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# JESUS WILL BAPTIZE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (MARK 1:8)

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

## I. INTRODUCTION

*“I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8).*

**I**n Mark 1, John the Baptist comes to the nation of Israel. His ministry is one of preparation. He paves the way for the coming Messiah. Part of that ministry involved baptizing the people in water. But he also informs the people that the ministry of the Messiah will be different. One difference will involve baptism. John declares to the people: “I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (v 8).

Clearly, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is greater than the baptism with water. The Messiah’s ministry will not only be different from John’s, it will also be greater. But to what does the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” refer? Who received this baptism? This article will attempt to address these issues.

## II. THE MAJORITY VIEW

It is safe to say that in Acts 2, the majority of Evangelical scholars see in the birth of the Church the fulfillment of John’s statement concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:5, the Lord tells the disciples that they will be baptized in the Holy Spirit in a few days, and this occurs on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). It appears as if this baptism initially was experienced by approximately 120 people (Acts 1:15).

Grassmick takes this view. He claims that this baptism of the Holy Spirit was predicted in the OT as an expected feature of the Messiah's ministry (Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29).<sup>1</sup>

Stein agrees and says that the baptism of the Spirit here in Mark 1:8 is associated with the Christian Church. The water baptism of John must be understood as Christian baptism. Both of these baptisms are to be taken together and are literal. The baptism of the Spirit begins in Acts 2 when the Spirit brings in the new age.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar fashion, France suggests that this baptism is also the fulfillment of Joel 2. It points not just to Acts 2, but to the "whole experience of the early Christian movement."<sup>3</sup> While this may be interpreted to mean he believes this was fulfilled in the first century, France later comments that the baptism of the Spirit is not what Pentecostals today maintain it means. Instead, it is associated with "authentic Christian experience."<sup>4</sup> This implies it refers to something all Christians today experience, probably when they are baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ when they believe (1 Cor 12:13).

The other Synoptic Gospels contain passages parallel to Mark 1:8. The majority view is often found in discussions of those passages as well.

### A. Matthew 3:11

Matthew 3:11 contains the statement by John that Jesus will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In the Majority Text the verse ends there. However, there is a textual problem. The Critical Text adds "and with fire." Because both the Majority and Critical Texts contain "and with fire" in the Lucan parallel, the significance of the phrase becomes an issue and will need to be discussed since it contributes to a proper understanding of baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Walvoord holds that John's baptism by water was strictly for the Jews and therefore is not to be equated with Christian baptism. It belonged to the old dispensation. However, the baptism of the

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 50-51. See also, Barry K. Mershon, Jr., "Mark," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. by Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 77.

<sup>3</sup> Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Holy Spirit only applies to the Christian Church. It begins in Acts 2 and places the Christian into the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). He says that the baptism of fire does not deal with the Church, but will occur at the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Morris feels that the baptisms of the Holy Spirit and fire are connected and apply to the Christian. This is because only one preposition governs both.<sup>6</sup> Fire is involved in the baptism of the Spirit on Pentecost with the tongues of fire (Acts 2:3). The reference to fire points to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian.<sup>7</sup> He says that in the Lucan parallel it means the Christian is strengthened by the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

According to Keener, the baptism of the Spirit is experienced by Christians and the baptism of fire by non-believers. Joel 2:28-29 is the OT background for the Spirit baptism. It brings eternal salvation, but also prophetic empowerment. The baptism of fire refers to the eternal flames in the lake of fire.<sup>9</sup> In the context, John also seems to speak of judgment (vv 10, 12). In v 10, John speaks of every tree that does not bear good fruit as being cast into the fire. In v 12 John says that the chaff will be burned with fire.

Carson does not see the fire mentioned in vv 10 and 12 as being connected with the baptism of fire. He agrees with Keener that Joel 2 predicts the coming baptism of the Spirit, but thinks that the baptism with fire is also for the Christian because the Spirit brings purification of sin.<sup>10</sup> The fire of vv 10 and 12 refers to hell and the judgment on unbelievers.

## **B. Luke 3:16**

Luke is the only Synoptic Gospel which unequivocally adds “and with fire” to the fact that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Bock discusses the difficulty in understanding the significance of the

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<sup>5</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974), 31-32.

<sup>6</sup> The preposition *en* occurs before the words “Holy Spirit” but not before the word “fire.”

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 62.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 107.

<sup>9</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 127-28.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 104-105.

relationship between the two. In regards to how fire is associated with the Spirit, he gives four options.

One is that it refers to the tongues of fire which appeared at the birth of the Church in Acts 2:3. The second option is that both the baptism of the Spirit and baptism of fire point to the judgment of God, which is a minor view. The third option is that Spirit baptism is for the believer and speaks of eternal salvation, and the baptism with fire is one of judgment. This judgment is not necessarily a picture of hell since fire is a familiar metaphor for other judgments in the OT (Ezek 38:22 and Mal 3:2).<sup>11</sup> As in the case with Matthew, Luke also speaks of judgment in the immediate context; this judgment involves fire (vv 9, 17).

However, Bock says it is unlikely there are two separate baptisms since it does not say “or” fire. He takes the fourth option. The Spirit and fire refer to one baptism. The Spirit purges people by dividing everyone into two groups: believers and unbelievers. The baptism of the Spirit began at Pentecost (Acts 2), which Ezekiel and Joel predicted (Ezek 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32). Eternal salvation is offered to all. The fire here represents the fires of hell and not the tongues of fire in Acts 2. Jesus’ message means people either receive salvation or eternal judgment. It is a message for all people today.<sup>12</sup>

Hughes agrees with Bock that there is only one baptism in view here, but does so based on the existence of only one preposition governing both “Holy Spirit” and “fire.” He disagrees with Bock, however, that the fire refers to hell. Instead, like Morris, he says that the Christian is the recipient of both actions. The Spirit carries on an ongoing work of cleansing and purification, just as fire purifies metal. Both refer to an inner baptism of the Spirit at the moment of faith and continue throughout the life of the believer.<sup>13</sup>

Recognizing the difficulty of the connection between the Spirit and fire, Marshall freely admits that we cannot know what the baptism of fire means. In the OT, fire is associated with various types of judgment (Isa 29:6; 31:9; Ezek 38:22; Amos 7:4; Zeph 1:18; 3:8; Mal 3:2; 4:1). The pouring out of the Holy Spirit can be understood

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<sup>11</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:51* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 322.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>13</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 117-19.

from the OT as a picture of judgment as well. But it can also be a picture of salvation.<sup>14</sup>

Green thinks Acts 2 is clearly the ultimate fulfillment of the baptism of the Spirit. But the context (v 17) also speaks of judgment so the reference to fire can have this connotation. This judgment is eternal and will come to those who do not accept the message of John to repent.<sup>15</sup>

Among the scholars discussed above, there are obvious differences of opinion. While most see the baptism of the Spirit as something Christians today have experienced, there is disagreement on whether judgment is also a part of Jesus' message in Mark 1:8. The contexts of the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke certainly include the idea of judgment. The concept of a baptism with fire does as well. As will be discussed, the context of Mark also implies judgment. This will play a role in determining what is meant by the baptism of the Spirit.

## II. JUDGMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF MARK 1:8

Not only does Mark not mention a baptism of fire, but in the context of Mark 1 there is no mention of a burning fire as there is in Matthew and Luke (Matt 3:10, 12; Luke 3:9, 17). However, the idea of judgment is not absent in Mark 1.

John the Baptist comes to the nation in the wilderness and calls the people to come out to him (v 4). This strongly implies that this prophet of God is not pleased with what is going on in the nation, especially Jerusalem. John's clothes (v 6) remind the nation of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).<sup>16</sup> John is identified as the messenger of Mal 3:1 (v 2), and Mal 4:5 identifies that messenger with Elijah. The Lord will later say that John came as Elijah (Mark 9:13).

Elijah looked for repentance from the Jewish nation of his day (1 Kings 18:37).<sup>17</sup> He ministered at a time of apostasy. Elijah had to flee and live in the wilderness because of the rebellion of the Jews against God (1 Kings 19). John not only dressed like Elijah and lived in the wilderness like Elijah, he also preached repentance (v 4).

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<sup>14</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 146-48.

<sup>15</sup>Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 181-82.

<sup>16</sup>France, *Mark*, 69.

<sup>17</sup>James A. Brooks, *Mark* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 40.

To repent means to turn from sin (Jonah 3:8-10; Matt 12:41). The Jews in Elijah's day needed to repent, and so did the people in John's day. He was calling them to confess their sins (v 5). Jesus was offering them the kingdom of God (v 15). Before the kingdom could come to the nation, they needed to repent. In Deuteronomy 28, God told the nation of Israel that He would bless them if they obeyed Him and curse/judge them if they disobeyed. This was a part of the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant. During Jesus' ministry the Law of Moses was still in effect. To be blessed with the kingdom, they needed to obey the voice of John, the prophet of God. With the coming of Jesus, God was offering the Jewish nation the blessing of the kingdom. If the nation did not turn from its sins, instead of blessing it, God would judge the nation for its sins.<sup>18</sup>

The Gospel of Mark shows that the nation did not listen to the message of John or Jesus and did not repent of their sins. Most did not believe in Jesus as the Christ to receive eternal life, either. As a result, the nation would be judged. In the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13, Jesus speaks of this coming judgment. This judgment fell on the nation in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed and the nation was scattered among the Gentiles.

### III. THE AUDIENCE OF JOHN'S MESSAGE

As mentioned above, Walvoord is correct when he says that John's message of water baptism was directed towards the Jews. France, based upon Acts 19:3, also recognizes that John's baptism must not be equated with Christian baptism.<sup>19</sup> Simply put, John was preaching to the Jews, and his baptism was directed towards them.

This is also seen in the kind of baptism he performed, i.e., a baptism of repentance that would result in the forgiveness of sins. This is not the purpose of Christian baptism. A new believer is not baptized in order to be forgiven. He does not have to confess his sins or turn from his sins prior to being baptized.

This makes it clear that John the Baptist is not on this occasion telling people how to become believers, that is, how to receive eternal life. He did proclaim the promise of everlasting life to all who believe

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny* (Monument, CO: Paniym Group, 2012), 870.

<sup>19</sup> France, *Mark*, 71.



in Jesus on other occasions (cf. John 1:7-9; 3:36; Acts 19:4). But here he does not speak of believing in Jesus for everlasting life. He does not speak of the grace of God. It is a mistake to use John's preaching as a model for reaching unbelievers today.

This is confirmed by the word "repentance," which is rare in Mark. The noun only occurs here in 1:4 and in 2:17. The verb "to repent" only occurs in 1:15 and 6:12. In all of these cases, the message is directed towards the nation of Israel. John's baptism was to *prepare* the Jewish people for faith in the Christ who was to come.<sup>20</sup> When John began his ministry of water baptism, he did not know who the Christ was; therefore, the people being baptized were not called to believe in Him before they were baptized. Of course, Christian baptism is different in that it takes place *after* a person believes in Christ.

It also needs to be noted that in John's mind, the same group that he baptized in water was the group that was to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. John says, "I indeed baptized you (*humas*) with water." Then, speaking of the Christ, John says that, "He will baptize you (*humas*) with the Holy Spirit." The same Greek word occurs in both instances.

