his confidence in God’s promises will return” (p. 59). But he is not talking about certainty. He is talking about some degree of confidence, that is, hope-so, not know-so, Christianity.

⁴¹ Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 63-72, 99-100, 104-107, 167-68, 195, 196-213.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 216.

the growth of assurance over time by favorably citing Schreiner and Caneday:

While we are traveling on our faith journey—or, perhaps better, while we are running the marathon to obtain the prize—assurance is not a fixed entity. On the whole, it should grow and increase. Our growth in assurance is like a spiral, not in a direct and straight line upwards, but overall there is more certainty about our status with God as we run the race. At times we may regress in our assurance, but the general pattern is one of progress and advancement.⁴³

Hoskinson's view is that everlasting life is a prize to be won by continuing to run the race of the Christian life. Assurance, which in the composite view is not an aid in running the race, but instead a result of how well one is doing in the race, never reaches the point of certainty. It can't, because perseverance to the end of the race is the condition of gaining the prize, which the composite view believes in everlasting life. Earlier, in the same book that Hoskinson quotes from, Schreiner and Caneday give more explanation about winning the prize: "Warnings and admonitions call for faith that endures to receive the prize. The prize is salvation, eternal life."⁴⁴ They add, "If one abandons the race one will not receive the prize."⁴⁵ While Schreiner and Caneday are Calvinists—like Hoskinson they believe that everlasting life is "final salvation." They all believe that no one has "final salvation" yet. No one can lose what he does not have. Hence, they believe that the eternal destiny of believers is in doubt until the day they die.

When discussing the Arminian view of assurance, he says, "In spite of its view on [the necessity of] perseverance [to retain one's salvation], however, this school of thought does not deny the possibility of any assurance for the believer."⁴⁶ The reason Hoskinson does not disparage the Arminian view of assurance is because it is essentially the same as his view. The composite view is essentially the same as the present only view.

⁴³ Ibid., 217-18, note 4. The citation is from Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 276, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race*, 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 52.

Hoskinson's book is opposed to the idea that one can be sure that he is eternally secure prior to death. As we will see in the next section (practical ramifications), if people were sure they were eternally secure now and forever, then in his view the warning passages in Scripture would not do their work. Believers would fail to persevere in faith and good works and would miss out on what Hoskinson calls *final salvation*. They would end up in the lake of fire because they were misled by Free Grace people.⁴⁷

VI. PRACTICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF HOSKINSON'S VIEW

The expression *assurance of salvation* means many things for Hoskinson and those who share his composite view. It can refer to assurance of *present salvation*. That is, I am confident that I have everlasting life right now, but I know I might fail to persevere and if so, I would never get *final salvation*. Or, it can refer to assurance of *final salvation*. That is, I can have some level of confidence that I will finally be saved in the future. Often, however, he uses the expression in a general way that seems to include both assurance of present and final salvation. Most references to assurance of salvation in AOS do not mention whether the salvation in view is present or final.

But since assurance of salvation is not all or nothing for Hoskinson, one's assurance of *final salvation* can be wide ranging from weak to moderate to strong to *full assurance*.

Assurance of final salvation requires both the objective promises of God and subjective factors such as feelings and perseverance in faith and good works. Even *full assurance* is not certainty. After discussing the objective side of assurance—in which he speaks of God's character, His promises (“specifically those that emphasize the divine initiative in the salvific process”),⁴⁸ and “the work of God in Christ (e.g., election, justification, propitiation),” Hoskinson writes,

⁴⁷ See note 40.

⁴⁸ Amazingly, Hoskinson does not mention *the promise of everlasting life to whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ* (e.g., John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Rev 22:17) in his summary of the objective means of assurance.

On the subjective side, theologians must carefully teach that a faith that saves is a faith that endures, all the while maintaining *sola fide* [by faith alone]. One whose faith truly rests on Christ will finally persevere in faith and obedience. Maintaining a biblical emphasis on *this secondary yet necessary means of assurance* will help believers see biblical exhortations and warnings as God's method for sanctifying them. As they persevere and grow in character, their hope will grow as well (Ro 5:3-5). Consequently, theologians must instruct believers to expect such growth in their confidence, rather than reducing assurance of salvation to a point-in-time decision that may not necessarily resolve the issue.⁴⁹

He concludes by looking back at the objective means of assurance, which he considers primary (though not enough):

In the end, the character, promises, and work of God in Christ are the primary basis for the believer's assurance of final salvation. Looking to Christ in faith gives believers the full assurance of their future hope and impels them to pursue Him in holiness.⁵⁰

Practically speaking, Hoskinson's view means that a Christian cannot know where he will spend eternity until he dies. He may have varying degrees of confidence or hope that he will gain *final salvation*. But since only those who persevere in faith and good works will gain this *final salvation*, no one can be sure.

Passages dealing with eternal rewards are understood by Hoskinson to refer to *final salvation*.⁵¹ Hence in his view there are no eternal rewards. *Final salvation* is itself a reward (or prize) for our perseverance in faith and good works.⁵²

There is little difference between Hoskinson's view and the Arminian view (the present only view). Admittedly, unlike Arminians, Hoskinson does not say that a believer can lose his salvation. But when he says, "biblical exhortations and warnings" are the "secondary

⁴⁹ Hoskinson, *Assurance*, 213, emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 39 (Phil 2:12), 157-59 (Col 1:21-23), 188-89 (Heb 3:6), 189-90 (Heb 10:23), 193-95 (Heb 3:14).

⁵² Ibid., 217-18, note 4.

yet necessary means of assurance,” he shows that the difference is one of semantics.

Hoskinson never explains how his view impacts evangelism. Presumably he tells people that all who *truly believe* in Jesus as their Savior will be saved now and will one day gain final salvation if they prove they truly believe by persevering in faith and good works. That seems to be a reasonable conclusion from his closing words in the penultimate paragraph in the conclusion, cited above: “theologians must instruct believers to expect such growth in their confidence, rather than reducing assurance of salvation to a point-in-time decision that may not necessarily resolve the issue.”⁵³

When summarizing the three views, he gives a strong indication of what he would say when he evangelized someone. Hoskinson explains his view of saving faith in this way by quoting favorably from Bruce Demarest, “Saving faith includes ‘knowledge of Christ’s person and saving work,’ ‘emotional assent of the heart to the realities they signify,’ and ‘wholehearted trust and commitment to Christ, evidenced by obedience and good works.’”⁵⁴ He adds, this time favorably citing Wayne Grudem, “Only those who persevere until the end are truly born again.”⁵⁵ Concerning apostasy, quoting MacArthur, he says that “Those who turn away completely...demonstrate that they never had true faith.”⁵⁶ Finally, concerning the means of assurance, he cites Schreiner and Caneday, “Our assurance in faith depends on a three-legged stool: (1) God’s promises (2) the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and (3) the [inner] witness of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁷ Surely all of those points would come out when Hoskinson evangelized someone, for he is seeking to lead people to what he calls *true saving faith*.

⁵³ Ibid., 213.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 198. From Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 259-60.

⁵⁵ Ibid. From Wayne Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 182.

⁵⁶ Ibid. From John F. MacArthur, “Perseverance of the Saints,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* (Spring 1993): 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 199. From Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race*, 276.

VII. CONCLUSION

While I am glad to have another book on assurance, I am disappointed that it is not presenting an accurate view of the NT teaching on assurance. It is good, of course, that he cites leading Free Grace people such as Zane Hodges, Jody Dillow, R. T. Kendall, Michael Eaton, Charles Stanley, Charles Ryrie, and me. However, I wish he had given more detailed quotes, especially showing our explanations for our interpretations of various passages.

AOS is easy to follow. However, it is not well organized. Hoskinson bites off entire sections of the NT in Chaps. 4-6. It would have been more reader-friendly if he had chosen ten or so key texts and covered each text in detail, one chapter per text. In that way he could have explained *why* Free Grace people take a given text in a certain way. And he could defend his understanding of those texts.

It is unfortunate that AOS lacks both a Scripture index and a subject index.

Drawing from Hoskinson's own concluding paragraphs, we can summarize AOS in two sentences: *Assurance of salvation is the flexible and ever-changing less than certain degree of confidence one has that he will gain the prize of final salvation when he dies. In order to have some degree of assurance of salvation, one must believe the revelation of God's character and work in His Word and one must steadily grow in personal character and holy conduct, ultimately persevering in faith and good works until death.*

The problem with Hoskinson's work is that he is wrong on both points. First, assurance of salvation is certainty regarding my eternal destiny. It is not some degree of confidence. Second, the basis of assurance of salvation is solely in the promises in God's Word that the one who believes in Jesus has everlasting life and will never be condemned.

I recommend this work for well-grounded believers only. Free Grace pastors and theologians probably should read it. But it is not a book for new believers or for believers who are not yet well-established in the faith.

A REVIEW OF RICHARD J. FOSTER'S *CELEBRATION OF DISCIPLINE: THE PATH TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH*, PART 2

BRAD DOSKOCIL

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the previous edition of the *JOTGES*, I began a review of Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*.¹ In that article I covered the first eight chapters of the book. It was concluded that in those chapters, which deal with various spiritual disciplines, Foster has an unbiblical emphasis on mystical experiences. He does not simply rely on the Word of God to transform the believer through the Holy Spirit.

In this article, I will review the remaining chapters in the book. Each section will deal with the chapter titles of the book; every chapter discusses a specific discipline.²

II. SERVICE

This chapter begins with a description of Jesus' twelve disciples arguing over who was the greatest among them. At Jesus' last Passover, He teaches them once again about greatness. Jesus washes their feet and tells them to follow His example (John 13:14-15). Jesus once again demonstrates that greatness is about service, self-denial, and humility. Foster here has made a good observation. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each present greatness in Jesus' kingdom in light of these qualities.

¹ Brad Daskocil, "A Review of Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Part 1, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 2019): 43-59.

² Instead of footnotes, I will put the page number of Foster's book in parentheses when referencing what he discusses.

Foster says that “the discipline of service...abolishes our need (and desire) for a ‘pecking order (p. 127).” He then quotes Matt 20:25-26 in which Jesus tells His disciples:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,
and those who are great exercise authority over them.
Yet, it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to
become great among you, let him be your servant (p. 127).

Foster observes that Jesus completely rejected the idea of how the world defines greatness (p. 127).

It is commendable that Foster here derives his points from the Bible instead of devotional masters or mystics of past ages. By treating service as a discipline, he once again takes a learn-by-doing approach. He hopes that by practicing service, adherents will become servants. Unfortunately, he does not mention eternal rewards for service. Jesus frequently taught eternal rewards and greatness in His kingdom as the benefit of serving Him in a self-sacrificial manner with humility.³

A. Self-Righteous Service

Foster then distinguishes true service from “self-righteous” service: the latter comes through human effort, while the former arises from “whispered promptings, divine urgings” (p. 128). Once again, we are introduced to Foster’s mystical ways. According to Foster, service comes through being audibly told by God to do something, not from things we are told in the Bible.

While not mentioning the Pharisees by name, Foster’s description of self-righteous service is reminiscent of them. Instead, he describes in practical terms various kinds of self-righteous service. Such service is concerned with the “big deal” instead of small tasks. It requires external rewards and seeks human applause and acknowledgement. There is an expectation of *quid pro quo* which focuses on results. As a result, it picks and chooses whom to serve and thus discriminates. In addition, moods and feelings affect how one serves. This results in temporary service since it happens only when specific acts of service are being performed.

³ For example, Matt 5:3, 5, 9-12; 6:1-4, 6, 18, 20; 8:11; 10:32, 42; 16:24-28; etc.

Self-righteous service is insensitive and can be an affront to the dignity of the one being served. Often it can fracture a church community because those who are serving are seeking their own glory (p. 128-29).

B. True Service

In contrast, true service seeks opportunities no matter how big or small and welcomes all opportunities. It also is content with divine approval, instead of human applause. Results do not need to be calculated since it simply delights in serving.

There is no discrimination since true service serves all. It functions because there is a need, not because of emotions or feelings. Those who perform true service do so because it is a lifestyle. This means it is not temporary or fleeting. True service is caring and seeks to build community, not tear it down.

These are all good practical observations about service and are Biblically based. However, Foster does not cite many Biblical references.

C. Humility

Foster also discusses humility. His premise is that we become humble only by practicing the discipline of service. Once again, Foster reveals that spiritual disciplines regularly practiced are the only means to grow spiritually. This is at odds with Scriptures like Rom 12:2-3 in which Paul admonishes Christians to renew their minds in order to be transformed and develop sound judgment. Foster also does not consider a verse like 2 Pet 3:18 which commands us to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

D. Counting the Cost

Next, Foster addresses those who might be hesitant to practice service. He makes a Biblical observation when he says, "it is wise to count the cost before plunging headlong into any discipline" (p. 132). Jesus told His followers to count the cost of discipleship.

The reason for Foster's comment about counting the cost is that there is a difference between choosing to serve and being a servant. He observes that when we choose to serve, we remain in control. We

decide whom we will serve and when we will serve. If we remain in control, we are likely to worry about people stepping on us or taking advantage of us (p. 132). These are good observations. People can certainly hurl abuse when we serve them.

However, if we choose to be a servant, we are no longer in charge. We are now slaves. This frees us not to worry about being abused. We can serve others by exhibiting God's grace. Jesus Himself was abused by those whom He served. So was Paul. Paul endured many hardships and insults while serving the Lord (e.g. 2 Cor 11:23-28).

E. Miscellaneous Observations

Foster sees being a servant as different from performing service. Being a servant is "a way of living" or lifestyle (p. 134). To cultivate this lifestyle, Foster describes several different types of service Christians should practice.

There is *the service of hiddenness*, which is performing service in a concealed manner. The servant becomes anonymous. There is also *the service of small things*. This is being helpful in small matters, such as fetching a drink for someone thirsty.

Another way to serve is to guard the reputation of others. This often involves holding one's tongue. It is not engaging in slander or gossip about someone.

Foster lists a number of ways to serve, which most do not consider. There is *the service of being served*. We must allow others to serve us. Common courtesy is another form of service, as is *being gentle*. Foster also includes the Biblical idea of *hospitality*. Christians should be willing to welcome others into their homes.

In addition, there is *the service of listening to others*. Christians should truly listen to others and hear what they say. Moreover, there is *the service of bearing the burdens of others*. This can be grieving with a friend. Finally, there is *the service of sharing the word of life with another*. Christians should share with others any word received from God. According to Foster, this is any word God has audibly spoken. He once again turns to mystical ideas. In Foster's view, this is not merely sharing thoughts about a passage of Scripture (pp. 134-40).

