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DISCIPLESHIP AND THE WIDOW'S MITES (MARK 12:41-44)

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

In Mark 8:22–10:52, the reader finds a long section that deals with the topic of discipleship. In it, the Lord teaches the disciples about the cost of following Him. It begins and ends with the Lord healing a blind man. The disciples are blind to these truths, and these two blind men serve as illustrations of the truths they need to see.¹

The second blind man is Bartimaeus. He is an important figure in the Gospel of Mark, especially in this discipleship section. He becomes the example for the original twelve disciples as well as the reader of Mark to emulate.² It is fitting that his healing is the close of the section.

Beginning in Mark 11, there is a dramatic shift in themes. From Mark 11–13, Jesus, after His entry into Jerusalem, conflicts with the Jewish religious leaders. They have decided to kill Him (11:18; 12:12). The Lord speaks of the coming judgment upon the nation, the temple, and the religious leaders as a result of their rejection of Him.

D. B. Sloan says this section on conflict and judgment can be diagrammed in a chiasmic structure:

- A Jesus curses a fig tree and cleanses the temple as a sign of judgment (11:12-26).
- B The religious leaders question Jesus' authority (11:27–33), and Jesus tells a parable condemning the religious leaders (12:1-12).
- C The religious leaders test Jesus' interpretation of Scripture (12:13-34).

¹ Kenneth Yates, "The Healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), Part 1," *JOTGES* 29 (2016): 3-18.

² Kenneth Yates, "The Healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), Part 2," *JOTGES* 29 (2016): 3-15.

- C' Jesus exposes the scribes' misinterpretation of Scripture (12:35-37).
- B' Jesus condemns the scribes (12:38-40) and commends the widow who loves God with all she has (12:41-44).
- A' Jesus prophesies the destruction of the temple and uses a fig tree for a lesson (13:1-37).³

This section, then, begins and ends with the idea of the judgment of the Jewish leaders and the temple (11:12-20; 13:2). In between, the religious leaders ask Jesus a number of questions. As Sloan's chiasm suggests, they challenge the authority of Christ and His ability to interpret the Scriptures.⁴ The first question asked by the leaders specifically challenges His authority (11:28).

With each question, Jesus leaves His enemies speechless. He answers each question wisely, with one of the religious leaders himself acknowledging this fact (12:28, 32). Mark concludes that at the end of the questions, nobody dared ask Him any more questions (12:34). Though fiercely opposed, the Lord establishes His role as a teacher sent from and whose authority comes from God.⁵

Chapter 12 ends with the Lord strongly rebuking the religious leaders (12:38-40), including a statement about their coming judgment. This is immediately followed by the well known story about a poor widow (vv 41-44). The account of the widow, as this article will show, is closely connected with Jesus' denunciation of the religious leaders. Since chap. 13 is the Olivet Discourse and is given to the disciples, one could say that the rebuke of the leaders and the scene with the poor widow form the conclusion to Christ's conflict with the religious leaders in chaps. 11-12.

This is especially true when one considers the location of Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders. This opposition begins in the temple (11:27), and Mark presents the questions by the religious leaders as occurring in the same location. Jesus sees the widow in the temple

³ D. B. Sloan, "God of Abraham, God of the Living: Jesus' Use of Exodus 3:6 in Mark 12:26-27," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 74 (2012): 86-88.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ D. C. Ortlund, "Mark's Emphasis on Jesus's Teaching, Part 1: Exploring a Neglected Motif," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174 (2017): 337.

and comments on her actions. After these comments, He leaves the temple, never to return.

The account of the poor widow, then, is intimately connected with judgment on the nation. What is that connection? In addition, in Mark 11–12, has Mark left the theme of discipleship completely and is only dealing with opposition to the Lord and judgment on the nation, or are there discipleship truths being taught in this section as well?

Finally, does the poor widow of Mark 12:41-44 function in a manner similar to Bartimaeus in 10:46-52? In other words, is she an example or illustration of the truths taught in Mark 11–12? This article will attempt to answer these questions.

II. THE IMMEDIATE CONNECTION (MARK 12:38-40)

After the various religious leaders ask Jesus a series of questions (11:27–12:34), Jesus asks them a question (12:35-37). This inquiry from the Lord answers the original question from the religious leaders (11:27-28).

Jesus has now shown that He accurately interprets the Scriptures. With the authority He has from God, He has pronounced judgment on the nation and its temple. But the religious leaders have rejected Him and His message. This leads to a scathing rebuke of these leaders by Jesus (12:38-40).

A. The Sins of the Religious Leaders

The Lord lists several sins that the leaders are guilty of. Not only do they commit these sins, they take pleasure (*thelō*) in them.⁶ The KJV translation of the Bible translates the word with “love,” and the NKJV gives the same sense. This seems like a good translation and description of their attitude towards their sins:

Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour

⁶ “*thelō*,” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 448.

widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.
These will receive greater condemnation (emphasis added).

The “best seats” in the synagogues probably refer to seats next to the place where the Scriptures were. They would have been in front of the congregation. Those chosen to sit in these seats could be seen by everyone. The implication is that the person sitting in such a seat would be a person of honor.

The same could be said about the best seats at a feast (Luke 14:7-8). It is similar to the modern-day phrase, “a seat at the head table.” The person holding the feast would invite people of honor to sit with him. William Lane suggests it would have been an honor to have such a scribe attend your feast.⁷

Here in the West, we think of the marketplace simply as a place of merchandise. It is a place where things are bought and sold. But in the first century, and in this context, we should think of it as a place where discussions take place as well. As in the synagogues, the scribes wanted to be recognized as men of honor and importance with the various titles they wanted people to call them.

It may be that the robes the scribes wore set them apart from other people as well. They were white, whereas common people wore robes with colors.⁸ It could be that Jesus also has in mind robes that scribes would wear on special occasions.

These scribes also loved to make long prayers. But they did so “for a pretense” (*prophasis*). BDAG says that in Mark 12:40 *prophasis* refers to prayers made “for appearance sake.”⁹ Their motive was not to communicate with God.

In light of the other sins Jesus lists, their motive was clearly to draw attention to themselves. They want to appear religious and important in the eyes of others. Their respectful greetings, their places of honor, their clothing, and their prayers all had this purpose. That is why they loved to engage in such activities.

Geoffrey Smith rightly points out that the rebuke by the Lord in these actions of the scribes “is primarily concerned with their

⁷William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 440.

⁸Ibid.

⁹BDAG, s.v. “*prophasis*,” 889.

preoccupation with the mere appearance of godliness.” The practice of their faith only involves “religious displays.”¹⁰

The Lord had just spoken to another scribe about the greatest commandment in the Law (12:28-34). Jesus told him that the greatest commandment is to love God with one’s whole being and to love one’s neighbor as oneself. That scribe says that Jesus has spoken the truth.

Clearly, Jesus’ rebuke of the scribes indicates that the scribes neither loved God nor their neighbor. They did not love but were concerned with outward religiosity. Instead of loving God and pointing people to Him, they pointed people to themselves. Instead of loving others, they loved to appear religious before others.

B. Their Hypocrisy

The Lord makes it clear that the scribes are not what they appear to be. By definition, they were hypocrites. Even though Jesus lists a number of sins that point to their hypocrisy, Smith rightly indicates that there is one sin that stands out:

Jesus singles out one particular sinister activity of the scribes that reveals the horrendous nature of their hypocrisy: They devour widows’ houses, covering up their crimes with still more superficial piety—their long prayers.¹¹

It is not known what the Lord means when He said “devour” the homes of widows. Perhaps the scribes charged excessive legal fees which hit the poor particularly hard. In such a case, a home may have been a pledge for debts which could not be paid. They may have been trustees of estates and mismanaged them to their own financial advantage. It is also possible that they promoted their religion at the temple to guilt people into giving beyond their means. This would be appealing to the pious poor. The phrase could also have a general meaning and imply that they exploited the hospitality provided by widows.¹²

¹⁰ Geoffrey Smith, “A Closer Look at the Widow’s Offering: Mark 12:41-44, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 491.

Brooks points out that scribes were not allowed to receive payment for their teaching. If they were not secularly employed, they were dependent upon gifts. In such a situation they appeared holy in order to obtain such gifts, including from naïve widows. This could also explain the association of praying long prayers with devouring the homes of widows. They may have “expected” generous gifts from widows after praying for them.¹³ By appearing religious, they would have gained the trust of these widows.¹⁴

Even though we do not know the exact details of the phrase, it almost certainly means more than taking advantage of the hospitality of widows. The Greek word for “devour” suggests the idea of consuming something completely. It is used to describe what happens to seeds when they are eaten by birds (Luke 8:5). The prodigal son “devoured” his father’s estate (Luke 15:30). When he did so, the son was left completely destitute. The word is also used to describe something being burned up by fire (Rev 11:5; 20:9). The point here in Mark 12 is that the actions of the scribes leave these widows devoured of their financial means. They are practically penniless.¹⁵ This certainly finds support in Jesus’ strong denunciation of the scribes. Their sin is a serious one with catastrophic consequences for the widows in question.

The seriousness of their sin in this regard is also seen in Jesus’ saying they will receive a “greater condemnation” (v 40). This indicates that all, including unbelievers, will be judged by their works. While bad works do not send a person to the lake of fire, there will be degrees of eternal judgment (Heb 6:2; Rev 20:12-13). The scribes will receive a worse eternal judgment because they were experts in the Law and teachers of it. They claimed to be the men to whom the Jews should go in order to draw near to God. Instead, they wanted to draw people to themselves. They wanted for themselves the honor due God. As religious leaders they will be held to a higher standard.¹⁶

¹³ J. A. Brooks, *Mark* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 202.

¹⁴ Perhaps we see a modern day equivalent when preachers on television become rich with specially crafted appeals for money. Their slick appeals come from people who claim to be especially close to God. At least some of their wealth comes from poor donors who give, thinking they are donating to such godly men. In such instances, the poor can hardly afford to give and are taken advantage of.

¹⁵ Smith, “A Closer Look,” 28-29.

¹⁶ The same is true for believers. Our works will determine our rewards in the kingdom of God. But believing teachers of the Word of God will be judged with a harsher judgment in this regard (Jas 3:1).

If these scribes knew the Lord and the Law the way they presented themselves as knowing, they would have understood that they were to love their neighbor (vv 29-31). These widows were such neighbors. Their long prayers were simply another means by which they took advantage of their neighbor.

C. Conclusion

The Lord's denunciation of the scribes in Mark 12:38-40 paves the way for the account of the widow with her two mites in vv 41-44. Jesus mentions in v 40 how the scribes make widows financially destitute. The reader meets such a widow in the next verses. One writer says that the widow with her two mites is a representative of "the wreckage left behind by the greediness of the scribes."¹⁷

A severe judgment is coming upon the scribes. Their hypocritical sins make such judgment well deserved.

But Mark 11-12 shows that judgment is also coming upon the temple. The rejection of Christ by the religious leaders shows this judgment is deserved as well. It will be shown that the poor widow is proof of the coming judgment on both the temple and its leaders.

But the widow is also an example for believers who read Mark's Gospel.

III. THE WIDOW AS LIVING PROOF

The well known account of the widow with her two mites comes immediately after the Lord's strong rebuke of the scribes. The words to the scribes are the last public teachings of Jesus to the nation of Israel. His words were directed to a general group of people ("them," v 38) in the temple. He specifically addresses the disciples (v 43) as He teaches them about this widow. Clearly, there is significance in the example of this woman for them. In addition, His rebuke of the scribes contains truths they need to understand as well.

A. The Actions of the Widow

The account of the poor widow is not only connected with the previous section by with the word "widow." The widow is clearly seen

¹⁷ Smith, "A Closer Look," 29-30.

as a contrast with the scribes. The religious leaders were men. She is a woman. They desire attention. She does not want to be noticed. They are rich. She is poor. They are greedy, while she is extremely generous. They are experts in the Law, while she is not. Even though that is the case, as will be seen, they do not follow the Law. She does.

Another connection is that Jesus has just mentioned the hypocritical prayers of the scribes, which is intimately connected with the way they rob widows. We see this woman's sacrificial giving in this section. Did the long prayers of the scribes encourage her to give all that she had? The hypocrisy of the scribes was such that they convinced the poor to give for their benefit by their attention-seeking religious activities. They knew that people who wanted to please God, like this widow, would be encouraged to give to the temple when they saw the supposed devotion of the scribes. These were men who, in the mind of the widow, merited her support.

After His rebuke of the scribes, Mark tells the readers that Jesus "sat opposite the treasury." The Jewish Mishnah says that there were thirteen receptacles into which the people could place money.¹⁸ These receptacles would have been located in the Court of the Women (cf. John 8:20), which explains the presence of this widow.

The Mishnah says these were called "trumpet chests," probably because they were shaped like trumpets. Different kinds of offerings could be placed into them. They could receive the temple tax, which was an obligation for all men. But they could also accept freewill offerings, which were voluntary.¹⁹ Such offerings would include money given to help the poor.

These "trumpets" were in a very public place. Those who gave were easily observed, as indicated by Jesus seeing all those who gave. The verb "saw" (v 41) is in the imperfect tense, which suggests a period of time that Jesus was watching people give. France suggests this place in the temple may have been a tourist attraction.²⁰ If so, this would have been an excellent place to go if a person wanted to give in order to appear religious.

N. G. Piotrowski suggests that this tourist trap was the way in which the religious leaders robbed widows (v 40). This is, in part,

¹⁸ Mishnah, *Shekalim*, 6:5.

¹⁹ France, *Mark*, 489.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

what made the temple a den of thieves (11:17).²¹ The extent of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders is seen in that even in the act of people giving to the Lord, they are robbing the flock.

The woman does not want to stand out. One could imagine that she was embarrassed by such a small gift. She is the exact opposite of the scribes (vv 38-40). They are proud, while she is humble. In addition, no doubt, the many rich who placed their money into the receptacles also wanted to stand out. If a rich person put in many coins, the sound of such an offering would have been noticeable. The irony is, of course, that she is the one who catches the attention of the Lord. The scribes wanted to appear religious. But it is this widow whose actions are truly religious.

After mentioning that Jesus saw the giving of many rich donors, Mark introduces the poor widow (v 42). She gave two mites. The Greek word *lepta* indicates that these two coins were almost worthless. Each was a small copper coin, and each was worth “1/128 of a denarius.”²² It would have taken the average worker less than ten minutes to earn what this woman offers to the temple. This coin was the coin with the least value used in Israel at this time. We see the poverty of this woman in the fact that this meager amount was all the money she had (v 44).

Her attitude is clearly seen in the fact that she gave two coins. After deciding to give, she could easily rationalize giving only one. That would have been half of her financial worth. But she gave all she had. The Greek uses more picturesque words for the extent of her giving. She gave “her whole life” (*holon ton bion autēs*).²³

B. A Lesson for the Disciples

The disciples, like everyone else in the Court of Women, would not have taken notice of this woman. But Jesus calls the disciples to Himself to point out what this woman has done (v 43). The verb for “calling” the disciples was used in 10:42. In that case, Jesus wants to

²¹ N. G. Piotrowski, “‘Whatever You Ask’ for the Missionary Purposes of the Eschatological Temple: Quotations and Typology in Mark 11–12,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21 (2017): 105.

²² BDAG, s.v. “*leptos*,” 592.

²³ E. S. Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 270.

teach them vital truths. The phrase “assuredly I say to you” (*amēn legō hūmin*) occurs fourteen times in Mark (3:28; 6:11; 8:12; 9:1, 41; 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25; 14:30). The vast majority are found in the last half of the book. Jesus uses it with His disciples to call attention to things He wants His disciples to understand.²⁴

The same is true here. The disciples have shown that, in their opinion, the rich are more likely to please God (Mark 10:25-26). Jesus clearly wants to use this woman to correct their understanding of what was happening in the treasury. Once again we see the difference between the scribes and this woman. The scribes would call attention to their outward acts of religiosity. Jesus had to point out what this woman was doing.

As was the case with the rich man in Mark 10:17-29, Jesus teaches the disciples through this woman. He points out that this woman gave more than all the rich people who gave in the temple that day. Her giving sprang from poverty and was costly. Their giving cost them very little. Indeed, they themselves benefited from this giving by drawing attention to themselves.

In the context of Mark, this woman teaches the disciples two related things. The first is that the judgment that is coming upon Israel is deserved. The second is that she is an outstanding example of what a disciple is.

IV. JUDGMENT IS DESERVED

The account of the widow and her sacrificial gift occurs at the end of the section with a heavy emphasis on judgment. As noted above, immediately before this account, Jesus gives a strong rebuke towards the scribes. In that rebuke He says the religious leaders will receive a greater condemnation.

But the theme of judgment on the leaders has dominated a much longer section in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus showed His disapproval of the religious establishment when He cleaned out the temple (11:15-19). The cursing and destruction of the fig tree (11:12-14, 20) serve as a graphic illustration of the coming destruction of the temple. The Lord then gives a parable about judgment on the nation and especially

²⁴Ortlund, “Mark’s Emphasis on Jesus’s Teaching,” 341-42.

the religious leaders. The leaders themselves know that Jesus spoke the parable against them (12:1-12). Immediately after the account of the widow, Jesus specifically says the temple would be destroyed (13:2).

Jesus' strong denunciation of the scribes (vv 38-40) indicates that the judgment coming upon them is deserved. The fact that the religious leaders are thieves (11:17), and especially towards the poor, points to this woman. In light of what the OT teaches about judgment, it is significant that she is a widow. In the actions of the religious leaders, Jesus sees things that are crying out for judgment.

If the reader of Mark looks at chaps. 11–12 as a unit, he will observe that Jesus speaks of judgment. The two accounts of Jesus looking around in the temple form an *inclusio*. He looks around before He cleanses the temple (11:11). He looks around at the giving occurring in the temple (12:41). The whole section is speaking of a coming deserved judgment.

The religious leaders mistreated poor widows (v 40). They should have protected these vulnerable women. The scribes were experts in the Old Testament, and Moses wrote that widows and the poor were to be protected (Exod 22:22-24). It was against the Law to mistreat them. If a widow was afflicted, it was her right to appeal to God for relief.²⁵ In the Exodus passage, it says that God will judge those who mistreat such people. God will hear the cry for justice from the poor and the widow.

Other verses in the OT contain the same theme. Deuteronomy 10:18 says that God will bring justice for the afflicted poor and widows. Deuteronomy 27:19 pronounces a curse on those who mistreat widows. The Israelites were commanded to take care of their needs (Deut 14:29).²⁶

This OT teaching on poor widows helps the reader understand the reason for the stark contrast between the scribes in vv 38-40 and the widow in vv 41-44. The actions of the scribes were criminal in that they were against the Law. The widow in the temple is an illustration of the spiritual condition of the nation as a whole. This woman is a clear indication that the nation and her leaders have violated God's covenant. Judgment is richly deserved.²⁷

²⁵ Smith, "A Closer Look," 32-33.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 32.

This woman's state is directly connected with the actions of the leaders themselves. They have robbed her. They were supposed to teach the Law. Instead, they hypocritically appeared to be godly men so they could afflict the poor.

Smith says that the poor widow occurs at the end of the section on coming judgment as an "important piece of evidence." God's case against Israel is "complete."²⁸ Of course, the opposition of the leaders against Jesus the Messiah makes it even more clear that God's judgment is coming upon the nation.

When Jesus looked around the temple, both in 11:11 and 12:41, this was part of what He saw. Piotrowski points out that this situation in the nation and among the leaders was not a momentary lapse into sin. The leaders had long accepted this way of treating their fellow Jews. They had used the money given in the temple to provide loans. When the people could not repay, they seized their land. He suggests that this is the meaning of devouring the homes of widows.²⁹ If this is the case, even the two mites of this woman would be added to the financial resources of the leaders to afflict the poor.

In any case, this woman is a stinging rebuke against the rich, especially the rich religious leaders. She is also an illustration: not only does her sacrificial giving serve as a contrast to the greediness of the rich, but her circumstances cry out against the religious leaders who have taken advantage of her. Jesus' cleansing of the temple, cursing of the fig tree, and parable against the religious leaders all spoke of a coming judgment. The widow in the temple that day was exhibit number one that this judgment was deserved. After pointing her out to the disciples and commending her, Jesus leaves the temple, never to return. Judgment on that place and its leaders was certain.

But the disciples could also learn a great deal from this woman.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Piotrowski, "Whatever You Ask," 103.

V. EXAMPLE OF DISCIPLESHIP

A. Introduction

While the theme of judgment plays a dominant role in Mark 11–12, there are also discipleship truths taught in these chapters. Discipleship must be kept separate from receiving eternal life. Receiving eternal life is free and is obtained by faith alone. Discipleship involves works and is costly. While Mark 8:22–10:52 is often called the discipleship section of Mark, Jesus is continuing to teach the disciples while being opposed by the religious leaders.

This is in keeping with the original audience of Mark. There is general agreement, based in part upon early Christian writers, that the book was written to Christians in Rome who were living in a hostile environment. As a result, the main purpose was not to convert unbelievers to Christianity. Instead, it was to teach the readers how they should live *after* believing. Grassmick writes:

The Christians in Rome had already heard and believed the good news of God's saving power (Rom. 1:8) but they needed to hear it again with a new emphasis to catch afresh its implications for their lives in a dissolute and often hostile environment. They needed to understand the nature of discipleship—what it meant to follow Jesus—in light of who Jesus is and what He had done and would keep doing for them.³⁰

If this is the case, it would not be surprising to find discipleship truth even in a long section on judgment and opposition. In fact, the original readers could learn from the example of the Lord as He Himself faced difficulties and rejection from the religious leaders.

Even though Jesus is tested by the religious leaders with questions in Mark 11–12, it is clear that He is teaching the disciples in the midst of this opposition. As the opposition begins, He calls the disciples together and tells them to believe in God and be men of prayer. As disciples they will face obstacles, but God can overcome any obstacle they face if they rely on Him (11:22-25). He will meet their needs. These are all discipleship truths.

³⁰ John D. Grassmick, "Mark," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 99-101.

As has already been seen, the section ends with Jesus pointing out to the disciples the actions of the poor widow in the temple (12:43). This clearly suggests He wants them to learn from her example.

B. Discipleship Truths in Mark 11–12

The questions by the religious leaders and Jesus' responses provide lessons for any disciple of Christ. When they ask Him by what authority He cleared out the temple, the Lord says He got His authority from the same place John the Baptist received his authority (11:28-33). These religious leaders have already determined to kill Jesus (11:18). The reader knows what happened to John (Mark 6:14-29). This prefigures the death of Christ. The disciple can expect the opposition of the world. This is the reason disciples need to be men and women of prayer and to trust in God.

In all the questions by the religious leaders, Jesus gives answers related to discipleship. The Pharisees and Herodians ask Him if the Jews should pay taxes to Caesar. The Lord answers that one should give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. However, he should also give to God what belongs to God (12:13-17). Caesar's image is on the denarius with which the Jews paid the tax. It belonged to him. But the image of God remains in men and women. They owe Him their ultimate allegiance.

The Sadducees ask Jesus a question about the resurrection. They use a hypothetical case involving Levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-6) to suggest that the idea of a physical resurrection cannot be true. Jesus responds from the account of the burning bush in Exodus 3 that the character of God demands such a resurrection (12:18-27).