At face value, this seems to suggest that the baptism of the Holy Spirit here is something that the nation of Israel will experience. They are the ones to whom John ministered. A problem with many interpretations of this verse is that the different baptisms are for the benefit of different groups. Walvoord's view, for example, is that John's baptism is for the Jewish nation of his day. But the Spirit baptism is for believers in the church age and is not for the nation of Israel. He then goes on to say that the baptism of fire refers to unbelievers, who are not part of the Church, at the end of the Tribulation.<sup>21</sup> Bock disagrees about the baptism of fire, but agrees that John's baptism and the baptism of the Spirit are directed towards different groups. John's baptism was for the nation of Israel, and Christ's baptism of the Spirit was for the Church.<sup>22</sup> This certainly creates confusion, and one can be certain that John and the original hearers would not have understood such distinctions.

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<sup>20</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "Harmony with God: Part 3 of 3," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (2003): 25.

<sup>21</sup> Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 320-22.

France takes a similar approach. In Mark 1:8, he rightly says that the recipients of John's baptism were not a part of the Christian Church. However, the baptism of the Spirit is for Christians. Since he does not believe in a Tribulation immediately before the coming of Christ, he does not see a third baptism of fire for a third group. Instead, he discusses Joel 2:28-32 and its description of the Tribulation and concludes it also describes conditions relevant to the Church.<sup>23</sup>

Stein attempts to erase this confusion by saying that both baptisms are directed towards the same group in Mark 1:8. To do so, however, he maintains that John's baptism with water must be the Christian rite, since he believes that the Spirit baptism is referring to Acts 2. Stein goes on to say that the readers of Mark's Gospel would have understood John's water baptism in a Christian context.<sup>24</sup> Even if some readers would assume that, the bigger question is whether John and his audience would have seen his baptism in that way. The Church did not exist. Jesus was unknown to them. John did not even know who the Christ was at that time. How could this be a reference to Christian baptism?

As discussed above, a common opinion among scholars as it relates to the recipients of the baptism in the Spirit concerns Joel 2:28-32. There is widespread belief that these verses predict this baptism.<sup>25</sup> In a similar way, the promise of the New Covenant in Ezek 36:25-27 is often seen as predicting it as well. Those who take this view maintain that the baptism of the Spirit spoken of in Mark 1:8 is a description of the believer who receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith. This promise was fulfilled in Acts 2 at the birth of the Church. Peter quotes from Joel 2:28-32 during his sermon on that Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21). It is also held that this was not a promise just for the nation of Israel because the promise of the Spirit involves "all flesh" (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). This would include Gentiles and is an allusion to the Church in the OT.

However, the passage in Joel 2 is a prophecy to the nation of Israel. The reference to "all flesh" refers to all kinds of *Jews*.<sup>26</sup> Women, men,

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<sup>23</sup> France, *Mark*, 71-73.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 50-51.

<sup>25</sup> Morris, *Matthew*, 61; Keener, *Matthew*, 128; Carson, "Matthew," 105; France, *Mark*, 72; Bock, *Luke*, 322; Marshall, *Luke*, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 63.

old, young, slaves, and free would receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Joel is describing the events immediately before the Second Coming of Christ. At that time, the nation of Israel will turn to the Lord in faith. The context (Joel 2:27) makes it clear that the Lord is addressing the nation of Israel with this promise. Barbieri correctly points out that while there was an outpouring of the Spirit in Acts, Joel 2:28-32 was not fulfilled. Israel did not enter into the benefits promised by Joel.<sup>27</sup> It is clear that the descriptions of Acts 2:19-20 were not fulfilled and would not be until the whole nation of Israel repented. There was still a contingent aspect to Joel 2:28-32 being fulfilled.<sup>28</sup>

The same could be said about the New Covenant. This prophecy (Ezek 36:25-27 and Jer 31:31-34) is also a promise to the nation of Israel. Jeremiah 31:31 specifically mentions that the New Covenant is for Judah and Israel. It will be fulfilled at the Second Coming as well, when believing Israel enters into the kingdom.

Joel 2 does not say that the Jewish people will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. It says that God will pour out His Spirit upon His people, the Jews. The Church and Israel are not the same thing. Those who are part of the Church do indeed experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit when they believe (Acts 11:16; 1 Cor 12:13). But in Mark 1:8 when John preached in the wilderness, he had no concept of these things. He had something else in mind.

In light of Acts 11:16, it is best to see two different types of baptisms of the Spirit.<sup>29</sup> There would be a baptism of the Spirit that members of the Church would receive. But this was not predicted in the OT. The Church was a mystery not revealed in the OT (Eph 3:3-6). The Church and this kind of baptism in the Holy Spirit would come after the nation of Israel rejected the offer of the kingdom by the Lord. What new believers experience with the baptism in the Spirit was a marvelous blessing that Mark 1:8 only foreshadows.

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<sup>27</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 25.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 358.

<sup>29</sup> A similar thing occurs with the promise of the New Covenant. In the NT, there are two New Covenants. Israel will enter the New Covenant promised by the Lord to them in Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31 when the Lord returns. But the Lord also entered into a New Covenant with the Church (1 Cor 11:25). These two New Covenants are not the same and are not made with the same group of people.

But John said that the same audience he preached to, the Jews, would also be baptized in the Holy Spirit by the Coming One. They were the ones who submitted to his water baptism. It was a large number of people (Mark 1:5). Most of those who were baptized by John did not believe in Christ. These unbelieving Jews will also be baptized by the Holy Spirit in some way.

#### IV. FIGURATIVE OR LITERAL?

When John says that Jesus will baptize his audience with the Holy Spirit, it is important to determine if this baptism is literal or figurative. The water baptism of John is clearly literal, and it is possible that the baptism administered by the Lord must be as well since John places them side by side in Mark 1:8. Stein takes it that way.<sup>30</sup> This literal sense would indicate that the new believer in Christ experiences an immersion into the Body of Christ by the Spirit.

But it is certainly an option to see it as figurative. France points out that even if we take the position that the baptism with the Spirit describes the experience of the new Christian (1 Cor 12:13), there is no literal immersion or dipping into the Spirit.<sup>31</sup> Morris agrees and concludes that since the other Synoptics link it with a baptism of fire, it must be figurative because we cannot imagine a literal fire baptism.<sup>32</sup> Hughes claims that the baptism with the Spirit cannot be seen in the same way as John's baptism because the work of the Spirit is an inner reality, while John's water involved an external rite.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, there is plenty of evidence in the NT that the word "baptism" can be understood in a figurative way.

#### V. EXAMPLES OF FIGURATIVE BAPTISMS

It is almost universally held that the baptism of fire in Matt 3:11 and Luke 3:16 is figurative. If it refers to the fires of hell, the destruction of the nation in AD 70, or to the purifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, it clearly does not refer to a

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<sup>30</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> France, *Mark*, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Morris, *Luke*, 107.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, *The Truth*, 117.

literal baptism. Even today, in the military we use this word in such a figurative way—when a military unit first goes into combat, it is said that it experienced its baptism in fire.

In 1 Cor 10:2, Paul says that the Jews of the Exodus generation were “all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” While they did pass through the Red Sea, they did so on dry ground and were certainly not immersed in it or even became wet. The cloud led them in the wilderness. This is another example of a figurative baptism. Garland says it simply means they were associated with Moses and were placed under his leadership. A religious connotation may be found in that the cloud represented the presence of God. Moses was God’s ordained leader.<sup>34</sup> Thiselton takes a similar view. In his opinion, this baptism simply indicates that the Jews of that generation were baptized under the influence of Moses.<sup>35</sup>

Fee also says it is figurative but that being baptized into Moses means that He was their deliverer. At the Red Sea he saved them from the Egyptian army. With the guidance of God in the cloud, he safely passed them through the desert.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, Moses was a savior for them.

In Mark 10:38-39, Jesus uses the word *baptize* in a figurative sense. It refers to His suffering and death on the cross. He would be overwhelmed with agony and pain and tells the disciples that they will have a similar experience. They will also experience suffering because of their association with Him

A leading Greek lexicon says that this figurative use of the word *baptism* was common in the first century. A person can be *baptized*, that is, overwhelmed, by various things such as grief, lust, or debt.<sup>37</sup>

A few relevant examples outside of the NT also show a figurative use of the word *baptism*.

### **A. Isaiah 21:4**

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, Isa 21:4 contains the word “baptism.” However, because of its highly figurative use, the

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<sup>34</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 450-52.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 724.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 492.

<sup>37</sup> BDAG, 165-66.

English reader would not know the word was even present in any English translation. No such translation would use the word since a literal meaning would make no sense.

There is disagreement about the background of this verse. Some believe it refers to the fall of Babylon in war, while others think Isaiah is seeing a threat to Israel by Assyria.<sup>38</sup> Whatever the particular situation, the prophet Isaiah is terrified by the prospect of war and the destruction it will bring. Isaiah says that he was overwhelmed (baptized) by fear because of lawlessness. The NKJV gives it a completely figurative translation: “fearfulness frightened me.” The NET says the Hebrew means “shuddering terrifies me.” A literal translation of the Greek would be “lawlessness baptizes me.” While this is figurative language, the meaning is clear. Isaiah is overwhelmed by terror. He is “immersed” in fear because of what he sees.

## B. Josephus

The historian Josephus, writing in the first century, also used the word in a highly figurative way. Before the Romans besieged Jerusalem, the city allowed people from the surrounding areas to come into it for protection. The inhabitants thought these new tenants would be of help. However, Josephus says that this course of action “baptized the city.” As in the case of Isa 21:4, English translations of Josephus do not use the word *baptized*.

It is not possible to understand this phrase apart from the context. One must continue reading. Josephus goes on to explain that these new dwellers in Jerusalem depleted the provisions the citizens had stored up to support the defenders. This resulted in famine and led to rebellion. Their actions brought destruction upon the city in a strong way.<sup>39</sup> One author translates the word *baptized* with the paraphrase, “direct cause of (the city’s) destruction.”<sup>40</sup> The city was baptized in chaos and destruction because of their decision to take in these people.

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<sup>38</sup> John A. Martin, “Isaiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1067-68

<sup>39</sup> Josephus, *B.J.*, 4.137.

<sup>40</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. by William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1980), 670.

## VI. “BAPTIZE” IN MARK 1:8

Knowing that the word *baptize* can be used in a figurative way allows the exegete to look at other possibilities for the use of the word in regard to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A literal understanding of the phrase would perhaps lead one to adopt the majority view and equate it with what happens to a believer in Jesus Christ when the Spirit places him in the Body of Christ. Mark 1:8 would point to Acts 2 and the birth of the Church.

However, there are problems with this view. John is speaking to the Jewish people. Such a literal interpretation would conflate Israel with the Church. Is it possible that the Jewish nation John addressed was baptized by the Spirit by Christ in another way?

The Gospel of Mark provides the answer to that question. In the immediate context, in fact in the very next verses, Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit (vv 9-10). The Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove. This is the key to understanding what it means that Jesus will baptize the Jews with the Spirit. He is coming to them in the power of the Spirit. He is calling the people to Himself. The Spirit of God rests on Him. In light of the opposition from the religious leaders against Christ in the Book of Mark, we could add that the power of the Spirit does not reside in the temple in Jerusalem nor official religious Judaism.<sup>41</sup>

In the Book of Mark, Jesus will give overwhelming evidence of that power. It will be obvious and will occur right before the eyes of the people. It will be clear that the presence of God is in the Person of Christ. When Mark quotes from Isa 40:3 in v 3, the reader is reminded that the Messiah would come with the power of the Spirit (Isa 61:1).