He makes some good observations about service and being a servant. His approach is learn-by-doing. While this is an effective way to train, the manner Foster suggests lacks spiritual dynamic. He does

not mention belief in God's Word as necessary for spiritual growth or transformation. He does not discuss the power of God's Word, the Bible, to transform a person's thinking. If a person does not see the need to be a servant from what the Bible teaches, then practicing the discipline of service will not have the desired impact. The Bible teaches the believer that he is a slave of Jesus Christ. That forms the basis of why we should serve.

At this point in the book, Foster turns to corporate disciplines.

III. CONFESSION

Foster begins this chapter by saying that God wants to give and forgive. It is who He is. After describing what Jesus did in securing redemption from sin, he says that eternal salvation is both an event and a process. He then links confession to this process. It is the discipline necessary to grow spiritually.

While Foster recognizes that confession is a private matter between an individual and God, he says there is a corporate aspect as well (p. 145). He then states the need to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another; he cites Jas 5:16 in support. As will be seen, Foster believes confession should be between people. However, he does not mention the context of Jas 5:16 or any limitations the context might suggest regarding the kind of confession he is going to promote.

There is also the recognition that confessing sins to other people is difficult (p. 145). Foster lists several reasons for this, including how we view the church community. But the biggest hesitancy in confessing to one another is found in the notion that "we cannot bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others" (p. 145). In Foster's opinion, this is because we think other people in the church are much holier than we are.

Foster then observes that if we view our church as a body of sinners, we realize we are not alone. This should free us to confess to one another. In mutual confession, the power of healing is released, and we are transformed (p. 146).

To bolster his argument, Foster says that "followers of Jesus Christ have been given the authority to receive confession of sin and to forgive it in his name," citing John 20:23 as support (p. 146). However,

John 20:23 talks about forgiving others. It does not necessarily suggest confession of sins between believers. People frequently sin against others. Jesus' remedy is forgiveness (e.g. Matt 18:22).

To support the idea of confessing sins to other believers, Foster cites Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He maintains that when the believer goes to a brother to confess his sins, he is going to God (p. 146). This is followed by a discussion about the history and good things that spring from this form of confession.

Foster then decries personal confession to God, saying that it often leads to frustration. He states that such a practice often also leads to a fear that we have not made confession to God but to ourselves. As a result, personal confession of sin to God simply does not work as we doubt we have found forgiveness (p. 146).

However, this negative view of personal confession to God is rooted in unbelief. Foster is describing a person who doubts God's ability to forgive even though Scripture tells us God forgives when we confess our sin to Him (1 John 1:9). It also calls into question Jesus' work on the cross. Either Jesus paid for every sin of mankind for all of time, or He did not. The good news is that Jesus paid the penalty for the sin of all, and so God is free to forgive when we confess our sin to Him. If we believe Him, then we will have assurance that we are forgiven.

For Foster, belief is not enough. He requires an experience so that he can feel forgiven. Thus, when a person feels the despair associated with a lack of forgiveness after private confession, Foster's answer is confession to another brother or sister.

He now describes the benefits of confession to others, which he calls the "confessional" or "sacrament of penance." One advantage is that we cannot blame others for our sin (p. 148), which we are prone to do. While he does not say it, the implication is that in private confession we might excuse ourselves by blaming others. Such cannot happen when confessing to a brother. It seems to this reviewer that this is not necessarily the case.

Another advantage of the confessional is that there is a word of forgiveness given in the absolution (p. 148). The person confessing is told he or she is forgiven. For Foster, this experience is freeing. It is as if God proclaims this forgiveness, and the confessing believer has assurance that he has received it.

The third advantage of the confessional is penance (p. 148). Foster views penance as a way to pause and consider the seriousness of the crimes committed against God. He sees penance as a means of admonishing one to live a more holy life.

Foster then describes a personal account about how he felt when he confessed sin to a fellow believer. In this discussion, he emphasizes his experience. Foster gains assurance from experiences, not from believing God's word.

In concluding this chapter, Foster gives practical advice on giving and receiving confession. He encourages believers to find a safe person with whom to make their confession. Not everyone can keep confidences.

Sadly, Foster only considers confession to another person as real. Once again he puts emphasis on experience instead of belief.

IV. WORSHIP

According to Foster, when one worships, he experiences reality. It is "to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community" (p. 158). He adds that "worship is the human response to the divine initiative." Once again, we notice Foster's emphasis on human experience.

He is quite clear that the object of worship is God. Jesus has revealed God to us (p. 159). He adds that we worship the Lord not only because of who He is, but also because of what He has done (p. 160). This reviewer is in complete agreement on this point.

Foster encourages us to prioritize worship. It should be a major priority in our lives and lived out daily (p. 160). Every day we should be quick to praise God, thank Him, and show adoration for Him (p. 161). These are good observations and are things done individually. Foster rightly understands that private worship has a bearing on corporate worship, which is going to be his main emphasis.

According to Foster, we must prepare to worship. This involves coming to corporate worship with a "holy expectation" (p. 161). He explains that those who worship need to expect God to show up in miraculous ways and that His presence will be manifest, much like the Shekinah glory of the OT. In building up this expectancy, Foster

encourages the use of imagination. We are to conjure up mental images of God's presence in our midst (p. 163).

Once again we see that Foster emphasizes experience. Here it is the experience of God's presence. He does not mention that God is omnipresent or that He has promised to be with the believer forever (Matt 28:20). Nor does he mention that every church age believer is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, and therefore God is with every believer at all times.

Foster says that God's presence is manifested when the church is gathered for worship. The individual parts become one. It is in this gathering where the participants experience *koinōnia*, which Foster describes as "deep inward fellowship in the power of the Spirit" (p. 164). This Greek word *koinōnia* can describe any kind of sharing. Many things can be shared when saints gather.

A gathering for corporate worship necessitates a leader. Foster is quick to point out that "genuine worship has only one Leader, Jesus Christ" (p. 165). By this he means that Jesus is alive and present among His people. His voice and presence are known. Foster once again slips into mysticism here when he proclaims that we not only read about Christ in the Scriptures, we can know him by revelation (p. 165).

What are Foster's "holy expectations" of these worship gatherings? He tells us. We should expect to see miracles and healings. These should be the rule, not the exception. He tells us we should be experiencing the Book of Acts. In addition, any or all the gifts of the Spirit can be freely exercised and freely received. He has expectation that the sign gifts will be readily seen and experienced (p. 165).

Foster does not mention or discuss whether the sign gifts have ceased. He does not discuss or make mention of the fact that Paul could not heal people later in his life (Phil 2:25-27; 2 Tim 4:20). In addition, he does not address Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13 concerning the cessation of gifts. These would negate Foster's views of ideal worship.

A. Avenues of Worship

Next, there is a discussion on the "avenues into worship" (p. 166). This section begins by explaining why worship is a spiritual discipline. Through this discipline, God can transform us.

To accomplish this transformation, the first avenue into worship is “to still all humanly initiated activity” (p. 166). By this he means we are to live in perpetual silence and listening so that God is the source of our words and actions. In other words, we should be practicing silence and listening for God to audibly speak to us and tell us what to do each moment of the day.

Praise is another avenue into worship. Foster cites the Psalms as an example of praise. Here he introduces the idea that such praise should involve our whole being. Our emotions need to be brought into the act of worship. This dovetails with singing and music. It is clear that music is designed to stir the emotions. Singing is meant to move us to praise God.

Foster praises the charismatic movement for its emphasis on emotions as part of worship. He remarks that worship is one reason for the gift of tongues (p. 169). Tongues “helps us move beyond mere rational worship into a more inward communion with the Father.” For Foster, tongues are not known languages. Our minds may not even know what is being said. But our inward spirit does understand (p. 169). Strangely, Foster does not mention or discuss Paul’s admonition that church meetings are to be orderly, nor does he mention the need for an interpreter when tongues are exercised.⁴

Foster believes worship is physical and involves our whole being. He briefly mentions that the words used in the Bible for worship mean to prostrate oneself. This is a welcome comment since to be prostrate before another was a display of adoration and humility, necessary ingredients of worship.

B. Steps for Worship

Foster provides steps for worship. These are his practical suggestions for doing worship: “worship is something we do” (p. 170). Once again, Foster’s approach is learn-by-doing. He wants his adherents to have an experience.

He lists and discusses seven steps to worship. First is to learn to practice the presence of God daily. While this sounds mystical, Foster describes this as a private time of worship by praying, praising, and

⁴ Foster does not mention or discuss the prophecy of tongues from Isa 28:7-11 and how it was to be a sign to unbelieving Jews; cf. 1 Cor 14:22.

thanking God. Second, the believer should have many different experiences of worship. Worship God alone and in groups. Third, find ways to prepare for corporate worship when your local body gathers. Fourth, be willing to go to the church meeting to worship. Fifth, cultivate an attitude of being wholly dependent upon God. Sixth, absorb distractions with gratitude. Seventh, learn to offer a sacrifice of worship (pp. 170-72). We should worship even when we do not feel like it.

C. Conclusion

Foster concludes the chapter by mentioning the outcome of worship. He clearly states that worship should result in obedience to God. This is a worthy observation. However, obedience seems also to be an integral part of worship itself.

The first mention of the word *worship* in the Bible occurs in Gen 22:5. This is the famous account of Abraham taking Isaac up to the mountain to offer him as a sacrifice. The entire account is a display of complete obedience on the part of Abraham. This suggests a close link between worship and obedience. God confirms this by acknowledging that Abraham revered Him (Gen 22:12).

Foster makes a good observation at the end of this chapter. He says, “Holy obedience saves worship from becoming an opiate, an escape from the pressing needs of modern life” (p. 173). To state that worship should not be an opiate suggests that some order in corporate worship is necessary. This seems contrary to the “anything goes” attitude suggested in the chapter.

V. GUIDANCE

In this chapter, Foster discusses the concept of divine guidance, or how a Christian should be directed in his or her daily life. Foster’s desire is that every person would enjoy a daily “God with us” experience of being led by God (p. 175). He also explains how this happens.

Foster views individual knowledge and guidance by the Holy Spirit as insufficient (p. 175). He believes individual guidance must yield to corporate guidance. By corporate guidance, Foster means guidance from a group or community in a functional sense. He is not

referring necessarily to organizational leadership. Then he observes that teaching about such corporate guidance has been deficient in the church.

His premise is that God leads through His people, the body of Christ (p. 176). That is the reason why Foster lists guidance as a corporate discipline. He acknowledges that God does guide a person individually, but He also guides groups of people and can instruct a person through a group experience. Once again, Foster emphasizes an experiential approach.

To find support for his premise, Foster cites several Biblical examples in which people were led in groups, as groups, and by groups. These examples culminate with the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. The group came together in unity and consensus and provided much needed guidance. He calls this “Spirit-directed unity” and observes that there were no compromises (p. 179).

Having made his case for the need for group guidance, Foster introduces some models of group guidance to follow. He recites examples of people who wrestled with guidance, including an account in the life of St. Francis of Assisi who sought guidance from several friends. He then describes another model, which some call “meetings for clearness.” These are meetings in which a person seeking guidance calls people together for group guidance. The idea is that the person is seeking direction from a group of people who are more spiritually mature. The practice of the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. is held out as an example to follow. These are impromptu meetings in which others in the church meet to help a person who lays out a vision or idea. Although Foster cites other groups who meet for guidance, all these examples are anecdotal.

Foster’s conclusion from these examples is that “Spirit-given unity goes beyond mere agreement” (p. 182). He believes that when this agreement occurs, the voice of God is heard. To drive home his point, he cites more anecdotal examples. These groups “do not seek compromise, but God-given consensus” (p. 184).

What is missing from these examples is Biblical support. Do Foster’s views line up with what God wants as revealed in Scripture? Are the groups he describes genuine believers in Christ who have everlasting life? Are the groups he describes merely examples of group dynamics as taught on college campuses?

A. Mysticism and Guidance

Foster now introduces the reader to the mediaeval idea of “the spiritual director.” He observes that, “not even the greatest saints attempted the depths of the inward journey without the help of a spiritual director” (p. 185). He is quick to point out that such a director is a brother or sister. It does not have to be a church leader. The relationship is that of an advisor and friend.

It is here that Foster borders once again on mysticism. While he does not directly say it, his other writings suggest that a spiritual director is to help a person learn the mystical techniques contained in the spiritual disciplines. He hints at this when he says, “Spiritual directors must be on the inward journey themselves” (p. 186).

What is also troubling is that most of Foster’s examples are of Catholic mystics from the past. This raises questions of its own. Were these mystics of the past regenerate? Did they have everlasting life by belief alone in Jesus for it? If not, then why adopt spiritual practices from unregenerate people? If these ancient mystics were true to their Catholic religion, then they adhered to a belief plus works form of eternal salvation.

B. Limitations

Foster concludes the chapter by mentioning the limits of corporate guidance. He observes that man is sinful, so there can be the dangers of manipulation and control by unscrupulous leaders.

To avert this problem, he says that, “Scripture must pervade and penetrate all our thinking and acting.” He points out that the Spirit will never lead in opposition to “the Word He inspired” (p. 188). In light of much of this book, this is a remarkable statement for Foster. It is one with which this reviewer agrees. However, it rings hollow since his view of inspiration is not verbal plenary inspiration. We know this from his other writings (e.g., *Renovare Study Bible*).

He takes back some of this seemingly high view of Scripture when he says that groups who provide spiritual guidance are living under the spiritual disciplines (p. 189). Foster believes there is no spiritual growth apart from practicing the spiritual disciplines. Such a viewpoint negates the value of Scripture. It also places experience as prominent instead of transformation by the renewing of the mind.

This transformation happens when we learn, believe, and obey God's infallible word.

VI. CELEBRATION

Celebration is the concluding discipline. Foster tells us that it is "the heart of the way of Christ" (p. 190). At His birth, Jesus brought great joy (Luke 2:10). Jesus wanted His disciples to have His joy and wanted their joy to be full (John 15:11). Joy is behind the discipline of celebration.

Foster cites the example of Israel who was told to celebrate the Year of Jubilee. From this he says that we are called to live in a perpetual "Jubilee of the Spirit" (p. 190). God wants His people to be happy.

Israel was to celebrate the gracious provision of God when they celebrated Jubilee. It was intended to release them from anxiety. Yet Israel failed to celebrate Jubilee because of unbelief.

Foster tells us that if we realize that God cares for us, we can cast all our cares upon Him. We can then celebrate. However, Foster concludes that a carefree attitude is missing in modern society. Mankind today is so wound up in anxiety that there is no room for joyous celebration (p. 191).