While the main point in these verses is that there will be a physical resurrection, discipleship truths are present as well. The seven brothers involved in this case of Levirate marriage are giving to God what is due Him (12:17). God had commanded them to raise up, with the surviving widow, children for a brother who dies without children. Obedience to this command would have involved a great cost to the surviving brothers, as any children produced would have reduced the inheritance of the brothers. The OT gives examples of the financial difficulties involved in obeying this command by the Lord. Some simply refused to do so (Gen 38:9; Ruth 4:4-6).

These brothers also served the widow involved. Without a husband or any children, she was in dire straits. They took on the responsibility of her care.

Implied in the question of the Sadducees is that obedience to the commands of God are not important. These bodies will not be raised. The sacrifices of these seven brothers were foolish.

When Jesus refers to the burning bush, He is referring to God's statement that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had made a covenant with them.³¹ Included in this covenant was a physical resurrection. But this covenant involved more. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were obedient men, like the brothers in the example. The covenant God made with them not only required a physical resurrection, it demanded rewards in that resurrection. These men made great sacrifices to obey the Lord. As a result, they will be greatly rewarded in the kingdom.³²

In Hebrews 11, the author talks of these three men as well (Heb 11:8-10, 17-21). They all lived lives of faith in order to receive a reward—an inheritance—in the life to come (Heb 11:6, 35).³³

We can conclude that when Jesus tells the Sadducees that Exod 3:6 proves there will be a resurrection of the dead, part of the reason deals with rewards in the world to come. God has promised to reward His children who walk in obedience to Him. His character demands He raise them from the dead to reward the works they have done as a result of His commandments.

The last question a religious leader asked the Lord is found in 12:28. It concerns the greatest commandment in the OT Law. Jesus responds that the greatest commandment is to love God with your whole being. A second commandment is like it. It is to love your neighbor as yourself. Clearly these commandments deal with discipleship truth. The Apostle John applies these commandments to

³¹ Lane, *Mark*, 430. Lane points out that Jesus is saying more than simply these three men were with the Lord even though they were dead. He had made a covenant with these men that involved future things.

³² Zane C. Hodges, *The Free Grace Primer* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2018), 364-65.

³³ Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (Monument, CO: Panyim Group, Inc., 2012), 77, 125-26 and Kenneth Yates, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2018), 178-79, 181-82.

Christians. If we desire to have fellowship with God, we must love Him and others (1 John 4:20-21).³⁴

C. The Widow's Example

After all these questions and answers, Mark ends this section with the example of the poor widow in the temple. Based upon what Jesus says to the religious leaders in the temple, this woman comes off in a very positive light.

When the Lord says that His authority comes from the same place as John the Baptist's authority, we are reminded that God's people will experience difficulties if they walk in obedience. This woman understands this principle. She has also been mistreated by the religious elite. She also lives in extreme poverty. But she desires to obey God and acts upon that desire.

With the withering of the fig tree, Jesus speaks of the need to believe in God when one faces obstacles. This woman faces the obstacles of poverty, opposition from those who should be concerned for her, and the lack of future prospects. But she has extreme faith in God as is shown by her giving all her life to His work. She has faith that He will meet her needs.

On the issue of taxes, the Lord had said to give God what is due Him. Financially speaking, it would not be possible to find a person who gave more to God. Jesus Himself says she gave more than all the other people in the temple that day (12:43).

When one reads the question about the resurrection and the Lord's response, this woman once again comes across in a good light. Even though it is difficult, she obeys God. We can assume that she believed God would reward her faithfulness because of His character and promises. He had made a covenant with the Jewish people, and she was part of the Jewish nation.

Jesus' response that His followers should love God with all their being and their neighbor as themselves also finds an illustration in this woman. The money given in the temple was for the poor, that

³⁴ Once again, like discipleship, being in fellowship with God is not the same as receiving eternal life or being eternally saved. Being in fellowship with God involves obeying Him. This fellowship/obedience will result in rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 John 2:28). See Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 124, 209-211.

is, for others. She did not want to be noticed, and so she clearly gave out of love for God. In her actions, she literally loved Him with all her life.

Smith points out that this woman is not only an example of the discipleship truths taught in Mark 11–12. He speculates that the disciples also remembered what the Lord said about counting the cost and taking up their crosses to follow Him (8:34-38). He had also told them to deny themselves and serve others (10:42-45).³⁵

A similar thing occurred when the disciples argued about who would be in positions of honor in the kingdom. The Lord pointed out that their actions illustrate how the world operates. Greatness in His kingdom will come from being the last and the one who is a slave of others (10:35-45).

The widow is again an excellent illustration of these truths. The scribes want to be noticed. They want positions of honor at feasts and in the synagogues. They want to rob others and become richer. They want to be served. The woman is the exact opposite. She does not want recognition. She has no hope of seats of honor in this world. She does not rob others but gives and serves others with what she has. She becomes even poorer. She is one who knows the cost of obeying the Lord, and she has counted those costs. She is a disciple of the things Jesus teaches.³⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of Mark 10 and his long discussion on discipleship, Mark uses Bartimaeus as an illustration for the disciples of the Lord. Bartimaeus is an illustration of their blindness towards the cost of discipleship. He is also an example: Bartimaeus leaves his important coat behind and follows Jesus on the difficult road to Jerusalem and the cross.³⁷

This article has argued that the poor widow of Mark 12:41-44 functions in a similar fashion. She is an illustration and an example. She is an illustration in that she shows that judgment is coming upon

³⁵ Smith, "A Closer Look," 31.

³⁶ Whether she is a believer is not the point. Mark uses this woman as an illustration of what the attitudes and actions of His followers should be.

³⁷ Yates, "Bartimaeus," 14-15.

the nation. The rebuke of the religious leaders, especially in 12:38-40, points to that coming judgment. Bartimaeus is a foil for the disciples. The woman is a foil for the religious leaders. Of all the people in the temple that day, including the rich and religious leaders, she is the one who worships the Lord.³⁸ The religious leaders only pretended to adore God.

The Lord had told the disciples to trust in God in view of this coming judgment (11:22-24). With that judgment, difficult times were ahead. It would even involve the death of the Lord. But God would meet their needs. The woman at the end of the section demonstrates this faith.

Like Bartimaeus, then, this woman is an example for the disciples. He had left behind his valuable garment. Peter says the disciples left behind everything to follow Christ (10:21). She gives up everything to obey the Lord.³⁹ This is what the Lord requires of those who would follow Him (8:34-38).

The poor widow in the temple that day is not even named. One could conclude that she is a minor character in the Gospel of Mark. But she is a great example for any believing reader of Mark who desires to follow the Lord in discipleship. This woman of faith has a wholehearted devotion to God. She gives God all she owns. It does not escape the notice and praise of the Lord.⁴⁰ She is an important "minor" character. For believers who want to be great in the kingdom, she is someone to be imitated.

³⁸ John R. Donahue, "A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 101 (1982): 583.

³⁹ R. A. Culpepper, "Mark 10:50: Why Mention the Garment?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 132.

⁴⁰ J. F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 153 (1996): 340-41.

TESTING YOURSELF REGARDING GOD’S APPROVAL AND DISAPPROVAL (2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-7)

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, I wrote a short magazine article on this passage.¹ There are several reasons why I felt it was important to write a longer article on these verses of Scripture .

First, this passage is typically taken to mean that the believer must regularly evaluate his works in order to reaffirm that he is likely born again. This view makes certainty of one’s salvation impossible. The best one can hope for is a high degree of confidence that he is probably saved.

Second, the context of this passage is often not examined carefully enough to determine what is meant in vv 5-7. Theologically preconceived ideas tend to hinder the exegete from seeing things clearly.

Third, this is the only place in the entire Bible where the word *dokimos* and its antonym, *adokimos*, occur in the same verse (v 6). Indeed, one fourth of the NT uses of those words are found in these three verses. That fact has not received enough attention.

Fourth, if the issue is whether the readers are currently *approved* by God—which is the view advocated in this article—rather than whether they are born again, then the application of the text concerns eternal rewards, not eternal salvation.

¹ Bob Wilkin, “Examine Yourselves: Assurance and God’s Approval in 2 Corinthians 13:5,” *Grace in Focus* (November-December 2014): 4-8.

II. THE TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-7

Many commentators think Paul was concerned about whether his readers were born again or not. He wanted them to test themselves to see if they were regenerate.

Others think that Paul's primary concern was to prove to the readers that he genuinely spoke for God. In this view the reason he wanted them to test themselves was to show that he was indeed a true apostle. If they examined themselves and found they passed the test, they would prove that he was an apostle, for he had led them to faith in Christ and begun their initial training in the faith. But most who hold to this second view think that some in the church would fail the test and prove to be what they call *reprobate* or *not really born again*.²

Wayne Grudem cites this passage to refute Free Grace Theology. After quoting v 5, he writes:

This verse poses a challenge for Free Grace advocates because they do not think it appropriate to tell regular church-goers who profess to be Christians that they should "examine themselves" *to find out if they are really born again or not*. That comes too close to saying that good works are a necessary result of saving faith, which is contrary to Free Grace teaching.³

Grudem ends his discussion of 2 Cor 13:5 saying, "Surely, the entire verse is talking about whether they are born-again Christian believers or not."⁴

Similarly, John MacArthur says,

The call to Christian discipleship explicitly demands just that kind of total dedication. It is full commitment, with nothing knowingly or deliberately held back. No one can come to Christ on any other terms. Those who think that

²An exception of one who holds that view would be Perry C. Brown, "What Is the Meaning of 'Examine Yourselves' in 2 Corinthians 13:5?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 1997): 175-88. He argues that, "Rather than doubt the security of the Corinthian Christians' eternal salvation because of a personal attack on himself, Paul used that very security in Christ to prove his God-given authority and sincerity" (188). So also, James H. Brookes, "Self-Examination as It Relates to Assurance," *JOTGES* 11 (1993): 54-55.

³Wayne Grudem, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 131, emphasis added.

⁴*Ibid.*, 132.

they can simply affirm a list of gospel facts and continue to live any way they please should examine themselves to see if they are really in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).⁵

Over 150 years ago, Charles Hodge wrote:

To examine...whether ye be in the faith [emphasis his], that is, whether you really have faith, or are Christians in name only...The fact, therefore, that we are commanded to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith, proves that a true believer may doubt of his good estate. In other words, *it proves that assurance is not essential to faith*.⁶

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes sees the emphasis on Paul's vindication. He understands *adokimoi* to refer to those who "are reprobates—put to the proof and rejected as spurious."⁷ However, he thinks that,

If such self-examination reveals that they have experience of the grace of God, then that alone is proof irrefutable that it is none other than Christ who speaks in Paul, for it was precisely through his ministry in Corinth that they received the gospel and passed from death into life.⁸

Hughes suggests that "This [some being reprobates] doubtless is always true of some within the Church; but it cannot be true of the Church as a whole."⁹

Though John Piper also understands 2 Cor 13:5-7 to be a call for self-examination as to whether one is truly born again or not, he warns that self-examination can be "evil" ("When Self-Examination Is Evil") and "tiring and fruitless."¹⁰ He starts out a blog on 2 Cor 13:5 by saying, "Unhealthy introspection is a daily threat to our joy in Christ. Many of us tend to examine ourselves in a way that is excessive, inaccurate, and leads to discouragement."¹¹

⁵ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?* Revised & Expanded Anniversary Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988, 1994, 2008), 220.

⁶ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1859, reprinted 1980), 305, emphasis added.

⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 481.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 481.

¹⁰ John Piper, "Self-Examination Speaks a Thousand Lies," at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/self-examination-speaks-a-thousand-lies>. Last accessed January 7, 2020.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Piper thinks that proper self-examination considers the grace and love of God:

Grace transforms examination from a tyrant and a burden into a means of faith, love, and hope. Self-examination doesn't have to be buckets of water thrown on the fires of our faith. Instead, it can be fuel. We can see where God is at work in us, and we can move forward with the confidence of knowing that he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6).¹²

Though he does not explicitly express my view, Colin Kruse comes closest. Like Hughes, he sees the main issue as the readers *confirming Paul's apostleship*: "When they pass the test of holding the faith, and that finds expression in moral renewal in their lives, then the genuineness of Paul's apostolate will be confirmed (cf. 3:1-3)."¹³ Kruse does not explicitly say that the issue is approval versus disapproval. He speaks of passing the test and failing the test. But he seems to believe that even if some of the readers fail the test, Paul was not questioning their eternal destiny.¹⁴

There are some who have espoused the view suggested in this article, but for the most part they are not well-known Evangelicals of the present or the past and their view on this passage is not widely known.

Zane Hodges, for example, said it "is unthinkable" that in 2 Cor 13:5-7 Paul was issuing "a challenge to the Corinthians to find out whether they were really saved or not!"¹⁵ He summarized his view of the passage in this way:

So long as the Corinthians were not living "outside the boundaries of their faith," so long as their lives were not "disapproved" by God, they could indeed discern in their

¹² Ibid. What Piper seems to be saying is that while we should examine our works to see if we are born again, we must cut ourselves some slack. We are not to look for perfection or anything approaching that. What exactly would convince us that we are born again he does not say. This is one of the problems with the traditional understanding of 2 Cor 13:5. Even with a very gracious approach to self-examination, it still leads people to be uncertain of their eternal destiny. Piper's concerns should make us wonder whether 2 Cor 13:5-7 is talking about assurance of everlasting life, or something else entirely.

¹³ Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 221.

¹⁴ Ibid., 219-21.

¹⁵ Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1989, 2014), 177-78.

own experience—as Paul did in his—the reality of the indwelling Christ.¹⁶

G. H. Lang said that *adokimos* in this passage “had before been used to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:27) of being refused the crown.”¹⁷ He saw everlasting life as secure, but future rulership as depending on continuing to abide in Christ: “It is to be much observed that Christ dwelling in a believer is not a present inevitable consequence of conversion.”¹⁸

Commenting on 2 Cor 3:5-7, Bing says, “never has a passage been so carelessly yanked out of context and used to do immeasurable damage to God’s people. Doubt does not grow disciples of Jesus Christ. You can’t go forward if you are always looking back.”¹⁹ He concludes his discussion in this way: “To know if you are saved, keep your eyes off yourself and keep them on Christ!”²⁰

The traditional understanding of 2 Cor 13:5-7 is well entrenched in Evangelical circles. But should it be?

III. AN ALTERNATE INTERPRETATION IS SUGGESTED BY THE CONTEXT

Paul puts the readers in a Catch-22 situation when he challenges them to examine themselves. The readers had been examining Paul (13:1-4). He now turns the tables and says, “Yourselves examine...” In Greek, the first word in the sentence is *yourselves* (*heautous*). If they concluded that they were indeed walking in the faith and Christ is abiding in them, then they would prove that Paul is indeed an apostle and that he speaks for God. However, if they were so concerned to show that Paul does not speak for God, then they would have to admit that they themselves were not walking in fellowship with God.

But, in addition, Paul knew that only some in the church of Corinth were currently in a state of approval before God (1 Cor

¹⁶ Ibid., 179.

¹⁷ G. H. Lang, *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., 1984, reprint of 1936 publication by Samuel Roberts Publishers, London, England), 193.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Charles C. Bing, *Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship* (NP: Grace Theology Press, 2015), 169-70.

²⁰ Ibid., 170.

11:19). He wanted them all to be approved. Therefore, another reason for the call to self-examination was to move the believers who were currently not approved to realize that fact so that they might change their ways and get on the path to God's approval. And, of course, he wanted those who were currently approved to remain that way.

One major proof that this passage is talking about self-testing to see if one is approved by God (not to see if one is born again) are the Greek words *dokimos* and *adokimos*.

IV. AN ALTERNATE INTERPRETATION IS SUGGESTED BY THE WORDS *DOKIMOS* AND *ADOKIMOS*

Dokimos and *adokimos* are antonyms. That is, they are fully opposite in meaning. Whatever one means, the other carries the opposite meaning.²¹ We do the same thing in English by adding the letter *a*. Consider these antonyms:

- Typical versus atypical.
- Symmetrical versus asymmetrical.
- Theist versus atheist.
- Moral versus amoral.
- Morphous versus amorphous.
- Granular versus agranular.
- Gnostic versus agnostic.

The same is true in Greek. Words in which the first Greek letter, *alpha*, is added as a prefix are called *alpha privatives*. In addition to *adokimos*, consider these examples of alpha privatives (with translation):

- *Adikia* (unrighteous).
- *Apistia* (unbelief).

²¹ Andy Woods, "The Paradigm of Kadesh Barnea as a Solution to the Problem of Hebrews 6:4–6," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 12 (2006): 60: "The word 'worthless' (*adokimos*) could be applied to a believer since Paul applied the same word to himself (1 Corinthians 9:27). The word simply means *disapproved* rather than *totally rejected*. The antonym of the word is *dokimos*, which emphasizes a favorable evaluation (1 Corinthians 11:19; 2 Corinthians 10:18; 2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:12)." He concludes that the issue in Heb 6:4-8 is "forfeiture of blessings," 62-63.

- *Apistos* (unbelieving).
- *Atimos* (without honor).
- *Agamos* (unmarried).
- *Azumos* (unleavened).
- *Akathartēs* (uncleanness).
- *Akarpos* (unfruitful).
- *Alalētos* (unspeakable).
- *Anaxios* (unworthy).
- *Aniptos* (unwashed).
- *Asaleutos* (unshakable).
- *Asophos* (unwise).
- *Acharistos* (ungrateful).

Second Corinthians 13:5-7 is unique in all the NT in terms of how often *dokimos* and *adokimos* appear. Those words are only used seven and eight times, respectively, in the NT. *Dokimos* occurs in Rom 14:18; 16:10; 1 Cor 11:19; 2 Cor 10:18; 13:7; 2 Tim 2:15; Jas 1:12. Six of the seven NT uses are in Paul. *Adokimos* occurs in Rom 1:28; 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 13:5, 6, 7; 2 Tim 3:8; Titus 1:16; and Heb 6:8. Seven of the eight NT uses are in Paul.²² Therefore, in these three verses those two words appear four times, over 25% of their entire usage in the NT.

In every other passage in which these words are used, only one of the two is used, and then only once. Here we have both words used, and one is used three times. Yet commentators do not give this fact due consideration.

The emphasis is even greater when we consider that the cognate verb *dokimazō* is also used in this passage. The words *test yourselves* in v 5 translates *dokimazete*.

While some translations of v 7 reflect the fact that antonyms are used, many hide this fact and confuse the English reader. The NKJV, for example, translates v 7 in this way: "Now I pray that you do no evil, not that we should appear *approved* [*dokimos*], but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem *disqualified* [*adokimos*]" (2 Cor 13:7). That is essentially the translation also of the

²² Or all eight, if Paul wrote Hebrews (which I doubt).

LEB and MEV. The KJV and GNV translations have *approved* and *reprobates* for the antonyms.²³

I found two translations, the NASB and YLT, which render these words as *approved* and *unapproved* and *approved* and *disapproved*, respectively. Those translations show the words are antonyms. Several translations have *passed the test* and *failed the test*.²⁴

Outside of this text, but still within 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul used the word *dokimos* twice (1 Cor 11:19 and 2 Cor 10:18) and *adokimos* once (1 Cor 9:27). A comparison with those texts shows that Paul was concerned lest he himself might be found *adokimos* (1 Cor 9:27). The context in 1 Cor 9:24-27 is one of eternal rewards and the prize of an imperishable crown (i.e., ruling with Christ).²⁵ First Corinthians 9:27 should be compared with 2 Tim 2:15 where Paul urged Timothy himself to be diligent so that he might be *approved*. In Rom 16:10, Paul greeted Apelles, whom he said was currently *approved*. In 1 Cor 11:19 Paul speaks of “those who are *approved*” among the Corinthians. In 2 Cor 10:18 Paul says that it is not the one who commends himself who “is *approved*, but whom the Lord commends.”

Approval and disapproval are not terms used by Paul to refer to who is born again and who is not.²⁶ Instead, they refer to believers who are pleasing the Lord and believers who are not pleasing the Lord. These are terms related to eternal rewards, not eternal destiny.²⁷

²³ Since the word *reprobate* is often taken as a reference either to unbelievers (or the non-elect for the Calvinist) or to believers who have lost their salvation (for the Arminian), this translation is particularly problematic.

²⁴ See Bob Wilkin, “Castaway and Disqualified Are Bad Translations (1 Cor 9:27),” at <https://faithalone.org/blog/castaway-and-disqualified-are-bad-translations-1-corinthians-927/>. Last accessed Jan 8, 2020.

²⁵ Contra R. Bruce Compton, “Persevering and Falling Away: A Reexamination of Hebrews 6:4-6,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* (Spring 1996): 162. He argues that even in 1 Cor 9:27 *adokimos* refers to Paul’s fear that he is not in the faith.

²⁶ The lone possible exception is Titus 1:16, where *adokimos* is often translated as *reprobate*.

²⁷ Contra Brown, “2 Corinthians 13:5,” 183. While he agrees that *adokimos* in 1 Cor 9:27 refers to Paul’s concern regarding eternal rewards, he writes, “However, importing the implication of a loss of rewards because of disobedience in one’s Christian life from 1 Corinthians 9:27 to 2 Corinthians 13:5 is an error if the latter passage is understood in an ironic sense, as this article asserts.”

V. AN ALTERNATE INTERPRETATION IS SUGGESTED BY PAUL'S REPEATED REFERENCES TO THE SALVATION OF THE READERS

As noted above, it is fairly common in the commentary literature to suggest that the words “examine yourselves...test yourselves” are set against a background where some (many?) in the church of Corinth were examining Paul and wondering whether he spoke for God. Commentators note that Paul is turning the tables on them here.

However, those same commentators—if they do comment on what it would mean to fail the test and be *adokimos*—see eternal condemnation in view. That is, they believe that anyone in the church of Corinth found to be *adokimos* would be a false professor (or a believer who lost everlasting life). But there is every reason to think that is way off the mark.

Paul was not concerned that he might be eternally condemned (Rom 4:4-5; 5:1; 2 Tim 1:12). However he was concerned that he might be found *adokimos*. His fear was that after preaching to others about eternal rewards and running the race well (1 Cor 9:24-26), he might end up being disapproved (1 Cor 9:27).

Nor was Paul concerned that the people in the church of Corinth to whom he was writing might be eternally condemned. His use of the words *adelphos* and *adelphoi* and his use of the expression *en Christō* in 1 and 2 Corinthians demonstrates that he considered all of those to whom he was writing in the church of Corinth to be born again:

- Paul uses the word *brother* (*adelphos*, singular) four times in 1 Corinthians, always affirming the regenerate status of the readers (1 Cor 6:6, twice; 7:12; 8:11).
- He uses the word *brethren* (*adelphoi*, plural) twenty-three times in 1 Corinthians, always affirming the fact that the readers are born again (1 Cor 1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 6:5, 8; 7:24, 29; 8:12; 10:1; 11:2, 33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1; 50, 58; 16:15).

- Paul uses his famous *in Christ (en Christō)* designation of the readers four times in 1 Corinthians, in each case indicating they are regenerate (1 Cor 1:2, 30; 3:1; 4:15).
- Paul uses the word *brethren (adelphoi, plural)* three times in 2 Corinthians, each time affirming the fact that the readers are regenerate (2 Cor 1:8; 8:1; 13:11).
- Paul uses the expression *in Christ (en Christō)* in reference to the readers twice in 2 Corinthians, each time indicating they are regenerate (2 Cor 1:21; 2:14).