This power and presence bring with them the possibility of judgment. The nation is called to repent of and confess its sins. If they do not, this judgment will come. In v 2, Mark had quoted from Mal 3:1, which speaks of judgment as well. The Messiah will come and purify the nation, and nobody can stand before Him (Mal 3:2-3). In the Malachi passage there is a reference to the righteousness of God, and in Jesus the nation would see that as well.

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<sup>41</sup> Allan Chapple, “Jesus’ Intervention in the Temple: Once or Twice?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58/3 (September 2015): 564.

John calls Jesus the One who is “stronger” than he is (v 7). This strength comes, in part, from the power of the Spirit. This power is immediately put to the test when Jesus is impelled by the Spirit to go into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (vv 12-13).

Jesus, then, begins His ministry with the anointing and power of the Spirit. This power is evident in casting out demons (1:25-26). He is also able to heal a variety of illnesses (1:29-34). A leper is healed simply by His word (1:41-42). A lame man is made whole, and Jesus shows that He is even able to forgive sins (2:1-12). He also claims to have power over the Sabbath (2:28). He continues to cast out demons and heal the sick as His ministry continues among the Jews (3:1-11).

Perhaps we could add that the power of the Spirit is also seen in His teaching. He teaches with authority and the people are amazed by the things He says (1:27).

Because of His Person, as well as the power of the Spirit, He is stronger than John and, as He shows, stronger than Satan when He casts out demons. He shows the nation this power over and over again. He has overwhelmed them with this power. How will they respond?

In answering this question, Mark makes a connection between the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and the rejection of the Lord and His ministry by the religious leaders in Mark 3:22-30. They proclaim that the display of Christ’s power was not in the power of the Spirit, but in the power of Satan. The only two times Mark uses the word “strong” are in 1:7 (“stronger”) and 3:27. He is “stronger” than John (1:7) and “stronger” than Satan (3:27).

As He begins His ministry being tempted by Satan (1:13), the next time Satan is mentioned is in 3:23. After John says He will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:8), the next time the Holy Spirit is mentioned is 3:29. When Jesus begins His ministry, He offers the nation the kingdom of God (1:15). The next time the word *kingdom* is mentioned is 3:24. After His rejection by the religious leaders, Jesus gives a series of parables about the kingdom of God (4:11).

The connection between the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Mark 1 and His rejection by the leaders in Mark 3 suggests a figurative sense of the baptism of the Spirit He brings to the nation of Israel. His miraculous works show that He is stronger than Satan and is able to bring the kingdom of God to the nation. His power is obviously



through the power of the Spirit. In the Person of Christ, the nation has been “baptized” in that power. It was right before their eyes. Jesus tells the leaders that He has gone into the house of Satan (Israel) to set people free from disease and demon possession (3:27). After seeing the miracles the Lord performed, when they claimed that He was empowered by Satan, they were actually blaspheming the Holy Spirit since Jesus had gone out and done what He did through the Spirit (3:29).

This understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Mark 1:8 compares favorably with other figurative uses of the word. The baptism into Moses in 1 Cor 10:2 refers to being under the influence of Moses. In Jesus’ ministry, the nation would be under the influence of the Lord who came in the power of the Spirit. As Jesus would be overwhelmed by suffering with His baptism on the cross (Mark 10:38-39), so the nation of Israel would be overwhelmed by the dazzling display of the power of the Spirit in the ministry of Christ. This also is similar to the use of the word in the Greek translation of Isa 21:4.

We could also compare the reference in Josephus mentioned above. The actions of the people “baptized” the city of Jerusalem in a negative sense, as it was a baptism of destruction. The actions of the Lord baptized the nation in a positive sense, as He released people from what sin and Satan had brought to the nation of Israel in particular.

## VII. CONCLUSION

John the Baptist was sent and ministered to the nation of Israel. He had no concept of the Church or Christian baptism. He paved the way for the Messiah and the coming of the kingdom of God for the Jewish people.

What did he mean, then, when he said that the Christ would baptize the people with the Holy Spirit? While it is possible that he was speaking prophetically, without knowing it, about the coming church age and Acts 2, the connection with Mark 3 suggests a better alternative.

John knew that the Messiah would come in the power of the Spirit (Isa 61:1; John 1:33). The figurative use of the word *baptism* is well attested both in the NT and other contemporary writings.

John was saying that the Christ would baptize the nation with the Spirit in the sense that He would do works among them that would overwhelmingly prove that He came in the power of the Spirit of God. Just as the presence of God was at hand when the Jews were baptized into Moses, the presence of God through the Spirit would be abundantly evident in His ministry. The Spirit would be operating in their very midst.

The rejection of the Lord by the leaders in Mark 3 indicates that this work of the Spirit was also rejected. The nation would not turn from their sins in anticipation of believing in the Christ (Mark 1:4). The nation did not heed John's call to repent. As a result, another figurative type of baptism awaited them. It would be a baptism of fire and judgment. Jesus predicted this judgment in Mark 13:2. It came to them in AD 70.

# AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF DILLOW'S VIEW OF JESUS' KINGDOM ENTRY SAYINGS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

**F**inal Destiny<sup>1</sup> is a major expansion of Jody Dillow's earlier work, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. Chapters 18-22 deal with the Lord Jesus' kingdom entry sayings. The author has been a friend of mine for thirty years. He has written for our publications and spoken at our conferences. A mutual friend who has adopted Dillow's view of the entry sayings recently challenged me to show why that view is mistaken. While I have reflected on Dillow's view of the entry sayings before, I realized they warranted a more thorough review.

I have chosen six of Dillow's major points in chaps. 18-22 to illustrate why I believe this portion of *Final Destiny* misses the mark regarding what the kingdom entry sayings mean. Before we look at those six points, I will first delineate Dillow's three understandings of the entry sayings.

## II. THREE WAYS DILLOW UNDERSTANDS ENTRY SAYINGS

Dillow suggests that when the Lord talks about entering His kingdom, He means three different things. The context in each case determines which of the three meanings is meant.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, 4th rev. ed. (N.p.: Grace Theology Press, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018).

First, entry sayings can refer to “a call to enter into personal salvation or soteriological entrance into the millennium.”<sup>2</sup> We agree on this point.

Second, entry sayings are sometimes “a call to enter a rich life now by following the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.”<sup>3</sup> I do not see any examples of this in any of the entry sayings.

Third, the kingdom entry saying can refer to “a call to greatness, that is, an abundant entrance into the kingdom.”<sup>4</sup> I do not see this type of entry saying in the NT except in cases where the context specifically mentions a rich entrance, as in 2 Pet 1:5-11.<sup>5</sup>

I disagree with points two and three. All kingdom entry sayings refer to entering the coming kingdom of Christ.

### III. QUESTIONABLE EXEGETICAL SUPPORT #1: BELIEVING FALSE PROPHETS IN MATTHEW 7:16-20, 21-23

Dillow maintains that Matt 7:21-23 refers to believers entering a rich life now. But that depends on showing that the people who prophesied, did miracles, and cast out demons in Jesus’ name were believers.

Dillow is right to see a connection between the false prophets in Matt 7:15-20 and those in Matt 7:22 who prophesied in Jesus’ name but are excluded from entering the kingdom (Matt 7:21, 23). But there is nothing in the context to suggest a shift. If the false prophets in vv 15-20 were unbelievers, then so were those in vv 21-23.

To prove that the false prophets in Matt 7:16-23 were believers, Dillow turns first to the Didache.<sup>6</sup> However, Scripture interprets

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> If 2 Pet 1:10 is considered an entry saying, then it would be the lone NT example. However, it is not a saying of the Lord Jesus, which is what Dillow is considering, and it does not speak merely of *an entrance into the kingdom* but *a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom*. It is the word *rich* that reveals something more than mere kingdom entrance is in view.

<sup>6</sup> Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 315-16.

Scripture. The Didache is not Scripture. The writings of the church fathers totally miss the concept of grace.<sup>7</sup>

For NT support, Dillow turns initially to Titus 1:11, which refers to people who teach false doctrine. Are false teachers the same as false prophets in the OT or NT? The author cited no evidence of this. In addition, he gives no proof that the false teachers of Titus 1:11 are born again. Does the third person plural pronoun *them* in Titus 1:13 refer to the same people as referred to in vv 11-12? Possibly. If so, it is reasonable to take them as believers. If not, then those in vv 11-12 are most probably unbelievers.

Dillow also turns to Phil 1:15-17 and 2 Cor 2:17, neither of which refers to false teachers or false prophets.

Of course, born-again people can stray from the truth and become false teachers or even false prophets. But what evidence is there that the Lord was speaking of born-again people in Matt 7:15-20 and Matt 7:21-23? I did not see any evidence for that presented in *Final Destiny*.

Barbieri comments on this portion of the Sermon on the Mount:

Those hearing this sermon must have wondered about the religious leaders...Jesus made it clear they were not good for they were leading others astray...They would be refused admission to the kingdom because Jesus had no personal relationship with them (vv. 21, 23).<sup>8</sup>

I could not find a commentator who suggested that these false prophets were born again.<sup>9</sup> That does not prove that Dillow is wrong. However, when combined with lack of contextual support, this is telling. The most reasonable understanding of the entry saying in Matt 7:21-23 is that it concerns entering Jesus' coming kingdom. This would fall in Dillow's first category.

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<sup>7</sup> See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1948, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament Edition, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 34.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 292-95; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 178-81; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 132-33.

#### IV. QUESTIONABLE EXEGETICAL SUPPORT #2: THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN JOHN 7:17 IS OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST'S TEACHINGS

Another way Dillow supports his view that Matt 7:21-23 refers to believers who have strayed and who have failed to enter a rich life now is to show that “the will of the Father” used in Matt 7:21 refers to obeying God’s commands given in Scripture.<sup>10</sup> Dillow suggests that when the Lord Jesus refers to those *willing to do His will* in John 7:17, he is referring to those willing to obey God.

By contrast, if *the will of the Father* refers to *believing in Jesus*, then those excluded from the kingdom would be unbelievers. Which interpretation makes more sense?

John 7:17 uses the expression, “His will.” This refers to the will of God the Father. But that understanding of John 7:17 is inconsistent with Dillow’s Free Grace views. Dillow does not give any explanation of what John 7:17 means, or how his understanding of the will of the Father in that verse would impact its meaning. After quoting it, he writes, “Doing ‘His will,’ in this context, refers to obedience to Christ’s teachings.”<sup>11</sup> If so, the Lord was teaching that a willingness to obey God’s commands is a precondition of coming to faith in Christ and being born again.

In John 7:17, the Lord said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” The issue here is *doctrine*, not *practice*. If the will of the Father is to believe in His Son, as the Lord already said in John 6:40, then “willing to do His will” here is specifically a willingness to believe in Jesus. Compare John 5:40, “but you are unwilling to come to Me [= unwilling to believe in Me, see John 6:35] that you have life.” The issue here is unwillingness to believe in Jesus, not unwillingness to obey. After all, the legalistic Jews were obviously willing to obey God’s commands.