Next, he says that celebration brings joy, and joy makes us strong (p. 191). He cites Neh 8:10 as support (i.e., "the joy of the Lord is our strength"). He makes his point by citing examples of toil. People do not continue in any endeavor without strength derived from joy. For example, a mother will endure the pains of childbirth because the joy of motherhood awaits her.

How do we obtain this joy? Foster answers, "in the spiritual life only one thing will produce joy, and that is obedience" (p. 192). He cites the old hymn "Trust and Obey." There is no way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. His point is that obedience to Jesus will bring blessing, and he cites Luke 11:27-28 as support. For once, Foster comes close to mentioning the importance of belief.

Foster observes that without obedience to Jesus, joy is hollow and artificial. In other words, it lacks the strength that Jesus provides. For example, he says that joy is not found in singing only one kind of music or in getting with the right kind of group or even in exercising

the charismatic gifts. Obedience is necessary if one is to have joy (p. 193).

Foster admonishes that to overcome the shallowness of seeking joy without obedience, “obedience must become part of the ordinary fabric of our daily lives” (p. 192). He remarks:

Joy is the end result of the Spiritual Disciplines functioning in our lives. God brings about the transformation of our lives through the Disciplines, and we will not know genuine joy until there is a transforming work within us (p. 193).

For Foster, one cannot mature spiritually apart from these spiritual disciplines. This is his learn-by-doing approach. Transformation comes only from the disciplines, not from our minds being transformed by God’s word. Belief is not mentioned. Only obedience is. Without belief in God and His word, how can one consistently obey? Once again, Foster is proclaiming that we walk by sight and not by belief. This contradicts 2 Cor 5:7.

He introduces the idea of carefree celebration. This is celebration without worry and anxiety. He begins by quoting Phil 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” He follows this by quoting Phil 4:6-7 which explains how to rejoice. The negative side is not to be anxious. The positive instruction is in everything to pray and express thanksgiving. Jesus taught these very principles in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:25-34).

Foster tells us that in order not to be anxious, we must trust God (p. 195). We are to rely on Him for what we need. This is good but is as close as Foster gets to mentioning belief as an important ingredient in growing spiritually. It is difficult to rely on someone if you do not believe he is dependable. Even more, without believing what God says, we are not in agreement with Him.

Through prayer and thanksgiving, we are to set our minds on higher virtues as expressed in Phil 4:8 (p. 195). The premise is that if we fill our lives with good things and are thankful for them, we will be happy. Foster concludes that this requires a decision on our part. It is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a discipline. Once again, belief is left out of the equation. Instead, it is an act of the will and something we are to do.

Having challenged us to have the right attitude about celebration, Foster describes the benefits of celebration. He lists several. First and foremost is that it saves us from taking ourselves too seriously (p. 196). This leads to another benefit. Celebration helps us relax and enjoy good things.

Celebration also provides perspective. We are freed from an inflated view of ourselves and our own importance. Finally, celebration leads to more celebration. Joy leads to more joy, and laughter leads to more laughter (pp. 196-97). These are good practical observations.

After discussing the significance of celebration, Foster tells us how to practice it. Since this is a corporate discipline, it is to be practiced with others.

There are several ways to practice celebration. There is singing, dancing, and shouting. Foster cites Psalm 150 and accounts about King David as examples. He mentions that singing, dancing, and noise-making are not required forms of celebration, but rather they are only examples. Laughing is another way to practice celebration. It is also therapeutic. We should poke fun at ourselves.

Another way to celebrate is to use fantasy and imagination. Foster wants us to dream dreams and see visions. Once again, Foster introduces mysticism. He encourages us to make family events into times of celebration and thanksgiving. Finally, we should take advantage of festivals of our culture and really celebrate. He lists Christmas, Easter, and similar holidays as examples (pp. 197-200).

Most of these are good practical suggestions, which encourage celebration and joy. But if practiced without underlying belief in God and His word, of what spiritual benefit will they be?

VII. CONCLUSION

Foster thinks that practicing spiritual disciplines will lead to spiritual growth and maturity. He derives much of his information about these disciplines from Catholic mystics of past ages. While practicing disciplines will generally make a person more disciplined, that does not mean it will result in spiritual growth. Such growth only comes from walking or living by belief in God and His infallible word. In 2 Cor 5:7, the Apostle Paul says that we are to walk by faith, not by

sight. Foster turns this verse upside down by telling us to walk by sight.

While the original edition of *Celebration of Discipline* ends with the chapter on the discipline of celebration, in the fourth edition, Foster adds some additional information. There is a chapter entitled “The Great Conversation: An Annotated Bibliography.” It lists references to books written by the “devotional masters,” as Foster calls them. It is quite a listing and includes many Catholic mystics of past ages as well as modern day mystics. He then provides a “starter kit” of specific references he encourages readers to investigate. Many of these writers are mystics as well. What is sad about this chapter is that Foster is encouraging his readers to read many books other than the Bible. In other words, in order to grow spiritually Foster emphasizes the writings of mystics, instead of the Bible.

This is followed by a brief chapter called, “In Celebration of Discipline.” It lists endorsements by well-known people in Christendom. It is not surprising that many, if not all, of those listed are proponents of Spiritual Formation and mysticism.

These two chapters should give any reader pause about the things Foster promotes in *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*.

While this book contains many helpful practical suggestions and observations, it, nevertheless, is both seductive and dangerous and denies the importance of belief. I cannot recommend this book.

JOHN 4:10: A PROMISE TO THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

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Sequim, WA

I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus' testimony to Nicodemus reveals God's *chesed* or loyal covenantal love in giving His Son for the salvation of the world, both Jew and Gentile.¹ As a teacher of Israel and a Pharisee, Nicodemus might well have been taken aback with Jesus' promise: "For in this manner, God loved (*chesed*) the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, emphasis added).² Despite his high standing within Israel, Nicodemus as an individual, we learned, was a mere *whoever* in need of eternal life.

While traveling through Samaria and to the disciples' dismay, Jesus stretches the meaning of *whoever* by befriending a lowly Samaritan woman, a nameless *whoever*, and offering her eternal life: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a

¹ Frank Tyler, "John 3:16: The Manner of God's Love," *TTVF Fellowship Journal*, 2018. *Chesed* and *hesed* are common transliterations of the Hebrew word for loyal covenantal love, a love rooted in the covenantal or promissory nature of God's relationship with man. This word is frequently translated "mercy" or "lovingkindness."

² Tyler, "John 3:16," 15-18. In John 3:16, the Greek word translated *world* is *kosmos*, meaning "the inhabitants of the earth, men, mankind." The Greek word translated *whoever* is *pas*, meaning "all or every," and is followed by the participle with the article, *ho pisteuōn*, literally "the one believing." Hence, every one believing or *whoever believes* (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Spiros Zodhiates, [Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992], 881 and 1126).

drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Jesus fulfills His promise of living water by offering her, in verses 13 and 14, His promise of everlasting life: "*Whoever* drinks of this water will thirst again, but *whoever* drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14, emphasis added).³

Shockingly, Jesus promises living water and then freely offers eternal life to a *whoever* badly mired in sin, without calling her to repent. The events of Jesus' witness beg the question, "Why did our Lord need *to go through Samaria* (John 4:4) to witness to a Samaritan woman, let alone spend an additional two days witnessing to the men of Sychar?"

II. SETTING THE STAGE: SAVING THE NATION OF ISRAEL

Although John does not report on Jesus' preaching of repentance in the Fourth Gospel (because his purpose was evangelistic, John 20:31), the Synoptic writers do report His call for the nation of Israel to repent and to believe. As well, the Synoptics report that early in Jesus' ministry, God called the nation and its people to repent in order to receive God's promised Messiah and His kingdom.

When the Judean authorities ask, "What do you say about yourself?" (John 1:22b), John the Baptist quotes from Isa 40:3.

³ The inclusive nature of the Greek expression, *pas* followed by the article *ho* and the participle, along with the *hos d' an piē* (John 4:14) lies at the heart of Jesus' promise of eternal life to individuals. *Whoever*, or more literally "every one," reveals the freeness and inclusivity of Jesus' promise:

3:15 *pas ho pisteuōn en autō* ("every one believing in Him")

3:16 *pas ho pisteuōn eis auton* ("every one believing in Him")

4:13 *pas ho pinōn ek tou hudatos toutou* ("every one drinking from this water")

4:14 *hos d' an piē ek tou hudatos* ("who but ever drinks from the water")

6:40 *pas ho theōrōn ton huion kai pisteuōn eis auton* ("every one seeing the Son and believing in Him")

11:26 *pas ho zōn kai pistuōn eis eme* ("every one living and believing in Me")

12:46 *pas ho pisteuōn eis eme* ("every one believing in Me").

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make straight in the desert
A highway for our God.”

Isaiah goes on to write (Isa 40:4-5):

Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough places smooth;
The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

How did John “prepare the way of the LORD”? National repentance. “Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” National repentance. “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low.” National repentance. And, “the crooked places made straight and the rough places smooth.” National repentance. Indeed, “the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord, by calling the nation of Israel and her people to national repentance: “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). The Apostle Matthew records John’s very words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matt 3:2).

The message entrusted to John the Baptist was extremely important. So much so, that following the Baptist’s imprisonment, Jesus Himself begins preaching repentance: “*From that time Jesus began to preach* and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 4:17, emphasis added). Mark records:

Now after John was put in prison Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).⁴

⁴The word *gospel* in Mark 1:15 does not refer to the gospel as recorded in 1 Cor 15:3-11. Instead, as v 14 shows, it refers to the “the gospel [or good news] of the kingdom of God.” In order for the kingdom to come, the nation had to repent and believe in the good news of the kingdom, which would mean believing that Jesus is the Messiah, King, and Savior of that kingdom.

John Niemelä makes a strong case that, based upon the following sequence of events, Jesus did not begin preaching repentance to the nation until after the Baptist's imprisonment (Matt 4:17). Consider Niemelä's chronology chart.⁵

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
John baptizes Jesus (late fall, AD 29)	3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21 <i>f</i>	
The temptation	4:1-11	1:12 <i>f</i>	4:1-13	
John the Baptist testifies about Jesus: Part 1				1:15-34
Disciples testify about Jesus and go to Galilee				1:35-51
Turning water to wine				2:1-11
Disciples, Jesus and family go to Capernaum				2:12
The first Passover of His ministry (April 7, 30)				2:13-3:21
John the Baptist testifies about Jesus: Part 2				3:22-36
Ministry while crossing Samaria (Late May 30)				4:1-42
To Galilee after John's arrest (Late May 30)	4:12	1:14a	4:14a	4:43-45

During the time of Jesus' ministry in Sychar, John the Baptist continues to call the nation of Israel to a baptism of repentance. Shortly thereafter, the Lord Himself picks up the call to the nation to repent and believe. This call only ends after the leadership of Israel rejects Jesus' Messiahship, because they thought He was demon possessed (Matt 12:24-45). From that moment on, our Lord speaks to the nation in parables.

If the gift of eternal life defines the salvation of the individual, then the reception of Israel's Messiah and His kingdom defines the

⁵ John H. Niemelä, "Don't Get Ahead of Jesus: When Did He Start Preaching Repentance?" presented April 26, 2017, at the Grace Evangelical Society Conference, Fort Worth, TX.

salvation of the nation. Up until Jesus' rejection as Messiah, they remain related, yet distinct, concurrent ministry concerns.

III. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL SALVATION

As already noted, the witness to the Samaritan woman occurs before John the Baptist's imprisonment, during a time when the Baptist continues to preach repentance as a forerunner to Israel's Messiah. How then does Jesus the Messiah not call the Samaritan woman to repent prior to offering her living water? He knows of her sin, for He says to her, "For you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly" (John 4:18).

In several places, the NT documents a very poignant distinction between God's chosen people and the Samaritans. As He sends the twelve apostles out to preach the gospel, Jesus instructs them: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans" (Matt 10:5b). When a Samaritan town refuses to receive Jesus, the disciples James and John ask Jesus, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54).

In correcting *a certain lawyer* (Luke 10:25) who desires to *justify himself* (Luke 10:29), our Lord tells one of the most famous parables of all time. If a Samaritan receives a Judean as his neighbor and ministers to his urgent needs, then how do a priest and Levite fail to minister to this same person, a fellow Jerusalemite who urgently needs help after being robbed and left for dead (Luke 10:30-37)?

After healing ten lepers and commanding them to show themselves to the priests, only the Samaritan returns to give thanks to Jesus. The Lord asks, "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:18).

During the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, Jews considered Samaritans as foreigners. When Jesus asks for a drink of water, the Samaritan woman responds, "How is it that You, being a Jew [Judean]⁶, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" John explains,

⁶ In John's account, the Greek word *Ioudaios* is better translated *Judean*. See J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

“For Jews [Judeans] have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9). Would Jesus require Samaritans (foreigners) to repent in order to receive Israel’s Messiah and His kingdom? No. At the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, Judeans would never acknowledge Samaria as a part of Israel, for they were considered a second-class, despicable, low-life people.

Let’s step back momentarily in time: did our Lord call Nicodemus to repent? Surely, the ignorance and unbelief of a Pharisee and teacher of Israel (John 3:10) would be an even greater offense than the Samaritan woman’s adultery. Misleading the nation of Israel regarding the Messiah would make Nicodemus a false shepherd of the worst sort (Ezek 34:1-10), but Jesus does not call him to repent. Instead, He promises eternal life to him as a simple *whoever* (John 3:16).

Though you and I are not told so, the implication remains that as an anomaly in the midst of his fellow Pharisees, Nicodemus may have repented (turned away from the sins of the majority of his fellow Pharisees) and come to the light, that he and his students might hear and understand Jesus’ words privately. Nonetheless, Jesus never tells Nicodemus to repent in order to receive eternal life. Prior to John’s imprisonment, Jesus must hold a distinction between the requirements for the national salvation of Israel and the salvation of individuals like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, independent of the differences between Judeans and Samaritans.

Looking forward in time, we see that the events of John 5 take place in the wake of the Baptist’s imprisonment, after which Jesus begins preaching repentance to the nation of Israel and her people (Matt 3:2; 4:17).⁷ Our Lord heals a man who had suffered for thirty-eight years as a paralytic. In response, the Judean authorities “persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him” (John 5:16). When Jesus offers a simple explanation, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working,” the Judean authorities “sought all the more to kill Him” (John 5:17-18). Clearly, the individuals confronting Jesus exemplify the rabble Jesus described previously to Nicodemus:

Publishing Co., 2010), 95-96 for a discussion.

⁷ Niemelä, “Don’t Get Ahead of Jesus: When Did He Start Preaching Repentance?”