All through the two canonical letters to the Corinthians Paul affirmed the fact that the readers were born again. It would make no sense at the end of the second letter for Paul to begin to question whether they were born again.

Another strength of the suggested interpretation is that it fits with the NT teaching on assurance of everlasting life. The way in which one is certain he has everlasting life, according to the Lord and the NT authors, is by believing the testimony of God concerning His Son (John 11:25-27; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 John 5:9-13). Examination of one's works to see if one is born again is inconsistent with believing the testimony of God. We don't believe what God says by looking within ourselves. We believe what He says by looking outside ourselves, to Him and His trustworthiness.

Here is an interpretive paraphrase of 2 Cor 13:5-7 which captures the approval-disapproval motif in this passage:

Yourselves examine as to whether you are in the faith [i.e., abiding in the faith in your experience²⁸]. See if you yourselves pass the approval test. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you [i.e., is abiding in you]?—unless indeed you are disapproved. But I trust that you will know that we are not disapproved. Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not [for the purpose] that we should appear [to be shown as] approved, but that you should do what is

²⁸ J. Lyle Story, "Facets of Faith/Trust in Pauline Thought," *American Theological Inquiry* (January 2012): 113. He says that "in the faith" in 2 Cor 13:5 refers to abiding in "the living deposit of what Christians believe." He compares 2 Cor 13:5 with "Stand fast in the faith" in 1 Cor 16:13 and with being "sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13; 2:2) and with keeping the faith (2 Tim 4:7).

honorable, though we may seem disapproved [by some of our detractors].

The idea that the passage is about born-again people having and maintaining God's approval fits the use of the words *dokimos* and *adokimos* and Paul's repeated affirmations that the readers are brethren and are in Christ.

VI. GOD'S APPROVAL IS LINKED WITH ETERNAL REWARDS, NOT WITH ETERNAL SECURITY

With one possible exception (Titus 1:16),²⁹ every use of *dokimos* and *adokimos* in the NT is in a context dealing not with everlasting life, but with eternal rewards or temporal judgment. Here are all those verses, excluding 2 Cor 15:5-7, our target passage:

- *Romans 1:28*. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a *debased* [or a *disapproved*] mind, to do those things which are not fitting..." God does not approve (*adokimos* = *disapproved*) of a mindset that leaves God out. He should be *foremost* in our thinking (Rom 8:6; 12:1-2). Romans 1:18-32 does not deal with who is born again and who is not. It deals with those who are under God's wrath in this life. Whether born-again or not, anyone who does not retain God in his knowledge, anyone who "suppresses the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18), will experience temporal judgment from God.³⁰

²⁹ It is possible that *adokimos* in Titus 1:16 refers to unregenerate people. That is widely held in the commentary literature. However, in light of the uses of the word *adokimos* in the rest of NT, and the fact that v 13 refers to believers and v 16 appears to be the same people, it seems more likely that even Titus 1:16 refers to any believer who denies God in his works and is thus "disqualified [or disapproved] for every good work." For a defense of that interpretation, see Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), 175-76.

³⁰ Commentators who see the issue in Rom 1:28 as temporal judgment of unbelievers or believers include Zane Hodges, *Romans* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 38-53; René López, *Romans Unlocked* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005), 42-50; and F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963, 1985), 79. Bruce says, "The revelation of 'the wrath to come' at the end-time (1 Thess 1:10) is anticipated by the revelation of the same principle in the on-going life of the world." Most commentators simply indicate that Paul is talking about a *useless, debilitated, or depraved* mind. See, C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T.

- *Romans 16:10*. “Greet Apelles, *approved* [*dokimos*] in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.” Paul says that Apelles is currently “approved in Christ.” That was what Paul longed to remain (1 Cor 9:27). Believers who are in a state of God’s approval when they die or are raptured will rule with Christ in the life to come. The issue is eternal rewards, not eternal destiny.³¹
- *Romans 14:18*. “For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and *approved* [*dokimos*] by men.” Cranfield writes, “The Christian who serves Christ in the way indicated will not bring shame on the gospel by deserving the disapproval of men (whether his fellow-Christians or unbelievers), but will deserve (though, of course, he may not always receive) their approval.”³² Here the issue is human, not divine, approval. But the basic idea of divine approval is still in the background.³³
- *1 Corinthians 9:27*. “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become *disqualified* [*adokimos*].” In vv 24-26 Paul urged his believing readers to run the race and fight the fight so that they might receive the imperishable crown, which all who persevere in the faith will receive. In v 27, Paul personalizes the passage, talking about himself. He disciplined his body so that after he had preached to others about the imperishable crown, he would not end up being disapproved (*adokimos*) from the prize.
- *1 Corinthians 11:19*. “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are *approved* [*dokimos*] may be recognized among you.” Chapters 1–4 of 1 Corinthians deal with divisions, or factions, in the church of Corinth. Paul’s point here is that there are two types of believers in their church, the

Clark, 1975), vol 1, 128; and Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 219. Longenecker does not discuss whether the judgment is temporal or eschatological and does not indicate whether the people so discussed might include believers who have fallen.

³¹ Most commentators see Paul’s reference to approval here as indicating that Apelles was an outstanding Christian (e.g., Longenecker, *Romans*, 1070; Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2, 79). Cranfield suggests *dokimos* refers to “a faithful Christian,” but that it might simply refer to “any true Christian.” See, also, John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 230.

³² Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2, 720.

³³ See, for example, Hodges, *Romans*, 416.

approved and, by implication, the disapproved. The issue is not who is born again and who is not. Paul was writing to born-again people. Robertson and Plummer understand *dokimoi* here as “the trusty and true” and “the more stable characters.”³⁴ Only some of the believers in Corinth were currently approved by God.³⁵

- *2 Corinthians 10:18*. “For not he who commends himself is *approved* [*dokimos*], but whom the Lord commends.” This passage, 2 Cor 10:11-18 (and all through chap. 11), is a parallel text to 2 Cor 13:5-7. Again, some were questioning Paul’s authority and ministry. Again, he defends himself. He ends by talking about being approved by God, the same theme emphasized in 2 Cor 13:5-7. The ones in Corinth who were questioning Paul’s ministry were not approved simply because they commended themselves. Of course, neither was Paul approved because he defends himself. His point is that it is the Lord’s approval that matters. This is an eternal rewards issue. Kruse writes, “In this verse Paul’s eyes are upon the ultimate evaluation of a person’s ministry...What will matter is the commendation which the Lord himself will give (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1-5)...Paul returns again to the theme of passing God’s test in 13:5-7.”³⁶
- *2 Timothy 2:15*. “Be diligent to present yourself *approved* [*dokimos*] to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” This is the verse from which AWANA (approved workmen are not ashamed) youth ministry got its name. Paul is urging Timothy to strive for the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ, the very same aim he himself had in life (1 Cor 9:27). The issue is not Timothy’s eternal destiny, but his eternal rewards.³⁷

³⁴ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, Second edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), 240.

³⁵ See Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 240; Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958, 1985), 156. PHEME PERKINS, however, cites the NRSV translation favorably, understanding *dokimoi* here to refer to those “who are genuine.” See *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 142. Alan Johnson is undecided as to whether this refers to “the truly distinguished ones” as opposed to carnal believers, or to “the truly tested and approved” as distinguished “from the false.” See *1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 205.

³⁶ Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 238

³⁷ See Robert L. Thomas, “Biblical Hermeneutics: Foundational Considerations,” *Chafer*

Guthrie comments, “The shame that any workman feels when the incompetence or shoddiness of his work is detected is used as a figure for Christian ministry...A Christian teacher [should] unblushingly submit his work for God’s approval.”³⁸ He adds, “The main idea seems to be that Timothy must be scrupulously straightforward in dealing with *the word of truth*, in strong contrast to the crooked methods of the false teachers.”³⁹

Hiebert similarly writes, “Before the judgment seat of Christ he [Timothy] will be found a workman that ‘needeth not to be ashamed,’ no offense bringing shame upon him because of God’s disapproval.”⁴⁰ Concerning this task, he says, “The approved minister presents the eternal truths of the Gospel with fidelity...and refused to resort to torturous interpretations of God’s Word.”⁴¹

- *2 Timothy 3:8*. “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, *disapproved* [*adokimoi*] concerning the faith...” Some suggest that Jannes and Jambres were unbelievers, which is likely (though they could have come to faith when they saw the many signs), and so were those people opposing Paul and Timothy’s ministries. Hiebert calls these truth resisters, “fraudulent men”⁴² who “professed conversion to Christianity,” but were “like counterfeit coin[s] [which] have been found wanting, hence must be discarded as worthless.”⁴³ However, the point of connection is not their spiritual condition, but their *resistance*. Notice the repetition of the word *resist* (“resisted...also resist”). Anyone who resists the truth is “disapproved concerning the faith.” That would be true of believers or unbelievers.⁴⁴

Theological Seminary Journal 13 (2008): 31. He paraphrases Paul’s charge in this way: “You are looking for His seal of approval. Strive to maintain His standards so that you have nothing to be ashamed of before Him.”

³⁸ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957, 1990), 159.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁰ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Timothy* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1958), 68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁴ Contra Brown, “2 Corinthians,” 184. He says, “The persons described [in 2 Tim 3:8] are

- *Hebrews 6:7-8*. “For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is *rejected* [*adokimos*] and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.” Here the author gives an illustration of his point in Heb 6:4-6 concerning believers who fall away from the faith. The ground represents the believer. The thorns and briers represent the bad crop the believer brings forth. The result is he is rejected, or disapproved, and about to be cursed (i.e., about to experience temporal judgment).⁴⁵ Here is a clear allusion to the curse in Genesis 3. If our lives yield thorns and briers, then we will be cursed. The issue is temporal judgment, not eternal condemnation.⁴⁶ Tanner writes,

To be **rejected** (“worthless,” NASB) need not imply loss of eternal life. The Apostle Paul used the Greek term (*adokimos*) of himself in 1 Cor 9:27 in the sense of being “disqualified” from his reward as a result of not disciplining himself. Thus the unfruitful ground of Heb 6:8 is “rejected,” implying that the offender has not gained God’s approval and is considered unfit. He may be in store for God’s discipline and eventual loss of reward.⁴⁷

- *James 1:12*. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been *approved* [*dokimos*], he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” This could refer to eternal rewards received at the Bema.⁴⁸ However, it is more likely, based on the context, that it refers to blessings *in this life*. In any case, the issue is not eternal destiny.⁴⁹

obviously not Christians at all.”

⁴⁵ Woods, “Hebrews 6:4-6,” 62. He calls the danger “irreversible forfeiture of blessings.”

⁴⁶ However, for a typical understanding of those rejected or disapproved as unregenerate, see Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 221-24 and Homer A. Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), 114-15.

⁴⁷ J. Paul Tanner, “Hebrews” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Rev ed., ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010, 2019), 520.

⁴⁸ So, D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1979), 98-99.

⁴⁹ Contra Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 79-80. He writes, “The goal is to pass the test (i.e., keep genuine faith) and become approved.”

VII. PRACTICAL PROBLEMS WITH THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

There are four enormous practical problems that beset the traditional view.

First, it leads to perpetual doubt about whether a person has everlasting life or not. John Piper, who holds the traditional view, lamented the fact that so many people in his church kept telling him they doubted their salvation:

I deal with this as much as anything, probably, in the people that I'm preaching to. Fears, and doubts, doubts not about objective 'Did He rise from the dead'—very few people are wrestling with that—but 'Am I in? Am I saved?' That's very common for people to wrestle with.⁵⁰

Similarly, John MacArthur, who also takes the traditional understanding of 2 Cor 13:5-7, admits to problems that people he ministers to have with assurance of salvation. He writes,

It's a heartache to me as pastor to realize that so many Christians lack assurance of their salvation. They lack the confidence that their sins are truly forgiven and their place in heaven is eternally secure. The pain I feel over this issue was heightened as I read this letter:

I've been attending Grace Church for several years. As a result of a growing conviction in my heart, your preaching, and my seeming powerlessness against the temptations which arise in my heart and which I constantly succumb to, my growing doubts have led me to believe that I'm not saved.⁵¹

Three years before he wrote that, MacArthur presented a plenary message at the 1989 Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting in San Diego. I was in the audience and was able to ask him a few

He then adds, "The actual reward is salvation itself, for (eternal) life is certainly the content of the crown (so Laws, Mussner, Milton, Schrage)".

⁵⁰ Cited by Philip F. Congdon, "John Piper's Diminished Doctrine of Justification and Assurance," *JOTGES* 23 (2010): 68.

⁵¹ John MacArthur, *Saved Without a Doubt: How to Be Sure of Your Salvation* (NP: Victor Books, 1992), 7.

questions about assurance. In his answers he cited 2 Cor 13:5. Here is a transcript of our discussion:

Wilkin: I was wondering if I understood you correctly to suggest that we should test ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5)—if that is something we should continue to do throughout our lives.

MacArthur: I think the answer to that would be generally yes. The assumption of 2 Cor 13:5 is that it is not limited to some one-time event. Particularly 1 Corinthians 11 comes to mind also, where even gathering at the Lord's Table (which is by virtue of Biblical revelation to be a continual exercise for the believer, in the ordinance) demands a self-examination process. I also think a corollary to that, and something I would want to add to what Dr. Saucy said in taking this thing further, is this whole matter of treating the ministry of the Holy Spirit's work within us demands a certain kind of self-examination. Or at least a certain kind of communion process going on as we experience, as Berkhof would put it, the multiplicity of ways in which the Spirit of God communes to us the witness affirming our salvation. So I think it is an ongoing situation—we're really kind of getting over into the whole matter of assurance at this point, and I think as we become assured of our salvation, that self-examination process might diminish, but I do think it can be more than certainly one occasion.

Wilkin: I guess on the assurance issue then, when would we be 100 percent sure that we passed the test?

MacArthur: Well, again you're back to those quantifying situations. I don't know what 100 percent means. If you...

Wilkin: Completely.

MacArthur: Yeah, if you read say, some of the Puritans, if you read Brooks or Hooker on this, if you read Berkhof's book *Assurance of the Faith*, you will find that all of them will speak of the fact that a person can be redeemed, to use your term, 100 percent and never necessarily experience the fullness of assurance. So, there is no way to quantify that because everybody is different, and there are a myriad of factors which deal with that. I personally believe that since the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and so forth,

inherent in that is certain confidences about my position before God. And if I am exercising my flesh and living in disobedience, I may not enjoy the fullness of that. So, to say that you could reach a point that you are 100 percent sure of your salvation permanently would be very difficult to deal with Scripturally.

Wilkin: Thank you.⁵²

Anyone who looks at themselves for proof that they are born again will come away with doubt. The reason is simple. We all are sinners (Rom 3:23), we all sin every day (1 John 1:8, 10), and we all fall short of the glory of God every day (Rom 3:23). While a mature believer will have many good works in his life, he will also recognize wrong attitudes, actions, and words in the course of his day. Anything short of perfection could not result in assurance based on works.

Second, as Bing indicated,⁵³ if a person doubts his salvation, he will not grow in his faith. Doubt stunts spiritual growth. So, if a person who is already born again hears and accepts the traditional view of 2 Cor 13:5-7, he will remain eternally secure, but he will lose his assurance and his spiritual life will suffer. The longer he continues to doubt, the worse his spiritual depression will become.

Third, if an unbeliever hears and accepts this view, he will remain in unbelief unless and until he gets around this works-oriented view of salvation.

Fourth, this interpretation results either in people not evangelizing others because they wonder why someone would want to hear their witness if they themselves are not sure that they are born again, or it results in a works-oriented evangelistic message. If I base my salvation on observing my own works, I will tell the person to whom I'm witnessing to base his salvation on his works.

VIII. PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED ALTERNATE VIEW

The four problems with the traditional view are all strengths of the alternate view.

⁵² This transcript is available at <https://faithalone.org/blog/the-assurance-debate-goes-back-a-long-time/>. Accessed Feb 3, 2020.

⁵³ Bing, *Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship*, 170.

First, the alternate interpretation keeps certainty of everlasting life intact (John 11:25-27; 1 John 5:9-13).

Second, the alternate interpretation promotes spiritual growth. Love and gratitude are powerful motivators (2 Cor 5:14; 1 John 4:19).

Third, the unbeliever hearing the alternative interpretation will be hearing the distinction between everlasting life and eternal rewards and will come to faith as a result if he continues to meditate on what he has heard (John 4:1-42; Acts 10:1-48; 17:11).

Fourth, the believer who adopts the suggested alternate view will be able to share his faith enthusiastically and clearly (John 3:14-18; 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:25-27; 1 Tim 1:16).

IX. CONCLUSION

The single strongest passage in the NT dealing with God's approval or disapproval is 2 Cor 13:5-7. The context shows that the issue is God's blessings, not eternal destiny. The one who is currently approved by God is currently experiencing His blessings. Should he persevere in a state of approval, he will hear Jesus say, "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17).

It is tragic that the commentary tradition has for the most part adopted an understanding of this text that turns it into something it is not. Instead of a call to abide in Christ and to be approved by Him, the issue changes to assurance of one's eternal destiny.

If we look at our works for assurance, we will not be assured. Works are not the basis of assurance. Faith in God's promise of life is the sole basis for assurance of everlasting life.

CROSSING THE TIBER: WHAT'S DRIVING THE EVANGELICAL EXODUS TO ROME?

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I. INTRODUCTION

A book released in February 2016 by the Roman Catholic Ignatius Press is entitled *Evangelical Exodus: Evangelical Seminarians and Their Path to Rome*.¹ The back cover of the book states:

Over the course of a single decade, dozens of students, alumni, and professors from a conservative, Evangelical seminary in North Carolina (Southern Evangelical Seminary) converted to Catholicism. These conversions were notable as they occurred among people with varied backgrounds and motivations—many of whom did not share their thoughts with one another until this book was produced. Even more striking is that the seminary's founder, long-time president, and popular professor, Dr. Norman Geisler, had written two full-length books and several scholarly articles criticizing Catholicism from an Evangelical point of view.

What could have led these seminary students, and even some of their professors, to walk away from their Evangelical education and risk losing their jobs, ministries, and even family and friends, to embrace the teachings they once rejected as false or even heretical? Speculation over this phenomenon has been rampant and often dismissive and misguided—leading to more confusion than

¹I draw the material for this article primarily from two sources: *Evangelical Exodus: Evangelical Seminarians and Their Paths to Rome*, ed. Douglas M. Beaumont (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2016) and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, First Image Books, 1995).

understanding. The stories of these converts are now being told by those who know them best—the converts themselves.

They discuss the primary issues they had to face: the nature of the biblical canon; the identification of Christian orthodoxy and the problems with the Protestant doctrines of *sola Scriptura* (“scripture alone”) and *sola fide* (“faith alone”).

One of the chapters in the book is authored by a young man who, some years ago, led worship for our church. He also received financial support from us while attending Southern Evangelical Seminary. What are the things that drew him and other Evangelicals to “cross the Tiber” and become Roman Catholic?

II. CROSSING THE TIBER

Francis J. Beckwith was the President of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) from November 2006 until May 2007, when he resigned from his position and from ETS. He is currently professor of philosophy and Church–state studies at Baylor University. He converted to Roman Catholicism in 2007. In the foreword to *Evangelical Exodus*, he relates:

After decades of assimilating Catholic thought in my spiritual pilgrimage without realizing it, and with the help of some Catholic friends who posed to me just the right questions with just the right degree of gentle prodding, I had been brought to the outer bank of the Tiber.²

The Roman Catholic Church argues that it is the true Church, in part, because of its antiquity and its unity of leadership. Beckwith’s favorable view of the Roman Catholic claim to historical continuity and institutional unity led him to take “his first steps on the bridge that traversed those foreboding waters.”

The river Tiber is the main watercourse of the city of Rome. The seven hills of Rome lie east of the river. The seven hills are the Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal, and Viminal. Vatican Hill lies northwest of the Tiber and is not counted among the traditional seven hills. Ponte Sant’Angelo, a pedestrian *bridge*,

² Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 9.

crosses over close to the Vatican. Some converts employ the terms “swimming the Tiber” or “crossing the Tiber” to signify their conversion to Roman Catholicism.

There are, of course, many different reasons why an Evangelical may leave a conservative Protestant practice of faith and convert to Catholicism. There may be reasons related to marriage, the community in which one lives, or even business concerns. In other words, there may be very practical reasons for such conversion. In this article, however, I will concentrate on certain theological reasons and certain appeals that the Catholic Church may have for the religious seeker.

III. DEPARTURE FROM OR RESISTANCE TO FAITH ALONE AND SCRIPTURE ALONE

A departure from or a resistance to *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide* may render an Evangelical susceptible to the attraction or appeal of the Roman Catholic Church. *Sola Scriptura*, Latin for “by Scripture alone,” is the theological concept that the Bible is sufficient by itself to be the final authority for doctrine and spiritual practice. *Sola fide*, Latin for “by faith alone,” is the theological concept that justification is by faith alone. A right standing with God excludes all human works, including religious rituals that may come through a church.

In conservative Evangelicalism, justification is seen as a judicial matter. God declares a believer righteous as a result of faith in Christ.³ In Catholicism, justification is seen as a continuing process. God makes a believer righteous through the gift of faith that expresses itself in works of love. These works includes partaking of the sacraments. These sacraments are a means of conveying grace. Justification is initially conferred in baptism and entails sanctification of one’s whole being.⁴

The Biblical concept of justification is not the exact same thing as receiving eternal life. When a person believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life, he receives it as a free gift. One of the additional benefits of this faith is that the believer is declared righteous before God. This newfound status allows the believer to walk by the Spirit, approach

³ For an excellent example of this view, see Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 98-105.

⁴ *Catechism*, 1992, 1995.

God, and go from being at enmity with God to being at peace with Him.⁵

Evangelical Exodus contains appendices which attempt to refute the theological concepts of *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*. Most of the contributors to the book relate their difficulties with those two concepts. For example, Jeremiah Cohort expresses, “I have also never understood the Evangelical Protestant emphasis on the doctrine of *sola fide* because the ‘saved’ inevitably do good works anyway.”⁶ Michael Mason writes of discussing with his wife his unease over the conflicting interpretations of Scripture found in Evangelicalism. He observes, “Our subsequent discussions led us to question the two fundamental guiding principles of the Protestant Reformation: *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*.”⁷

Evangelical academics who convert to Catholicism tend to write books attacking the concepts of faith alone and Scripture alone. An example is Robert A. Sungenis, who was born into a Catholic family but converted to Protestantism in early adulthood. He graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary, but later converted back to Catholicism and is an apologist for the Catholic Church. After returning to Catholicism, he wrote *Not by Faith Alone: The Biblical Evidence for the Catholic Doctrine of Justification* (Queenship Publishing Company, 1997) and *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (Queenship Publishing Company, 1998).⁸

Clearly, at least for some, those who leave conservative Protestantism do so over fundamental doctrine. It does bear noting, however, that people such as Cohort have a view of *sola fide* that opposes the view of Free Grace theology. His view that those who are “saved” inevitably do good works promotes a Lordship/Reformed view of faith. Free Grace theology separates faith from good works in a way that Lordship Theology does not.

A Lordship view of faith, it seems, would make one more susceptible to finding common ground with Catholic teachings on faith.

⁵Hodges, *Romans*, 132ff.

⁶Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 79.

⁷Ibid., 127.