Brown comments, “Doing God’s will is more than ethical obedience; *it involves the acceptance through faith of the whole divine*

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<sup>10</sup> Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 314.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

*plan of salvation, including Jesus' work (5:30).*<sup>12</sup> Evidently Brown's Catholicism moved him to bring up ethical obedience, but he clearly sees that the point is believing in Jesus.

Lenski comments, "*This will of God is faith on our part.* 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he did send,' John 6:29; compare 6:40."<sup>13</sup>

It is true that some commentators see in John 7:17 a requirement of a commitment to good works to believe and be born again. Carson says, "a seeker must be fundamentally committed to doing God's will [in order to be born again]."<sup>14</sup> Borchert writes, "They were work-oriented people (see comments at 6:28–29); so Jesus argued that if they had done God's work (*thelēma autou poiein*, 'do his will'), they would have known that his teaching was from God (7:17)."<sup>15</sup> These all reflect the teaching of Lordship Salvation. But Dillow, who disagrees with Lordship Salvation, is nonetheless interpreting the verse in a way that is consistent with Lordship Salvation.

## V. QUESTIONABLE EXEGETICAL SUPPORT #3: ENTERING THE KINGDOM IS OFTEN ADOPTING A KINGDOM LIFESTYLE NOW

The passage that Dillow cites first and discusses the most to prove his point is Matt 5:19-20. According to the Lord's words in v 19, to be called great in the kingdom one must obey and teach God's commands. Dillow springboards from that to understand entering the kingdom in Matt 5:20 is "to enter into the way of the life of the future kingdom in the present by submitting to the Lordship of Christ."<sup>16</sup>

The word *your* in "your righteousness" in v 20 is plural. One interpretation is that the Lord is speaking of the national salvation of Israel, which requires both repentance and faith.<sup>17</sup> The nation will not

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I–XII)* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 316, emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961) 544, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 312.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 284.

<sup>16</sup> Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 264. See also p. 254.

<sup>17</sup> Argued by Brian Vranicar in an unpublished paper for Rocky Mountain Bible Seminary.

enter the kingdom until it is a righteous nation. That is clearly taught in many other texts (e.g., Matt 3:2; 4:17; 24:13; Rom 10:13).

The more common understanding is that the Lord is talking about the positional righteousness which all who believe in Jesus need in order to enter the eschatological kingdom. No one will enter Christ's coming kingdom apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Yet another view is that the Lord is talking about actual personal righteousness which those who believe in Christ will have when they gain glorified bodies.<sup>18</sup>

But the idea that the Lord is talking about *entering a kingdom lifestyle now* is foreign to the use of the expression *entering the kingdom*.<sup>19</sup>

In Matt 19:23-30, in the aftermath of His encounter with the rich young ruler, the Lord equates entering the kingdom with being saved. He spoke of how difficult it was "for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt 19:24). In answer to the question that followed, "Who then can be saved?" (v 25), the Lord answered, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

In his section on entering the kingdom, Dillow does not discuss Matt 19:25 or the connection between entering the kingdom and being saved. But he does briefly comment on it in his chapter on the rich young ruler. There he says that the salvation being asked about in Matt 19:25 was the saving of one's soul as discussed in Matt 16:24-26.<sup>20</sup> That is a dubious conclusion. It involves taking the rich young ruler as already being born again and asking about eternal rewards, not about being in the kingdom. Both of these are highly unlikely. When the disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?" the most natural understanding is that they wonder how anyone can have everlasting life, not how anyone can have fullness of everlasting life.

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. Craig Blaising expressed this view to me during a visit we had while discussing my doctoral dissertation. He was one of the three advisors for my dissertation.

<sup>19</sup> However, in his book *The Way that Leads to Life: The Radical Challenge to the Church of the Sermon on the Mount* (Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), Michael Eaton takes the position Dillow does. Possibly Eaton was the source of Dillow's newfound view on the kingdom entry sayings (except that Eaton does not suggest that Matt 7:21-23 concerns entering a kingdom lifestyle). Eaton says that in Matt 5:20 Jesus "is speaking of our actual life, the way we live. There is an actual righteousness which far outstrips that of the scribes and Pharisees. If we live in the way Jesus wants, we shall *experience* the kingdom of God" (p. 63, emphasis his; see also p. 67).

<sup>20</sup> Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 355.



Dillow understands the ruler's question about having eternal life (Matt 19:16) to mean that he "wants to be one who 'has eternal life abiding in him' (1 Jn. 3:15). He wants a firm grip on it."<sup>21</sup> He also says the ruler may have been a believer.<sup>22</sup> But if so, would that be a natural way for a believing first-century Jew to ask about abiding in Christ and about eternal rewards? We are never told that the disciples, who were surely more advanced than this man, asked about *having eternal life* in any sense, especially not in terms of fullness of life.

I do not find a single case in the NT where entering the kingdom is entering into a kingdom lifestyle now. Nor did Dillow give any examples where it clearly means that.

I found it surprising that in this section Dillow distinguishes between "final salvation" and "initial salvation."<sup>23</sup> Salvation is final when one believes in Christ, if by *salvation* we mean *regeneration* (e.g., John 3:16-17; 11:26). There is no such thing as a separate and subsequent *final salvation*. That is the language of works salvation and Lordship Salvation.

## VI. QUESTIONABLE EXEGETICAL SUPPORT

### #4: THE WORD *YOUR* IN MATTHEW 5:20 MUST REFER TO SAVED DISCIPLES

As mentioned above, *your* (*humōn*) in Matt 5:20 is plural. It could well refer to national Israel. The kingdom will not come, and Israel will not enter it, until all the adults in the nation are both believing and repentant (i.e., in fellowship with God and thus having a greater righteousness than the legalistic observances of the scribes and Pharisees).

Or it might refer to individuals collectively. No one will enter the coming kingdom without the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Or it could even refer to individuals and to their actual righteousness in the life to come. Those from this age who will enter the kingdom will be believers who have been glorified. Their personal righteousness will exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 263 (and 285) and 266, respectively.

Dillow suggests that only the eleven saved disciples are in view.<sup>24</sup> Judas is not to understand this as directed at him. Nor are Jesus' other unsaved disciples in view (cf. John 6:64). Nor are the people in the multitude (Matt 5:1) being addressed.

While that is certainly possible, it is unlikely.

First, there is nothing in the context of Matt 5:20 to indicate that entering the kingdom refers to something that born-again people needed to attain. The most natural understanding would be that the Lord is talking about who will enter the kingdom and who will not.

Second, the word *humōn* occurs 62 times in Matthew. Rarely does it ever refer specifically to believers.<sup>25</sup>

Third, in the preceding verse the Lord spoke of those who would be called least in the kingdom of heaven. France comments, "While vv. 17–19 have confronted those who are tempted to set the law aside, v. 20 confronts those who are so preoccupied with its literal observance that they miss the whole point of the fulfillment to which it is pointing."<sup>26</sup> In contrast to His discussion of those who will be least in the coming kingdom, the Lord spoke in v 20 of those who would not be in the kingdom of heaven at all.

Morris understands this righteousness as imputed and sees in the Lord's words a call to live consistently with one's new position:

Their righteousness is a given righteousness. Nowhere do we get the idea that the servant of God achieves in his own strength the kind of living that gives him standing before God. But when he is given that standing, Jesus looks to him to live in accordance with that standing.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Barbieri writes:

The righteousness they were currently seeking—**that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law**—was

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>25</sup> The only clear examples in Matthew 5 would be in the Beatitudes, in Matt 5:11, 12, and in the salt and light analogy in Matt 5:16. But then a shift occurs in v 17, and the Lord is giving general remarks in the rest of chap. 5.

<sup>26</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 191. France sees the fulfillment in terms of personal righteousness which flows from a proper mindset. However, his comments also are helpful for those who understand v 20 as referring to the believer who receives the imputed righteousness of Christ.

<sup>27</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 111. Keener sees the Lord as referring to personal righteousness guaranteed by the new birth (Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997], s.v. Matt 5:20).

insufficient for entrance into **the kingdom** Jesus was offering. The righteousness He demanded was not merely external; it was a true inner righteousness based on faith in God's Word (Rom. 3:21–22). This is clear from what follows.<sup>28</sup>

Dillow's first option fits best here as well.

## **VII. QUESTIONABLE EXEGETICAL SUPPORT #5: THE KINGDOM IS NOT NOW, YET FAITHFUL BELIEVERS HAVE ALREADY ENTERED IT**

I appreciate the fact that Dillow makes a point of rejecting *already, not yet* eschatology. However, in his discussion of entering the kingdom, Dillow says some believers have already entered it. I realize Dillow thinks entering the kingdom does not actually refer to entering the kingdom, but as entering into a kingdom lifestyle. However, if living that lifestyle is a form of entering the kingdom, and that lifestyle can be lived now, then in some sense the kingdom is now. This is an *already, not yet* eschatology.

Note this statement by Dillow: "*How is it possible that we are in the kingdom now* in view of the fact that Jesus and John the Baptist told that global judgment would precede the arrival of the kingdom?"<sup>29</sup> Later he adds, "Jesus invites his believing followers to enter the kingdom of heaven."<sup>30</sup>

## **VIII. QUESTIONABLE EXEGETICAL SUPPORT #6: THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN MATTHEW AND JOHN IS PRIMARILY GOOD WORKS**

Dillow argues that most of the references to the will of the Father refer to obeying His commands, not to believing in His Son. Even so, he does take John 6:40 as referring to believing in Jesus.

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<sup>28</sup> Barbieri, "Matthew," 30, emphasis his.

<sup>29</sup> Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 255, emphasis mine.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

However, far from being rare, a study of that expression shows that nearly every use of the expression *the will of the Father* refers to believing in Jesus.

*Matthew 7:21-23.* Most naturally the will of the Father here is to believe in His Son. Notice that the people who are rejected here contend that they have done many mighty works “in Your name.” The Lord does not dispute their claim about works done. Instead, He says that they did not do the will of the Father, and as a result they will be excluded from the kingdom.

Eaton says, “This is not a passage about examining ourselves... Actually the text we have before us quite clearly deals not with ourselves but exclusively with the false prophets! It is ‘You shall know *them* by their fruits,’ not ‘You shall know yourself by your fruits.’”<sup>31</sup> Eaton further says that the will of the Father refers here to believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup>

One of Dillow’s proofs that the will of the Father here refers to obeying His commands is “John 5:30 where the will of God [is] related to doing and not believing.”<sup>33</sup> Yet that is not a good comparison. In Matt 7:21-23, the issue is the will of the Father *for a human to enter Christ’s kingdom*. But in John 5:30, the will of the Father is what He wants *His Son to do in His earthly ministry*. It is comparing apples and oranges. What Jesus needed to do to fulfill His ministry is far different from what humans need to do to be guaranteed entrance into His kingdom. He had to live a sinless life. We do not. He had to be arrested, beaten, mocked, spat upon, scourged, and killed on the cross. We do not need to do those things to be guaranteed kingdom entrance.

*Matthew 12:50.* The Lord indicated that His spiritual family is made up of those who do the will of the Father. We do not become children of God by doing good works. We do so by believing in Him (John 1:12).

*Matthew 21:31.* The will of the father in the story refers to those who said that they would not go into the vineyard to work, but then who changed their minds and went. That might make us think that this verse refers to obeying God’s commands. Yet when the Lord

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<sup>31</sup> Eaton, *The Way that Leads to Life*, 191.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 193, 194.