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (John 3:19-21).

If Jesus views Nicodemus as an exception of one who came to the light (v 21), then the Judean authorities now seeking His life reveal the normative leadership of the nation of Israel who practice evil and refuse to come to the light (vv 19-20). Does Jesus call them to repent of their evil deeds? No. Instead, without one exhortation to repent, Jesus promises them “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24).

If following the Baptist’s imprisonment, God, through His Son Jesus, actively calls the nation to repent in order to hear their Messiah, the Prophet like Moses, then surely these Judean authorities represent the nation and need to repent in order for the nation of Israel to receive her Messiah and His kingdom.⁸ Ironically, though Jesus has already begun preaching repentance to the nation of Israel (following John the Baptist’s imprisonment), He draws a distinction between Israel’s national salvation and the salvation of a group of individuals, even if those individuals themselves are leaders responsible for the salvation of the nation.

Whatever the distinction between His chosen people and the Samaritans may be, it is not an entirely adequate explanation of why Jesus does not call the Samaritan woman to repent. Likewise, whether John the Baptist or Jesus preaches repentance to the nation of Israel, the national salvation of Israel and the salvation of individuals remain related yet distinct concurrent ministry concerns. National salvation requires the nation to “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17), while individual salvation requires individuals to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in order to receive

⁸ In John 9, Jesus deals with this kind of rabble again and reminds them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains” (John 9:41). Even so, He does not call them to repent.

eternal life (John 3:16; 11:25-27; 20:31). Only after Jesus' rejection by the leadership of Israel does He no longer openly call the nation to repent but speaks to the nation in parables. In marked contrast, as the Apostle John records, Jesus never ceases reaching out with a straightforward simple message of life to individuals without one call to repentance.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF JOHN'S ACCOUNT

Within the Apostle John's account, Jesus' witness to Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the Judean authorities are not isolated instances in which our Lord fails to call His audience to repentance. If one searches John's Gospel for the words "repent" and "repentance," he cannot find a single usage of either word. While one might speculate that the Apostle John simply does not use the words "repent" or "repentance" in any of his writings, that would be a wrong conclusion.⁹ Of all the NT writers, only Luke uses the word "repent" more frequently than John.¹⁰

This dilemma becomes even more challenging when one considers the purpose statement in John's Gospel.¹¹

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the

⁹ Wayne Grudem is among those who argue that the idea of repentance is in John's Gospel, even though the word does not occur. He finds it, for example, in John 3:16. He claims it is involved in the phrase "believing in" Christ. Wayne Grudem, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 52.

¹⁰ John uses the word *repent* not at all in his Gospel account or his epistles, but twelve times in Revelation. Luke uses the word twenty-five times in Luke and Acts.

¹¹ Carson deals with this dilemma by redefining "believe" at the very beginning of the Gospel of John (John 1:12-13). He says that faith "yields allegiance to the Word, trusts him completely, acknowledges his claims and confesses him with gratitude." Even though Carson doesn't use the word "repent," it is clear that for him believing includes repentance and is much more than believing something to be true. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 125-26. The reader will have to determine if Carson and others are reading their theology into the text.

Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31).

If the Apostle John chose a limited number of specific signs out of all the signs Jesus performed, then the very process of selection (inclusion and exclusion in order to achieve a specific purpose) shows that the Apostle views these signs as sufficient to accomplish his purpose in writing—“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” If John has left out anything that is required for an individual to have life in the name of Jesus Christ, then he has misled his audience.

It might be tempting to write off the obvious conclusion that repentance is not a requirement to receive the gift of eternal life. One could argue that it is an argument from silence. However, the lack of a call to repent in John’s account does not come from a momentary silence or gap in dialogue or narrative. Instead, it involves a purposeful and systemic silence, even though both John the Baptist and Jesus concurrently call the nation to repent. The call to “repent for” the kingdom of heaven is at hand” does not occur in John’s Gospel (Matt 3:2; 4:17).¹² For this reason, the silence is utterly deafening.

In his Gospel account, the Apostle John avoids the word *repent*, because he purposefully does not record Jesus’ call for the nation to repent in order to receive the Messiah and His kingdom. Instead, John records Jesus’ call to individuals and/or groups of individuals to believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of God, for everlasting life.

Many other instances within John’s account confirm this simple truth. For example, when the Apostle John records John the Baptist’s witness (John 1:6-36), he never includes the Baptist’s calling of the nation to repent in order to receive Messiah and His kingdom. When Nathanael believes in Jesus and says, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49). His Lord does not call him to repent in order to receive the Messiah and His kingdom (John 1:48-51). Likewise, when Jesus feeds 5000 men and their families,

¹² Besides Grudem, other theologians such as John MacArthur and David Croteau have desperately tried to read repentance into John’s account. For an outstanding exposition regarding this kind of approach, see Robert N. Wilkin, “Is the Concept of Repentance Found in John’s Gospel, and If So, What Difference Does It Make?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring 2019 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society), 23-41.

the men conclude “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” and “they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king” (John 6:15a). But Jesus does not seize the opportunity to call them to repent and receive the Messianic kingdom. Instead, “He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone” (John 6:15b).

The call to repent does not occur in John’s Gospel. But the call to believe does. The Apostle records Jesus’ witness to individuals and groups of individuals as the Christ, the Son of God who gives eternal life to those who believe in Him and His promise of eternal life.

A. Jesus’ Meaning of *Whoever*

Thus far, we surmise that whether or not John the Baptist or Jesus preaches repentance to the nation and people of Israel, the promise of eternal life to individuals remains unfettered with the call to repent. Likewise, as the Gospel of John reveals, Jesus continues steadfastly reaching out to individual *whoever*s or groups of *whoever*s with the promise of eternal life well after He ceases to call the nation to repentance.

1. *Nicodemus*

The story of Nicodemus reveals a teacher of Israel willingly pursuing Jesus and His message. John 3 records Nicodemus and his students coming to Jesus, the Light of God’s revelation, in order to seek clarification and understanding of the message Jesus taught in the temple.¹³ Throughout the Gospel of John, Nicodemus remains an exception as a Pharisee because he comes to the light. Consider Nicodemus’ interaction with his fellow Pharisees as they interrogate officers previously sent to arrest Jesus:

“Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, “*Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?*” They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look,

¹³ While referring to Himself and His disciples, Jesus uses the first person plural. In addressing Nicodemus and his students, He uses the second person plural (John 3:11-12).

for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:48-52, emphasis added).

While his fellow Pharisees have already foreclosed any possibility that Jesus is the Christ, Nicodemus wants to hear and know what Jesus is doing. His ears and eyes remain open to Jesus, God’s Prophet like Moses. This same openness reflects Nicodemus’ attitude towards Jesus throughout John’s account. John 3 is no exception. Having seen the signs our Lord performed in the temple, Nicodemus wishes for himself and his students to hear Jesus quietly, away from the tumult and combative presence of his fellow Pharisees.

As mentioned in the Introduction concerning John 3:16, in the quiet hours of night,¹⁴ Jesus shared a very radical and challenging message with Nicodemus: “For in this manner God loved (*chesed*) the *world*, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (emphasis added). The thought that 1) God loves the *world*, both Gentiles and Jews, with loyal covenantal love, or *chesed*, greatly offends the leadership of Israel during Christ’s earthly ministry, especially in light of Roman oppression (John 12:19),¹⁵ and that 2) Jesus promises Nicodemus and his students everlasting life as mere *whoevers*, proves equally shocking in light of who Nicodemus is as a teacher of Israel.

Although Nicodemus and his students,¹⁶ along with Jesus’ disciples, may find His words challenging, Jesus’ radical message remains

¹⁴ While it is common to hear that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night out of fear of being seen, there is no need to take this position. Nicodemus could very well have come at night because he was a busy man. Michaels says both reasons are possibilities. See Michaels, *John*, 177-78.

¹⁵ Jonah became so offended with the possibility that God would show *chesed* toward the Gentile city of Nineveh, he initially sought to thwart God by fleeing to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3) and after God spared the city, pleaded, “please take my life from me” (Jonah 4:1-3). Ironically, Nineveh, her king, and nobles engaged in national repentance (Jonah 3:7-9) and moved God to spare the city and nation (Jonah 3:10). Rome was no less an oppressor of Israel, while Jesus, the Prophet like Moses, was certainly greater than Jonah. Yet unlike Nineveh, Israel as a nation failed to repent and receive God’s deliverance, her Messiah, and His kingdom (Matt 12:41).

¹⁶ Even though the verb used by Nicodemus is plural (“we know”), it is common for commentaries to say that Nicodemus came alone. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 212. It is better, however, to conclude that Nicodemus brought others

true. The *world* does not just include Jews. It includes Romans and, as His disciples will soon discover, the hated Samaritans. *Whoever—Roman, Samaritan or Jew—believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Nicodemus remains guilty of failing to teach accurately the Scriptures as they relate to Israel's Messiah (John 3:10),¹⁷ but as an individual, he has no need to repent, for openly and with his students present, he seeks out Jesus to hear His message. Both he and his students have ears to hear the truth of Jesus' promise of eternal life.

2. *The Samaritan Woman*

When Jesus sits by the well of Jacob at the sixth hour in the heat of the day, a woman comes to the well alone to draw water. That this woman does not come in the cool of the day and in the midst of a social gathering of women demonstrates her status as a pariah within Sychar.¹⁸ When Jesus asks for a drink of water, He is alone and thirsty from a long day's walk. It is surprising that the woman answers Him at all. Her answer indicates her understanding of the status she thought she had in His eyes. She asks of Him: "*How is it that You being a Jew [Judean], ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?*" (John 4:9). Although the Samaritan woman's response to His request for water reveals her forwardness, it also shows openness on her part to hear and seek after our Lord.

Jesus does not rebuke her, but responds by offering her living water: "*If you knew the gift of God and who it is says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water*" (John 4:10). The Samaritan woman may not understand Jesus' promise, but she has ears to hear Him and begins a purposeful inquiry into His meaning.

with him. It would be natural for him as a teacher to be accompanied by his students. In the conversation Jesus points out that Nicodemus is a teacher.

¹⁷ Keener says that Nicodemus' performance of his teaching was "shameful." See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 2003), 559.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 102.

Like Nicodemus, she is a sinner who has no need to repent in order to hear Jesus' words, for she actively pursues Him (John 4:11-12). Jesus clarifies His meaning to her with a simple promise:

Jesus answered and said to her, "*Whoever* drinks of this water will thirst again, but *whoever* drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14, emphasis added).

Clearly, she does not yet understand the meaning of Jesus' promise to her (John 4:15).¹⁹ Nevertheless, she openly seeks to understand. Jesus tells her, "Go, call your husband and come here" (John 4:16). When she says, "I have no husband," Jesus commends her honesty: "You have well said, 'I have no husband'" (John 4:17).

Perhaps the Samaritan woman knows not to offer more information than is required in response to a simple command and now thinks the bulk of her sinful life escapes the notice of Jesus. She is wrong. Jesus tells her He knows that she has had five husbands, and the one she is living with at that time is not her husband (John 4:18). The sin of adultery riddles her life. Jesus knows it and purposefully reminds her of it. And yet, she continues to pursue Him.²⁰

Jesus' revelation allows the Samaritan woman to deduce two important truths: 1) knowing the intimate details of her life, this Judean stranger must be a prophet, and 2) Jesus promised her living water, knowing full well of her ongoing sin of adultery, without calling her to repent. Therefore, she need not turn from her sins to partake of the living water.

Her deductions are correct: 1) Jesus is a prophet, and 2) He has no interest in the Samaritan woman repenting in order to usher in the Messianic kingdom, but instead desires her as a lowly sinner *whoever* to partake of the living water. As long as the Samaritan woman has ears to hear Jesus' words to her, she can believe in Him and His promise of eternal life. And why should she not believe Him? He knows the intimate details of her life as a sinner and still offers her living water. In her eyes, this act of grace and mercy reveals the lovingkindness (*chesed*) of a godly man addressing the pressing needs of a woman in dire need of living water.

¹⁹ Bruce, *John*, 106.

²⁰ As she does in v 25 as well. See Michaels, *John*, 255.

When the woman responds, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” (John 4:19), she draws an obvious conclusion.

In His dialogue with a Samaritan adulteress, Jesus reaches beyond the social barriers and adroitly builds her confidence in Him by showing her the manner of God’s love, *chesed*. It is a loyal covenantal love anchored in His promise to her of eternal life, a promise that transcends her nationality, gender, sin, and hurt as an outcast.

Now He must breach the religious barrier between Judeans and Samaritans in order to reveal Himself as Messiah. He does so by continuing to prophesy. “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father” (John 4:21). As the Prophet like Moses, Jesus reveals the end of the division between worship in Judea and Samaria.²¹ Although the Samaritans currently worship in ignorance, both Samaritans and Judeans will soon unite together as *true worshipers* and *worship the Father in spirit and truth* (John 4:22-24). When she responds, “I know that Messiah is coming... When He comes, He will tell us all things” (John 4:25), as a Samaritan, she effectively asks, “Are you the Messiah, the Prophet like Moses?” (Deut 18:15, 18-19).²²

The very moment Jesus reveals Himself, “I who speak to you am He” (John 4:26), the Samaritan woman believes in Jesus as Messiah,²³ the Prophet like Moses, and His promise to her of everlasting life (John 4:13-14). She takes one sip of the living water that Jesus promised to her and knows she has what He promises. She now has everlasting life.

B. Samaritans Called Jesus *the Savior of the World*

Just as the Samaritan woman believes in Jesus for eternal life, His disciples return from the city of Sychar and marvel that He spoke with the Samaritan woman. The woman leaves her water pot and goes to the men of the city, proclaiming, “Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:27-29). This woman, a lowly Samaritan *whoever*, whose life remains riddled

²¹ Carson, *John*, 223.

²² Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible, as canon. See Michaels, *John*, 256.

²³ Bruce appears to take this view. See Bruce, *John*, 111.

with sin, was not deafened by her sin of adultery, but heard and actively pursued Jesus and ultimately believed in Him as the Christ.

Did Jesus tell her to repent of her sins either before or after she believed in Him as the Messiah? No, and yet, amazingly, the witness of this unrepentant woman causes the men of the city of Sychar to come to Jesus (John 4:30). All of these events transpired before the eyes of Jesus' disciples as an object lesson in order to teach them the meaning of *whoever*. It was a lesson they had begun to learn when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus and his disciples late at night.

Jesus challenges His disciples with a reality that runs contrary to their social upbringing,²⁴ that *whoever*s include the *world* of wayward Pharisees like Nicodemus, Gentiles (Romans, etc.), as well as those despicable low-life Samaritans. It even includes an adulterous Samaritan woman.