⁸For a good response to Sungenis’s arguments against justification by faith alone apart from works, see Bob Wilkin, “A Response to Robert Sungenis’s *Not by Faith Alone*,” *JOTGES* 16 (2003): 3-16.

Free Grace Theology makes a clear distinction between faith and works. Works have nothing to do with being “saved,” but with sanctification. Maturity in the Christian faith/walk is not “inevitable.” It is this writer’s view that only Free Grace theology accurately expresses the Biblical view that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. Lordship Salvation causes the believer to look at his works for proof of his justification which inevitably leads to confusion of the role works play in eternal salvation. Free Grace theology, then, is especially in direct opposition to the Catholic view of faith. Not all definitions of saving faith within Protestantism are equal.

A belief that only the Scriptures provide the rule for living the Christian life as well as the source of sound doctrine is a strong deterrent for clinging to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church maintains that its teachings throughout the history of the Church as well as its hierarchical leadership provide such authority. More of this will be discussed in the following section.

While one may sympathize with Mason’s concerns about disagreements in Evangelicalism and regret that such disagreements exist, that is not the main issue. The question is one of authority. In those disagreements, where should the Christian go to resolve such disagreements? If the answer is the Scriptures, then Catholicism teaches a false view of doctrinal authority.

If one gives up a strong view of either *sola Scriptura* or *sola fide*, a move towards Catholicism naturally becomes more likely. But it is not just doubts and misunderstanding about certain theological doctrines that cause some to convert from Protestantism to Catholicism. The Catholic Church has certain other appeals.

This article will address seven such appeals.

IV. THE SEVENFOLD ATTRACTION OR APPEAL OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

I metaphorically use the seven hills of Rome to describe the attraction or appeal of the Catholic Church. The prospective convert to the Catholic Church may appreciatively view the Vatican from one or more of these vantage points and then go down and “cross the Tiber.” Andrew Preslar, after recounting the considerations that led him to

Catholicism, states that the Church of Rome “exercised something like a magnetic pull upon me.”⁹

A. Hill of Infallible Authority: Church Magisterium

The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Catholic Church vested in the Pope and the bishops. The Catechism states, “The supreme degree of participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the charism of infallibility.”¹⁰

Douglas Beaumont was the assistant to Norman Geisler at Southern Evangelical Seminary and taught Bible there for years. Currently, he is the editor of the *Evangelical Exodus*. Writing of his own experience, he speaks of “Surveying the Tiber” from this vantage point:

Catholicism began working its way into my life in the early days of seminary. Another student had briefly sat in on a couple of classes, and one night he and I spent over an hour discussing problems of biblical interpretation. He could not seem to get past the fact that otherwise good Christians could not seem to agree on what the Bible teaches. I assured him that with proper hermeneutics and good philosophy, correct results were attainable. He asked how we could know what counted as proper hermeneutics and good philosophy apart from the Bible itself. Each time I suggested some other safeguard to accurate biblical interpretation, I was met with the same basic problems: How can we know which of the numerous competing claims to accurate biblical interpretation were correct? Eventually this exhausting conversation simply petered out, but it stayed in the back of my mind for some time.¹¹

Eventually Beaumont came to see the Catholic Church as the only infallible authority for knowing and interpreting the Word of God. He chooses, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, to adhere “to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule.”¹²

The *Catechism* unequivocally asserts:

The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form

⁹ Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 183.

¹⁰ *Catechism*, 2035.

¹¹ Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 46-47.

of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome... [The] faithful receive with docility the teachings and directives that their pastors give them in different forms.¹³

Beaumont and the other contributors of *Evangelical Exodus* argue that the infallible authority of the Church is needed to determine the canon of Scripture and the tenets of orthodoxy. Without that there is interpretive chaos and church disunity. As discussed above, this was a major concern of Mason. Can the canon of Scripture simply be determined by the tests of canonicity independent of the pronouncements of a “universal” council such as the Council of Trent? Can the tenets of orthodoxy be established by the study of the Scriptures alone?

The fact that historical support for the canon of Scripture and some tenets of orthodoxy can be gained from the Church Fathers and theologians does not make the Catholic Church the infallible authority for these matters. That is a leap from support to determiner. It is God, not the Church, who gave us the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21).

Another point that seems to be missing in this discussion is the consistency of the Catholic Church. There are numerous examples in the history of the Church in which the leadership has contradicted what was taught by its earlier leaders. If the Church is infallible in its authority, how could this occur?

B. Hill of Historical Continuity: Apostolic Succession

Closely tied to the appeal of infallible authority is the appeal of historical continuity. The *Catechism* asserts:¹⁴

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority. Indeed, the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be

¹³ *Catechism*, 85, 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 77, 78, 79.

preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time.

This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes...

The Father's self-communication made through his Word in the Holy Spirit, remains present and active in the Church: God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the Spouse of his beloved Son.

Thus, not only does the Church have the infallible unique authority to know and interpret the written Scriptures, she also infallibly transmits Tradition and continues to receive divine revelation. Apostolic succession makes all that possible.

Beaumont wants to “identify the Church objectively—by looking at whom the original apostles ordained to continue the Church’s authoritative functions (and whom they, in turn, ordained and so forth).”¹⁵ He finds that in the Catholic Church.

Did the apostles ordain bishops to continue their authoritative functions? If so, is there a historically demonstrable line of succession from the first century apostles to the present? The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20), but there is no Biblical support for the apostles imparting an infallible spiritual authority through the laying on of hands to an unending line of bishops, beginning with the Bishop of Rome. Rome ultimately appeals to tradition to support apostolic succession. The Scriptures, however, do not. Once again, one can see the sharp distinction between the Catholic Church and conservative Evangelicalism.

C. Hill of Institutional Unity: Unified, Universal, and Visible Church

The *Catechism* asserts:¹⁶

The sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic subsists in the

¹⁵ Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 39.

¹⁶ *Catechism*, 870.

Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.

Beaumont argues, “How could we evangelicals claim to have unity if we disagreed on so much?”¹⁷ He goes on to state: “I was convinced that the Church that Jesus founded had to be both authoritative and objectively identifiable. That meant it was unified, universal, and visible.”¹⁸

Beaumont and other contributors to *Evangelical Exodus* are drawn to the Catholic Church by the appeal of its institutional unity.

However, the question needs to be asked. Did Jesus pray for the Church’s institutional unity in this age or simply its spiritual unity by virtue of the baptism and sealing of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13-14; 4:4-6)? Each believer has a spiritual unity with all who believe the promise of Jesus for eternal life and are children of God (John 1:12).

D. Hill of Spiritual Tangibility: Sacraments, Liturgy, Statues, etc.

Joshua Betancourt relates the appeal that spiritual tangibility has for him: “There I was, in front of a life-size statue of Jesus at a rural parish in Northern California—my eyes fixed on his, and his seemingly on mine...This encounter felt real: this Jesus whom I had read and sung about in Sunday school was standing before me.”¹⁹ He goes on to write:

I came to the conclusion that Protestant Evangelicalism is devoid of the spiritual resources that God intended to help regulate our concupiscence (or disordered passions). The truth is that we have a human nature that is wounded by sin, and God has provided us with the means to receive healing: the sacraments. Evangelicals are known for encouraging other believers “to be more like Jesus,” but the only way to do this is to partake of the divine nature (becoming more like God) through the sacraments, by which we receive the very life of God into our souls (2 Pet 1:8).²⁰

¹⁷ Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

Jeremiah Cowart asks of Evangelicalism, “Where is the liturgy? Where is the real presence of Christ with his people? ... Where are the aesthetics? ... Protestantism is paltry, and this paltriness just kept me searching for something more.”²¹

Brandon Dahm writes that, “participating in Catholic spirituality gave existential confirmation of church teaching.” He explains concerning Eucharistic adoration:

Eucharistic adoration is a time when the host is exposed—is visible—so that people can come pray in its presence. Remember, the Eucharist is not just a symbol but is Christ himself. So think of adoration as going to spend time with Jesus. My first adoration was a powerful experience.²²

The *Catechism* states,

Christ manifests, makes present and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of his Church, “until he comes.”²³

Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present.²⁴

The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments. There are seven sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.²⁵

The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament.²⁶

Beaumont writes appreciatively of “incense, holy water, candles, pictures, statues, bells, chants, and even physical movement”. He states, “These things were designed to engage the whole person, while Evangelicalism, I saw, limited faith expressions to between-the-ears

²¹ Ibid., 80.

²² Ibid., 103.

²³ *Catechism*, 1076.

²⁴ Ibid., 1104.

²⁵ Ibid., 1210.

²⁶ Ibid., 1131.

activity.”²⁷ He continues to write depreciatively of Evangelicals, “Evangelical ‘liturgy’ typically consisted of a few songs, a long-winded sermon, and nothing else.”²⁸ He writes of himself, “For my part, I quickly learned to appreciate . . . the tactual worship services that respected our nature as embodied beings.”²⁹

Can believers have a spiritual vitality apart from ubiquitous sensual experiences? Can we “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7)? Another question for the Catholic convert is this: How does the Church determine which of these sensual experiences are valid?

E. Hill of Kingdom Theology: Mission to Serve Justice and Peace

The *Catechism* states:³⁰

Christians have to distinguish between the growth of the Reign of God and the progress of the culture and society in which they are involved. This distinction is not a separation. Man’s vocation to eternal life does not suppress, but actually reinforces, his duty to put into action in this world the energies and means received from the Creator to serve justice and peace.

Brian Mathews cites “the Church’s being the largest charitable organization on earth” and “the Church’s leading the way in defending vital moral and social issues,”³¹ among notable factors that influenced his embrace of the Catholic Church.

F. Hill of Philosophical Theology: Thomism

In the foreword of *Evangelical Exodus*, Beckwith asks, “How is it possible that such an august group of Catholic converts can arise from one small Evangelical seminary in one geographical region of the United States over only a few short years?”³² He answers that one of the reasons was that the founder of Southern Evangelical Seminary, Norman Geisler, was a self-described Evangelical Thomist. By that, Geisler meant that he found Thomas Aquinas’s views on

²⁷ Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 35.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁰ *Catechism*, 2820.

³¹ Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 161.

³² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

God, faith and reason, natural theology, epistemology, metaphysics, and anthropology congenial to his Evangelical faith. Geisler rejected those parts of Aquinas's thoughts which embrace Catholic doctrines, but his love of Aquinas inspired his students to investigate Aquinas's body of work with greater depth and less antipathy to Catholicism.

Dahm writes, "What I loved about apologetics was the philosophy involved." He then states:

"Through Geisler, we became Thomists; that is, we took Aquinas as a philosophical guide. This meant that I had to respect Aquinas as a thinker, which required me at least to try to give his theology a fair hearing."³³

Betancourt writes of "Meeting the 'A-Team,'" by which he means that he studied Aquinas, Anselm, and Augustine.³⁴ He found himself drawn to Catholicism through his exposure to Catholic philosophers and theologians in his studies in apologetics and philosophy at Southern Evangelical Seminary.

Betancourt does point out that in an unpublished article in 2014, "Does Thomism Lead to Catholicism?" Geisler argues that there is no logical connection between embracing Thomism and converting to Catholicism. Valuing Aquinas's natural theology does not obligate one to embrace his Catholic theology. The argument that if one accepts part of Aquinas's teaching, one must accept all is a philosophical fallacy. None of the issues Aquinas taught that Geisler appreciated have a bearing on the two major doctrinal distinctions discussed above: *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*.

G. Hill of Mystical Spirituality: Contemplative Practices

The Catholic Church has a contemplative tradition which enables a mystical spirituality. This involves a spirituality that supposedly can bring about a direct experience of God and the possibility of hearing from God.³⁵ Betancourt finds the contemplative practices of the Catholic Church appealing:

The Catholic is equipped with a variety of prayers and spiritual exercises, such as sacramentals, meditation,

³³ Ibid., 86-87.

³⁴ Ibid., 52.

³⁵ The CCC devotes two sections to Meditation and Contemplative Prayer: 2705 – 2719.

and contemplative prayers. I was accustomed to praying only extemporaneously as an Evangelical. I deepened my prayer life with the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet, which encourage the faithful to meditate on the lives of Jesus and Mary (in the Rosary) and on the mercy of Jesus (in the Divine Mercy Chaplet).³⁶

Contemplative practices are not found in the Bible. The Bible presents prayer as words and thoughts expressed by us to God. Nowhere in the Bible are believers encouraged to seek mystical experiences through meditative exercises.

H. Summary

The ex-Evangelicals mentioned in this article maintain there is a spirituality in the Catholic Church that is missing from conservative Evangelicalism. This spirituality supposedly leads to a deeper intimacy with the Lord.

There are various things the Catholic Church offers a seeker that they claim is not found in Evangelicalism. Based upon the writings of those who have converted to Catholicism in this article, these appeals are attractive to some.

What should Evangelicals teach to counter these appeals by the Catholic Church?

V. PRESCRIPTION TO COUNTER THE APPEAL

Not surprisingly, Evangelicalism needs to stress the foundational basics of the faith. Even a casual observer can see that there is a de-emphasis on *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide* in Evangelical churches and even seminaries. The teachings of the Scriptures are also the key to finding true spirituality.

As a result, I will suggest three prescriptions to counter the pseudo-spirituality of the Catholic Church.

A. Affirm Faith Alone in Christ Alone for Eternal Life

As mentioned above, there is disagreement among conservative Evangelicals on the meaning of *faith*. Those who hold to a Lordship

³⁶ Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus*, 69.

Salvation view of faith promote a view which necessitates that faith includes works.³⁷ Even though the types of works differ, such an Evangelical definition of faith finds support in Catholic doctrine.

Free Grace theology has correctly pointed out that the Book of John is the only book in the NT written for the purpose of showing how an unbeliever receives eternal life. One hundred times the book refers to faith. It never uses the word “repentance” and never requires anything other than believing in the promise of eternal life.

When a person believes in that promise, the Gospel of John makes it clear that he has that gift. It is a gift that can never be lost (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47). One reason Evangelicals do not feel intimacy with the Lord is because they do not have the assurance of their salvation. Such assurance only can come from understanding that eternal life is given as a gift and that this faith has nothing to do with works of any kind. One wonders if those from Southern Evangelical Seminary who converted to Catholicism had that assurance. If one doubts his salvation, he is more likely to look elsewhere.³⁸ The Catholic Church with its various spiritual appeals becomes an option.

Evangelicals need to emphasize that faith simply means to believe what the Lord has promised about eternal life. This wonderful promise brings far more joy and intimacy with the Lord than any ritual or sacrament of any church.

Even in some of the hymnology of Christianity, we can find this joy. These words were written by Christian L. Scheidt in 1742 and make up part of the hymn “By Grace I’m Saved”:

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;
Our works and conduct have no worth,
God in His love sent our Redeemer,
Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;
His death did for our sins atone,
And we are saved by grace alone.

By grace! O, mark this word of promise
When thou art by thy sins oppressed,

³⁷ For a popular defense of this view of faith, see John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, 1988, 2008).

³⁸ A Lordship Salvation view of faith and assurance can bring only doubt. See Robert N. Wilkin, *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur’s ‘The Gospel According to Jesus’* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2015).

When Satan plagues thy troubled conscience,
 And when thy heart is seeking rest.
 What reason cannot comprehend
 God by His grace to thee doth send.

B. Affirm that the Scriptures Alone Are Our Authority for Faith and Practice

Believers have a very early example in the history of Christianity of where they should go to find sound doctrine. When Paul came to Berea to preach the gospel on one of his missionary journeys, the Bereans in the synagogue went to the Scriptures to find if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:10-11). Luke, the author of Acts, clearly thinks this was admirable. He says that they were “noble-minded” for taking this practice.

Alberto Valdés correctly states what these verses say about the authority of Scriptures. The admirable attitude of these Bereans “model[s] key principles of interpretation: openness, eagerness, and searching the Scriptures.”³⁹

Whatever disagreements Evangelicals have in interpreting certain Biblical passages, the Catholic Church openly contradicts the teaching of many passages. The Church itself is not troubled by this because the Church sees itself as the final authority.

It is not only Luke who saw the authority of the Scriptures. Paul tells Timothy that in the Scriptures Timothy will have all he needs to do “every” good work. There is nothing God requires of us that we will not find in the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17). If this is the case, why do believers need the traditions of any church to know what to believe or how to act?

Paul was placing a large burden on Timothy. The young man would continue Paul’s work after Paul’s soon martyrdom. But the Scriptures would give Timothy what he needed to know and how he was to act. Litfin states it this way:

He [Paul] was confident of Timothy’s commitment to and dependence on the Scriptures, and he was even more

³⁹ Alberto S. Valdés, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Vol 1, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 571.

confident of God's ability to supply all Timothy's needs through the Word.⁴⁰

Peter had the same high view of the authority of Scriptures. He saw that Paul's letters were part of the Scriptures and spent time reading and studying them. In addition, he recognized that the wisdom of God was found in these writings (2 Pet 3:14-18).⁴¹

Many other passages support the authority of Scriptures. For example, the author of Hebrews exhorts the believers he writes to that they need to hold fast to what was spoken by the Lord and written by the apostles (Heb 2:1-4). We have these precepts in the teachings of the apostles in the Scriptures, as well as the teachings of the Lord that they recorded.

C. Adopt a Simple Spiritual Life of Devotion and Obedience to Christ

The Catholic Church promotes the use of certain spiritual exercises and things like contemplative prayers to feel close to God and please Him. However, the Bible does not teach such things. Believers become more like Christ as they see Him in the Scriptures and ask the Lord to transform them into the image they see in those writings (2 Cor 3:15-18).⁴²

Paul tells the Colossian believers that they have everything they need for spiritual maturity because of their union with Christ (Col 2:8-10). Christ dwells within each believer, and in Him the fullness of Deity dwells. The false teaching at Colossae had, at its very foundation, the view that physical things that can be touched and eaten were needed in order for them to mature in their faith (Col 2:11-22). The parallels with the teachings of the Catholic Church are striking.

The life that is pleasing to God is not found in practices that men have developed over the centuries. The Scriptures tell us that the answer is to walk in obedience to what Christ has told us and what

⁴⁰ A. Duane Litfin, "2 Timothy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament Edition, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 757.

⁴¹ Zane C. Hodges, *Second Peter: Shunning Error in Light of the Savior's Return* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2015), 123.

⁴² For a full discussion, see Zane C. Hodges, *Six Secrets of the Christian Life* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2016).

He has told us through the apostles. The believer lacks nothing but to focus on Him and walk by His Spirit and strength.

VI. CONCLUSION

Some Evangelicals, including some at Southern Evangelical Seminary, have left the faith they held and have converted to Catholicism. There are multiple reasons why a person may take this route.

For many, the reason to convert to Catholicism is a rejection of certain foundational tenets and a belief that in the traditions and rituals of the Catholic Church they can find a depth of spirituality missing in Evangelicalism. However, Biblical spirituality is not found in these kinds of things. Being conformed to the image of Christ involves a process that begins with being saved by grace through faith. This security frees up the believer to see Christ in the Word of God and through His Spirit to become more and more like Him.

DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY ON SALVATION: A SURVEY OF SOME POPULAR PROFESSORS BETWEEN 1965-1990

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I. INTRODUCTION

What did Dallas Theological Seminary (hereafter, DTS) professors teach about eternal salvation (i.e., regeneration) to the general public? To answer that question this article will survey books written by four DTS professors and published by mainstream presses between the years 1965 and 1990. The authors are John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, and Zane Hodges. This article will ask the following four questions: according to the author, 1) What is the saving message? 2) What is the condition of salvation? 3) What is the definition of faith? And 4) Is Lordship Salvation correct?

II. JOHN WALVOORD

John Walvoord (1910-2002) was professor of systematic theology and a long-time president at DTS (1952-1986). During that period, he wrote several books, but I will mainly draw on three: *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*; *Jesus Christ Our Lord*; and *What We Believe*.

A. The Saving Message

What do you need to believe to be saved? Walvoord is not entirely clear on the content of the saving message. For one, a person must believe he is a sinner: “Before a person can intelligently believe in

Christ, he has to be aware of the guilt of his sin.”¹ He must also know that only the righteousness of God will save him: “What the sinner needs to learn is that nothing short of the righteousness of God will allow him to be saved.”² And he must also know that while he is condemned for his sin, only one sin in particular prevents him from being saved:

An unsaved person needs to realize that while he is a sinner, as all men are sinners, this constitutes only a part of his condemnation before God. The one sin that prevents him from entering into grace and favor with God is the sin of unbelief. Accordingly, he must realize that salvation is by faith alone. He also needs instruction on the matter of righteousness.³

Moreover, he must know that both sin and Satan were judged on the cross, allowing for salvation by faith:

The three aspects of the Spirit’s convicting the unsaved are (1) that a person seeking salvation must understand the nature of sin in contrast to the righteousness of God, (2) that God provides a righteousness which is by faith and is not earned or deserved, (3) that God has judged sin in Christ on the cross, including the condemnation of Satan.⁴

The unsaved person may also have to believe in the deity of Christ: “Once a person is saved and has recognized the deity of Christ...”⁵

Taken together, Walvoord seems to have believed that you need to believe a great deal of information to be saved.

B. The Condition of Salvation

Walvoord says the condition of salvation is faith, not works. First, salvation is rooted in God’s grace, not our merit: “In every instance where grace is mentioned, it is entirely due to God’s favor, not human

¹ John F. Walvoord, *What We Believe: Discovering the Truths of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1990), 86.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 90.

works.⁶ Thanks to God's grace, salvation is offered through faith, as per Acts 16:30.⁷ For example, Walvoord said that unbelief is the one thing that prevents a sinner "from entering into grace and favor with God," hence, "he must realize that salvation is by faith alone."⁸

In his explanation of the meaning of Christ's death, Walvoord argued that, while Christ died for all, one must believe to receive the benefits of the cross: "The appeal is that God has already provided reconciliation for all, but it is effective only when received by the personal faith of the individual. The contrast is between provision and application. The provision is for all, the application is to those who believe."⁹

Walvoord denied that salvation depended on doing works: "To make the continuance of our salvation depend upon works, however, is gross failure to comprehend that salvation is by grace alone."¹⁰

In sum, Walvoord repeatedly taught that the condition of salvation is to believe, or to have faith, and denied it was by works. However, what does he think it means to believe?

C. The Nature of Faith

In *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, Walvoord defined faith this way: "In the nature of the case the issue of faith is to believe in the revelation given."¹¹ Walvoord explained that salvation was always by faith in the revelation given:

Faith as a condition of salvation is obviously faith in the promises of God insofar as they were revealed. For Adam and Eve this was faith in the promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent—would bring salvation to fallen man and defeat the tempter.¹²

In other words, faith seems to mean being persuaded that a revelation or promise is true.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁹ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1969), 182.

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1966), 82.

¹¹ Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 58.

¹² *Ibid.*, 59.

However, just a few sentences later, Walvoord introduced the idea that genuine faith was manifested in works:

A believer who *really trusted* in Jehovah would, on the other hand, be sure to offer his sacrifices. The sacrifices, although not work which was acceptable as a ground of salvation before God, were nevertheless work which demonstrated faith. Faith in the Old Testament therefore took a definite outward form of manifestation.¹³

Was Walvoord making works part of his definition of saving faith?