<sup>33</sup> Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 313.

applies the story, He refers to believing in Him, not to obeying God's commands: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, *and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him*" (Matt 21:32, emphasis added).

*John 5:39-40.* Here the will of the Father is clearly that people believe in His Son for everlasting life. Compare John 6:35, where coming to Jesus is a figure for believing in Him.

## IX. PRACTICAL PROBLEMS WITH DILLOW'S INTERPRETATION OF THE ENTRY SAYINGS

There are at least four practical problems with Dillow's understanding that the entry sayings of the Lord have multiple possible meanings.

*Opens the Door to Lordship Salvation.* Dillow understands many of the entry saying texts the same way in which Lordship Salvation advocates do, with the exception that he suggests entering the kingdom refers to entering into a kingdom lifestyle or entering into greatness. If someone initially accepts his interpretation and then later becomes convinced that entering the kingdom in these contexts refers to actually entering at all, then the person will likely cease being Free Grace.

*Introduces an Unreliable Hermeneutic.* If we can understand *entering the kingdom* to refer to *entering a rich life now*, then those who adopt this hermeneutic may decide to apply it to other phrases. Maybe *reigning with Christ* does not refer to future rulership in His kingdom, but to present reigning with Christ in this life. Maybe being *Christ's partners* refers not to sharing in His future kingdom rule, but to being His partners now. Maybe being *joint heirs with Christ* refers not to ruling over cities in the life to come, but to being spiritual rulers in this life.

*Might Lead to Assaults on the Free Grace Position.* What Dillow does with the kingdom entry sayings does not deal with contexts or parallel texts. Lordship Salvation people would surely say Dillow's view is untenable. But, of course, they would not restrict their criticism to Dillow, but that his position on the entry sayings illustrates the weakness of the Free Grace position.

*Weakens an Otherwise Outstanding Book. Final Destiny* is Dillow's *magnum opus*. It has 1,060 pages in which he covers all the tough texts in the NT. His discussion of the kingdom entry sayings is inconsistent with the excellent exegetical work done in the rest of the book.<sup>34</sup>

## X. CONCLUSION

Dillow presents a different way to explain the kingdom entry sayings. Unfortunately, his creativity is inconsistent with the simple meaning of the passages he is discussing. David Cooper, founder of the Biblical Research Society, famously wrote:

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.<sup>35</sup>

The kingdom entry sayings make common sense as referring to entering the coming kingdom. All who do the will of the Father, which is to believe in His Son, will enter His eschatological kingdom. The believer has Christ's righteousness imputed to him and so his righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you will enter His kingdom. You will not enter it in this life, because the kingdom is not yet here. But your future entrance to that glorious kingdom is assured.

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<sup>34</sup> His discussion of repentance and salvation is also inconsistent with the fine exegetical work elsewhere. See the review by Robert N. Wilkin at <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/book-reviews/final-destiny-the-future-reign-of-the-servant-kings/>.

<sup>35</sup> This citation can be found at <https://www.bibletruths.org/the-golden-rule-of-interpretation/>. Last accessed December 9, 2020.

# THE TABLE OF THE LORD: PART 1

ERIC SVENDSEN<sup>1</sup>

## I. CHAPTER 1: PAUL'S CONCERN FOR UNITY IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11

First Corinthians 11 has long been the standard Lord's Supper text used by Protestants in their communion services to recite the words of institution; and rightly so. The Pauline version of the Last Supper is the only one which we may be certain was written primarily for liturgical purposes.<sup>2</sup> It alone is found in the context of a discussion about the Lord's Supper, whereas all others were (apparently) written to record the historical fact of the Last Supper.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Paul's account is helpful in that it offers insight into other avenues of the Lord's Supper not specified by the other accounts. This is not to say that Paul is exhaustive in his treatment—indeed, we would not have even this much if there had not been abuses of the Lord's Supper in Corinth—but that what he offers by way of explanation exceeds that offered by the other accounts. In other words, whereas the Synoptic accounts purport to record the historical event and give only minimal reflection as to its ramifications for the Lord's Supper,<sup>4</sup> Paul's account is

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: This article was part of a booklet written by the author in 1996. It was published by the New Testament Restoration Foundation in Atlanta, GA. We plan to publish the booklet in three parts in this journal. The article appears as it was first published except for format changes, such as the numbering of sections and the transliteration of Greek words. In addition, some footnotes contained explanations which, due to constraints on length, were omitted. The full booklet, in its original format, can be found at: [https://comingintheclouds.org/wpclouds7/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/the\\_table\\_of\\_lord\\_communion\\_Lords\\_supper.pdf](https://comingintheclouds.org/wpclouds7/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/the_table_of_lord_communion_Lords_supper.pdf). Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> Paul's immediate concern, of course, is to resolve a problem in church practice. However, since liturgy may be defined as standardized church practice, and since Paul's concern is to bring the Corinthians in line with that which he "received" (v 23), it is not inaccurate to speak of Paul's purpose as "liturgical."

<sup>3</sup> I. H. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 35. Although it is true that purpose and literary form must carefully be distinguished, it is equally true that purpose (at least to some degree) determines literary form. Cf. Craig Blomberg's case study in his *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987), 66-72, passim.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say there are no redactional considerations by the writers for their readers. Indeed, the very fact that there are differences among the accounts indicates that the writers

just the opposite; his includes only minimal treatment of the historical event (11:23-25) and much reflection on its ramifications.<sup>5</sup> For this reason special consideration must be given to Paul in discussions where the primary focus is the Lord's Supper.<sup>6</sup>

It is precisely because Paul expands on the traditional words of institution that we may begin to see other related aspects of the Lord's Supper that would be difficult at best to ascertain from the Synoptic accounts. One such aspect, unity, is particularly strong in 1 Corinthians 11,<sup>7</sup> and it is to this aspect that we may now turn.

### **A. The Problem at Corinth**

In order to understand what Paul says about the Lord's Supper in this text one must first understand what he is battling. The views on this, though varied, do not deviate severely from each other. Regardless of which view one takes about the problem at Corinth, few deny that the underlying problem is disunity. Some of the Corinthians were excluding other Corinthians from the fullness of benefits that accompany the Lord's Supper. Paul's burden therefore is to reestablish the unity-aspect in the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, it will be helpful to survey the contents of 1 Cor 11:17-34 and the proposed views of the problem at Corinth, and then to decide among them.

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were selective about the details to be included. Nevertheless, the thrust of the Synoptic accounts (and of Paul's account in 1 Cor 11:23-25, for that matter) is, in the first instance, historical.

<sup>5</sup> This should not be construed to mean that one account is more "valuable" than the others. Neither does this mean that Paul sees little relevance for his church in the Last Supper account or that the Synoptic writers see little value in the Lord's Supper. The inclusion or exclusion of this or that material does not thereby appreciate or depreciate the value of the account. It means only that each account is better able to yield those theological points for which it is redactionally suited.

<sup>6</sup> As opposed to discussions where the primary focus is the Last Supper.

<sup>7</sup> Granted, Paul's words are situationally constrained and are designed to counter an abuse. Nevertheless, since Paul says nothing that would not be true of the Lord's Supper in any case (even if there were no abuses), and since he places great importance on what he does say, we can only conclude that what he says is essential to the Lord's Supper. That he might have presented the Lord's Supper differently had there been no abuses is beside the point. The fact is, there was an abuse and it is because of this abuse that we know more about the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper than we otherwise would have known.



## B. Survey of Views

Paul begins his discussion of the Lord's Supper with a negative tone. He has previously praised the Corinthians for their adherence to "the traditions" (v 2) but finds he cannot praise them in their practice of the Lord's Supper<sup>8</sup> since their meetings do more harm than good. Paul identifies in v 18 why this is so, and it is at this point that the exegetical options open up. The root of the Corinthians' problem is division. The problem for the exegete is not so much in determining the kind of divisions to which Paul is referring (it seems clear from vv 21-22 that Paul has in mind class divisions, viz., the wealthy and the poor<sup>9</sup>) as in determining the reason for these divisions. There is virtual unanimity that the Lord's Supper described here by Paul is a full meal and not merely the bread and cup. Hence the church at Corinth came together for a common meal, probably provided by the wealthy, which was to be shared with the entire assembly. On a cursory reading it seems apparent that the wealthy were arriving at the meeting ahead of the poor and eating the meal before the poor arrived.<sup>10</sup> Paul's corrective then would be for the wealthy to "wait"<sup>11</sup> for the others before eating.

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<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, *First and Second Corinthians*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1971), 108, sees *touto* in v 17 as referring to what has preceded, as does J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962), 111-12, and C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1968), 260, and concludes that Paul is only with qualification praising the Corinthians for holding to "the traditions" in 11:2. While this is certainly possible, it must be noted that Paul's usual form in 1 Corinthians is to give praise and then immediately to qualify his praise (such is the case with 7:1-2, "it is good...But"; and 8:4-7, "we know...However"). Paul does this in 11:2-3 as well ("I praise you...But"), which seems to argue against the notion that the qualification comes in v 17. Moreover, Paul's statement in v 17 ("I do not praise you in this") seems (in form) to negate rather than to qualify. It is probably better, with G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 536 n. 23, to take this instance of *touto* together with that found in v 22 as forming an *inclusio* (cp. 7:29-35).

<sup>9</sup> There is a near consensus among scholars that Paul does not have in mind the divisions mentioned in 1:10-12. Based on Paul's mention of *schismata* and *haireseis*, Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 147, rightly associates the problem at Corinth with groups rather than with individuals. Moreover, these groups are later identified as the poor and the wealthy (i.e., those who are hungry and have nothing over against those who are drunk and take their own meals, vv 21-22), *idem*, 148.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *prolambanō* in v 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ekdechesthe*.

This reconstruction has not gone unchallenged. On the lexical level some have questioned whether *prolambanō* in v 21 can here be rendered “to take before.” B. H. Winter, for instance, holds that the problem in Corinth was that the “haves” were eating their meal in the presence of the “have-nots” who, after partaking of the bread, patiently waited for the “haves” to finish their meal so that the entire body could then partake of the cup together. His reconstruction revolves around the idea that *prolambanō* in v 21 is to be translated here simply as “receive” (not “take before”).<sup>12</sup> For support he notes that neither of the two other occurrences of this word (Gal 6:1; Mark 14:8) has the meaning “to take before” and that the preposition in compound is intensive, not temporal.

S. H. Ringe has further developed Winter’s proposal and has argued that there were differing “menus” in the church, one for the haves and another for the have nots, and that it is against this “banquet etiquette” that Paul reacts so strongly in 1 Cor 11:17-34.<sup>13</sup> J. Murphy-O’Connor argues similarly that the problem of 1 Cor 11:17-34 is about the type of food offered to the participants.<sup>14</sup> He argues that in the architecture of the first-century Corinthian house, the triclinium (i.e., the dining area) could not accommodate everyone, and that there was a necessary overflow into the atrium (the courtyard), hence creating two groups. According to Murphy-O’Connor’s reconstruction, the rich Christians (in the triclinium) were offered choice food while the poor (in the atrium) were offered only scraps. It is in this way that “one is hungry and another is drunk” (v 21). Certainly,

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<sup>12</sup> B. H. Winter, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth: An Alternative Reconstruction,” *Reformed Theological Review* 37 (1978): 74-78. *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Sharon H. Ringe, “Hospitality, Justice, and Community: Paul’s Teaching on the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34,” *Prism* 1 (1986): 60. In support of this view it should be noted that in v 21, “each one” (= all at the assembly) “takes his own supper” (i.e., the kind of food fitting for his social status), and as a result, “one is hungry” (since his supper is of the kind that is offered to the lower class) “and another is drunk” (since his is of the kind that is offered to the upper class). The *men...de* construction ties together both the “hungry” and the “drunk” as receivers of a “supper” of some kind. But “each one” (*hekastos*) could just as readily refer to all at the table before the poor arrive (*viz.*, the “haves”). The *men...de* construction need imply no more than the end result of such a practice (*viz.*, one remains hungry [when he finally arrives], the other [imbibing too long] is drunk).