Jesus has a discussion with His disciples:

...My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors (John 4:34-38).

The fields *white for harvest* are the myriad of Samaritan men with their traditional white headdress²⁵ coming out of the city of Sychar toward Jesus: "So when the Samaritans had come to Him, *they urged Him to stay with them*; and he stayed there two days" (John 4:40, emphasis added). That a lowly unrepentant Samaritan woman, and not the disciples, brings Jesus this food (John 4:34) reveals the necessity of why their Lord needed to go through Samaria (John 4:4).

The men of Sychar pursued Jesus, yet no record exists of Jesus calling them to repent as Samaritans of their false worship of God or to repent of any other sin. Drawn to the manner of God's loyal

²⁴ Morris, *John*, 274.

²⁵ Thomas L. Constable, <https://netbible.org/bible/John>, accessed October 10, 2019.

covenantal or promissory love based upon His promise of eternal life, they, like the Samaritan woman, were simple *whoevers* riddled with sin, in need of living water. “And many more believed because of His own word” (John 4:41).

Eventually, the men of the city spoke to the Samaritan woman: “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for *we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world*” (John 4:42, emphasis added).²⁶

As Israel’s Messiah, Jesus really is the “Savior of the *world*,” sent by God the Father with the power to save unrepentant sinning *whoevers*.²⁷

V. APPLICATIONS FOR EVANGELISM

Regardless of an individual’s particular sin or sins, as long as a person has ears to hear Jesus’ message, he or she has the opportunity to believe in Him and be saved as an individual. *Whoevers* riddled with sin do not necessarily need to repent in order to hear the truth of the gospel. Moreover, if turning from sin were a requirement for everlasting life, then Jesus would not have made a genuine offer of living water to the Samaritan woman (John 4:10, 13-14) unless He first called her to repent of her sins. Repentance from sin is not a requirement for individuals to receive eternal life.

The lesson for Jesus’ disciples remains unmistakable even to this day. Jesus is the *Savior of the world*. *Whoever* includes all people, regardless of their sins. If they hear Jesus’ promise and believe Him, they have, as individuals, what He promises—everlasting life.

As shocking as it may seem, despite the ongoing call recorded in the Synoptic Gospels for the nation to repent and believe in Jesus, neither Jesus nor the Apostle John uses the words “repent” or “repentance” within John’s Gospel account. Rightly so, for John maintains

²⁶ The word *Savior* (*sôtēr*) only occurs here in John’s Gospel (4:42)—and then on the lips of the Samaritans.

²⁷ Borchert says the story of the woman at the well shows Jesus reaching out not only to Jews, but also to “rejected and thirsty half-breeds of Jewish society.” See Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1996), 205.

an abundantly clear witness to the individual throughout the entirety of his account:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name* (John 20:30-31, emphasis added).

Following Jesus' example in witnessing to Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, we, like Jesus' disciples, learn to first demonstrate our Lord's covenantal or promissory love (*chesed*) by sharing the good news and calling individuals to believe. They are to believe in His Person, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God and His promise of everlasting life.

If, unlike Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, the individuals we share with do not hear or pursue understanding, consider that they may well not hear because of sin in their lives. Pray and trust that the Holy Spirit brings conviction (John 16:7-11). Then ask the Lord for an opening to address the sin that keeps them from hearing the good news. Hearing the good news does not guarantee a person will believe in Jesus as the Christ. Pray that the Lord persuades of the truth of who He is and His promise of eternal life. As tempting as it may be, never confuse repentance from sin in order to hear the good news with believing in Jesus and His promise of life.²⁸

²⁸ Though not documented in John's account, this is not an uncommon approach. Our Lord's witness to the rich young ruler provides one of the best examples. The young man is unable to see Jesus as God (Matt 19:16-17). He cannot hear Jesus' correction (Matt 19:20). Jesus calls him to repent (Matt 19:21). Lastly, the young man fails to turn from the sinful riches which blind and deafen him, and he departs from Jesus (Matt 19:22). Had the young man turned and followed Jesus, he would have heard the good news from Jesus time and again and had the opportunity to believe in Him and His promise of eternal life. When the disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus answers, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:25-26). Under these circumstances, pray, for only God can bring a man to repentance in order to hear the truth of the gospel. In Athens, the Apostle Paul finds the city *given over to idols* (Acts 17:16). He preaches the gospel, but finds his audience unable to hear (Acts 17:18-21). He calls them to repent (Acts 17:22-31). Then, he shares the good news again (Acts 17:32-33) with the result that some *joined him and believed* (Acts 17:34). Be careful not to impose your personal preferences regarding repentance from sin in the life

Though the Samaritan woman and the men of Sychar seem a distant concern to us today, do we have within our society those who might be regarded as downcast, despicable, and low-life individuals? Absolutely. On street corners in every American city, there are homeless, drug-addicted drifters who gather to panhandle. They are a rough lot through force of circumstances, oftentimes resorting to violence and sex crimes in order to gain a dollar. If we lift our eyes beyond the street corners, the conclusion is inescapable. The *world* overflows with sinful *whoevers* of whom you and I, even as born again believers, remain a part (1 John 1:8-10).

Are we willing to stretch our understanding of *whoever* to include homeless drifters? They are *whoevers* whose sins Jesus has paid for on the cross, upon whom Jesus, through His promise, desires to bestow the gift of eternal life. Or, like Jesus' disciples, do we quietly bury our shock and moral dismay at His *chesed* or loyal covenantal love for those we consider downcast, despicable, low life individuals? What sin has our Lord and Savior not paid for in full on the cross? Who cannot be drawn to the *chesed* of God so ably demonstrated upon the cross and confirmed by Jesus' promise of eternal life? "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* peoples to Myself" (John 12:32, emphasis added). The object lesson Jesus taught His disciples regarding *whoevers* remains as vital today as the day He offered living water to the Samaritan woman and the men of Sychar.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Synoptic Gospels reveal that both John the Baptist and Jesus called the nation of Israel to "repent, for *the kingdom of heaven* is at hand" (Matt 3:2; 4:17, emphasis added). Jesus did not begin preaching this message to the nation personally until after the Baptist's imprisonment. When the leadership of Israel rejected the Messiah and His offer of the Messianic kingdom, Jesus pronounced the AD 70 judgment on that particular generation of Israel. From that time forth, He began addressing the nation in parables. As recorded in the Synoptics, this remarkable ministry to the nation of Israel provides a wonderful and decisive contrast for understanding God's *chesed* for

of another person, but pray to understand the sin(s) that keeps him or her from hearing the good news.

the world and Jesus' concurrent call to individuals to believe in Him and His promise of everlasting life.

As *the Savior of the world*, Jesus needed to go through Samaria so that His disciples might better understand the manner of God's love (*chesed*) for the *world* in saving some despicable low life Samaritans, including an adulterous woman.²⁹ In the Gospel of John, from beginning to end, Jesus witnesses to a multitude of individuals and/or groups of individuals for the explicit purpose that they may believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of God and receive *as individuals* the gift of life in His name.

Ultimately, Jesus needed to go through Samaria for two reasons: 1) to save individual Samaritans and 2) to teach a simple, but extraordinarily hard lesson to His disciples. Jesus saves individual *whomevers*, riddled with sin, without requiring them to repent of their sins. Indeed, *Jesus needed to go through Samaria* to demonstrate His loyal covenantal or promissory love for a people long before written off as low-life despicable foreigners.

²⁹ Morris says it means He is the Savior of all, unimportant and important people alike. See Morris, *John*, 284-85.

DORTIAN CALVINISM IS DEAD WRONG ON EPHESIANS 2: A REVIEW OF TIMOTHY R. NICHOLS'S *DEAD MAN'S FAITH*¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dortian Calvinism is known by the acronym T-U-L-I-P. The first point is the T, which stands for total inability. The following sermon by Brian Anderson is typical of those who hold to this theological view. It deceives many into imagining that the unregenerate totally lack the ability to believe. They claim that regeneration must precede faith.

...the sinner is spiritually dead. He is not just very sick, and about to die. He is dead. The answer to his dilemma is not in using his free will to reach out and take the medicine [i.e., believe Jesus' promise of life]. The answer is that God must breathe His life into him, and make him alive [before he can believe]! Now, what is the Biblical answer to this question? Is man well, sick, or dead?²

Yes, Eph 2:1 and 5 say that unbelievers are dead, but Dortians are dead wrong about what that means.

¹Timothy R. Nichols, *Dead Man's Faith: Spiritual Death, Faith, and Regeneration in Ephesians 2:1-10* (N.p.: Headwaters Christian Resources, 2016). 116 pp. Paperback, \$15.00.

²Brian Anderson (Pastor of the Bridge Church, Rancho Cordova, CA), "Total Inability: Ephesians 2:1-3," October 24, 2016. Transcript at <http://www.thebridgeonline.net/sermons/total-inability/> accessed January 23, 2017.

II. THE PREHISTORY OF THE BOOK BY NICHOLS

Timothy Nichols argues powerfully for faith preceding regeneration. Note his title: *Dead Man's Faith*. Nichols (while my student) presented a paper on Eph 2:1-10 at a 2000 pastors's conference. The evening before speaking, he asked me to evaluate his new observation on Eph 2:8. Then he spent the night preparing for any objections. Dortian Calvinists with Ph.D. degrees were oddly silent during the question and answer period. The paper was that powerful.

In 2001, Nichols reworked his paper into a journal article: "Reverse-Engineered Outlining: A Method for Epistolary Exegesis."³ Then, in 2004, his Th.M. thesis refined that same argument. The title was, "Dead Man's Faith: Spiritual Death, Faith, and Regeneration in Ephesians 2:1-10," which title the book shares.⁴

He had hoped to shed the thesis format and to produce a regular book. However, ministry, family, and work encroached upon his time. Rather than delaying further, he published a word-for-word copy of his thesis.⁵

III. COMMENTARY, THE ARGUMENT, AND THE EXEGETICAL METHOD

Since the book began as a thesis, its format follows academic protocols. However, Nichols wishes to assist readers in finding what

³ Timothy R. Nichols, "Reverse-Engineered Outlining: A Method for Epistolary Exegesis," *CTSJ* 7 (April 2001): 16-58. The article's interlinear format allows those not knowing Greek to understand the discussion. It appears at: http://chafer.nextmeta.com/files/v7n2_2_reverse.pdf.

⁴ Timothy R. Nichols, "Dead Man's Faith: Spiritual Death, Faith, and Regeneration in Ephesians 2:1-10" (Th.M. thesis: Chafer Theological Seminary, 2004).

⁵ The only changes are its use of both sides of pages and its absence of signatures from his thesis readers (this reviewer and George E. Meisinger). Occasional typos still survive and references to the work as a thesis remain. Double-sided pages helpfully place the diagrams of Eph 2:1-7 and 2:8-10 on facing pages (17-18). This also makes it a much thinner volume. Single spacing would have been welcome, as would a Scripture index and an index of cited authors.

particularly ministers to them, rather than letting its thesis format intimidate them. He says,

This is a master's thesis, so it's not particularly designed for ease of use. But I've had some practice helping people use it over the years, and here's [*sic*] the best directions I can give you:

- If you're just interested in the passage, go to chapters 2 and 3.
- If you're after the theological take-away, the core argument is all on page 74, and then you can work outward from there.
- If you're more interested in the [exegetical] methodology, it might serve you to tackle the appendix on BAR⁶ outlining first, and then go back and see the method in action in the main text.⁷

The theological take-away appears as six syllogisms that are this review's focal point.⁸ Hopefully, many readers will buy the book so they "can work outward from there" to the whole argument. The following streamlines the wording of the six interlocking syllogisms (p. 74). The six syllogisms show that Dortian Calvinists are dead wrong about dead in Ephesians 2:

Syllogism 1:

- Major Premise: All believers were once *dead* [2:1a, 5a].
 Minor Premise: *Dead* refers to spiritual death.
 Conclusion: Therefore, all believers were once spiritually dead.

⁶ As my one-time teaching assistant, Nichols coined the term BAR for the second aspect of epistolary exegesis. BAR stands for Boundary, Assertion, and Relation. See pp. 94-102. Later, I expanded the acronym beyond BAR, drawing upon the title *Diagrammatic Analysis*, by Lee L. Kantenwein (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1976). The combined acronym is DABAR (*DĀBĀR*, a Hebrew term for *word*). Nichols explains and exemplifies Diagrammatic Analysis plus Boundary, Assertion, and Relation. Pages 17*f* contain a grammatical diagram of the Majority Text of Eph 2:1-10 before applying BAR outlining. The book serves as a textbook in my seminary courses on exegetical methodology.

⁷ Nichols, "Preface" to *Dead Man's Faith*.

⁸ The book as a whole leads to this set of six syllogisms. Applying the exegetical method (pp. 94-102) to the passage yields the commentary (pp. 5-69 and 76-91) and leads to the syllogisms (pp. 70-74). Thus, the rest of the book should deepen one's grasp of this six syllogism argument.

Syllogism 2:

- Major Premise: All believers were *made alive* [2:5b].
 Minor Premise: *Made alive* refers to spiritual life (regeneration).
 Conclusion: Therefore, all believers received spiritual life (regeneration).

Syllogism 3:

- Major Premise: *By grace you are saved* (2:5) is parenthetical to *made alive*...
 Minor Premise: The parenthetical relation...[equates] *made alive*...with...*by grace you are saved*.
 Conclusion: Therefore, *made alive*...is equated with...*saved* (2:5).

Syllogism 4:

- Major Premise: *Made alive*...is equated with...*saved* (2:5).
 Minor Premise: *By grace you are saved* (2:8) resumed the topic of discussion from 2:5.
 Conclusion: Therefore, *made alive*...is equated with...*saved* (2:5).

Syllogism 5:

- Major Premise: *Through faith* indicates the instrumental cause of *by grace you are saved* (2:8).
 Minor Premise: *Made alive*...is equated with...*by grace you are saved* (2:8).
 Conclusion: Therefore, *through faith* is the instrumental cause of *made alive*.

Syllogism 6:

- Major Premise: *Through faith* is the instrumental cause of *made alive*.
 Minor Premise: Instrumental cause necessarily precedes its effect.
 Conclusion: Therefore, *faith* precedes being *made alive* (regeneration).⁹

The minor premise in the sixth syllogism is the crux of the argument, but may require explanation. The word *through* (*dia*) often introduces instrumental cause. The major premise in syllogism #6 can be restated: you were made alive (regenerated) ***through faith*** (2:8).