Years later, in *What We Believe*, Walvoord distinguished between faith and saving faith:

It is rather obvious to any careful observer of the church today that there are many who have made some outward profession of faith in Christ who have never been born again and show no evidence that they are saved. How can one know whether he has put his faith in Christ or not? According to James 2:19, “Even the devils believe that—and shudder.” From these passages it is clear that there is saving faith and faith that does not save.¹⁴

Walvoord denied that simply believing the truth of the gospel is enough to be saved: “simply assenting to the fact of the gospel and believing mentally that Jesus died for the sins of the world does not result in salvation and is not really what can be called ‘saving faith.’”¹⁵ What else is required to have saving faith?

First, saving faith must be “an act of the whole person.”¹⁶ For Walvoord, believing with the mind is not enough—your whole person must be involved. He wrote that saving faith “may involve not only the mind but the feelings, or sensibility, and, most of all, it involves the will, for faith is actually a step authorized by our will.”¹⁷ Hence, he said, “faith is the sole requirement for salvation, but it is faith in which all the elements combine, that is, it is an act of human

¹³ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹⁴ Walvoord, *What We Believe*, 85.

¹⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷ Ibid., 87.

will and the human mind and the human capacity for emotion.”¹⁸ But even that is not quite enough.

Second, Walvoord further clarified that Biblical belief “is more accurately expressed as *trust*, or committing oneself to faith in Christ.”¹⁹ What is the difference between simply *believing* in Christ and *committing* oneself to faith in Christ? Walvoord appealed to an elevator to illustrate the difference. To get to the top floor, it is not enough to believe it can take you there—you must get in:

Faith would mean that he stepped in the elevator and put his weight into it and committed himself to its mechanical perfections. Likewise, there is more than mere assent in the matter of believing in Christ. Saving faith involves the work of the Spirit as well as the whole person—intellect, sensibility, and will.²⁰

Getting into an elevator sounds like a work, doesn’t? In fact, according to Walvoord, saving faith is distinguished from false faith by the works it produces: “it is not faith plus works *but faith that produces works* that results in the salvation of an individual.”²¹ But if faith without works is not saving faith, then has Walvoord smuggled works into the condition of salvation by redefining faith to include them?

D. Lordship Salvation

Confusingly, despite saying that only faith that produces works results in salvation, Walvoord also formally denied that works were an additional requirement to faith for salvation:

In an effort to distinguish true faith from mere assent, some have found it necessary to add requirements to the single requirement of faith for salvation. In keeping with this goal, they have required a person who wants to be saved to accept the lordship of Christ and the promise to serve the Lord from then on. This has been made *a*

¹⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹⁹ Ibid., 87.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 88, emphasis added.

prerequisite to faith. This view is contradicted in Scripture where works follow faith but do not precede it.²²

However, while he faults Lordship Salvation for requiring works to *precede* faith, he obviously did not think it was wrong to require works to *follow* faith: “it is not faith plus works but faith that produces works that results in the salvation of an individual.”²³ But what is the difference between “plus works” and “produces works”? Either way, works are required for salvation.

Although Walvoord faulted Lordship Salvation for requiring a person to “promise to serve the Lord,” he made “commitment” to the Lord a condition of salvation: “In other words, it is faith alone, but it is the kind of faith that saves. It is real faith and real commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior.”²⁴ What, exactly, is the difference between a promise to serve and a “commitment to” the Lord?

E. Summary

Walvoord communicated a mixed message about the condition of salvation. Although he stated that salvation was by faith in Christ apart from works, he also taught faith must produce works and be a “real commitment” to Christ to be saving. It seems that Walvoord made works a condition of salvation just as surely as Lordship Salvation does.

III. J. DWIGHT PENTECOST

J. Dwight Pentecost (1915-2014) was distinguished professor of Bible exposition at DTS. He published several books during this period, but we will focus on two, namely, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* and *Pattern for Maturity*, which was republished as *Designed to Be Like Him*.

²² Ibid., 89, emphasis added.

²³ Ibid., 88.

²⁴ Ibid., 90.

A. The Saving Message

What is the saving message according to Pentecost? I could not find a clear statement of what Pentecost considered to be the saving message. The following *may* be representative:

It is because your debt has been paid. It is because God's wrath has been poured out upon Another and God's judgment against your sins has already been executed in the Person of Jesus Christ. A divine transaction took place at Calvary, a transaction in which all of your debts were gathered together, and Jesus Christ paid them to the full. Jesus Christ offered to the Father complete satisfaction for your sins and mine.²⁵

More generally, and more minimally, Pentecost presented the saving message as the call to believe in Jesus as your personal Savior: "The Word of God tells us that a man who does no more than believe that Jesus Christ is his personal Savior passes from death to life. Those are all the facts which are presented to you for your belief, that you might accept those facts and reckon upon them."²⁶

Interestingly, Pentecost thought that eternal security was central, not peripheral, to the *kind* of salvation Jesus promised:

As we consider with you the doctrine of security, we recognize immediately that our security is related to the kind of salvation which God has provided for sinners. Has God provided salvation, or has God provided a chance for salvation to those who accept Jesus as a personal Savior?²⁷

For Pentecost, a salvation you can forfeit is not salvation, but a mere chance to be saved. Since Jesus promised eternal salvation, it makes a difference what kind of salvation you are believing in Jesus for.

Pentecost argued that eternal security is implied by God's power and love, as well as the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Notably, he also thought it is implied by the promise of eternal life itself:

²⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine: Doctrinal Studies of Fourteen Crucial Words of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1965), 39.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 123-24.

...the promise of God is a basis for our security. We go into a familiar passage such as John 3:16 where it is made so clear: "...God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Notice the two aspects of the promise: negatively, he shall not perish; positively, he shall have everlasting life!...When God offers a man life, God offers a man only one kind of life, and that is eternal life. Eternal life is the life of God, and as God's life could never be terminated by death, so the life of God, given to the child of God, could never be terminated. We submit to you that the promise of God to give eternal life to the one who accepts Christ as his Saviour is a sufficient basis for our security.²⁸

For Pentecost, the only salvation that Jesus promises is everlasting and irrevocable.

B. The Condition of Salvation

What is the condition to receive eternal salvation? Pentecost explained that the gospel "is characterized by its simplicity,"²⁹ and is often misunderstood.³⁰ The gospel is simple because we are saved through faith, entirely apart from works:

They had come to know Christ by faith; by faith and faith alone they had accepted the gift of God, which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. They were not saved by rationalization, by good works, by joining a church, by being baptized, or by following human philosophy. They were saved by the faith principle. They accepted God's Word that He would save anyone who comes to Him by faith in Christ. And as a result they were born again.³¹

Furthermore, Pentecost stressed how faith alone makes assurance of salvation possible:

It is of faith, that it might be of grace, *to the end that it might be sure*. If God covenanted to do ninety-nine percent

²⁸ Ibid., 127.

²⁹ Ibid., 61.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Designed to Be Like Him: New Testament Insights for Becoming Christ-like* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1994), 244-45. Previously published within our timeframe as *Pattern for Maturity* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1966).

of the work of salvation if you did one percent, *you would have no certainty* that you had accomplished your part of the bargain so that God could do His ninety-nine percent. You would live out your days in dread and fear because *you would have no assurance* that you had lived up to your part of the bargain. But, in order that salvation might be sure, God says it must be by grace. It is no wonder we delight to sing of the grace of God that brought salvation, for it is a gracious salvation that gives us *certainty, security, and assurance*.³²

If salvation were anything less than eternal and by anything other than faith, you could not have assurance of salvation.

C. The Nature of Faith

Pentecost affirms that salvation is by faith, but what does it mean to believe? Pentecost says, “Faith is an attitude toward God in which we consider Him to be a faithful God who will perform what He has promised.”³³ In other words, faith is persuasion that God will do what He promised. Pentecost’s view of the nature of faith is also implied in what he says about repentance:

There are a number of references we could cite to show that repentance is often used as a synonym for faith. In these passages you could eliminate the word “repentance” and substitute the word “faith” and it would not change the truth of the Word at all. The point to be observed is this: repentance is a change of mind toward the revealed truth of the Word of God. Previously a man disbelieved the revealed truth; and he has changed his mind and now accepts or believes the revealed truth, so that faith and repentance, on occasion, seem to be used interchangeably.³⁴

Hence, for Pentecost, to believe something is to be persuaded that a fact is true. Elsewhere he says that “when one believes a fact, he turns from doubt or unbelief to faith in that revealed fact.”³⁵

³² Pentecost, *Things Which Become*, 27, emphasis added. Pentecost does not say that assurance of one’s own eternally secure salvation is of the essence of saving faith.

³³ Pentecost, *Designed*, 244.

³⁴ Pentecost, *Things Which Become*, 63.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

D. Lordship Salvation

While Pentecost does not address Lordship Salvation by name, he is very clear that we are saved by faith apart from any kind of work:

The Israelites didn't have to work; they didn't have to pray; they didn't have to plead; they didn't have to make a promise; they didn't have to pay—they just had to look. And to look upon that serpent was to respond, in faith, to the message and the fact that Moses presented.³⁶

Pentecost also warned that Satan confounds the gospel “by addition, not subtraction.” That is, Satan adds other conditions to salvation, besides simple faith in Christ:

That is why some will teach that salvation is by faith and good works; or, salvation is by faith and baptism; or, salvation is by faith plus church membership; or, salvation is by faith plus repentance. These are all attempts to darken the mind of the man who needs to be saved concerning the central issue and the basic plan of redemption.³⁷

Moreover, Pentecost denied that salvation is by faith and repentance if repentance is defined as “sorrow for sin,” instead of as a “change of mind.” As I have already quoted Pentecost as saying, he believed that repentance could be used as a synonym for faith: “There are a number of references we could cite to show that repentance is often used as a synonym for faith. In these passages you could eliminate the word “repentance” and substitute the word “faith” and it would not change the truth of the Word at all.”³⁸

But the main point is that salvation is by faith, apart from works, and even apart from repentance (if defined as sorrow for and turning from sins):

We want to consider now something of the relationship of repentance to salvation. It is here that the great doctrinal battle has been fought as to whether salvation is by faith alone, or whether salvation is by faith plus something. There are approximately 150 passages in the New Testament that tell us that salvation is by faith alone; that salvation is the gift of God to one who will accept Jesus

³⁶ Ibid., 38.

³⁷ Ibid., 61.

³⁸ Ibid.

Christ as his personal Savior. . . Repentance is not a prerequisite to salvation; for if repentance is required, salvation is based, at least in part, upon works.³⁹

E. Summary

In his books during this period, Pentecost was clear that salvation is by faith alone, apart from works, and that believers get an eternal salvation.

IV. CHARLES RYRIE

Charles Ryrie (1925-2016) was professor of systematic theology at DTS. He wrote several popular-level books between 1965 and 1990 that addressed the topic of salvation. In this section we will examine *Balancing the Christian Life*, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, *Basic Theology*, *So Great Salvation*, and *The Ryrie Study Bible*.

A. The Saving Message

What must you believe to be saved? On the one hand, Ryrie appeals to John 4:10 to illustrate the content of saving faith: “Know about the gift and the Person, then ask and receive eternal life.”⁴⁰ Likewise, in his *Study Bible* comment on this passage, Ryrie says, “Salvation is a gift from Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Messiah. Notice that Christ asked the woman to receive Him and His gift without any prerequisite change in her life. After she believed, and because she believed, her way of living would be changed.”⁴¹ What is the object of saving faith? Jesus and His gift. However, Ryrie has also said that people “are saved through faith in the substitutionary death of Christ. And, of course, they must learn about the death of Christ somehow in order to have content to their faith.”⁴² And he explained that “Paul gives us the precise definition of the Gospel we preach today in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.”⁴³ That is what we must believe today to be saved:

³⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1982), 327.

⁴¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1976, 1978), 1606.

⁴² Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 314.

⁴³ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Wheaton,

Paul wrote clearly that the Gospel that saves is believing that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. This is the complete Gospel, and if so, then it is also the true full Gospel and the true whole Gospel. Nothing else is needed for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.⁴⁴

It is necessary to believe in Jesus' substitutionary death and resurrection to be saved: "I do need to believe that He died for my sins and rose triumphant over sin and death."⁴⁵

If that is right, what about the woman at the well? Ryrie said she had saving faith, and yet she did not know or believe that Jesus died and rose again (since that had not yet happened). Does Ryrie believe the saving message changed? It appears so.

B. The Condition of Salvation

What is the condition of salvation, according to Ryrie? At times, he emphasized that faith was the sole condition of salvation: "More than 200 times in the New Testament, salvation is said to be conditioned solely on the basis of faith—faith that has as its object the Lord Jesus who died as our substitute for sin (Jn 3:16; Ac 16:31)."⁴⁶ He said that a gospel that compromises *faith alone* is a false one:

The message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore, one of them is a false gospel and comes under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel (Gal 1:6-9), and this is a very serious matter.⁴⁷

He says that faith had no co-conditions for salvation: "Faith is the *only* condition. Anything added becomes a work attached to the grace of God. *Faith* is the condition, and it is faith in Him who alone can save."⁴⁸ However, elsewhere, Ryrie added both works and repentance as co-conditions with faith for salvation. For example, he explained there is a "repentance that is unto eternal salvation," the clearest

IL: Victor Books, 1989), 39.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1972), 134.

⁴⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1969), 170.

⁴⁸ Ryrie, *Survey*, 139.

example being Acts 2:38.⁴⁹ At times, Ryrie took a modified change-of-mind view. For example, commenting on Acts 2:38, Ryrie could say, “Repent. To change one’s mind; specifically, here, about Jesus of Nazareth, and to acknowledge Him as Lord (= God) and Christ (= Messiah). *Such repentance brings salvation.*”⁵⁰ Likewise, he said, “In both the Old and New Testaments repentance means ‘to change one’s mind.’”⁵¹ And again: “To repent is to change your mind.”⁵² Hence, repentance can be a synonym for faith: “if repentance means changing your mind about the particular sin of rejecting Christ, then that kind of repentance saves, and of course it is the same as faith in Christ.”⁵³

But in other places, Ryrie says that salvific repentance also involves *a change of behavior*: “Biblical repentance also involves changing one’s mind in a way that affects some change in the person. Repentance is not merely an intellectual assent to something; it also includes a resultant change, *usually actions.*”⁵⁴ Or he said, “Repentance means a genuine change of mind that affects the life in some way.”⁵⁵ Or, in his comment on John 4:10, he noted that while the woman at the well did not have to change her life as a prerequisite to be saved, “After she believed, and because she believed, *her way of living would be changed.*”⁵⁶

That creates a problem for Ryrie, and confusion for his readers, for if you must repent to be saved, and repentance involves a change of actions, then you must change your actions to be saved. But how is that compatible with Ryrie’s claim that salvation is by faith apart from works?

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ryrie *Study Bible*, 210, emphasis added.

⁵¹ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 92.

⁵² Ryrie, *Survey*, 139.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 92, emphasis added.

⁵⁵ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 337.

⁵⁶ Ryrie, *Study Bible*, 1606, emphasis added.

C. The Nature of Faith

Ryrie's confusing stance on the role of works in salvation is further complicated by an illustration he often used to describe the condition of salvation, such as in his *Survey of Bible Doctrine*:

James 2:14-26 is saying that a nonworking faith is not the kind of faith that saves in the first place. What is said in that passage is like a two-coupon train or bus ticket. One coupon says, "Not good if detached," and the other says, "Not good for passage." Works are not good for passage, but faith detached from works is not saving faith!⁵⁷

If the coupon to heaven requires both faith and works, then works are a condition of salvation. Ryrie also used the two-coupon ticket illustration in the *Ryrie Study Bible*, commentating on Jas 2:24: "Unproductive faith cannot save, because it is not genuine faith. Faith and works are like a two-coupon ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works."⁵⁸ He used the illustration again in *Basic Theology*:

Unproductive faith is not genuine faith; therefore what we are in Christ will be seen in what we are before men. Faith and works are like a two-coupon ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works.⁵⁹

Hence, despite claims to the contrary, Ryrie taught that good works *are* necessary for salvation. One needs both faith and works to have a ticket to salvation. He emphasizes that in several books.

Ryrie's belief that works are somehow necessary to salvation is further supported by his description of different *kinds* of faith (instead of different *objects* of faith), such as intellectual or historical faith,⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ryrie, *Survey*, 133-34; cf. the *Ryrie Study Bible* comments on James 2:24: "Unproductive faith cannot save, because it is not genuine faith."

⁵⁸ *Ryrie Study Bible*, 1860.

⁵⁹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 300.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 326-27.

miracle faith, temporary faith,⁶¹ and saving faith.⁶² Ryrie further analyzed the nature of saving faith, saying it has different “facets”—intellectual, emotional, and volitional.⁶³ He claimed that you must have all the facets to have genuine faith. Ryrie described this as believing with all your being: “While these three facets may be distinguished, they must be integrated when saving faith takes place. The person believes in Christ with all his being, not just his intellect or will.”⁶⁴ But if willingness is part of genuine faith, how much is necessary? If emotion is a condition of having genuine faith, what kinds of emotions and how intense must they be for one to be saved? If producing works is a condition of having genuine faith, how many works must you do to have a “ticket” to heaven? The seriousness of these problems for Ryrie’s theology is shown in that he will raise the same objections against Lordship Salvation.

D. Lordship Salvation

Despite making works a co-condition with faith for salvation, Ryrie denied that making a commitment to Christ was a condition for salvation: “Simply stated the question is this: Must there be a commitment to Christ as Lord of one’s life in order to be saved?”⁶⁵ According to some theologians: “one must believe *and* give Christ control of his life in order to be saved. Sometimes it is said only that there must be a willingness to surrender even if the surrender of life does not occur.”⁶⁶ However, Ryrie replies, “But, if willingness is

⁶¹ Ryrie quotes Luke 8:13 as an example of “temporary faith.” Since that is contrasted with “saving faith,” he implies that “temporary faith” does not save. He says that temporary faith is distinguished from “intellectual faith” because “there seems to be more personal interest involved” (*Basic Theology*, 327). What does that mean? How do you know if you have the right amount of interest?

⁶² Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 326-327.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 327. The emotional aspect is especially problematic. Ryrie says: “The truth and the person of Christ are now seen in an interested and absorbing way.” If saving faith requires this kind of emotional commitment, how absorbed must you be? Compared to what? The volitional facet is equally problematic. Ryrie says, “Now the individual appropriates personally the truth and the Person and places his reliance on Him.” Again, what does that mean? How do you “appropriate” a Person?

⁶⁴ Since belief must have some content which is believed, it is difficult to know in what sense you could believe only with the will. See Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 327. This mistakenly puts the saving power in the kind of faith you have, instead of in the Savior Himself.

⁶⁵ Ryrie, *Balancing*, 169; Ryrie, *Survey*, 134.

⁶⁶ Ryrie, *Survey*, 134-35.

required at the moment of believing in order to be saved, how much willingness is necessary?”⁶⁷ Ryrie warned against the confusion that Lordship Salvation will cause: “Confusion enters when we attempt to take the conditions for spiritual growth and make them conditions for becoming a disciple, or when we make the characteristics of the life of discipleship conditions for entering the life of a disciple.”⁶⁸ And elsewhere, he said, “To make these conditions for the life of service requirements for acquiring the life is to confuse the gospel utterly by muddying the clear waters of the grace of God with the works of man.”⁶⁹

However, these criticisms are ironic because in his explanation of faith Ryrie did exactly what he criticized. He made works and willingness aspects of saving faith and so also part of the condition of salvation, too, raising many of the same problems he sees in Lordship Salvation.

E. Summary

Although there are passages in Ryrie’s books that teach salvation by faith apart from works, there are other passages, such as his two-coupon ticket illustration, or his claim that saving faith must be “productive,” that make works a co-condition with faith for salvation. What did he really believe? During this time period, Ryrie sent a mixed message at best, and a salvation-by-works message at worst.

⁶⁷ Ibid. This is deeply ironic since, as we saw in the previous section, Ryrie himself made willingness a facet of saving faith and said one must believe and have good works to have the right “coupon” to salvation.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

V. ZANE HODGES

Zane Hodges (1932-2008) taught NT Greek and exegesis at DTS (1959-1986). During the period we are studying, he wrote two books published by major publishers, *The Hungry Inherit: Refreshing Insights on Salvation, Discipleship, and Rewards*⁷⁰ and *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*.⁷¹

A. The Saving Message

In *The Hungry Inherit*, Hodges focused on the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well as recorded in John 4, and summarized what the woman came to believe to be saved:

Ignorant she had come, enlightened she had left. Empty she had arrived, full she had departed. The gift of God? She knew it now—eternal life inexhaustibly welling up within the heart! “Who is it that saith to thee, ‘Give me to drink’”? She knew Him now—the Christ, the Saviour of the world!

*She knew these two things. They were all she needed to know, deftly led to them by the will of the Saviour. Then a transaction had occurred. Without a word, without a prayer, her heart had asked and He had given them.*⁷²

Hodges said the woman knew two things and that was all she needed to know to be saved (i.e., that Jesus is the Savior and that Jesus offers her eternal life). Elsewhere, Hodges explained that “Not all facts about God are saving facts.”⁷³ Why not? Because you can believe a great deal about Jesus while being ignorant of, or even rejecting, His promise of eternal life: “Naturally, there are many people in the modern world who would claim to believe that Jesus is God’s Son...But if they were asked whether Jesus guarantees resurrection

⁷⁰ Zane Clark Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit: Refreshing Insights on Salvation, Discipleship, and Rewards* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1972), 18-19, emphasis added. It was later republished as *The Hungry Inherit: Whetting Your Appetite for God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980).

⁷¹ Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).

⁷² Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, 18-19, emphasis added.

⁷³ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 39.

and eternal life to people on the simple basis of faith, their reply might be negative.”⁷⁴

For Hodges, to believe in Jesus for salvation is to believe certain facts about Him, such as the truth of His promise of salvation:

But to believe that Jesus is the Christ—in *John’s sense of that term*—is to believe saving truth. It is, in fact, to believe the very truth that Martha of Bethany believed. To put it as simply as possible, Jesus was asking Martha whether she *believed* that He fully guaranteed the eternal destiny of every *believer*. That was the same as asking if this great truth applied to *her* as well! And Martha affirmed that it did by affirming her conviction about who He was.⁷⁵

According to Zane Hodges, the saving message is that Jesus guarantees the eternal destiny of the believer.

B. The Condition of Salvation

Hodges made clear that the one condition for salvation is *belief*. “The truth that Jesus is the Christ—the truth that He is the Giver of eternal life to every believer—is saving truth. Belief in this truth produces an immediate—and permanent—new birth.”⁷⁶ Specifically, the condition of salvation is a single moment of belief. You are given eternal life the moment you believe in Jesus for it: “there is no such thing as believing the saving message without possessing eternal life at the same time.”⁷⁷ Continuous faith in Jesus is not necessary: “a single moment of simple, childlike trust was all that God required.”⁷⁸

Moreover, Hodges rejected salvation by works, saying works “have nothing to do with the bestowal of God’s gift, but they have everything to do with the life which should follow.”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁹ Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, 32.