<sup>14</sup> Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Eucharist and Community in First Corinthians,” *Worship* 50 (1976): 37.

this was a common practice in the ancient world as is evident by examples from the writings of Juvenal, Martial and Pliny.<sup>15</sup>

An older and much discussed view is that of Hans Lietzmann. Calvin Porter gives a helpful summary of Lietzmann's view of the Supper.<sup>16</sup> Lietzmann breaks the Supper down into two different traditions: (1) the Jerusalem tradition which observed no memorial to Christ's death but which was celebrated in anticipation of the Messianic banquet; and (2) the Pauline tradition in which the death of Christ and a memorial to Him was the central theme (apparently without exclusion of the Messianic banquet). The problem in 1 Cor 11:17-34 according to Lietzmann is that those who held to the Jerusalem tradition were attempting to supplant the Pauline tradition. Consequently, Paul must reinforce his tradition by emphasizing in v 26 the centrality of the death of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

There is some merit to Theissen's view. Theissen thinks the problem is that the wealthy members were eating a "private" meal (which consisted of choice morsels) before officially starting the common meal (which consisted of an inadequate quantity and quality of food).<sup>18</sup> Theissen takes *en tō phagein* in 11:21 temporally ("during the Lord's Supper") and argues that these private meals were also eaten in front of the poor. Marshall agrees with Theissen's assessment of the situation in Corinth, and in this way Marshall can account for both the idea that each was "taking his own supper" (v 21) as well as the idea that some were eating ahead of others (v 33).<sup>19</sup>

### **C. Proposed View**

None of these views seems very satisfying. Against Lietzmann's view, Porter echoes a common concern among scholars that one should not "assume opposing views about the Lord's Supper within the Corinthian church."<sup>20</sup> Lietzmann's proposal is much too speculative

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<sup>15</sup> Part 3 of this series will bear this out.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin L. Porter, "An Interpretation of Paul's Lord's Supper Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11:17-34," *Encounter* 50 (1989): 32.

<sup>17</sup> Theissen, "Social Setting," 148, 151-52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Porter, "Interpretation," 34.

and for this reason has been rejected by many scholars (e.g., Marshall, Higgins, Porter, et al.).

The view of Winter, Ringe and Murphy-O'Connor is an attractive reconstruction but does not answer all the questions that must be raised about the text. Why, for instance, does Paul tell the Corinthians to "wait for each other" (v 33)?<sup>21</sup> As Theissen notes, this explanation "does not make wholly comprehensible the conflict connected with the Lord's Supper...in that case Paul would only have to admonish all to share equally."<sup>22</sup> Ringe's use of the evidence is deficient in this respect. In order to harmonize her reconstruction with Paul's injunction in v 33, Ringe must propose that the rich were partaking of their menu before the poor arrived, who then, upon arrival, partook of a less substantial meal than the rich.<sup>23</sup> However, this argument is difficult to sustain since it introduces a modification in the historical evidence of the ancient banquet etiquette to which she appeals. According to Murphy-O'Connor, the uniqueness of the ancient banquet etiquette theory lies in the fact that both groups (both rich and poor) are at table at the same time.<sup>24</sup> But if the acceptance of this theory requires a modification to make it work, why accept the theory in the first place? Winter attempts to deal with this injunction of Paul by assigning to the meaning of "'receive one another' in the sense of sharing,"<sup>25</sup> although he recognizes that in every other instance of the word the meaning is "to wait for." Moreover, Winter's assertions about the meaning of the word are not conclusive. Even Fee (who

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<sup>21</sup> The "hungry" one in v 34 is not the same as the one in v 21. In v 21 it is the "have nots" who are hungry; in v 34 it is the "haves." To view Paul's words in v 34 as an instruction for the poor referenced in v 21 would not only seem callous (he has already chided the Corinthians for "shaming those who have nothing" in v 22)—as though this instruction would suddenly cause the "have nots" to be relieved of their hunger—but would also seem to be in tension with his instruction to "wait for one another" in v 33; wait for what? It is also noteworthy that Paul's purpose for this instruction is to prevent the Corinthians from coming together "for judgment." It was the eating practices of the wealthy (not the poor) that were resulting in judgment. Little would be served by instructing the poor to eat at home while the rich continued in their practice of the meal to the exclusion of the poor—the basis for "judgment" is not thereby eliminated. It is only by viewing the "hungry" in v 34 as the "haves" (who felt a need to eat all the food of the meal before the poor arrived) that these difficulties can be removed.

<sup>22</sup> Theissen, "Social Setting," 155.

<sup>23</sup> Ringe, "Hospitality," 61-62.

<sup>24</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "Eucharist and Community," 37.

<sup>25</sup> Winter, "Lord's Supper," 79.

sympathizes with Winter's position) admits, "one cannot totally rule out a temporal sense" and "the lack of further description by Paul makes a clear-cut decision impossible."<sup>26</sup> In spite of the arguments in its favor, it seems best to abandon the "banquet etiquette" theory<sup>27</sup> and conclude simply that the rich were arriving at the meeting and eating the supper *before* the poor could arrive. Possibly the demands of employment created longer working days for the lower class, whereas the wealthy enjoyed the luxury of shorter working days or setting their own hours.<sup>28</sup>

The view of Theissen and Marshall is the most promising; yet it too has problems, the most obvious of which is the treatment of *idion deipnon* in v 21. Both Theissen and Marshall take this as a reference to the Corinthians' practice of eating individual meals which each person brought only for himself, or a "private" meal for the rich only which was eaten before the common meal shared with the poor. It is unlikely, however, that this is what Paul intends since, as Käsemann argues, the words are probably to be seen in contrast to *kuriakon deipnon* in the preceding verse.<sup>29</sup> If this is correct, then we cannot view *idion deipnon* as referring to any "private meal" which was eaten by the rich before the common meal took place. Nor is it likely that this refers to individual meals that each person brought solely for himself. Rather we should see this as referring to the Supper itself, which, when all in the body are invited, becomes the *Lord's Supper*, and which, when some are excluded for illegitimate reasons (such as social status), remains one's *own* supper.<sup>30</sup>

How then should we view the problem at Corinth? There is no good reason to abandon the *prima facie* sense of Paul's words. The wealthy in Corinth, it seems, were purposely arriving at the meeting conveniently at a time when the lower class could not possibly be

<sup>26</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 542.

<sup>27</sup> As Theissen (155) says, "as long as it is assumed that it is a matter merely of different quantities of food for the rich and the poor Christians, Paul's suggested solution must seem odd."

<sup>28</sup> A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (SBT 6; London: SCM, 1952) 71; and Gunther Bornkamm, "Lord's Supper and Church in Paul," *Early Christian Experience* (London: SCM, 1969), 126.

<sup>29</sup> E. Käsemann, "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, SBT 4 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), 119-20.

<sup>30</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, American ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1981), 81.

there (perhaps because of occupational restraints). There they partook of the meal (intended for all), perhaps reasoning that since the poor contributed nothing to the meal, neither should they eat anything. This may even have been a distorted application of Paul's own tradition for his churches.<sup>31</sup> That the Corinthians may have misinterpreted Paul at this point is not exactly out of the question. Moreover, it seems possible (though by no means certain) that the Corinthians saw a distinction between the meal proper (which they may have viewed as optional) and the bread and cup (which they saw as the actual "Lord's Supper"). If this is the case then it may be that the wealthy Christians at Corinth were taking the common meal before the poor arrived, saving the bread and cup which were taken with the poor present, thus separating (illegitimately, according to this view) the meal from the so-called Eucharist.<sup>32</sup> Bornkamm subscribes to this view (though not in every detail). He proposes that it is the "sacralization" of the bread and cup apart from the common meal that Paul is correcting in v 29, and sees it as a "strange irony" that Paul is refuting the very thing of which the church would later be guilty when historically it abolished the common meal altogether.<sup>33</sup>

## II. THE LORD'S SUPPER AS DEFINED BY UNITY

Perhaps one of the clearest themes that emerges from this section of Paul's writings is his overarching concern for unity in the body when celebrating the Lord's Supper. Yet it would be a grave mistake to view this unity merely in metaphysical terms. All too often "we equate unity with union."<sup>34</sup> This, however, does not seem to be the case in Paul. Paul's concept of unity is one that must be worked out and expressed on a practical level. As Murphy-O'Connor puts it, "if

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<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., 2 Thess 3:6-13.

<sup>32</sup> Paul's recital of the Lord's Supper *paradosis* would then be seen as a corrective to show the intended order—bread, meal, cup. That Paul does not go into detail about the order is explained by the fact that he sees the order of the Lord's Supper as secondary to the more important issue of disunity at the Supper. It may be inferred from Paul's statement at the end of this section.

<sup>33</sup> Bornkamm, "Lord's Supper," 149.

<sup>34</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "Eucharist and Community," 373.

an explanation [of the body] in 'static' terms is thereby excluded, we are forced to consider an explanation in terms of 'function.'"<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, it is not so much the unity of the body universal that Paul is concerned with, but the unity of the body in each local assembly.<sup>36</sup> This unity is to be portrayed, in Paul's view, "when you come together as a church" (1 Cor 11:18), and, more specifically, "when you come together to eat" (vv 20, 33). It is against this unity that the Corinthians are acting in their practice of the Lord's Supper.

Paul's immediate concern, therefore, is to address their "divisions" and to reestablish unity. As already mentioned, the "divisions" (*schismata*) in v 18 are related to social status; they are divisions between rich and poor. The "divisions" (*haireseis*) of v 19, on the other hand, are not so easily explained. Why does Paul say "there must be divisions among you"? The answer, in part, lies in v 18 since v 19 begins with an explanatory *gar*.<sup>37</sup> Most commentators believe that Paul here intends an eschatological division; that is to say, the tares will eventually and inevitably be divided from the wheat and so much the better if it occurs now.<sup>38</sup> The phrase in v 18 ("to some extent I believe it") is variously interpreted. Fee, for example, thinks Paul acquired his information from some of the poor who were being excluded from the meal and who thus had a biased "view from below."<sup>39</sup> On this view Paul is acknowledging that his informants are not exactly impartial witnesses and so believes them "to some extent" but wants also to hear the "view from above." But Paul's tone throughout the rest of this section betrays no hint that he only partially believes the report, as though it were merely a matter of a misunderstanding between the rich and the poor that Paul must attempt to patch up. On the contrary, Paul's language toward the alleged violators is much too strong for someone who only half believes the report. Indeed, Paul

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>36</sup> Although Paul does not use the term here, he elsewhere uses "body" in reference to the local assembly (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-27), and specifically in the context of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor 10:17). See also P. T. O'Brien's discussion in "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 105-114, *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 538 n. 32

<sup>38</sup> So, Fee, *Corinthians*, 538-39; Bruce, *1 Corinthians*, 109; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 261-62; Héring, *Corinthians*, 112-13; and L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 157-58.