The following shows the logic that faith precedes its effect (being made alive):

⁹ Nichols, *Dead Man's Faith*, 74. I omitted some optional words to save space. The full text is in his book.

The car was started *through* someone's turning the key to the start position.

The word *through* introduces what must occur first. Paul's grammar demands that faith precedes being made alive. The title says it all: *Dead Man's Faith*. Dortians are dead wrong about the word *dead*!

What does *dead* really mean in 2:1 and 5? Ephesians 4:18 clarifies the meaning. It says that the rest of¹⁰ the Gentiles (i.e., Gentile unbelievers) have darkened understanding, because they "are alienated from the life of God." That is, *dead* speaks of alienation (separation) from God and from the life that He gives. Unbelievers lack everlasting life. Someone who lacks life is *dead*. Paul calls unbelievers *dead* here, because they lack everlasting life.¹¹ Dortians foist their total-inability theory onto this passage; Paul would be horrified by such a conclusion.

IV. THE REFERENT OF *TOUTO* (*THAT*) IN EPHESIANS 2:8

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that (*touto*) not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God" [JHN translation]. Many Dortians take the referent of *that* to be *faith*. The resultant interpretation would be that the faith with which one believes is not his own, but God gave the faith as a gift. This meshes with the Dortian theory that *dead* signifies total inability for unbelievers to believe. That is dead wrong about the meaning of dead.

Nichols considered four options before proposing his own. Daniel Wallace states the first four options briefly, "The standard interpretations include: (1) 'grace' as antecedent, (2) 'faith' as antecedent, (3) the

¹⁰ The *Majority Text* of Eph 4:17 says, "the rest of the Gentiles." The Critical Text omits "the rest of."

¹¹ Some may object that unbelievers have life: "Won't unbelievers live forever in the lake of fire?" They will exist forever, but conscious existence should not be equated with life. Remember that Rev 20:14 calls their eternal existence the *second death*, not the second life. Unbelievers exist now; they are dead now. Unbelievers will have conscious existence forever, but that existence is called *death*, not *life*.

concept of a grace-by-faith salvation as antecedent, and (4) *kai touto* having an adverbial force with no antecedent ('and especially').¹²

Regarding views 1–2, Nichols notes that *grace* and *faith* are both feminine, so (if either were the referent) Paul would have used a feminine form of *this* (*hautē*), not *touto* (a neuter form).¹³ Concerning view 4, Nichols offers a pioneering critique:

...Wallace's case for this category is shaky at best. Three of his four examples [Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 6:6 and 8] have a clear conceptual referent [not a non-referent, as Wallace suggests], and [3 John 5] the last one (problematic, but very possibly adverbial) is outside of Paul.¹⁴

Many grace interpreters embrace Wallace's third referent option—a grace-by-faith salvation, because neuter pronouns often refer to multiple word antecedents (phrases, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs). Wallace is *almost* right here. Nichols notes that the twice repeated "by grace you have been saved" clause (2:5 and 8) is the natural referent.¹⁵ He adopts this and calls it the fifth option. He establishes that *through faith* should be excluded from the referent. Making faith part of the gift confuses the means for receiving the gift with the gift itself.¹⁶ Also, making faith part of the gift presupposes that God needs to give faith to people with total inability. The antecedent for *this* (*touto*) should be the *by grace salvation* (of 2:5 and 8).

¹² Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 334.

¹³ Nichols, *Dead Man's Faith*, 78-83.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84. He footnotes a preliminary exploration of referents for demonstrative pronouns in Paul's writings that he co-authored: Ann Marshall and Timothy R. Nichols, "Neuter Uses of *Houtos* in Paul" (paper submitted for 305 Advanced Greek Grammar, Chafer Theological Seminary, Fall 2000).

¹⁵ Nichols, *Dead Man's Faith*, 87f.

¹⁶ In a nutshell, the gift is the by-grace salvation, while faith is the instrumental means for receiving the gift. It does not make sense for the means for receiving a gift to be seen as part of the gift. If I hand someone a wrapped gift, he might request a pair of scissors. No one would view scissors as part of the gift (or it would be wrapped also), but as the means for opening the gift (which is inside the wrapping paper).

V. THE CORPORATE NATURE OF EPHESIANS 2:10

Typical translations of Eph 2:10 render *poiēma* as *workmanship*. Nichols prefers *artifact*.¹⁷ His objection is not because of a meaning change. Rather, the English rendering is unclear whether workmanship is singular or plural. (The Greek is singular.) *Artifact* is clearly singular; *artifacts* would be plural. In context, knowing that artifact (workmanship) is singular is vital.

Singular

Plural

This sculpture is his <i>workmanship</i> .	These sculptures are his <i>workmanship</i> .
This sculpture is his <i>artifact</i> .	These sculptures are his <i>artifacts</i> .

Why is this important? Ephesians 2:10 has a plural subject (*we*) and a singular predicate nominative (*artifact*).¹⁸ Usually, plural predicate nominatives go with plural subjects. The first column below has plural predicate nominatives with plural subjects, while the second has singular predicate nominatives:

Individual Focus

Group Focus

We are <i>Americans</i> (plural).	We are a <i>nation</i> (singular).
We are <i>relatives</i> (plural).	We are <i>family</i> (singular).
We are <i>worshippers</i> (plural).	We are a <i>church</i> (singular).

The point in Eph 2:10 is corporate: “We [the body of Christ] are His [corporate] artifact,¹⁹ created in Christ Jesus for good works which He prepared beforehand, so we [the body of Christ] should walk in them.” It gives no basis for fruit inspection. Ephesians 2:15

¹⁷ Nichols, *Dead Man’s Faith*, 34.

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:8-9 uses the second person plural (*you*). The shift to the first person plural in v 10 is dramatic, intentional, and often ignored by interpreters.

¹⁹ Note the created body of Christ (corporate) in Eph 2:14-16 (in this very chapter), especially 2:16.

calls the body of Christ *the created new man*. Artifact is an excellent suggestion here.

VI. CONCERNS

The reader may wonder, “Are there any red flags at all in the book?” Unfortunately, there are. Tim Nichols has (since writing his thesis) gone in some directions that I cannot endorse. The preface to this book openly speaks to some of these, so I must respond. He says:

Since I wrote this [the thesis], I’ve been a pastor, teacher, author, bus driver, massage therapist—you know, the usual range of ministry jobs. I’ve been privileged to see demons leave, the sick healed, the poor fed, the wounded made whole. I’ve heard God speak to me and to others, from the wealthy and well-off to homeless guys holding cardboard signs—truth be told, sometimes a lot clearer to the latter. More significant still, I have come to know God’s good heart for His children, and for me in particular, a lesson that somehow eluded me for most of my life. I’ve come a long way from the green, self-serious feller that penned this thesis.²⁰

Some directions that Nichols has gone after seminary concern me. I told him that my review would mention this. He said, “The disclaimer is not unexpected, and doesn’t disturb me at all. Theology is a contact sport; a little jostling comes with the territory.” The thesis/book was written before his theological shifts. Readers should not dismiss this book because of its preface.

VII. CONCLUSION

How I have wanted the book to be in print. God opens eyes to Ephesians 2 when people read through the six syllogisms. No one expects to change long held views of a key proof text after reading approximately 300 words of the syllogisms. A few years ago, a Dortian Calvinist told me his response to the syllogisms: “For forty years, I have been taught wrong.” He now champions grace. This book is an eye-opener. The truth of God’s grace is liberating.

²⁰ Nichols, *Dead Man’s Faith*, “Preface.”

This review article opened with a recent quote by Brian Anderson, a California pastor. He asked, after pushing for a Dortian view of Eph 2:1-3, “Is man well, sick, or dead?”²¹ Of course, the unbeliever is dead. Only one of the following understandings can be right:

Dort: God must give a person life, so he can believe.

Paul: The person must believe, so God can give him life.

Dortians have it backwards. They are dead wrong about the meaning of dead.

As for me and my house, we will follow Scripture, not human theological systems. The Synod of Dort was dead wrong about what Paul means in Ephesians 2. The Lord privileged Tim Nichols to discover a long-hidden treasure in Eph 2:8. The treasure is that the deadness of unbelievers does not mean spiritual inability to respond to God, but instead the absence of God’s life. His title says it all: “Dead Man’s Faith.” Ephesians 4:18 defines *dead* as *alienation from the life that God gives*, not *total inability*. Upon believing Jesus’ message of life, one who, a moment before, was a dead unbeliever passes from death to life via faith.

²¹ Brian Anderson, “Total Inability.”

BOOK REVIEWS

Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts. Edited by Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2018. 532 pp. Hardcover, \$77.17.

Ibrahim was raised in Egypt and is a professor of Islamic studies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Greenham is a professor of missions and Islamic studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. The book contains 31 articles by various experts in missions and evangelism towards Muslims. They provide a wide range of views about how Muslims who convert to Christianity should live out their faith.

Insider movements encourage new Muslim converts to Christianity to keep their Muslim identity and embrace syncretistic practices. As a general rule, the scholars in this book argue against such movements and say that such compromise will cause difficulty in spiritual growth. The book relies heavily on the testimonies of BMB (believers from Muslim backgrounds). Those critical of the insider movements say that the Qur'an is not a guide for Muslims to follow after they become believers.

The book relates reports of many Muslims coming to faith. It does not really address the gospel and certainly does not present the case for a Free Grace gospel. It assumes that many Muslims are coming to faith. This includes some coming to faith as the result of dreams and visions about Jesus.

There are disagreements between the different contributors. Harley Talman (a pseudonym) writes in his article, "Muslim Followers of Jesus, Muhammad, and the Qur'an," that insiders are still a part of the Muslim community, and they try to evangelize within that community (p. 125). All insiders honor Muhammad and the Qur'an, but in different ways (pp. 123-25). He sees this as a good thing and says that this is what Paul did in Acts 17. When Paul preached to unbelievers, he did not denigrate the pagan beliefs of the hearers. Some

insiders reject Muhammad as a prophet, while others do not. Those who do reject Muhammad do not do it publicly (p. 129).

Talman supports a kind of double speak for Christian Muslims. If such believers are asked if Muhammad is a prophet, a correct answer is, "he is a prophet of Islam." One Muslim was on trial for blaspheming Muhammad. He was found innocent because he said that Muhammad was sent by God, and Muhammad turned people away from idolatry to serve the Creator (p. 130). It is both wise and honors God if Muslim Christians avoid speaking ill of the Muslim prophet.

According to Talman, God is at work in the Muslim world through dreams of Jesus, "signs, and miraculous guidance." The Lord is drawing Muslims to Himself through these means and is not calling them to renounce Muhammad or the Qur'an. The article relates how one woman had a dream about Christ and that as a result she became "a follower of Jesus." In the dream, Jesus shows the woman a coffin. Muhammad was in the coffin. Even though he was dead, he was beautiful. The point of the dream was that a Muslim could be a believer in Jesus but appreciate the beauty of Muhammad. Another person became a Christian when he had a dream in which Jesus told him to "follow Me" (p. 129).

There is, according to Talman, much beauty in the Islamic culture, and Muslim Christians can embrace such beauty (pp. 125-26). Insiders recognize that there is good in the Qur'an. The sacred scriptures of Islam speak of the love of God. As a result, there is truth about God in Islam. It is even acceptable for a Christian in the Muslim world to consider Muhammad a true prophet (pp. 127-28).

Talman is probably the boldest author in the book when it comes to compromise with Islam. Ibrahim, one of the editors, critiques Talman's article with one of his own. He says that the Qur'an has no spiritual value. He also argues that one's faith should not originate from dreams, testimonies, or "strange experiences." Talman's views do not reflect the supremacy of Christ or His uniqueness (p. 152).

Another conservative view is found with another pseudonymous author in an article entitled, "Biblical Salvation in Islam?" He critiques the idea of some insiders that they can use the Qur'an to bring people to faith. Some of these insiders see the Qur'an as a "lesser light" that can take people to the greater light of Christ. This is because

the Qur'an mentions Jesus and calls Him a prophet. However, the author says that the Qur'an says that Jesus was only human and was submissive to Allah, the god of Islam. The author maintains that evangelism in the Muslim world should not rely on the Qur'an but on the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit (pp. 172-74).

Even though this book does not give a clear gospel presentation, it has value. It gives different views of evangelism as well as how Christians should live in a hostile, Islamic culture. There are various reports of great numbers of Muslims being converted to Christianity. How should we understand these testimonies? What do we make of people having visions and dreams of Jesus, especially when these dreams do not contain a clear gospel?

This is not an easy read. Most readers are not familiar with evangelism in the Islamic world, and the book uses terms with which many believers are unfamiliar. In addition, it is hard for most of us to appreciate what it is like to be a Christian in a hostile environment. In what areas can Christians in a Muslim world compromise with the culture in which they live, or should there be no compromise at all?

Clearly, the editors have a specific group of people in mind in compiling this book. For those who are interested in what is happening within Christendom in the Muslim world, I recommend this book.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism. By Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry, Editors. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 372 pp. Paper, \$40.00.

While in seminary, I became very interested in NT textual criticism. Initially I held to the eclectic approach, which is basically a Critical Text (CT) approach. Later I became convinced of the Majority Text (MT) position.

This book, edited by Hixson and Gurry, has a total of fourteen authors.

Here are several things I learned in reading this book.

First, the dating of NT manuscripts is far from an exact science. Many are dated by using paleography, which is comparing the handwriting in a manuscript with the handwriting common in each time period. As one might imagine, this is a subjective practice, which could be off by many years. In reading Chap. 5, I found myself wondering if the dates I'd assumed were accurate were far less precise than I'd assumed.

Second, we probably cannot restore the entire NT from the writings of the Church Fathers. That claim is one that we probably should stop using.

Third, the number of manuscripts we have in other languages (e.g., Latin, Coptic, Boharic, Sahidic) is probably not nearly 10,000. We probably should be content with saying that there are thousands of ancient manuscripts of the NT in various languages.

Fourth, a good number to use for the number of Greek manuscripts of the NT we have today is around 5,100.

Fifth, the NT autographs (original manuscripts written by the author and released for circulation) probably did not last a century or two as some NT scholars today suggest. More likely they lasted under a hundred years, with copying beginning as early as the original production. Paul, for example, might have had a copy of his letters made before he sent them out so that he would have them for his own use. While this is conjecture, it is something I'd not considered.

Sixth, the Byzantine text type (MT) is finding a resurgence in NT textual criticism. No longer do most NT text critics consider the MT to be worth little or nothing. Now the MT is given some weight. While I wished it were given weight equal to its numbers, I'm thrilled that NT scholars are no longer simply overlooking it.