C. The Nature of Faith

Given that salvation is by a single moment of faith, what does it mean to believe? Hodges recognized there was a temptation to redefine faith to make salvation harder than it is:

But the superb simplicity of all this is lost on many modern evangelicals. Indeed, they are frightened by it, and they are tempted to evade it by invoking some special definition of saving faith. In the process, they cloud beyond hope the biblical doctrine of faith and distort in a tragic way the biblical message of grace.⁸⁰

In *Absolutely Free*, Hodges clarified what it means to believe. He rejected the idea that we have seen in other DTS professors, namely, that faith is a combination of intellect, emotion, and will: “It is an unproductive waste of time to employ the popular categories—intellect, emotion, or will—as a way of analyzing the mechanics of faith.”⁸¹ He also rejected the idea that saving faith is distinguishable by its fruits,⁸² or that there are different categories of faith: “The Bible knows nothing about an intellectual faith as over against some other kind of faith (like emotional or volitional). What the Bible does recognize is the obvious distinction between faith and unbelief!”⁸³ Simply put, according to Hodges, the Bible teaches that faith is persuasion that something is true: “What faith really is, in biblical language, is receiving the testimony of God. It is the inward conviction that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith.”⁸⁴ Hence, when Martha believed Jesus’ promise (John 11:25-27), what mattered was the truth of His promise, not the way in which Martha believed it: “Everything depended on the *truth* of what she believed. It was not at all a question of what *kind* of faith she had. She either believed this or she didn’t. It was as simple as that.”⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 43.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

D. Lordship Salvation

As indicated by the subtitle, Hodges's *Absolutely Free* was explicitly written against Lordship Salvation which he condemned in the strongest terms:

This is the view that a commitment to obedience must be a part of true spiritual conversion. But beneath the surface lie all the hideous fruits of this disastrous way of thinking.

Eternity alone will reveal how many thousands of people have been deprived of their assurance by this teaching and have been brought into the bondage of fear in their relationship to God.

Instead of promoting holiness, the doctrine of lordship salvation destroys the very foundation on which true holiness must be built. By returning to the principle of the law, it has forfeited the spiritual power of grace.⁸⁶

Hodges was consistent in rejecting works as an explicit or implicit condition of salvation.

E. Summary

Readers of Zane Hodges's book would have learned that the only condition to have eternal life is to believe in Jesus for it. And he clearly warned against redefining faith to include doing good works.

VI. CONCLUSION

What must I do to be saved? Between the years 1965-1990, readers of books published by these four DTS professors would have understood that the formal answer is that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, apart from works. However, thereafter the details became fuzzy.

For example, the saving message itself was not entirely clear. The authors either disagreed over, or did not explicitly state, the content of saving faith. However, broadly speaking, with the exception of Zane Hodges, most authors indicated that the object of faith included the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross and resurrection from the dead, with, perhaps, a sense of one's own condemnation for sin. They

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

implied that the content of the saving message changed over time, as more revelation was given, and especially after Jesus' resurrection. By contrast, Hodges indicated the saving message was that Jesus guarantees the eternal life of believers.

A further area of disagreement is on the role of works in salvation. Although all authors formally accepted⁸⁷ salvation by faith apart from works, only Dwight Pentecost and Zane Hodges unambiguously held to that position. By contrast, while both John Walvoord and Charles Ryrie warned against making works a condition of salvation, they also made statements making works a condition of salvation.

What did DTS professors teach the public about salvation? Sadly, rather than a clear and consistent theology of salvation by faith apart from works, readers of popular DTS literature between 1965-1990 received a mixed message.

⁸⁷The original print run for this issue mistakenly read, "all authors formally *rejected*..."

DISPENSATIONALISM'S REFUSAL OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL AND THE EFFECT OF ITS REFUSAL ON THE URGENCY OF EVANGELIZATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Modern missions cannot be discussed without also discussing eschatology. This is because how one sees eschatology—whatever system of eschatology to which he holds—will impact how he conducts missions.¹ In the same light, one's eschatology will also form one's theory of missions.

David J. Bosch accurately discusses the development of each system of eschatology and its influence on missions.² Besides Bosch, many missiologists agree that there is a connection between each system

¹There are three major eschatological positions: premillennialism, amillennialism, and post-millennialism. Of course, there are derivations in each position, so there are a multitude of eschatological views among Christians. In general terms, premillennialism holds that Christ will come again before the physical millennial kingdom. Christ will reign on this earth for 1000 years. Amillennialism denies a millennial kingdom in the physical sense. The verses that supposedly deal with such a kingdom are said to involve a spiritual kingdom. An amillennialist asserts that the kingdom refers to Christ's reign over the church, His reign in heaven over His saints, or His reign over the believer's heart. Christ inaugurated the kingdom at His first coming, and this kingdom will continue until He comes again. Postmillennialism teaches that Christ will come after the kingdom is over. The Church will usher in the kingdom by bringing in a Christianized society through the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of Biblical morals.

²David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 313-27. He briefly discusses how each of the three major views of eschatology has affected modern missions.

of eschatology and how its adherents have historically conducted missions.³

An important contribution of Bosch to the discussion is his comments on Matt 24:14. He points out that this verse in the Lord's Olivet Discourse began to be employed by premillennialists as central to their conduct and theory of missions.⁴

Commenting on how premillennialists often looked at Matt 24:14, Bosch explains: "Christ's return was now understood as being dependent upon the successful completion of the missionary task; the preaching of the gospel was a condition to be fulfilled before the end comes."⁵

Such an understanding of Matt 24:14 has provided faithful believers with a missionary motivation and encouraged them to adopt an urgency in the area of missions.

This is one facet of premillennialism's impact on missions. But there were others, such as the emphasis on seeing the spiritual salvation of people.⁶ Premillennialists have mainly focused on the personal salvation of those they meet on the mission field.

Related to this is dispensationalism. Many premillennialists have historically been identified as dispensationalists. Dispensational

³Peter Beyerhaus, "Eschatology: Does It Make a Difference in Missions?," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 26 (1990): 366-76; Don Fanning, "Eschatology and Missions," http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=cgm_theo. Accessed Nov 13, 2014; Everett W. Huffard, "Eschatology and the Mission of the Church," *Restoration Quarterly* 33 (1991): 1-11; Julie Ma, "Eschatology and Mission: Living the 'Last Days' Today," *Transformation* 26 (2009): 186-98; William Manson, "Mission and Eschatology," *International Review of Mission* 42 (1953): 390-97; and A. Christopher Smith, "The Eschatological Drive of God's Mission," *Review & Expositor* 82 (1985): 209-16. For more discussion on the premillennial view, along with the accompanying expectation of Christ's soon return, see Andrew F. Bush, "The Implications of Christian Zionism for World Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33 (2009): 144-50; Colin Chapman, "Premillennial Theology, Christian Zionism, and Christian Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33 (2009): 137-42; Michael Pocock, "The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology on Evangelical Missionary Theory and Praxis from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33 (2009): 129-34; and Michael Pocock, "The Destiny of the World and the Work of Missions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 436-451.

⁴Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 316.

⁵Ibid.

⁶The NT speaks of different kinds of "salvation." People can be saved from illness, from physical death, from the temporal consequences of sin, or from hell. In the words of the Gospel of John, salvation from eternal condemnation occurs when a person believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life. This is what is meant here by the term "spiritual salvation."

premillennialists have been particularly identified as believers who see an urgency in missions that would bring eternal salvation to the hearers of the message.

When one brings in the theology of dispensationalism, the discussion of Matt 24:14 takes a twist. Dispensationalists see a distinction between Israel and the Church. Matthew 24 is seen as addressing issues related to the nation of Israel and not the Church.

Why have dispensational premillennialists seen this urgency in missions? Why has the need to proclaim the reception of eternal life for all who believe in Jesus for it become so important in this system of eschatology? Has their dispensational theology determined their view of missions?

This article will answer these questions. It will argue that the dispensational premillennial understanding of the “not yet” eschatological kingdom has led adherents of this system to see an urgency in the conduct of missions as well as a desire to see people experience eternal salvation. This also explains why they have not placed a great emphasis on the social gospel.

The first section will provide a brief history of how premillennialists have played an active role in promoting an urgency in missions while focusing on eternal salvation. The second section will investigate dispensational teaching's connection to premillennialism. Then, the third section will demonstrate that the dispensational understanding of the “not yet” eschatological kingdom has been the theological foundation for this urgency as well as evangelism-centered missions.

There are two types of dispensationalism. Traditional dispensationalism is also known as *classical dispensationalism*. This category is represented by older writers like John Nelson Darby, C. I. Scofield, and Lewis Sperry Chafer. It also includes what could be called revised dispensationalism found in the writings of Charles C. Ryrie, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Alva J. McClain, and Stanley Toussaint.

However, since the 1980s, another type of dispensationalism has come upon the academic scene. Its proponents include Robert L. Saucy, Darrell L. Bock, and Craig A. Blaising. This new version is called *progressive dispensationalism*. One of the notable differences from the earlier versions is an understanding of the eschatological kingdom. Traditional dispensationalism holds to a “not yet”

eschatological kingdom. This view maintains that the kingdom of God does not exist in any manner during the church age. Progressive dispensationalism, on the other hand, holds to an “already, but not yet” kingdom framework—in some ways, Christ is reigning on the throne of David today. This article’s focus will be on the “not yet” eschatological kingdom of traditional dispensationalism. However, in the conclusion of this article, it will be seen that the rise of progressive dispensationalism suggests the need for further study.

II. PREMILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY’S EFFECT ON MODERN MISSIONS

Premillennial eschatology’s impact on modern missions can be seen historically in two areas. The first is the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM). The second is faith missions.

The successful mobilization of the SVM produced many missionary volunteers. However, denominations in the late nineteenth century could not accept them all, and the volunteers could not wait until the denominations were ready. Thus, some of them took part in a missionary task through faith missions.

In the meantime, another characteristic of premillennial eschatology’s impact on missions is its refusal to promote the social gospel. Instead, it held to the importance of presenting the gospel of eternal life on an individual basis.

A. Urgency in Evangelism through the Student Volunteer Movement

Premillennialism took root in a variety of traditions and denominations starting in the nineteenth century. Bosch names a number of different religious traditions in this regard. They include Adventism, the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism, and conservative Evangelicalism.⁷ In spite of the variety in these traditions, they all became noticeably active in the task of missions.⁸ A notable catchphrase developed which accurately captured the premillennial conviction in regard to the task of missions, especially as it related

⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 315.

⁸ *Ibid.*

to the urgency and importance that they saw in this task. It was “the evangelization of the world in this generation.”⁹

This motto was accepted as the watchword of the SVM. The origin of the phrase is found in Arthur T. Pierson’s famous address to D. L. Moody’s Mount Hermon Student Conference in 1886. The title of the conference was, “The Bible and Prophecy.” When Pierson proposed this motto, Beyerhaus maintains that Pierson’s heart was burned with an eschatological motivation for missions. Pierson made this clear when he said that “the evangelization of all the nations was the condition laid down by Jesus himself for his future coming in glory.”¹⁰

The message of the motto had a huge impact. Many young believers were kindled with a missionary zeal. Dispensational missiologist Michael Pocock correctly concludes, based upon Pierson’s speech, that this zeal was thoroughly “eschatological in nature.”¹¹

J. R. Mott and J. H. Oldham used the motto and diligently labored to mobilize missionaries. Their effort bore much fruit. Over 20,000 students joined the SVM and devoted themselves as missionaries.¹² The hearts of these would-be missionaries were filled with an eschatological hope that they might be the last generation and would perhaps witness the Second Coming of Christ. They also saw their efforts as a push to finish the task of the Great Commission. Even though they faithfully accomplished their own missionary tasks, they did not see the fulfillment of such an eschatological hope.

Because of this unrealized hope, the SVM developed a new motto for its missionary endeavors. Pocock explains the history of the SVM and its missionaries. In addition, he explains how the motto pointed to the future:

They accomplished a great deal but failed in their great ambition. Almost a century later, in 1989, the watchword was restated as “a church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.”¹³

⁹ Beyerhaus, “Eschatology,” 366.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Pocock, “The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology,” 132.

¹² David M. Howard, *Student Power in World Missions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 90; Pocock, “The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology,” 132.

¹³ Pocock, “The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology,” 133.

Students and mission agencies worldwide responded to what was called the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement. Thousands of missionaries were deployed and engaged many unreached people groups. While premillennialists were not the only driving force behind the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, there was an emphasis on “closure.” This emphasis was based on Jesus’ words in Matt 24:14, that the end would come after the gospel of the kingdom was preached to the whole world. The point was that this age would “close” after the gospel went out to the whole world. Clearly, this motto and movement had a definite premillennial eschatological dimension. Not surprisingly, Luis Bush, its leader, was a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, a premillennial dispensational school.¹⁴

Although the successors of the SVM changed their watchword, the eschatological motivation still led them. The history of the SVM has been led by the firmness of the eschatological motivation for missions based on Matt 24:14.

B. Urgency in Evangelism through Faith Missions

As mentioned above, the work of the SVM was so successful, there were more missionary volunteers than the denominations could accept and send to the mission field. The urgency these volunteers felt about going to the mission field caused many to decide they could not wait until the denominations were ready for them. As a result, many of those who wanted to engage in foreign missions had to look elsewhere. For them, faith missions were the only option.

Dana L. Robert says:

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, American interest in foreign missions increased dramatically. Student volunteers flooded the denominational sending agencies, and nondenominational missions were founded to contain the rising tide. Little did the average Christian of 1880 realize that the age of foreign missions would irrevocably change the religious landscape at home. By the early twentieth century, American missions had not only influenced the developing world, but a constellation of separatist evangelical missions, often called “faith

¹⁴ Ibid.

missions," had emerged from the heady enthusiasm of the mission revival.¹⁵

Faith missions were connected to premillennialism. Robert explains that the faith missions owed its rise to "the popularization of new mission theories based on premillennialism," which emphasizes the imminence of Christ's Second Coming.¹⁶

Klaus Fiedler agrees with Robert. According to Fiedler, many premillennialists had been involved in the beginning and vitalization of faith missions. Fiedler mentions many premillennialists such as John Nelson Darby, B. W. Newton, James H. Brookes, William Blackstone, A. T. Pierson, A. J. Gordon, D. L. Moody, and George Müller. He suggests that the faith missions originated in the nineteenth-century revivals in the United States and are connected to Hudson Taylor and his China Inland Mission. The faith missions are interdenominational and characterized by the faith principle of financial support. The missionaries are not supported by any particular denomination.¹⁷

Faith missions demonstrate an urgency for the evangelization of the world. The leaders of the faith missions, like those of the SVM, were deeply affected by premillennialism. This urgency resulted, in part, from a specific understanding of Matt 24:14 and the goal of seeing "the evangelization of the world in this generation."

III. THE REJECTION OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL BY PREMILLENNIALISTS

While John R. Mott was exerting great effort in mobilizing missionaries, he was also the chairman of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910. At the end of the conference, Mott delivered a message in which he emphasized the eschatological hope of seeing the coming of the kingdom of God in power.¹⁸

¹⁵ Dana L. Robert, "The Crisis of Missions: Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions," in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷ Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1994), 273.

¹⁸ Beyerhaus, "Eschatology: Does It Make a Difference in Missions?," 366.

However, the following generations of conferences at Edinburgh did not follow their founding father's eschatological motivation when they organized the International Missional Council. Peter Beyerhaus illustrates this deterioration as follows:

...the successors of Edinburgh who organized the International Missional Council (IMC) did not maintain this eschatological motivation for world missions. In fact, the German scholar Gustav Warneck, known as the father of the science of missiology, early on had criticized the "Anglo-Saxon eschatological optimism" seemingly contained in the SVM's watchword and the "superficial" perception of the missionary task derived from it.¹⁹

At the same time, in the early twentieth century, interest in social concerns among premillennialists dramatically decreased. This phenomenon is often called the "Great Reversal," which "took place from about 1900 to about 1930."²⁰ George Marsden asserts that premillennial fundamentalists such as C. I. Scofield and D. L. Moody contributed to the "Great Reversal."²¹ He asserts:

The Spirit-oriented holiness teaching, spreading quickly in this period, encouraged a clear distinction between law and Spirit, Old Testament and New Testament, and seems to have been a major factor paving the way for the acceptance of a more definite dispensationalism in the later nineteenth century.²²

C. I. Scofield in his classic formulation called these two dispensations "Law" and "Grace." The contrast between the present NT age of the Spirit and the previous OT age of Law did involve a shift toward a more "private" view of Christianity. In this new age, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of individuals. A personal experience of salvation was the chief concern. Social action was relegated to the province of private agencies. The kingdom was no longer viewed as a kingdom of laws. Civil law would not help bring in the kingdom as

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 85-86.

²¹ Ibid. See also Ernest Robert Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

²² Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 87.

postmillennialism maintained. The transition from postmillennial to premillennial views was the most explicit expression of this change.²³

Moody, in particular, relied heavily on premillennialism in his evangelism. He used it as an excuse to avoid, to a large degree, discussing social issues.²⁴ The priority of personal evangelism was seen as infinitely more important.

Marsden suggests one of the reasons for the "Great Reversal" was the stark contrast it made with the social gospel. The social gospel seeks to bring a kind of "heaven on earth." On the other hand, premillennialism looks for a coming kingdom brought by Christ at His return. Marsden states:

Furthermore, the liberal and Social Gospel emphasis on the kingdom of God as realized in the progress of civilization was readily contrasted with premillennialist eschatological hopes.²⁵

However, a trend of world missions led by a major organization such as International Missional Council gradually changed missional outlook from the salvation of the lost to social and political liberation. As a result, the eschatological motivation for missions began to be blurred. Beyerhaus fairly portrays the change in the philosophy of missions as follows:

For a time, between the IMC's 1952 Willingen meeting and the Word Council of Churches' 1954 assembly at Evanston, it appeared that their concern had been attended to, but eventually their thrust was completely discarded by the dominating theology of missions in the conciliar movement. This became obvious at the World Council's fourth assembly at Uppsala in 1968 and at its eighth world missionary conference at Bangkok in 1972. Both meetings signaled that mission meant humanization, socio-political liberation, and dialogue with other religions, with a view toward finally setting up a "coming world community."²⁶

²³ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁶ Beyerhaus, "Eschatology: Does It Make a Difference in Missions?," 367-68.

Nevertheless, a new conservative Evangelical missionary movement appeared. People in this new movement began to raise the eschatological expectation for world missions. They held to “the premillennial hope that Pierson and his companions had once attached to world missions.”²⁷ Beyerhaus explains this resurgence:

In recent decades all of the important evangelical affirmations have sounded this eschatological keynote, such as the Wheaton Declaration (1966), the Frankfurt Declaration (1970), and the Lausanne Covenant (1974). However, in view of this evangelical rediscovery of eschatology, we should not allow our confession of Christ’s return to appear as a piece of high-sounding rhetoric, but rather make it the focus of our total understanding of Christ’s mandate for world evangelization.²⁸

In the meantime, the premillennialism of the fundamentalist movement continuously influenced missions. Most fundamentalist mission agencies held to the belief in a premillennial eschatology. Don Fanning portrays such a situation after World War II:

After WWII several thousand mission agencies were formed with specialized ministries and/or geographic targeted areas for church planting and other ministries. Most of these agencies’ statement of faith declared a premillennial view of the Second Coming, which often was reiterated in publications and mission conferences to declare the urgency for world evangelism as soon as possible.²⁹

It is noteworthy to consider the resurgence of fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist churches in the 1980s. This resurgence of the denomination at this time involved a re-emphasis of premillennialism since premillennialism was dominant among the fundamentalist movement. William A. Pitts illustrates the resurgence:

Fundamentalists in the 1920s made their attack on the religious liberal establishment through the issues of Darwinian evolution and biblical inerrancy. These two issues remained central for resurgent Fundamentalism in the SBC of the 1980s. Premillennialism was part of the Fundamentalist package that many Baptists

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Fanning, “Eschatology and Missions,” 28.

accepted. Millennialism began to flourish in new ways among Baptists... Clearly the tide had turned; outsider became insider...The Southern Baptist Convention has changed by embracing Fundamentalism. Its ministers have redefined not only their views of Scripture and women but also of millennialism.³⁰

As Pitts points out, premillennialism flourished among the Southern Baptists. Although the Southern Baptist Convention's mission agency, the International Mission Board, did not plainly address the eschatological motivation for the task of missions, the eschatological hope clearly lay beneath the surface.

In the early twentieth century, premillennial fundamentalists successfully rejected the social gospel. However, when the next generations abandoned premillennial eschatological motivation for missions, the social gospel became dominant in world missions. Nevertheless, premillennial fundamentalists still had a major impact on world missions by focusing on presenting the gospel to individuals. Clearly, eschatology not only determined how missions were conducted but also the gospel the missionary proclaimed.

IV. DISPENSATIONALISM'S EFFECT ON PREMILLENNIALISTS AND FUNDAMENTALISTS

The mobilizers of the SVM and the leaders of the faith missions held to premillennial eschatology. This resulted in an urgency to preaching the gospel so that individuals would receive eternal salvation. However, many premillennialists in those days were also greatly impacted by dispensationalism. Most of the premillennialists in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century supported dispensational millennialism. Ernst Robert Sandeen maintains that many Christian leaders in those days held to John Nelson Darby's dispensational theology. He says:

[A]ll of these men [Arthur T. Pierson, A. J. Gordon, James H. Brookes, etc.] embraced and taught, at least for a few years, the millenarian views identified earlier with Darby's dispensational theology... The Niagara [conference]

³⁰ William A. Pitts, "Southern Baptists and Millennialism, 1900-2000: Conceptual Patterns and Historical Expressions," *Baptist History and Heritage* 34 (1999): 8-9.

would have deserved to be known as the source of a new method of Bible teaching, a new zeal for the defense of the Bible, and a new wave of enthusiasm for dispensational millenarianism.³¹

Sandeen explains the situation in more detail. The pretribulation Rapture view of dispensationalism also dominated among premillennialists. He argues that the Gaebelien-Scofield party emerged from the struggle far stronger than its opposition. Those who held to a post-tribulational position of the Rapture lost control of the millenarian movement. They did not even maintain the level of support they had in 1900.³²

Clearly, many participants of the Niagara Bible Conferences were affected by dispensationalism. Following a series of conversations with George Müller,³³ Pierson abandoned a postmillennial interpretation and was convinced of a dispensational, premillennial view of Scripture. After becoming a premillennialist, Pierson joined the Niagara Bible Conferences. Through the teaching of Pierson, many Niagara participants converted to dispensational premillennialism.

Robert supports the assertions of Sandeen:

Muller [*sic*] then convinced Pierson of a premillennial interpretation of Scripture: that the condition of the world would in fact worsen until Jesus returned to usher in the millennium. Late-nineteenth-century premillennialism's view that human effort could not in fact bring in God's kingdom seemed to Pierson to be both more scriptural and more consonant with reality as he experienced it in his own ministry in urban Detroit.³⁴

The Niagara Bible Conference was a regular fellowship made up mainly of church leaders. Most came from Presbyterian and Baptist churches. These leaders, to a very large degree, had become convinced of a premillennial interpretation of Scripture.³⁵

³¹ Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930*, 144.

³² *Ibid.*, 220.

³³ Many prefer the spelling *Mueller*.

³⁴ Robert, "The Crisis of Missions: Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions," 34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Both Darby's and Müller's dispensationalism heavily impacted the participants of the Niagara conferences. The same was true for fundamentalists across the United States. Both men often travelled from Europe to the United States in the 1870s and 1880s.