<sup>39</sup> Fee, *Corinthinas*, 537.

knows that “many are sick” and that “a number have fallen asleep” (v 30), and explains this epidemic as the consequence of their actions at the Lord’s Supper—not exactly the kind of language used by someone who is only half convinced that there is in fact such a violation. Barrett’s explanation, that Paul deemed his informants credible people but was unwilling “to credit so scandalous a story,”<sup>40</sup> Is much more plausible.

Grosheide takes *schismata* as a reference to personal opinions, so that, although Paul is against disunity in the body, he is equally against uniformity.<sup>41</sup> It seems unlikely though that this is Paul’s intent, since it requires too drastic a change of thought. As Barrett notes, there can be no significant change of meaning between *schismata* and *haireseis*, for “if there were such a change the connection of thought would break down.”<sup>42</sup>

Whatever view is to be adopted, it must adequately account for both *gar* in v 19 and *oun* in v 20. The word *gar* in v 19 explains either the report itself or Paul’s partial willingness to believe it (but it may be a combination of both). The word *oun* in v 20 introduces the consequence of the Corinthians’ *haireseis* in v 19. It is at this point that the difficulty arises for those who see *haireseis* as “eschatological divisions,” for in the first place it is difficult to see how eschatological divisions “explain” in any way the divisions between rich and poor at the Supper. Are we to assume that the wealthy Corinthians are not true believers and that they are even now making themselves manifest? What then is Paul’s point in vv 30-32 when he says that the reason many of the violators of the Supper are sick and many have died is precisely so that they “will not be condemned with the world”? To introduce the eschatological division of believers and unbelievers at this point does not fit well with the flow of Paul’s argument. Nor does this interpretation account well for *oun* in v 20. Why would the Supper cease to be the Lord’s Supper (v 20) simply because some unbelievers have made themselves manifest? In other words, if Paul sees these *haireseis* as an “eschatological necessity”<sup>43</sup> (and one that is ultimately good since it makes clear those who are “approved”),

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<sup>40</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 261.

<sup>41</sup> Grosheide, *Corinthians*, 266

<sup>42</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 261.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



then his conclusion in v 20 (which is one of rebuke—"it is not the Lord's Supper you eat") must seem odd to the Corinthians. It would be more in keeping with Paul's style if at this point he suggested the Corinthian believers separate themselves from the false Christians rather than to suggest they strive for unity with them.

On the whole it seems more natural to take Paul's statement in v 19 as one of irony or sarcasm. While it is true (as most commentators point out) that *schismata* in v 18 does not refer to Paul's previous discussion about "divisions" in 1:10-12 and 3:4, it does not at all follow that this must be the case with *haireseis* in v 19. It is likely that Paul is thinking of just such divisions and is in effect saying, "Oh yes, of course, I've forgotten; these divisions of yours are necessary so that everyone will know that it is your own little clique that has God's approval, and nobody else!" This view adequately accounts for *gar* (v 19) since the Corinthians' general proclivity toward "divisions" explains their divisions in the Lord's Supper as well, and *oun* since what follows from their divisions is the annulment of the Lord's Supper from their meals. It is quite probable that the sarcasm extends through v 22.

Paul now proceeds in vv 20-21 to define the Lord's Supper in terms of unity. The norms of society (according to which class divisions were expected) were influencing (if not dictating) the manner in which the Corinthians were behaving at the Lord's Table.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, these norms were destroying "the very unity which that meal proclaimed." Paul's primary concern here is not the Lord's Supper *per se* but the significance of the Lord's Supper as an expression of unity. When Paul says in v 21 that the Corinthians' behavior is tantamount to despising the "church of God," he means not so much that the "have-nots" are being ill-affected (although this is certainly true in light of his additional statement, "shame those who have nothing") as that the "church" as a community, as a result of abuse, is being deprived of its essential unity.<sup>45</sup> A celebration of the Lord's Supper apart from this corresponding unity is not the Lord's Supper at all. The rationale for Paul's statement is explained by the premium he places on the unity-aspect of the Supper. Not only is unity one focus of the Supper, but, for Paul, "the Supper is the focus of Christian unity."<sup>46</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>44</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 544.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 153

any celebration of the Supper without this unity (regardless of the title the Corinthians might give to it) is simply one's *own* supper (v 21).

### III. THE STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S ARGUMENT IN 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16-17

Paul's mention of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 10:16-17, although decidedly incidental to his discussion about the consequences of idolatry, reveals a significant aspect of the Supper, both in its practice and in its theology, that would, apart from this section, have remained unknown; namely, that there is "one loaf" from which all partake. Before exploring this aspect, however, it will be profitable (if we are to avoid the erroneous interpretations which plague this passage) to examine the context in which it is found.

Paul's line of thought begins in 10:1. The Israelites were identified as the people of God. Their identifying mark was bound up in their association with Moses and the exodus from Egypt. They were in effect "baptized" by means of this relationship (v 2). There is no need here to see this "baptism" as anything more than a convenient parallel between the Israelites and the Corinthians. Properly speaking, this was not a baptism at all. Paul is merely trying to make the point that the Israelites were identified as the people of God no less than the Corinthians are presently. His point is extended in a further analogy. The Israelites identity as the people of God can also be seen in the provision of food and drink supplied by God himself. Paul calls it "spiritual food" (*pneumatikon brōma*) and "spiritual drink" (*pneumatikon epion*) intentionally to parallel the Lord's Supper of the Corinthians, just as he has previously paralleled the Israelites' "baptism" to the Corinthians' Christian baptism.<sup>47</sup> Paul's point of these parallels is revealed in vv 5-6, and the application for the Corinthians extends to v 11. Even though the Israelites retained their identity as God's people, it did not follow that they were beyond God's judgment; for, as the historical account clearly indicates, "they were laid low in the wilderness" (v 5). So also, the Corinthians are not beyond

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<sup>47</sup> So, among others, E. Käsemann, "Pauline Doctrine," 114; also A. T. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical on the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 202.

God's judgment even though they are identified as God's people. It is therefore important for Paul that the Corinthians keep a close watch on their lives. The overarching theme running through this section (which began in chapter 8) is idolatry. Paul mentions this first in his list of applications (v 7) and then mentions other activities in vv 7-10 which must be seen in relation to idolatry, perhaps even as consequential to idolatry (viz., orgies [v 7], immorality [v 8], rebellion [v 9], and complaining [v 10]). He ends his list of applications in vv 12-13 with a warning and a promise: a warning to those who flippantly consider their status as "Christians" as a guarantee of indestructibility—they must "take heed"; and a promise to those who in humility acknowledge their frail condition—they must take courage. The promise, that when tempted by idolatry (and its related activities) God will provide "a way out," applies to those (but only to those) who are not "looking for the *way in*."<sup>48</sup>

Paul begins in v 14 to come to the heart of what he has to say. The Corinthians thought it harmless to participate in the banquet ceremonies of pagan gods. They were, after all, "knowledgeable" that there is only one God and that there is no such thing as an idol (8:1-6), and that food is made for the stomach (6:13) and is not to be rejected (1 Tim 4:3-5). Therefore, it must follow that no harm can be done by eating in an idol's temple. But Paul rebuffs this logic of the Corinthians. While it is true that an "idol is nothing" (8:4), it does not at all follow that there is no force at work behind the worship of an idol. As Bornkamm puts it, these "demonic *non-entities*" are, nevertheless, "*demonic non-entities*."<sup>49</sup> Yet on what principle is it true that a Christian is ill-affected by his participation in a pagan feast? Could it not be argued that, demons or no demons, as long as one understands what is behind it all and refrains from the worship-aspect of the pagan feast, one could conceivably partake of the food without compromising his Christian faith? That is what Paul answers in vv 15-22, and it is here that his discussion is significant for the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>48</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 229.

<sup>49</sup> Bornkamm, "Lord's Supper," 125.

### A. The Meaning of *Koinōnia*

Paul chooses two scenarios by which he may illustrate the magnitude of the Corinthians' practice of participation in the pagan feast. On the one hand, there is the nation of Israel; those who eat the sacrifices become sharers in the altar. On the other hand, there is the Church; those who eat of the bread and drink from the cup become sharers in Christ. The question remains: What is the meaning of this *koinōnia*? Is it communion (vertically with a deity), or participation (horizontally with other participants)?

A. T. Robertson subscribes to the former. He draws a distinction between *koinōnia* in these verses and *metechō* in v 17 (the former means "having the whole," while the latter means "having a share").<sup>50</sup> The basis for this view customarily comes from the papyri where there is evidence of invitations to the feast of one god or another.<sup>51</sup> On this view the worshipper has mystical communion with the deity at whose table he is eating. Therefore, the Christian (or anyone else for that matter), when he partakes of the Lord's Supper, has this kind of communion with Christ. The meaning of *koinōnia*, therefore, is to be seen in light of the pagan understanding of communion with a deity.

Robertson is somewhat of a maverick in this regard, since almost all recent scholarship seems to be in disagreement with his view.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, almost no one subscribes to either view by itself. The majority of scholarship has instead come down somewhere in the middle. Wainwright concedes that Robertson's view is indeed a starting point for the meaning of this word, but it is only that and nothing more.<sup>53</sup> C. T. Craig has noted that in each case of the word *koinōnia* (or its derivative) in this passage the noun which follows is always in the genitive. He sees significance in this and in the fact that Paul does not use the preposition "with" (*meta*) in any of these cases, indicating that the idea here is not strictly association *with* another person but "participation in something in which others also participate."<sup>54</sup> The difference is that the former is a one-to-one

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<sup>50</sup> Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians*, 212.

<sup>51</sup> G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscription and Papyri Published in 1976* (North Ryde, Aust: Macquarie Univ, 1981), 5-9.

<sup>52</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 446-47; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 231-32; and Morris, *Corinthians*, 146.

<sup>53</sup> Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 115.

<sup>54</sup> C. T. Craig, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Introduction and Exegesis* (New York, NY:

relationship between the participant and the deity, whereas the latter is a one-to-many relationship between the participant and the rest of the community who are participating in the same thing.

This is essentially the view of most scholars. There is no real alternative between the ideas of communion and participation. Both ideas are implied.<sup>55</sup> The participants' *koinōnia* is with one another, but the "basis and focus" of this *koinōnia* are bound up in their common interest (in the case of a Christian) in Christ.<sup>56</sup> *Metechō* in v 17, therefore, needs to be seen almost as a synonym of *koinōnia*.<sup>57</sup> Any view that sees *koinōnia* as referring only to communion with a deity must break down in v 17; for there it is clear that Paul intends a common participation. In the case of Israel, those who sacrifice at the altar become *koinōnoi* or "sharers" (with one another<sup>58</sup>) of the altar (v 18). Certainly, this does not exclude communion with the deity; but neither can this be the primary idea, for the object of the common participation is the "altar," not God. What it does exclude is the idea that by eating the religious meal the participants are actually eating the deity.<sup>59</sup> If for no other reason than this, "modern translations have rightly abandoned the use of the term 'communion' in this verse."<sup>60</sup>

Since we have shown what is involved in the word *koinōnia*, it remains to see what the basis of this *koinōnia* is for the Christian. This may be adduced from v 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation of the body of Christ?"