This book, though technical, is not hard to read. Even so, I would not recommend this book for those who lack an introductory course in textual criticism. But I would highly recommend this book for pastors, Christian educators, and missionaries who do translation work.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith. By Gregg R. Allison. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018. 426 pp. Paper, \$29.99.

This is a condensed book on systematic theology. Its purpose is to guide in teaching theology to others. Each chapter contains an outline to help in that goal. The audience in mind is the layman. There are eight parts to the book: the Word of God, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, God's creatures, salvation, the Church, and future things.

Allison takes a high view of the Scriptures. He says that the inspiration of the Bible extends to the very words. The Bible is authoritative and infallible (pp. 9-61).

In some parts of the book, Allison does not take a firm position on the topics he discusses. He gives the different views. It is clear that he envisions the book's being taught that way. The "teacher" will present both (or multiple views) on an issue so that the students can know the issues and understand why different people take different positions.

A good example of this is on the issue of the spiritual sign gifts, such as tongues, prophecy, and healing. Allison says that a frank discussion should be had in the church, but it should be done in love. The church should concentrate on more important things and not get "caught up in the controversy" (p. 198). Allison says that cessationists should not be afraid to talk about the Spirit simply because they see "excesses" on the other side. He gives arguments both for and against cessationism (pp. 196-97).

The readers of the *JOTGES* will probably be most interested in what Allison has to say about eternal salvation. He does not address the Free Grace view. He presents the Arminian and Reformed views. Once again, he gives the arguments for and against both views (pp. 211-17). As with the spiritual sign gifts, Allison says that each side needs to be gracious towards the other. Even though he believes in predestination and takes the Reformed view, he acknowledges that the Bible can be used to argue that men and women have the ability to believe the gospel. He adds that Arminians also believe that God's grace is needed for eternal salvation.

Allison follows the same pattern when discussing regeneration. Does it happen before or after conversion/faith? He gives both sides of the argument (pp. 234-39).

As can be seen in these examples, even though Allison is firmly on one side of these issues, he does not believe they should divide Christians to the point of causing divisions or the loss of fellowship. Repentance is a case in point. Even though Arminians and Reformed theologians differ on eternal salvation in many areas, both believe repentance from sin is necessary for conversion to take place (p. 239).

This reviewer found Allison's discussion on perseverance and assurance of salvation interesting. Once again, he does not discuss the Free Grace position but deals with the Arminian and Reformed views. He says the Reformed position is that God "protects Christians from temptation, trial, demonic attack, and overwhelming sin." They cannot lose their salvation, and God "guards" His people. But this only applies to genuine believers. They will persist in exercising faith and engaging in good works, even if they temporarily fall into sin. People who profess Christ but do not walk by faith are not true believers (pp. 274-75).

Arminians maintain that true believers can indeed lose their salvation. Obedient believers can have assurance that they belong to Christ in the present, but not necessarily in the future. The way Allison presents the Reformed view of assurance is informative. He says that the assurance of salvation means that genuine Christians can have confidence that all genuine believers will continue being believers throughout their lives and go to heaven when they die (p. 275). It is clear to this reviewer, however, that since we cannot know for sure if we are genuine believers, this does not equate to personal assurance at all. It only means that we can be sure that genuine believers will not lose their salvation. We can only hope that we are genuine believers.

Even on this important topic, Allison says Arminians have good arguments. He admits that the Bible does indeed speak of human responsibility. As a result, he concludes that in some cases it is difficult to determine whether some people are genuinely saved or not (p. 276). Arminians and Reformed believers have common ground in the area of assurance. If you don't live a life of obedience, both camps say you will not be in the kingdom of God. Therefore, both also agree that we should not promote assurance of salvation to the point where it leads to "complacency." Doing good works plays a role in our assurance, as both Arminian and Reformed theologians teach (p. 277).

When talking about future things, Allison says that all views on the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 have merit. When teaching on this topic, the teacher should present all of these views fairly. Allison does mention that there will be rewards in the kingdom, but he does not go into any detail. He says that the Great White Throne Judgment will be the final judgment for all people, both believers and unbelievers (p. 390).

As this review points out, this is not a book in which one will find a dogmatic position on all the theological issues Allison addresses. Free Grace people will not find their views presented in the matters of eternal salvation, rewards, and assurance. For example, Allison says that perseverance in good works is the foundation for the subjective assurance of salvation (p. 279). For him, clearly, the promise of eternal life by faith in Christ alone is not enough for one to have assurance of his or her eternal salvation.

I recommend this book for the purpose for which Allison wrote it. It is a conservative evangelical work on eight topics of theology. If a layman is interested in giving the views on these topics as taught by the two major Protestant systems of belief, then this book will be of help. However, if a person rejects the soteriology of both Arminianism and Reformed theology, much of this book will not be of any help.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Tony Evans Bible Commentary. By Tony Evans. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019. 1440 pp. Hardcover, \$44.99.

Dr. Tony Evans is founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. He is also the founder and president of The Urban Alternative, an evangelical outreach ministry. He is on radio and has written numerous books. Needless to say, he is a popular speaker and writer.

He has now written a commentary on the entire Bible. It is written in a fresh and accessible style. So, it is easy to read and can benefit scholars and the average Christian alike.

What makes this commentary unique is that it is the first commentary on the entire Bible that is written from a Free Grace perspective. While GES has published a commentary on the NT, this one by Evans includes the OT too.

Free Grace permeates the commentary. His comments on Genesis 15:6 are a good example, where he says, “Abram believed God’s promise. God saw this faith and credited it to him as righteousness. The apostle Paul would pick up on this in Romans 4:3, using Abram as an example of how faith works. God spoke to Abram, and Abram took him at his word. That’s the essence of faith. Because of this faith, God chose to count Abram’s faith as righteousness. That’s the result of faith.”

There are other examples of a Free Grace perspective too. For example, concerning James 2:14, he writes, “Some people think that James is contradicting Paul, who said, ‘A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law’ (Rom 3:28). But James and Paul aren’t speaking about the same thing. Paul is talking about how a sinner becomes a saint. James is talking about how a saint brings heaven to earth.” The remainder of his comments on this important passage will refresh those who get grace!

It is encouraging to be able to access a commentary on the whole Bible that is written from a Free Grace perspective. So, I recommend this book for everyone, whether scholar, elder, pastor, deacon, or saint!

Brad Duskocil

Chairman

Board of the Grace Evangelical Society

Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter. By Thomas R. Schreiner. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018. 172 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

This book is very irenic in nature. Thomas Schreiner says that the issue of spiritual gifts is not a “first-order” doctrine (p. 2). Devout Christians can have different opinions. He was at one time a continuationist, believing that the sign gifts were operative today. This was in large part due to the teachings of D. A. Carson (p. 4). He is currently

a cessationist but admits he might be wrong. Schreiner stresses the idea that we should discuss the issues and not be polarized.

In the first chapter of the book, he says that the charismatic movement has both positive and negative aspects. Charismatics and non-charismatics can learn from each other.

Schreiner places the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible into two broad groups: speaking and serving (p. 27). It is not surprising that when it comes to the gifts of healing and tongues, he argues as a cessationist that if the gift exists, the person exercising such a gift must be able to exercise it on a regular basis (p. 22). Just because a person prays for somebody, and a healing takes place does not mean that we see the gift of healing in operation. This reviewer thinks this is an excellent point that is often not made during discussions on spiritual gifts. In the same vein, Schreiner says that even if a person speaks one time in a foreign language which he does not know, such as on a mission field, this is not the gift of tongues (p. 89).

Most readers of the *JOTGES* will agree with Schreiner when he maintains that all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith (p. 58). He recognizes that the Book of Acts, particularly the example of the Samaritans in Acts 8, is a unique period of time in church history. The Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit until the Apostles from Jerusalem placed hands on them because God did not want there to be a breach in the church between Jews and Samaritans (pp. 55-57, 145).

Schreiner also makes other points about spiritual gifts with which this reviewer agrees. The purpose of all gifts is the edification of the church. Ecstatic utterances without cognitive content, which is often seen in charismatic churches, do not meet that purpose (p. 79). He believes that every Christian has a spiritual gift. One particular point that he makes is that it is not important for the believer to know his particular gift. If a believer is serving in a local church, he will use his gift whether he knows what that gift is or not.

When it comes to the gift of prophecy, Schreiner rejects the notion that it refers to preaching. The NT defines it as giving God's people "spontaneous revelations" from God. Such utterances are infallible (p. 99). Schreiner argues that since there are no new revelations from God, the gift of prophecy has ceased.

The same thing could be said for the gift of being an apostle. Apostles and prophets gave revelation from God and were the foundation of the church. Once the foundation was laid, and the NT Scriptures were written, they passed from the scene (p. 157).

Schreiner walks a kind of tightrope when it comes to present day claims of tongues. He says that in the NT, tongues are known languages. However, “tongues” today are not languages. But even though present day tongues are not Biblical, they are not evil. Schreiner suggests they might be a kind of “psychological relaxation” for those who practice them. The same thing could be said about modern “prophets.” They are not evil but are giving people their “impressions” (pp. 130-31).

In keeping with the irenic nature of the book, Schreiner gives arguments for and against cessationism. He says the strongest argument for non-cessation is 1 Cor 13:8-10. These verses say that the gifts will stop at the Second Coming of Christ. The strongest arguments for cessationism are that there are no more prophets or apostles, and we do not see the regular, consistent use of sign gifts (p. 157). In any case, we should not “demonize” one another over differences in this area (p. 171).

I recommend this book for a couple of reasons. First of all, it is informative in that it shows that there are some non-charismatic evangelical scholars who hold to the non-cessationist view. Also, Schreiner makes many good general observations about spiritual gifts. The weakness of the book, in this reviewer’s opinion, is that Schreiner downplays the importance of certain aspects of the subject. If the gifts of tongues and prophecy do not exist today, those who claim to be practicing them are in error. It is not simply a matter of “relaxation” or of giving the people of God one’s impressions. To claim to be giving a prophecy without that utterance coming from God is not a trivial, second order matter. While peace is a noble pursuit, such teachings have caused much harm in the history of the church and in the lives of many believers.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Shepherd the Flock. By Donald Norbie. Port Colborne, CO: Gospel Folio Press, 2010. 38 pp. Paper, \$1.59.

This booklet summarizes the NT teaching about the roles of elders in the local church. Norbie has four chapters, “The Motivation,” “The Qualifications,” “The Work,” and “The Discipline of the Elders.” For the most part, Norbie’s observations are simple and solid. For example, in the first chapter, Norbie makes the point that elders should be motivated to please the Lord, not to make a salary. Occasionally, he subtly interjects his own opinion, such as his disapproval of salaries (pp. 9-10).

In the second chapter, Norbie makes some brief comments on the qualifications of an elder. I appreciated what he said about being “able to teach.” Norbie writes, “This means he will discipline himself to spend hours studying God’s word. He will build a helpful library with aids to help him in this life-long study of the Bible. A good exhaustive concordance, Bible dictionary and an [sic] one volume commentary will start him on the path of building a library...He must spend hours studying so he can feed God’s people” (pp. 22-23). Being a good student of the Word does, indeed, take hours and hours of study. *The Grace New Testament Commentary* would be a good start.

In the third chapter, Norbie emphasizes the elder’s work of evangelism, teaching, and visitation. Regarding evangelism he says, “If months go by and none are being saved it should be a matter of grave concern” (p. 28). Perhaps. It seems, though, that many smaller churches evangelize steadily and yet may not see people come to faith for long periods. Yes, we ought to evangelize, but “the wind blows where it wishes” (John 3:8). Our job is to sow, but is it not up to God to save?

Norbie advises that elders should show special care to new believers. “Young believers also require special attention. They must be encouraged to begin nursing on the Word of God (1 Pet 2:2-3). To read the Scriptures and to pray must become a daily habit” (p. 28). That is sound advice. It means teaching young believers to feed themselves on God’s Word and not be dependent on being spoon-fed by someone else.

Lastly, Norbie says elders should know that “a great day of reward is coming” where they will be held accountable for “care of the flock”

(p. 37). Norbie does not explain what that day is, or what the rewards will be. It would have been helpful to say a few words about the Judgment Seat of Christ and the nature of eternal rewards.

This booklet can be helpful as an introduction for church members about the role of elders. It would not be sufficient to train elders themselves. I recommend it as a teaching tool, but not as essential reading.

Shawn Lazar
Associate Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Assurance of Salvation: Biblical Hope for Our Struggles.

By Robert A. Peterson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019. 191 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

Robert Peterson was a Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Seminary for over twenty-five years. He has written or edited thirty books.

There is much to like about this book.

The tone is very irenic and pastoral. He demonstrates a strong concern that the readers “grasp the certainty of their salvation” (back cover).

Peterson’s style is very reader friendly. He is easy to understand and he uses a large number of illustrations from his many years of ministry as a professor and pastor.

While many Christian books today have outlines that do not make sense, *The Assurance of Salvation* (TAOS) has a very simple and effective one. Peterson breaks the subject in three parts, with each part being one of the three bases of assurance of salvation according to Reformed thought. Part 1 is “Assurance and God’s Word.” Part 2 is “Assurance and the Holy Spirit.” The last section is “Assurance and the Transformed Life.”

Before getting to part one, Peterson has a brief introduction and then a chapter entitled, “Troublers of Assurance.” Here are the issues Peterson cites as troubling people concerning assurance: “Difficult Backgrounds” (including “An Absent and Cold Father” and “A Propensity to Doubt”), “Intellectual Doubts,” “Sensitive

Hearts, Strong Emotions, and Fear,” “Hypocrisy and Apostasy,” and “Overconfidence.” Of course, these are all troublers of assurance *for people from within Reformed churches*. (Overconfidence according to Peterson gives *false assurance*. The only example he gives is of a young man named Jason who walked an aisle and prayed the sinner’s prayer. Jason was assured that he was eternally secure on the basis of the evangelists promise that anyone who came forward and prayed the prayer was “eternally secure in the family of God.”)

Each of the three sections of TAOS is divided into two or three chapters. “Assurance and God’s Word” (Part 1) has three chapters, dealing with assurance and the gospel, assurance in Paul, and assurance in John. “Assurance and the Holy Spirit” (Part 2) has two chapters, dealing with the Holy Spirit’s Person and work and the Holy Spirit’s role in assurance. Romans 8:16 is the primary text considered in part 2. Part 3, “Assurance and the Transformed Life,” has two chapters, dealing with the role of good works in assurance and the church and defenders of assurance.