Another reason dispensational premillennialism gained such great support is that many of the participants of the Niagara conferences were prominent urban pastors or evangelists who had many followers. These men include Dwight L. Moody of Chicago, A. J. Gordon of Boston, and James H. Brookes of St. Louis. All these men developed a strong commitment for personal evangelism. They came to view this as the solution to urban social problems and concluded that the social gospel was not the answer. Today scholars consider these conferences as the "primary breeding ground" for what would become fundamentalist Biblical exegesis.³⁶ If there was to be a change in societal norms, it would come through people becoming Christians through the gospel of eternal life. But even this was not the goal of evangelism. The world would not get better and better until the coming of Christ. In fact, the opposite was the truth.

The dissemination of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which was first published in 1909, also helps explain the proliferation of dispensationalism. In addition, it had an impact on missions. This is because the *Scofield Reference Bible* was intended to help missionaries.³⁷

Robert makes this point when she says that Cyrus I. Scofield was a Congregationalist who founded the Central American Mission (CAM), one of the earliest missions to enter Latin America. He is best remembered as the editor of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. It was an annotated King James Bible which encapsulated the hermeneutical system of premillennial dispensationalism. Many today would be surprised to find out that its original purpose was not to codify dispensational premillennialism. Instead, it was to be a one volume reference work for missionaries who had no access to theological libraries, especially for those working with CAM.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

³⁷ Most missionaries in those days were rapidly sent out through faith missions with an urgent motivation to evangelize. On the missionary fields, these missionaries needed theological assistance. The *Scofield Reference Bible*, written from a dispensational, premillennial viewpoint, was part of that assistance.

³⁸ Robert, "The Crisis of Missions: Premillennial Mission Theory and the Origins of Independent Evangelical Missions," 44.

Mark A. Noll, a noted church historian agrees. He comments, “[Scofield] intended [the *Scofield Reference Bible*] as a portable guide for missionaries more than as a polished theological system.”³⁹

V. RAPID EVANGELIZATION AND PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE COMING KINGDOM

It seems that Matt 24:14, understood from a premillennial hermeneutic, helps explain the explosion of missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century. This hermeneutic also rejected the social gospel. But we have seen, too, that dispensationalism also greatly impacted the urgency of missions among fundamentalists and the desire to present a gospel of personal salvation. More needs to be said on this last point.

Some have questioned how Matt 24:14 could be used by dispensational premillennialists to argue for an urgency in mission work. It is maintained that Matt 24:14 fits better with a postmillennial view. Isn't this verse saying that the gospel will go out to the whole world before Christ returns? This would argue that things will get better before the Second Coming. If the gospel goes out to the whole world, such preaching will have a positive impact on the world as a whole.

David Hesselgrave makes this point. He says that those who use Matt 24:14 as a motivation to engage in world-wide missions are attempting to force Jesus to come back. They do so by trying to make the world better and better, thus ushering in the Second Coming. He asks sarcastically, “If we go in force, will he come in haste?”⁴⁰

This critique seems to be reasonable at a glance. However, the premillennialist's obsession to engage with missions and its interpretation of Matt 24:14 is different from the postmillennialist's attempt to build a utopia by using diverse human approaches. In addition, dispensational premillennialists overtly rejected such social engineering and the social gospel. They instead sought personal salvation.

³⁹ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 378.

⁴⁰ David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 279.

The premillennial dispensationalists saw their missionary activity as preparation for the coming kingdom of God, not to bring it in. Henry W. Frost was an early contributor to the *Fundamentals*. He commented that missions were simply a vehicle to prepare for the future kingdom. The gathering together of people into the Church was a way for the kingdom of Christ to come, but it would be established on earth and was separate from missionary activity. Frost wrote:

... [The] Gospels, Epistles and Revelation speak of a work to be accomplished, which is preliminary to the coming kingdom, and which, in the divine economy, makes the one and the other possible...[M]issionary service is related to all the world and is for the purpose of gathering to God an innumerable number of people in preparation for the King and the Kingdom.⁴¹

Simply put, the work of missions for the premillennialist was a work the Church was to be involved in. God had mandated them to do so. Such efforts would not bring in the kingdom. Only Christ could do that.

In addition, dispensationalists see a distinction between the Church and Israel. Matthew 24:14 concerns the time of the Tribulation. As mentioned above, the majority of these dispensationalists believed the rapture of the Church will occur before the Tribulation. The Church will be removed from the earth. The preaching of the gospel to the whole world will occur after the removal of the Church. The postmillennial use of Matt 24:14 to argue for the transformation of society in this present age is contrary to the context.

Dispensational missions are done in order to complete the church. It is not required to bring in the kingdom of God. The first does not bring in the second.

⁴¹ Henry W. Frost, "What Missionary Motives Should Prevail?" in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 3, ed. by R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon (Los Angeles, CA: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917), 271.

VI. THE KINGDOM IS “NOT YET” AND THE REJECTION OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

As mentioned earlier, one of the characteristics of dispensational fundamentalism is to reject the social gospel and to adhere to the personal gospel of eternal salvation. The reason for such a trend is that dispensationalism’s kingdom framework holds to a “not yet” view by which the eschatological kingdom is not realized in the present age but will be realized in the future.

Since the kingdom does not belong to the church age, dispensational fundamentalists attacked the idea of a social gospel. Campos states that this idea dominated the theology of missions as well as their practice.⁴²

The “Great Reversal,” as discussed above, was the dispensational fundamentalists’ aggressive critique and attack on the liberal’s social gospel. The “Great Reversal” was stamped in the heart of fundamentalism. Campos comments, “That experience affected fundamentalist missionary theology and praxis, which avoided all social concern.”⁴³

According to Marsden, the theology of the social gospel is based on the realized kingdom concept, which is a desire to bring in the kingdom now. The kingdom can be experienced and realized in the “already.” This is contrasted with a dispensational eschatological framework. He points out that conservative Evangelicals did not see the threat of the social gospel in its concern for social issues. Evangelicals often had the same concerns. They also wanted to meet the great physical needs that people around the world experience.

The problem was that the social gospel emphasized these concerns to such an extent that they neglected the message of eternal life through Christ. In addition, the social gospel’s emphasis on the kingdom of God as realized in the progress of civilization was contrary to a dispensational view of the kingdom. It was impossible to reconcile the social gospel with a gospel of the need for individual salvation.⁴⁴

As the attacks on liberalism heated up, it became more difficult to defend both personal salvation evangelism and social action. As the

⁴² Oscar A. Campos, “The Mission of the Church and the Kingdom of God in Latin America” (Ph. D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000), 125.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁴ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 92.

conservative fundamentalists became stronger opponents of modernism, the attempt to balance the two declined.⁴⁵

Because of the “not yet” kingdom concept, dispensational theology has a pessimistic attitude toward the present world. To dispensational premillennialists, human effort to restore social order and to develop the present world is in vain. Campos explains that dispensationalists saw themselves as a separatist movement in more ways than one. They saw themselves as a heavenly people who belong to a universal and invisible church. They had a low view of social progress in this age. In their eschatological framework, the world would get much worse, not better, before the Second Coming of the Lord.⁴⁶ The contrast with postmillennialism, which once had many more proponents among conservative Christians, could not be more stark.

The “not yet” eschatological kingdom is described this way because the kingdom has been postponed. Because the Jews rejected their King, the Davidic kingdom was not established when Jesus came the first time. Jesus is never called the King of the Church. He does not rule as King today. He is not yet sitting on the throne of David. All of this awaits His Second Coming. It is only then that the Davidic kingdom will be realized. It will only be then that the long awaited Golden Age will come to the earth.⁴⁷ The social gospel cannot bring this about. Neither can missionary activity by the Church.

Ryrie, a dispensational premillennialist, concludes that the earthly kingdom is not for the present age. As a result, earthly norms cannot be applied now. The dichotomy between the future earthly kingdom and the present spiritual Church promotes the refusal of a social gospel. In speaking about the Good News, Jesus preached to the Jews not just a spiritual deliverance. The Good News also included material deliverance for the nation and a victory over earthly enemies. Ryrie rightly says that people get “sidetracked” when they try to impose on the world today the kingdom ethics taught in the NT to the Jews. The King is not here. He is not sitting on His throne ruling. The

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Campos, “The Mission of the Church,” 113.

⁴⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systemic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 298.

Christian should practice Church ethics. His focus is on the Church, not the betterment of the world.⁴⁸ Social concerns are secondary.

In discussing the future of this present age, Ryrie adds that even the Church will become apostate. Conditions in the world will worsen. The Church will not usher in lasting peace. That will only happen when Christ returns to set up His kingdom.⁴⁹

The Bible does instruct the Christian to do good to all people and to be light and salt to the world. Therefore, premillennialism does not teach insensitivity to the plight of those around us. Nor does it require believers to isolate themselves. Premillennialists are optimistic in the sense that they realize the kingdom is coming. But they also realize that only Christ can bring in the kingdom. At the same time, Christians are not to “sit on their” hands and do nothing about the evil around us. Biblical realism is both pessimistic and optimistic.⁵⁰

Some have suggested that whenever dispensational premillennialists are actively involved in social concerns, they are being inconsistent with their theology. Such a theology should cause them to be passive towards these things.⁵¹ Campos rightly says that the motivation for such social activity among dispensational premillennialists is Christian compassion. In addition, the motivation for such social work includes evangelistic outreach. It can be used to open a door to the presentation of the gospel of personal salvation. But it is not their theological framework that produces such concern.⁵²

Campos, who has a particular interest in missions in Latin America, gives a good summary of how dispensational premillennialism impacts missions. As a dispensationalist, he states that there is no historical manifestation of the kingdom of God. The Church is only preparing for it. In the present age, God is completing the Church. In the Tribulation, He will do all that needs to be done in order to bring in the kingdom. The Church’s mission is to proclaim spiritual salvation. The physical manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth is

⁴⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1982), 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Campos, “The Mission of the Church,” 141.

⁵² *Ibid.*

completely left to the future millennial kingdom. Social concerns are not the mandate of the Church.⁵³

The church is called to obey the Great Commission. "The Church is the proclaimer of spiritual salvation until the number of the saved is completed so that the Lord may bring in the future kingdom."⁵⁴

VII. CONCLUSION

This article has investigated why premillennialists have had a great impact on the urgency of foreign missions. But this urgency primarily involves missions that were centered on the spiritual salvation of individuals.

Most of these premillennialists have been affected by dispensational teaching. How has dispensationalism contributed to this view of missions?

It has been shown that the dispensational understanding of a "not yet" eschatological kingdom is a major reason for foreign missions as well as a desire for people to experience eternal salvation. At the same time, there is an understandable de-emphasis on social concerns and the social gospel.

As a final note, further study is needed on changes within dispensationalism itself and how this will impact a theology of missions. Progressive dispensationalism represents such a change. It rejects the hard distinction of a "not yet" framework in regards to the kingdom. Instead, it takes a middle road with an "already, not yet" view.

How will this change affect the field of missions among such dispensationalists? As this article has shown, one's theology and hermeneutic affect how one practices his faith, including missions. If one accepts an "already, but not yet" view of the kingdom, how will he practice missions? How will he balance social concerns with personal evangelism of the promise of eternal life? Since progressive dispensationalism is new to the theological scene, the impact of its hermeneutic remains to be seen.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

BOOK REVIEWS

Philippians: Pursuing Christ to Know Him—A Commentary.

By Thomas W. Finley. NP: NP, 2014. 135 pp. Paper, free.

Thomas Finley wrote this commentary on Philippians and offers it free of charge (though it is listed for \$6.33 on Amazon). On the copyright page Finley writes, “Permission is granted to copy, translate, reprint or distribute this book. Free distribution is encouraged.” His purpose in producing the book is to help leaders and believers in developing countries. In many of these countries, Free Grace material is greatly needed.

In keeping with its purpose, it is not what many would consider an academic book. However, Finley does go verse by verse through Philippians. Pastors and laymen alike can benefit from the book. In addition, since Free Grace commentaries are a minority in the academic world, all can see Philippians in a new light by reading this book.

While many come to Philippians and find verses they think support Lordship Salvation’s view of faith, Finley rightly points out that Paul’s purpose in writing the book was to thank the Philippians for their participation in his work of advancing the gospel. This included their financial support of that work.

In order to keep supporting this work, the Philippians needed to be unified. They also needed to know Christ more intimately (p. 7).

Finley makes it clear that knowing Christ is not the same thing as being eternally saved. This is a mistake Reformed and Lordship Salvation teachers almost always make. Finley says that in Phil 3:10, knowing Christ deals with discipleship. It involves obeying Christ and following Him. He makes it clear that this results in rewards and is not a requirement for receiving eternal life (pp. 64-65).

Regarding the widely misunderstood Phil 1:6, Finley remarks that the “good work” Paul refers to is the partnership the Philippians have with Paul in the work of the gospel. The completion of that work is related to the “day of Jesus Christ” (the Judgment Seat of Christ,

the Bema) when believers will be rewarded for such good works (pp. 13-15).

The “deliverance” or salvation that Paul prays for in 1:19 is for Christ to be manifested in his life, especially during the difficulties and suffering he was experiencing. Paul wanted Christ to be honored during those times (pp. 26-27). While most understand that Paul is not talking about eternal salvation in 1:19, they miss that Paul is discussing the same principle in 2:12.

In discussing Phil 2:12, Finley says that the Philippians needed to work out their salvation in the sense that they should work to be conformed to Christ’s image in order to receive a “full reward” at the Bema. Each difficulty in their lives, as in Paul’s life, was an opportunity to honor Christ by obeying Him in those circumstances. They do this in “fear and trembling” because it should be done in reverence and also with the knowledge that they could fail, be punished, and lose rewards (pp. 42-43).

Throughout the book Finley has what he calls “Life Application” sections. In these sections he applies what is being taught in Philippians to the lives of the readers of the commentary. For example, he points out that all of us go through difficult times, even though we may not go through exactly what Paul went through (pp. 28-29). This is an indication that the book is written primarily for the layman.

The book ends with four appendices. They address the issue of the eternal security of the believer as well as a Free Grace interpretation of James 2 and the importance of the Judgment Seat of Christ (pp. 99-133). While some may argue that such discussions do not belong in a commentary on the book of Philippians, one must remember the purpose of the commentary. It was written for the benefit of people in developing countries who, upon reading the commentary, will have questions about the things discussed in the appendices.

While this book has a foreign audience primarily in mind, anybody looking for a Free Grace understanding of Philippians will benefit from it. The church needs more commentaries on books of the NT from this perspective. I highly recommend it.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Asking the Right Questions: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Applying the Bible. By Matthew S. Harmon. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. 141 pp. Paper, \$10.31.

Harmon is a professor of NT studies at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, IN. As the title suggests, the purpose of the book is to help the reader understand and apply the Bible. To do so, we must know the right questions to ask as we study the Scriptures (p. 15). Harmon gives the reader four such questions.

The book elevates the Scriptures. The Word of God tells a sobering story of what has happened in the fall of man. However, God will bring in a kingdom in which creation is transformed, God dwells with mankind, the curse is lifted, and men and women are reigning over that creation. That is the destiny of the believer. This destiny should affect every area of our lives (pp. 31-32).

Harmon rightly points out that it is the Scriptures which are able to transform the believer, and he appeals to 2 Cor 3:18 as a proof text (p. 37). In addition, we should look at every passage of the Bible as a way to point us to Christ in some way (pp. 52-53). Harmon also accurately says that taking up our crosses and following Christ (Mark 8:34-38) is a discipleship passage and does not give the requirements for eternal salvation (p. 38).

When we study the Bible, we need to understand the distinction between the Bible's being written *for* us and not *to* us. God does not want us to sacrifice our children as He commanded Abraham to do in Genesis 22. Jesus told the rich young ruler to give everything away in Matthew 19, but that is not for us. Once we understand this principle, we can apply what the passages are saying to us (p. 61).

The heart of the book is chap. 5. It gives us the questions to ask when we study the Bible. As we study a passage, we should ask first of all, "What do we learn about God?" The second question is, "What do we learn about people?" The third is, "What do we learn about relating to God?" Finally, the last question is, "What do we learn about relating to others?" (pp. 64-71). The ultimate goal is to be transformed into the image of Christ. When we are transformed into that image, the Lord opens our eyes in order to see who He is, who we are, and how to walk with Him faithfully (p. 72).

The most disappointing part of the book is Harmon's discussion on faith. He says repentance, which he defines as turning from sin, is part of faith. God gives repentance as a gift, so it is not a work. We begin the Christian life by turning from sin and trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin (pp. 78-81). Clearly this is a distorted presentation of the simple gospel of eternal life, which is that a person who believes in Jesus' promise of eternal life receives it as a free gift.

The book has a short section on the different kinds of literature found in the Bible. These include narrative, law, poetry, parables, prophecy, apocalyptic literature, and letters/epistles (pp. 124-26). The limit of space does not allow Harmon to discuss the different types of literature in the Bible at length, but the section is helpful in letting the reader recognize that such differences exist. This helps in understanding how to interpret each type of literature and how to apply it to our lives.

This book has a number of positive attributes. It points the reader to the Scriptures as the means by which the Spirit transforms the believer. It gives helpful suggestions on how to look at the Scriptures, including looking at how they can lead us to love God and love others. It does not point people, as is so common today, to feelings or mystical experiences to accomplish these goals. Unfortunately, when it discusses the gospel, it presents unbiblical Lordship Salvation. Fortunately, that is not the purpose of the book, and the book does not dwell on it. The person reading it is not looking for a clear gospel presentation, but how to study the Bible. With that caveat, I recommend the book.

Kathryn Wright
Missionary
Columbia, SC

Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ. By Matthew Bates. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019. 269 pp. Paper, \$17.99.

This book is a follow up to *Salvation by Allegiance Alone (SAA)*; cf. pp. 18-20). It is more of the same. The first book taught works

salvation, but Bates did not come out and say that directly in *SAA*; he does in *Gospel Allegiance (GA)*.

By my count he mentions “final salvation” at least fourteen times (pp. 116 [3x], 150 [2x], 183, 194, 195, 196, 200, 201 [2x], 224, 225). You can have some sort of salvation now—we might call it probation—but that initial salvation is not secure. In order to get *final salvation*, you must persevere in good works.

Bates says straight up that “good works are saving” (p. 183). That is a heading. In that section he writes, “Paul repeatedly says *good works will determine final salvation* on the day of judgment” (p. 183). For proof he quotes Rom 2:5-8; Matt 16:27; 2 Cor 5:10; and several other texts.

Earlier he wrote that: “All major Christian denominations and groups—Lutheran, Baptists, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Mennonites, Catholic, and Orthodox (all except free-gracers)—agree that good works are necessary for final salvation. Both Protestants and Catholics believe this, though they have different ideas about how” (p. 150).

Bates presumably is aware of the rewards explanation of Matt 16:27 and 2 Cor 5:10 that Free Grace authors have given, though he does not discuss or try to counter that interpretation. However, he definitely is aware of and does discuss the hypothetical interpretation of Rom 2:5-8. His discussion is not convincing.

The Greek word *misthos* means *wages* or *reward*. Bates does not give it or passages which use it much attention. He does cite two passages which use that word: Rom 4:4-5 (p. 127) and 1 Cor 3:14 (p. 188). Without doing a word study, and without even mentioning the Greek word, Bates does say in passing concerning Rom 4:4-5, “Grace is wages without work” (p. 127). But that is exactly the opposite of what Paul says. Paul says, “To him who works, wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...” Paul says grace is not wages. Bates says grace is wages. Paul says wages are payment for work done. Bates says grace is wages without works. It is hard to see how he could make such a statement regarding Rom 4:4-5. It seems he has imposed his theology on the text.

As is common for many Evangelicals today, Bates makes no distinction between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment (GWTJ). In his view there is one “final judgment”

for believers and unbelievers. The purpose of that judgment is to examine works to see who will get into the kingdom. Bates writes, "In Revelation, although the Lamb's book of life is ultimate, nothing in context suggests that the books of deeds are totally irrelevant to eternal life. On the contrary, they seem to explicate or supplement the Lamb's book in some way. Consider: If *allegiance* to Jesus the king determines individual listing in the Lamb's book, then it makes sense that books of deeds recording the *quality of allegiance* for each would be present at the final judgment to serve as evidence for the presence or absence of each name. Final judgment includes deeds" (p. 187).

His view means that in practice, no one in Christianity will know where he will spend eternity until he appears at the GWTJ. Presumably, Bates believes either in soul sleep or that all people are held in torment in Hades until the Great White Throne Judgment. If people died and appeared in heaven in the presence of Jesus and God the Father and the angels, they would be sure that they were eternally secure long before the GWTJ. Of course, if an Evangelical died and found himself in torment in Hades, one would think he would conclude he did not have everlasting life. But Bates does not discuss this question.

There are two major practical problems with the view of Bates. First, he is proclaiming a false gospel (Gal 1:6-9), which misleads. His gospel is not the saving message of Jesus and His apostles. Second, his message makes assurance of everlasting life impossible. If a born-again person reads his writings and is moved away from believing the promise of life, then he will lose his assurance and will be thrown into despair and legalism. I am surprised that two NT scholars, Scot McKnight of Northern Seminary and Amy Peeler of Wheaton College, endorsed this book. I would think that Evangelical NT scholars would reject a clear and unequivocal treatment of works salvation.

I do not recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Eternity Is Now in Session: A Radical Rediscovery of What Jesus Really Taught about Salvation, Eternity, and Getting to the Good Place. By John Ortberg. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2018. 186 pp. Cloth, \$17.99.

The title and subtitle attracted my attention. When someone says he will say “what Jesus *really* taught,” I am skeptical. I thought this book might be some sort of novel approach to evangelism. In reality, it articulates the same views found in all Lordship Salvation books. However, Ortberg’s approach is a bit different. Rather than coming right out and saying what he means, he slowly develops his ideas and even when he reveals what he thinks the Lord Jesus *really* taught, he does so in a way that is designed to make his views sound less harsh than they are.

The outline of the book does not make sense to me. It is divided into two parts. Part one is entitled, “Rethinking Salvation.” The three chapter titles under it are 1) Breaking News; 2) The Minimum Entrance Requirements; and 3) Follow Me. Neither the section title nor the three chapter titles tell the reader what he is saying.

Part two is entitled, “Walking with Jesus.” The four chapters under part two are 4) Awakening: Seeing God Everywhere; 5) Purgation: Leaving Baggage Behind; 6) Illumination: A New Mental Map; and 7) Union: Never Alone. Once again, the reader is left not knowing what Ortberg is saying.

All seven chapters are saying the same thing in different ways.

Chapter 1 talks about eternal life, the good news, and the kingdom. Ortberg’s point is that “eternal life is *qualitative*—it makes a difference in the *kind* of life we live—more than it is quantitative” (p. 15). That is Lordship Salvation in a nutshell. He says concerning Jesus’ gospel: “You can revise your plans for living around this cosmic opportunity to daily experience God’s favor and power” (p. 18) and “to experience God’s reign in your own life, body, and will” (p. 19). The focus is in “the kind of life we live.” It is not on Jesus and the promise of everlasting life to the believer, since Ortberg is convinced that the issue is not belief, but behavior. Concerning the kingdom, Ortberg suggests that if you will get into heaven in the future, you will experience heaven and God’s kingdom here and now in the way you live (pp. 22-25).

What about “The Minimum Entrance Requirements” (chap. 2)? Wrong question, according to the author. “Salvation isn’t about getting you into heaven; its about getting heaven into you” (p. 33; see also p. 23). “If you proclaim, ‘The revolution is at hand,’ you will tend to produce warriors. If the church proclaims, ‘The gospel is how to get to heaven by doing nothing,’ it will tend to produce people who do nothing” (p. 45). The solution is found in chap. 3.

To be born again, people must heed the Lord’s call to “Follow Me” (chap. 3). “The gospel of the minimum entrance requirements is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls ‘cheap grace’” (p. 51). “Jesus never said, ‘Believe the right things about me, and I’ll let you into heaven after you die.’ His news was something far grander, more cosmic, more life-changing, more costly, more compelling, and more humbling than that” (p. 51). “If you want that life [eternal life], the logical step is to become a disciple—a student, an apprentice, a follower—of Jesus” (p. 52).

Ortberg has many ways to promote Lordship Salvation. Another is to say that Christianity is not “a bounded set,” which is concerned about “the necessary and sufficient conditions for being in,” but is instead “more like a centered set...The center is Jesus...This life is a call to love God with all that you are and to love your neighbor as yourself” (p. 54).

He cites C. S. Lewis as saying that there are people “who are slowly ceasing to be Christians” and others “who are slowly becoming Christians” (p. 57). What does Ortberg mean by citing this? He seems to suggest that the issue is not on the boundaries but on centering our lives more and more on Jesus (p. 60). When, then, would we know we have everlasting life? That is not a concern that Ortberg addresses. That is part of the dreaded minimum entrance requirements mentality. Instead, we center on Jesus.

Ortberg often mentions leading contemplative theologian Dallas Willard in this book. (In fact, Ortberg “is on the board of the Dallas Willard Center for Spiritual Formation” [p. 185].) I wonder if the reason he presses the idea of centering on Jesus is because that is a vital aspect of contemplative spirituality?

Part 2 of the book is about “Walking with Jesus” and the reader finds a continuation of Part 1.

Ortberg recounts the story of a young man who took meth and was an alcoholic who crashed his truck, nearly died, then “he recognized the grace of God and surrendered his life” (p. 77). “He began to preach in the county jail” (p. 77). While Ortberg says that testimony is more dramatic than his, “no one who has met Jesus goes away with a dull habit” (p. 78). According to Ortberg when God awakens someone, he will obey God: “The right response to awakening is *obedience*. ‘Listen to him’ [a reference to the Father’s words at the Mount of Transfiguration]” (p. 95).

The idea that “nothing in their life has to change at all” is a false gospel (p. 107). “It makes us think we can want grace without wanting Jesus” (p. 108). He then makes this patently false statement, “Genuine repentance never takes as its primary aim the avoidance of punishment” (p. 108). What about Jonah 3 and the Ninevites, which the Lord Jesus spoke of in Matt 12:41?

Ortberg ends chap. 5 suggesting the more we find ourselves loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves, then “love begins to outweigh fear” (p. 124). That seems to be his view of assurance of eternal life.

Chapter 6 begins with a quote that captures Ortberg’s understanding of saving faith: “To hold to a doctrine or an opinion with the intellect alone is not to believe it. A man’s real belief is what he lives by” (p. 125). Belief is not being convinced something is true. Belief is works. He rejects the idea that “life with Jesus starts by affirming certain beliefs about him” (p. 133). Instead, “He called people to make following him the *center* of their lives” (p. 134). “What I do—my ‘works’—reveal what it is I *really* believe” (p. 136). “To have saving faith is not to believe the minimum amount so God has to let you in” (p. 137). Instead, saving faith is to “do what Jesus himself would do” (p. 137).

The final chapter is entitled, “Union,” and is about abiding in Christ and producing fruit. Though Ortberg does not say it clearly in this chapter, he seems to be coming back to his mantra that we will make it into Jesus’ kingdom, and we will bring it to earth now, if we are abiding in Christ and thereby producing much fruit. “Union with Christ—to abide with him—means that he is present in our minds and can communicate thoughts to us at any moment” (p. 155). That sounds like special revelation, one of the tenets of contemplative

spirituality. “To be constantly mindful of God is salvation from worry, fear, and regret” (p. 155). Ultimately, the author says, union with Christ “is the participation of the self in the life of God” (p. 157). “Out of union, love flows” (p. 173). That seems to be Ortberg’s understanding of assurance of everlasting life. Do you see love flowing through you? If so, you are probably born again, assuming love continues to flow through you until you die.

The book, *Eternity Is Now in Session*, is a different kind of Lordship Salvation book. Ortberg does not explain any Scripture in this book. He is coming at the issue from a more philosophical and pragmatic approach.

I do not recommend this book, except for pastors and theologians who wish to keep abreast of Lordship Salvation.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

A Metrical Psalter: The Book of Psalms Set to Meter for Singing.

By Julie and Timothy Tennant. Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2017. 266 pp. Hardcover, \$24.95.

A recurring challenge for Free Grace churches is to find songs with good theology. Since most worship songs are written by proponents of Lordship Salvation, that salvation theology is reflected in the lyrics. So what can be done?

For centuries, Christians sang the Psalms, but that practice has mostly died out. “The psalms are for singing—so why don’t we sing them?” (p. xi). The husband and wife team of Julie and Timothy Tennant hope to revive the practice of Psalm-singing with the publication of *A Metrical Psalter: The Book of Psalms Set to Meter for Singing*. Each Psalm is translated according to a meter that corresponds to familiar tunes such as *Amazing Grace*; *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*; or *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*. The book is also available for free online (<http://psalms.seedbed.com>). If you would like to start singing the Psalms, this is an excellent book to have. But there are three potential problems with it.

First, the Psalter tunes are mostly taken from older hymns. If you know those old hymns, you'll be able to sing these Psalms right away. However, churches who want "contemporary" music will not be drawn to use this Psalter.

Second, the imprecatory Psalms will come as a shock. It is odd to sing, "*How bless'd will be the one who thus does end your cru-el-ty; Who takes your infants, dashing them upon the rocks justly*" (Ps 137:9). Dashing babies on rocks and praying for the destruction of your enemies are not considered good topics for worship.

Third, the Psalms do not explicitly teach about Jesus or the free gift of eternal life. Both are there in types and shadows, but not explicitly. So it will be hard for many people to connect these songs to Christ. However, that can provide a good opportunity to teach people how to read the Bible redemptively, as pointing to Christ (Luke 24:27).

I recommend this as a resource for families and churches to bring the Psalms back into worship.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The New Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic. By Gary M. Burge. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 144 pp. Paper, \$15.89.

Gary Burge is the dean of the faculty and a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary. He wrote *The New Testament in Seven Sentences* to get a broad, bird's eye view of the NT (p. 1). He feels that too often Christians selectively pick out verses to support a narrow view of things. What is worse, this narrow view is often wrong.

The author has chosen seven themes that he believes provide such a broad view. They are: fulfillment (chap. 1), kingdom (chap. 2), cross (chap. 3), grace (chap. 4), covenant (chap. 5), spirit (chap. 6), and completion (chap. 7).

Perhaps the greatest issue in one's evaluation of this book is Burge's hermeneutics. Because of its relatively short length, and lack of depth, it is hard at times to get a clear picture of his point of view.

But this lack of clarity fulfills the purpose of the book. Burge wants to paint in broad brushstrokes. If a person wants to find, for example, Burge's definition of faith, or if he believes in the assurance of salvation at the point of faith, he or she won't find it in this book.

Burge believes that the kingdom of God has, in part, come in the Person of Jesus Christ. In His ministry, Jesus "delivered" the kingdom (pp. 36-37). The Church's mission is to build the kingdom here on earth. The Spirit is involved in changing the world (p. 40). Part of that change, according to Burge, is to be concerned about environmental problems.

In dealing with the theme of the cross, Burge maintains that the cross is not just about the payment for our sins. It teaches us to give to the poor, love the least lovely, and stand with the powerless (p. 59). This is in line with his view that the kingdom has already begun.

In the same vein, grace is not just what saves us. It means we are to treat those on the margin of society in a gracious manner. The grace of the NT is nothing new but was displayed in the OT. Concerning his discussion of grace, it also seems fairly certain he believes that if we have experienced the grace of salvation, we will have good works, as he quotes Matt 7:21. An understanding of grace can impact society or, on a smaller scale, how students at a seminary conduct themselves (pp. 66-67, 76).

Not surprisingly, Burge sees the church as a continuation of the covenant God made with Abraham. The legacy of the church is found in Abraham, and today the people who belong to Abraham are a "redemptive community" for the whole world (pp. 94-95).

For the readers of *JOTGES*, it should be noted that Burge does not believe in a completely different new world. God is going to redeem this world (p. 128). He specifically says that belief in a seven-year Tribulation and the Rapture is the result of false teaching. He says that it is heretical to teach that God has a future plan for the nation of Israel (pp. 128-30).

In a very broad sense, Burge feels that Christians err when they focus on personal salvation and pleasing the Lord. Instead, in addition to these things, we should see how the kingdom belongs to this world and ask how this impacts our worship, our attitudes, and our serving the Lord.

Since Burge does not go into any detail about his views, especially concerning eschatology and the kingdom, this book has limited value. Those who already agree with Burge's Reformed views will find support for the views they hold. For those individuals, I recommend the book. For those who disagree, they will not be convinced. In that case, I do not recommend it.

Kathryn Wright
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The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ. By Brant Pitre. New York, NY: Image, 2016. 256 pp. Hardcover, \$23.00.

Brant Pitre had a crisis of faith while studying theology at a liberal school (Vanderbilt). His teachers told him that the Gospels were anonymous, and that Jesus never claimed to be God. Consequently, his faith in both the deity of Christ and the authenticity of the NT were shaken. So he decided to do doctoral studies in NT, during which time his faith was revived, and he began to see flaws in the arguments of liberal scholars. *The Case for Jesus* is a defense of the deity of Christ. "This book is about one big question: Did Jesus of Nazareth claim to be God?" (p. 1). To defend that claim, Pitre's book has two major goals: first, to establish the authenticity of the Gospel record of Jesus' teaching, and second, to defend the idea that Jesus claimed to be God. I think he accomplishes both goals very well.

In chaps. 1-7, Pitre makes a strong case for the authenticity and reliability of the Gospels. Chapter 2 begins by refuting the idea that the Gospels were anonymous books, based on the now-discredited theory that the Gospels belonged to the genre of anonymous folk-tale. Moreover, he explains that there is no manuscript evidence to support the theory of anonymity; instead, the earliest manuscripts unanimously attribute the Gospels to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In fact, there are no anonymous manuscripts. Moreover, he presents the "internal" evidence for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John being the authors of the Gospels. For example, tradition says that the Gospel according to Mark is really Peter's memoir. Pitre argues that Peter,

who was “unlettered” (Acts 4:13), would likely have used a secretary such as Mark, whom he calls his “son” (1 Pet 5:12-13). Or the fact that Luke’s Gospel is dedicated to a named person makes it unlikely that the book would have been originally anonymous (p. 33).

The internal evidence might be slim, but he shows that the external evidence, namely, the witness of the “Church Fathers,” is unanimous in naming Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the authors of those books.

He further defends the reliability of the Gospels by showing their genre is that of Greco-Roman biography. However, that is a potential weak point in Pitre’s presentation, as he says the Gospels should not be understood as verbatim transcripts of what Jesus said, as with Greco-Roman biographies, but instead they give “the substance” of His teaching (p. 81). He cites Thucydides’s aim to adhere “as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said” (p. 81). Perhaps all that Pitre means is that *sometimes* the Gospels *summarize* Jesus’ sermons instead of giving them word-for-word, in which case I would agree. But what about the rest of the time? Initially, I thought Pitre was suggesting there could be errors in the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus’ teaching. However, in chap. 7, Pitre argues the disciples would have had “rehearsed memories” of Jesus’ teaching, not “incidental memories” (p. 88). This “frequent recall” memory would mean a higher degree of word-for-word accuracy of Jesus’ teaching than you would find in Greco-Roman biographies. Still, in his discussion of the rich young ruler’s question to Jesus, Pitre says, “I for one see no way to reconstruct the exact words of Jesus, but I don’t think we need to” [p. 149]). If we do not know Jesus’ exact words, then how do we know they were not changed?

Chapters 8–13 explore Jesus’ claims to divinity. These chapters were full of insights into the Biblical allusions of Jesus’ actions and claims and how they point to His deity. For example, when compared to Ps 104:1-7, Jesus’ calming of the storm is precisely what YHWH does, without explicitly making that claim. During His walking on water, Jesus uses *ego eimi* and intends to “pass by” the way YHWH’s glory often passed by in the OT. In the Transfiguration, He appears on a mountain with Elijah and Moses, whom YHWH also appeared to on mountains. Or Jesus’ self-designation as the “Son of Man” is an allusion, not to his humanity, but to the divine “one like a son

of man” figure who comes with clouds (which only God does) in Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 7:13).

Some of what Pitre says is speculative (e.g., that the blood and water that gush out of his side is an image of the blood flowing from the Temple into the brook Kidron, showing that Jesus is the true Temple, p. 171). I think he gets Daniel’s prophecy of the fourth kingdom wrong—Pitre does not distinguish between Rome’s first (iron legs) and second (mixed iron and clay feet and toes) phase. All in all, I think this is an excellent book. It covers the kind of evidence that all Christians should know in order to defend the reliability of the Gospels and to understand Jesus’ claims of deity. Recommended.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Exalted Above the Heavens: The Risen and Ascended Christ.

By Peter C. Orr. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018. 238 pp. Paper, \$25.00.

This book by Peter Orr is part of the New Studies in Biblical Theology (NSBT) series. The primary purpose of the book is to address something that is lacking in Christological studies. Such studies usually address what Jesus has done (life, death, and resurrection) and what He will do (return and reign). Works that deal with Christ in His exalted state are rare (p. 1).

The book is conservative throughout and takes a high view of the Scriptures. The author discusses what continuity exists between the “earthly” Jesus and the exalted Lord. There is a continuity, but there is also a change. Only after the resurrection does He obtain the name above all names (Phil 2:9). Orr says it is only then that Jesus experiences the *full* expression of His identity as Son, Lord, and Christ (pp. 35-36).

One of the best treatments in the book is the relationship of Jesus with the Spirit. Some verses, such as 2 Cor 3:17, seem to equate the Spirit with the Lord Jesus. Orr’s position is that Paul does not identify the Spirit with Jesus. However, in their impact on the Christian, they are “inextricably linked.” Both the Spirit and Christ are divine, but

they can be distinguished. The Spirit is called by Paul the “Spirit of the Lord.” This means that the Spirit is perfectly suited to *mediate Christ*. For the believer, to encounter the Spirit is to encounter Christ (pp. 46-52).

Even though the Spirit and Christ are not to be equated, to have the Spirit is to have Christ (Rom 8:9-10). Christ is bodily absent from earth, but since believers have the Spirit, they experience the presence of Christ (John 14:23; pp. 37-44, 60).

In chapter four, Orr discusses the relationship of the exalted Christ with the Church (pp. 63-75). Based upon 1 Cor 12:12, he concludes that after the resurrection, we can conceive of Christ as a corporate Person who is united spiritually with the bodies of believers.

This reviewer particularly enjoyed Orr’s discussion in chap. 6 about the body of Christ (pp. 99-113). He maintains that Jesus, in His exaltation, retains a body and cannot be “collapsed” into being identical to the Spirit or the Church. Philippians 3 teaches that Jesus, though exalted, has an “ongoing humanity.” As such, the Lord will bring human believers to glory.

Probably the weakest part of the book is chap. 8, which deals with the “epiphanic” presence of Christ in the believer (pp. 133ff). This refers to any manifestation of the risen Christ to the physical senses. Orr does not say we experience them through the Scriptures. His discussion leaves one with the idea that we can have this through mystical experiences wrought by the Spirit. According to Orr, based upon 2 Corinthians 2–4, the believer can experience Christ in various ways through preaching and seeing suffering, for example.

It is a minor part of the book, but Orr believes in an “already but not yet” view of the kingdom (p. 172). Christ is present in the world in a salvific sense in the churches through the Spirit. At the same time, He is not bodily present.

Orr takes a Reformed/Lordship view of the High Priesthood of Christ. He believes that the warning passages in Hebrews teach us that believers need to persevere in order to enter the kingdom (p. 196). Christ keeps the believer from falling away or not persevering.

In his “Concluding Reflections,” Orr stresses a fact about the exalted Christ that many western Christians have forgotten. Because Jesus has a human bodily existence, believers will also have a body forever. It will be transformed, but it will be a bodily existence as

well. Too many Christians think of their future existence in “heaven” as simply floating around on the clouds and see too sharp a distinction between the physical and the spiritual (pp. 200-201).

While *JOTGES* readers will not agree with everything Orr says, this book has much value. It causes the reader to think about how the exalted Christ is different from the One who conducted His earthly ministry. It also gives different options on how to see the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the Lord, especially in regards to the Church. Orr is correct. We do not spend much time on these topics. I recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Grace Intervention: Understanding God's Beautiful Gift of Grace. By Bill Giovannetti. Uhrichsville, OH: Shiloh Run Press, 2015. 250 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

The title of this book caught my eye. Giovannetti is a pastor and has a heart for what is going on in Christian churches. He says that legalism is the biggest and most destructive problem we have (pp. 12-14).

Giovannetti writes this book for the layman. He wants to show how to live and relate to one another with grace. The book is easy to read, and he uses many illustrations the reader can relate to.

Since the book magnifies the grace of God, there is much to appreciate about it. For example, it says that the problem with Christians being like the world is legalistic practices. That happens when Christians do not understand the grace of God. Instead, they need to focus on Christ and knowing Him (pp. 104-106). While some may conclude that some of the examples of legalism Giovannetti uses are actually sinful, these examples will cause the reader to think about his own views on these matters.

Probably the two chapters of the book that the readers of the *JOTGES* would be most interested in are the ones entitled “Lordship” (chap. 3) and “Assurance” (chap. 13). In the Lordship chapter, the author directly discusses the Free Grace versus Lordship Salvation

controversy. He points out that the controversy did not start with GES or Dallas Seminary in the 1980s. John Stott and Everett Harrison debated the issue in the late 1950s. It even dates back to the very beginning of the Reformation (pp. 49-50).

Giovannetti directly says that he is Free Grace. Works have nothing to do with faith. Works are apart of discipleship and when we equate faith and obedience, our words become meaningless (p. 51). This is a great discussion.

He also points out that attacks on the Free Grace position are wrong. He includes the teachings of A. W. Tozer about the topic, as well as misunderstandings by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (pp. 54-61).

Giovannetti, however, does not see the Free Grace issue as being as important as many others do. He says that the Free Grace Alliance and GES are basically teaching the same thing. He also feels that both groups, as well as Lordship adherents, are “on the same team.” They all hold to the essentials of the faith. The Christian in the pew does not see the distinctions between the teachings and does not care. The battle between Free Grace and Lordship teachers did not have a winner, even though scholars believe the Lordship side won. Both sides teach that Jesus is Savior and Lord (pp. 51-53).

We see the same ideas in the chapter on assurance. The chapter starts off with a quote from the 1800s about the importance of assurance. Immediately after the quote, Giovannetti says that he has absolute certainty that he is going to heaven. He bases this assurance on the promises of the Bible, not on his good works (p. 193).

Giovannetti rejects the idea of perseverance of the saints as a means of gaining assurance (p. 194). This reviewer strongly agrees with the author up to this point. However, in the rest of the chapter, Giovannetti says that when he was saved, he did not have assurance. Assurance came about ten years later when God gave it to him as a gift. He specifically says that he was saved before he had assurance (pp. 195-96). Giovannetti does not think that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. He views assurance as a sanctification issue.

For Giovannetti, the proof of assurance is found in the promises of the Bible. This is outstanding. However, he goes on to explain that two further evidences can “buttress” assurance. He says these are the inward testimony of the Spirit (Rom 8:16) and the fruit of holiness in our lives (pp. 199-203). Even if we live sinful lives and do not

experience these “evidences,” we are still saved. This discussion can be confusing.

Free Grace people will find themselves saying a hearty “amen” to much of what Giovannetti says. However, they will groan when he says that the issues of assurance and the definition of faith are in-house arguments. Many in the Free Grace Alliance, GES, and Lordship camps would disagree. Even though this is not an exegetical book, it is full of stories about grace and warnings about the dangers of legalism. It also gives a little history about the Free Grace movement. For these reasons, I recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People’s Hearts the Way Jesus Did. By Randy Newman. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004, 2017. 267 pp. Paper, \$18.99.

Randy Newman was for a time on college campus staff with Campus Crusade for Christ.

Newman’s purpose is not to explain what the saving message is. For the most part he assumes that the readers already know the saving message. He focuses instead on asking good questions to get the listener engaged in a conversation, rather than a monologue, as often happens in evangelism.

The few times Newman alludes to what one must do to be saved, he brings in a mild Lordship Salvation message (pp. 37, 38, 157). For example, he writes, “Coming into a relationship with God involves a bowing of our wills to His sovereign lordship” (p. 157). But if a reader was not reading carefully, he could easily miss what Newman thinks a person must do or believe to be born again.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with the importance of asking questions. This, in my estimation, is the heart of the book. Chapters 1-3 fall within this section (pp. 23-72). More on this section after I describe the other two.

Part 2, the largest section (pp. 75-205), deals with the questions which are often asked of us when we share our faith. While this

section does sometimes use questions to answer questions, for the most part it is more straightforward answers to popular questions.

The third section (pp. 209-253) deals with some practical issues concerning our attitudes: do we care about the salvation of others? Are there some people we'd really like to see go to hell? And when is it time to shut up? Newman's suggestion that the attitude that we should continue to engage a scoffer is unwise struck me as excellent advice. (He discussed this same idea earlier in the book on pages 45-47 as well.) Too often in books on evangelism such a caution is not given.

Here are some questions Newman suggests in the first section that I found very helpful:

- What makes you think that Jesus was a good teacher? Have you read a lot of His teachings? Which messages impress you the most about Jesus's teaching ability? What would you say was Jesus's main message? (p. 33).
- On what do you base your reality? (p. 43).
- Are you willing to read something that I think answers your question? (p. 47).
- Can you explain that to me? (pp. 61, 63).
- Isn't it possible that the God who first inspired the Bible also preserved it? (p. 65).
- Isn't it possible that Jesus did rise from the dead? (p. 66).
- Isn't it possible that Jesus really is the one who fulfills all of those Old Testament prophecies? That He really is the Messiah? (p. 67).
- What convinces you of that? ...What is the strongest case for that? (p. 72).

Coming from a Free Grace perspective, we might develop some questions of our own, such as:

- What do you think a person needs to do to spend eternity with Jesus in His kingdom?
- Can you think of any Bible verses that tell us what a person needs to do to have everlasting life?

- Do you think it is fair or unfair of God to simply give people who believe in His Son everlasting life, apart from the works they have done or will do? Why or why not?
- How do you understand John 3:16?
- Why do you think that Jesus chose to die on the cross?
- What book of the Bible do you think was written to tell people what they need to do in order to have everlasting life?
- Would you be willing to read a chapter of John's Gospel each day if it would help you become sure you have everlasting life?
- What is the biggest objection to once saved, always saved?
- Is God within His rights to give a secure salvation, which can never be lost, even though some people may not live like they should after receiving it? Would that be fair on His part? Would that make sense?

Like Newman, I found that lecturing to people, especially when reading from a booklet, is not particularly effective. That is not what the Lord did when He spoke with individuals like Nicodemus or the woman at the well. He liked to ask questions and get into a back and forth with the person He was talking with.

Why not give questions a try? You might find that you like it.

I recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