The problem with Peterson’s book is the same problem which plagues most Reformed writings about assurance. It is the problem of subjectivity. According to Reformed thought, assurance is based in part on the promises to the believer in the Bible, and in part on the so-called inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and in part on one’s good works (which are regarded as God’s works, since in Reformed thought any good works are done by God, not by the believer).

It is often said that two of those bases of assurance, the inner witness and the works we do, are subjective, but the promises in the Bible to the believer are objective. However, as Peterson shows so well in part 1, even the promises in the Bible to the believer are subjective for Reformed people. The reason is simple. According to Reformed theology, saving faith is unknowable on any objective basis. False professors have the same intellectual beliefs as true professors. The way to determine if you are one of the people to whom the promise of eternal salvation applies is to examine your life.

In part 1, Peterson indicates that the purpose of First John is to give the readers tests to see if they are genuine believers (pp. 53-54). Those tests include perseverance. Peterson writes, “Genuine faith perseveres. True believers do not merely make an initial profession of faith in Jesus. They do so and then continue to trust him for salvation.

They go on with him. They often struggle and sometimes doubt. But they never fall away ‘totally and finally’...*God works in their lives as a confirmation of his love...*We continue to believe God’s promise of salvation. We keep going to church with God’s people, where the Word of God is honored and proclaimed. And *these faithful practices give us confidence* that God belongs to us and we belong to him” (pp. 56-57, emphasis added). Note how assurance is a mixture of believing God’s promise of salvation and *faithful practices*, which include not falling away doctrinally or morally, God constantly working in our lives, and continuing to keep on going to church. Peterson goes on to say that the genuine believer endures in the faith, morally and doctrinally, when temptations come (pp. 57-58).

Likewise, when discussing assurance in Paul, Peterson finds in Phil 1:4-6 a promise that all who genuinely believe in Jesus will persevere in new creation living and works until Christ returns (pp. 89-91). Of course, the person who does not see in himself a life of new creation works cannot benefit from God’s promise of salvation to the *believer*, for he would lack any confidence that he is a *believer*.

Part 1 ends with a sad story about someone called Tom. He was “a brilliant [seminary] student...an outstanding scholar” (p. 94). But he felt he “lacked the proper feelings of a Christian man” and hence doubted his salvation (p. 94). Peterson felt that he should have had assurance anyway by “standing on the promises of God, regardless of [his] feelings or lack thereof” (p. 94). But then he adds a solution for people like Tom, “That is why the Lord graciously assures us in three ways, through the gospel, by the Spirit, and by working in our lives” (p. 94). Well, if a person can’t have assurance by objective promises in the Bible to the believer, how could he possibly gain assurance by looking for inward feelings (exactly Tom’s problem) or for God’s work in his life?

I very much like the fact that TAOS has a Scripture index and a subject index as well.

The subject index shows that Peterson cites Tom Schreiner and the book he co-authored with Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, twice (pp. 61, 70). That book stands out since the authors argue that what they call *final salvation* is a prize to be won by staying in the race which is the Christian life. He also cites Schreiner by himself seven other times (pp. 49, 50, 81, 84, 118, 124, 144). Other Lordship

Salvation authors that Peterson cites frequently include D. A. Carson (four times), John Stott (three times), and J. I. Packer (three times).

I am honored that Peterson cited me and Grace Evangelical Society concerning the role of good works in assurance (Chap. 7). He cites me as saying that “We do not look to our works for assurance” (p. 137) and contrasts that with the Westminster Confession of Faith, which says that good works “strengthen assurance” (p. 138).

Chapter 7 shows the impossibility of assurance by works, though that is not Peterson’s intention. Look at some of the headings in the conclusion of that chapter: “Salvation Makes a Difference in People’s Lives,” “The Lost Are Recognizable,” and “The Saved Are Recognizable” (pp. 154-55). Verses cited here include Matt 7:13-14, Matt 7:16, 20 and the expression “by their fruit you shall know them” (which refers to false prophets, but Peterson thinks that the Lord then “broadens it to distinguish believers from unbelievers,” p. 154), Matt 7:21-23, Gal 5:21-23, 1 John 1:6-7, and 2 Pet 1:5-11, all popular Lordship Salvation texts. While Peterson says, “changed lives play a secondary role in assurance to God’s Word” (p. 155), it seems that changed lives play a primary role in his way of thinking since God’s Word only gives assurance to believers and Reformed thought is convinced that belief is unknowable apart from the works that it produces in a person’s life.

I do not recommend TAOS for believers who are struggling with doubts about their salvation. However, I do recommend it for Free Grace pastors, teachers, and leaders who should be aware of the teachings of Reformed theology regarding assurance of salvation.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Hospitality Commands. By Alexander Strauch. Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1993. 64 pp. Paper, \$6.99.

What kinds of spiritual practices should Christians emphasize? In this short, but powerful, booklet, Alexander Strauch explores what the NT says about *hospitality*. Unlike popular spiritual disciplines

that do not have clear Scriptural bases, Strauch shows that hospitality is an important NT theme.

In the first chapter, Strauch surveys some of the extra-Biblical evidence showing that hospitality made Christians distinct. He quotes Gustav Stahlin as saying, "One of the most prominent features in the picture of early Christianity, which is so rich in good works, is undoubtedly its hospitality" (p. 7).

The second chapter shows that hospitality is rooted in NT teaching about brotherly love. First, Strauch shows the Christian community is frequently described using the language of the family. "The terms *brethren*, *brother*, or *sister* occur some 250 times throughout the New Testament, particularly in Paul's letters," Strauch notes (p. 10). Appropriate to familial relationships, the early Christians "greeted one another with a holy kiss," "shared material possessions," "met in homes," "ate together," "cared for their widows," and, most important for this booklet, "showed hospitality" (p. 11). The Christians were not only called by family names. They acted like a family. Second, Strauch shows the NT also emphasizes the importance of love, where the word group for love "appears approximately 320 times in the New Testament" (p. 13). He goes on to say, "Christianity's teaching on love is unparalleled in the history of religion" (p. 14). How did early Christians encourage love and brotherhood? Hospitality. "I don't think most Christians today understand how essential hospitality is to fanning the flames of love and strengthening the Christian family" (p. 17). Hence, Strauch believes Christians should be practicing hospitality and inviting others into their homes. "We cannot know or grow close to our brothers and sisters by meeting for an hour and fifteen minutes a week with a large group in a church sanctuary. The home is the ideal place in which to build relationships and closeness" (p. 17).

In the third chapter, Strauch argues that the home can be a launching pad for the gospel in two ways: the home was a place to do ministry to others; it was a means for helping traveling evangelists and teachers, then sending them on their way (p. 21). He quotes Michael Green as writing, "One of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was by the use of homes" (p. 21). Strauch points out the different times that Jesus accepted someone's hospitality and then proceeded to do ministry in their homes. Strauch

recommends that Christians begin using their homes for ministry. For example, you can reach out and minister to the lonely: “Lonely people within all our neighborhoods need to be reached with Christ’s love...Hospitality could be a means of pointing these people toward the Savior’s love” (p. 25).

The fourth chapter treats the specific NT commands to practice hospitality, such as Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9; Heb 13:2; 3 John 8; 1 Tim 3:2; and 1 Tim 5:10. Christians should not be passive about hospitality. We should pursue it. “We are to think about it, plan for it, prepare for it, pray about it, and seek opportunities to do it” (p. 35). Strauch warns against the sin of selfishness, which may discourage us from practicing hospitality (p. 38). Of special interest to me was the section pointing out that showing hospitality is a requirement for being an elder (as per 1 Tim 3:1-2 and Titus 1:7-8). “Many Christians are unaware that spiritual leaders are, according to Scripture, required to be hospitable” (p. 43). I was aware of it, but I did not realize how important hospitality is and how it ties together several different aspects of ministry, such as exercising church discipline. The form that discipline takes is often in a refusal to show hospitality (e.g., 1 Cor 5:11).

The fifth chapter makes suggestions of how to practice hospitality, such as making cheap and simple meals, organizing a church hospitality program, or remembering to invite people to your home, especially during holiday seasons.

The book ends with a Study Guide containing questions suitable for a small group.

I was very challenged and edified by this book, and I highly recommend it for Bible-believing Christians who are seeking to focus their time and energies on spiritual practices that God’s Word emphasizes.

Shawn Lazar
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World. By Andy Stanley. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018. 332 pp. Hardcover, \$24.99.

Normally when I review books, I am confident that I understand the author's main point. In the case of *Irresistible* by Andy Stanley, I am confident I understand *at least a few of his main points*.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what Andy Stanley is and is not saying on many points.

Let me begin with what he is clearly saying.

First, we should not ever say to unbelievers, "The Bible says..." That is a very resistible message. Most people today do not respect the Bible or believe that it is authoritative.

Second, we should name names with unbelievers. If we wanted to quote Jesus' words in John 3:16 we might say, "Jesus said that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." But we would not mention John 3:16 and we would not mention the Bible.

Third, when teaching the Bible to Christians, we must take care to avoid presenting OT principles as though they were still in force today. He strongly rejects what he calls "mixing and matching (pp. 93-95, 104). More on this in a moment.

Fourth, the OT is not as authoritative as the NT. He writes, "The Bible says' establishes the Bible, as in *everything in the Bible as equally authoritative*. *It's not*. If it is, we have schizophrenic faith because, as we've noted, the Bible contains two covenants with two different groups for whom God has two different agendas" (p. 307, emphasis added). More on this soon.

Fifth, Stanley thinks it is more accurate to say that the authors of the Bible were inspired, rather than saying that the Bible itself is inspired. He writes, "So while we are accustomed to saying *The Bible is inspired*, it is more accurate and helpful to say, *The authors of Scripture were inspired*" (p. 302). For support he quotes Peter and Paul, though without mentioning where they said these things, except in endnotes at the back of the book. Oddly one of the two proofs he gives is Paul's words, "All Scripture is God-breathed..." (2 Tim 3:16). He does not cite the entire verse. That verse refers to the Scriptures being inspired, not the authors.

Sixth, the reason why so many Americans do not go to church is “because we’re too caught up *in what’s in it for us* rather than *what love requires of us*” (p. 322, emphasis added). I’m not sure what he means. Maybe he is rejecting prosperity theology here. But shouldn’t people go to church to learn how they can have everlasting life? And once they come to faith, shouldn’t they continue to come so that they learn how to live the abundant life that Jesus offers, and how to lay up eternal rewards? What is wrong with a desire to learn “what’s in it for us”? Stanley says that we ought to be calling people to love others. In evangelism? Unfortunately, he says this on the last page of the book and there is no explanation.

Seventh, “most ancient Jews didn’t believe in an afterlife. Why? Their Scriptures did not assume one” (p. 165).

Eighth, the Christian faith is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ: “There once existed a version of our faith that rested securely on a single unprecedented event—the resurrection. That’s the version I’m inviting you to embrace. The original version. The enduring, defensible, new covenant, new command version” (p. 321; see also pp. 23, 293-99).

I disagree with the first seven of those points.

Now some comments about what is *unclear* in *Irresistible*.

First, is he saying that we should not mention the OT when we evangelize?

Second, is he going further and saying that we should stop preaching the OT in our churches? He writes, “I’m convinced our current versions of the Christian faith need to be stripped of a variety of old covenant leftovers...We are dragging along a litany of old covenant concepts and assumptions that slow us down, divide us up, and confuse those standing on the outside peering in” (p. 92).

Third, is he suggesting that the entire OT is no longer in force? Or is he saying that the commands of the OT not repeated in the NT are no longer in force?

I am a Dispensationalist. I believe that Christians are no longer under the Law of Moses. Only those laws repeated in the NT are binding on us, and then not as part of the Law of Moses. However, the OT is far more than the Law of Moses. There are many timeless principles in the OT. In addition, even the Law of Moses has *application* for today (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Fourth, is he saying that there will be no temple in the Tribulation and in the Millennium (pp. 49, 65)?

Fifth, if it is more accurate to say that the writers of Scripture were inspired rather than what they wrote, does that mean that there are errors in the Bible? If not, why not say that the text itself is inspired?

Six final items before I close.

Item one: there are several online reviews of this book, which you may want to read. There is a negative review by Lita Cosner (<https://creation.com/stanley-irresistible-review>). It was the best review I read. There are relatively negative ones by Tom Schreiner (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/old-covenant-response-andy-stanley/>), Michael Kruger (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/irresistible-andy-stanley/>), and Owen Strachan (<https://cpt.mbts.edu/2018/10/15/we-have-no-divided-god-a-review-of-irresistible-by-andy-stanley/>). And there is a mostly positive review by Clark Morledge (<https://sharedveracity.net/2019/01/26/irresistible-by-andy-stanley-a-review/>).

Item two: I have an uneasy feeling as I read this book. Not once *in the text of the book* does Stanley tell the reader the book, chapter, and verses he is quoting. He leaves that to endnotes at the back of the book. Is he implying that *even when writing to believers* we should not give *believers* Bible references?

Item three: I don't see how anyone can understand the NT without having an excellent grasp of the OT. Yet Stanley's book makes the OT look outdated and irrelevant. While I would not start a new believer in Genesis or Leviticus, I'd certainly want a mature believer to read and study every book of the Bible.

Item four: I was taught in seminary to avoid attributing dialogue to God. The reason is that the Bible does not encourage us to do that. Stanley has a very odd fictional conversation between God the Father and Jesus (pp. 115-16). Lita Cosner comments, "He is also too cavalier when talking about God. Case in point, his 'conversation between the Father and the Son' starting on page 115 should horrify any Christian, where Stanley apparently imagines God the Father as a cross between a Harvard MBA and a used-car salesman, and Jesus as the ambitious but clueless go-getter. It's appalling to hear any pastor be so irreverent."

Item five: Instead of encouraging Christians to defend the Bible against attacks to its credibility, Stanley encourages Christians to simply throw the OT under the bus as irrelevant to our faith: “When skeptics point out the violence, the misogyny, the scientific and historically unverifiable claims of the Hebrew Bible, instead of trying to defend those things, we can shrug, give ‘em our best confused look, and say, ‘I’m not sure why you’re bringing this up. My Christian faith isn’t based on any of that’” (p. 290).

Item six: Andy Stanley is not clear about Free Grace issues. When he discusses Peter evangelizing Cornelius and his household and then the Jerusalem Council, for example, he doesn’t say that all who believe in Jesus for everlasting life (or for justification) have it (pp. 117-30). I did not find a single place in the book where he laid out the faith-alone message clearly, even though this book has as one of its purposes to teach us how to evangelize people. He has Peter speak about “my decision to follow Jesus,” which appears to be Stanley’s statement of Peter’s understanding not of discipleship, but of justification (p. 287).

I do not recommend this book.

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