In the first instance it must be noted that Christian *koinōnia* is "of the blood of Christ" and "of the body of Christ". As noted above, it is significant that Paul does not use the preposition *meta*; it is simply fellowship "of the blood/body of Christ." The "body" and "blood" of Christ likely refer to Christ's own physical body and blood given up in death, not the elements of the Lord's Supper by which they

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Abingdon Press, 1957), 114.

<sup>55</sup> W. A. Sebothoma, "Koinonia in 1 Corinthians 10:16," *NeoT* 24 (1990): 66; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1975), 171; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 231.

<sup>56</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 467.

<sup>57</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 233.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>59</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 467.

<sup>60</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 15

are represented; they are intended as metonyms for “the benefits of Christ’s death.”<sup>61</sup>

## B. The Significance of “The Cup/One Bread”

The phrase, “the cup of blessing,” may come from, as Kasper argues, a “modified form of Jewish table customs,”<sup>62</sup> but more likely comes from a Passover background. The presence of the first-person plural in both “we bless” and “we break” makes it likely that Paul does not intend to limit this practice with the cup and bread to Corinth alone, but rather suggests that he has all his churches in mind.<sup>63</sup> He is in effect quoting “commonly accepted belief.”<sup>64</sup> There is no significance for liturgical form in the fact that Paul reverses the usual order of the bread/cup to cup/bread. Marshall rightly ascribes the unusual order to the fact that Paul “wanted to make a point about the bread rather than about the cup.”<sup>65</sup>

But just what is the point that Paul makes about the bread? Paul goes beyond the mere fact that it is a participation in the body of Christ and, in addition, shows its significance for unity. There is *one* loaf of bread in the Lord’s Supper (v 17). This one loaf of bread, according to Paul, somehow creates unity within the body (“*because* there is one loaf of bread, we who are many are one body”). As if to prevent someone from downplaying the force of “because,” Paul adds: “*for* we all partake of the one loaf of bread.” There can be no mistaking Paul’s meaning here, and it is doubtful that the grammar can be taken any other way.<sup>66</sup> Paul believes there is theological significance in the singularity of the loaf of bread. It is important to Paul that there is an expression of unity in the body (not merely a static concept of unity); this is accomplished by all partaking of one loaf of

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<sup>61</sup> M. J. Harris, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” in *In God’s Community*, (Wheaton, IL: Shaw, 1978), 22.

<sup>62</sup> Walter Kasper, “The Unity and Multiplicity of Aspects in the Eucharist,” *Communio* 12 (1985): 116.

<sup>63</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 232.

<sup>64</sup> Calvin L. Porter, “An Interpretation of Paul’s Lord’s Supper Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11:17-34,” *Encounter* 50 (1989): 37.

<sup>65</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 119.

<sup>66</sup> “He gives the reason why the breaking of bread is a means of sharing in the body of Christ...Sharing the one loaf makes us one body.” A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament*, SBT (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1952), 70.

bread.<sup>67</sup> Harris' assertion that the single loaf and single cup "expressively symbolize the unity of believers"<sup>68</sup> is true in itself, but does not go far enough. Paul does not say that we partake of one loaf of bread *because we are one body*; on the contrary, we are one body *because we partake of one loaf of bread*. As Wainwright notes, the bread "both *signifies* and *causes* churchly unity" (emphasis his).<sup>69</sup> The force of *hoti* ("because") and *gar* ("for") together makes it clear that Paul sees the singularity of the loaf as a *cause* of this unity, not merely its symbol.

The same may be said about the cup. Although Paul does not specifically assign a numeric value to the cup, the presence of the article (*to*) and the parallel with the loaf *suggests that (as with the bread) there is only one cup*.<sup>70</sup> *Potērion* ("cup") is almost certainly intended to stand for both the cup itself and the contents within (viz., the wine). When each local assembly gathers together to partake of the bread and the cup, the members are made one body by virtue of their common participation in the bread and cup:

Because all have eaten portions of the same element, they have become a unity in which they have come as close to one another as members of the same body, as if the bodily boundaries between and among people had been transcended.<sup>71</sup>

Paul's concern then in this and the ensuing verses (vv 18-21) is to show the oneness of any given religious body (whether Israel, the church, or pagan religions) at a religious feast, of which the Christian feast serves as an example. This oneness means that anyone who thus joins himself with the participants of the feast becomes one with that religious body, and hence, becomes one with the activities of that religious body.

Whether this oneness is metaphysical or merely representative cannot easily be determined, although Paul's insistence in v 20 ("I

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>68</sup> Harris, "Baptism," 25.

<sup>69</sup> Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 117.

<sup>70</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 121. Of course, the article in both cases (v 16) could point to the kind of cup/bread that is being consumed without reference to the number of cup/bread. However, this use of the article seems to be precluded by Paul's insistence in v 17 that there is "one" loaf of bread. This singularity, by extension, seems to apply naturally to the cup also.

<sup>71</sup> Theissen, *Social Setting*, 165.

do not want you to be participants in demons”) favors a metaphysical oneness. In either case, this oneness must be seen as an essential quality of the Lord’s Supper. Its cause in the Christian feast (i.e., the singularity of the loaf and cup) must therefore also be of an essential quality. It is to this quality that we may now turn.

### C. Implications for Communal Form in the Lord’s Supper

As we have already seen, the elements of the Lord’s Supper (viz., the bread and wine) are, at least for Paul, in the form of a single loaf of bread and a single cup of wine. We have also seen that Paul attaches theological significance to this form of the elements and that the form itself somehow *causes* unity to occur within the local body of believers as each member partakes of the elements. But what if this form is not followed? What are the implications when the singularity depicted by the one loaf and one cup is absent?

According to Harris, a sacrament “dramatizes the central truths of the Christian faith.”<sup>72</sup> If this is true, then the correct form of the sacrament is of importance; for an incorrect form would not accurately convey the central truth that it intends to dramatize. If, for instance, Paul intends for the singularity of the bread and cup to portray oneness in the body, then the absence of that singularity necessarily implies the absence of a “visible proof” of oneness.<sup>73</sup> In fact, much more is at stake than mere portrayal. Since, as Paul argues, the singularity of the bread and cup *causes* unity in the body, then the absence of this singularity may imply the absence of bodily unity in the Lord’s Supper.<sup>74</sup>

Against this view, Marshall, while seeing value in maintaining the symbol of one loaf and one cup, allows modifications of this form where the form may be impractical. For larger settings he suggests

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<sup>72</sup> Harris, “Baptism,” 14.

<sup>73</sup> G. V. Jourdan, “*Koinōnia* in 1 Cor 10:16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948): 117.

<sup>74</sup> If there are other causes of bodily oneness that can replace this cause, Paul does not mention them. Of course, this may simply be one avenue of many. On the other hand, while it is true that other factors contribute to the unity of the body (love, acceptance, tolerance, etc.) it may well be that the kind of oneness Paul mentions in this passage is of a different sort altogether. The “table of the Lord” (v 21), the *koinōnia*, the bread and cup, and the act of participation all work together to produce this oneness in a unique way. Perhaps, then, it is more accurate to speak in specific terms of eucharistic unity rather than bodily unity in general. If this is the case, it seems no other avenue could easily replace the avenue of the singularity of bread and cup.



simultaneous participation.<sup>75</sup> However, it is not completely clear how simultaneous participation would convey adequately the symbol of unity which participation in one loaf and one cup pictures. After all, Paul states that one reason all of the participants of each local assembly<sup>76</sup> are one body is because they all partake of one loaf and one cup. Bread that is presented in a broken form<sup>77</sup> does not symbolize unity but division. The same holds true of wine that is pre-poured into individual cups.

Paul's words seem to demand singularity of the bread and cup before the form can accurately *portray* or *cause* unity. It is not enough simply to have the elements of the bread and cup; these elements must also be capable of expressing their intended theological function. Any other form, while perhaps more practical, does injustice to the theological significance Paul attaches to the oneness-aspect of the elements. To the extent that Paul's concept of oneness in the Lord's Supper is not portrayed via the proper form, to that extent the form is impoverished in terms of its ability to cause (or even to symbolize) the unity that Paul sees as so essential to the Lord's Supper.

#### IV. THE UNITY-ASPECT IN THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

The unity-aspect of the Lord's Supper was carried over to the first few generations of Christianity after the apostles.<sup>78</sup> Many of the early church fathers reflect the same teaching of oneness in their writings as Paul does in his. Ignatius is one such example. Although very brief (and certainly by no means descriptive), Ignatius does nevertheless indicate an adherence to the Pauline concept of the singularity of the elements. Within the closing of his epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius records the following:

Assemble yourselves together in common, everyone of you severally, man by man, in grace, in one faith and one Jesus

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<sup>75</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 156

<sup>76</sup> By "assembly" is meant the normal and regular local gathering of believers to partake of the Lord's Supper.

<sup>77</sup> E.g., the broken crackers that serve as the "bread" in a majority of denominations today.

<sup>78</sup> According to Eugene LaVerdiere, "The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church—IX: One Flesh, One Cup, One Altar," *Emmanuel* 100 (1994): 519.

Christ, who after the flesh was of David's race, who is Son of Man and Son of God, to the end that you may obey the bishop and the presbytery without distraction of mind; *breaking one bread*, which is the medicine of immortality and the antidote that we should not die but live forever in Jesus Christ.<sup>79</sup>

Although Ignatius does not here mention the singularity of the cup, he does so elsewhere in his letter to the Philadelphians:

Be careful therefore to observe one eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup into union in His blood; there is one altar as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons my fellow-servants), that whatsoever you do, you may do it after God.<sup>80</sup>

It seems evident from these two passages that Ignatius (and the churches to which he writes) sees importance in the singularity of both bread and cup. While Ignatius does not expand on that singularity it seems likely that he has in mind the same theology of the Lord's Supper as did Paul in 1 Cor 10:16-17. Ignatius makes a connection between the "oneness" of the faith, the Son of God, the flesh of Jesus, and the altar with that of the bread and cup in the Lord's Supper. In this regard he seems to go beyond Paul, perhaps in an attempt to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus over against his Gnostic opponents.<sup>81</sup> In any case, Ignatius believes that the church universal is partaking of one loaf and one cup within the Lord's Supper. This demonstrates that the unity-aspect was understood as an integral part of the Supper even within the post-apostolic church.

This emphasis on "oneness" is also apparent in *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, in which he records the words of the bishop who presides over the Supper: "And we ask you that you would send your Holy Spirit...and that you would grant it to all the saints who partake, that they may be united."<sup>82</sup> For Hippolytus the

<sup>79</sup> Ign. *Eph.* 20, in J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 142.

<sup>80</sup> Ign. *Phld.* 4, *ibid.*, 154.

<sup>81</sup> Ign. *Smyrn.* 2-3, *ibid.*, 156-57.

<sup>82</sup> *Apostolic Tradition* 4:12, quoted in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1963), 76. While Hippolytus does not specifically mention the "oneness" of the elements, his words here do reveal his belief that

unity of the body of believers is caused by the Holy Spirit through participation in the Eucharist. It would not be too far wrong to say that, for Hippolytus, unity is the goal of the Lord's Supper. At the very least, it is clear that the aspect of unity was an important part of the celebration of the Supper.

Another patriarch, Cyril of Alexandria, in commenting on 1 Cor 10:17, says: "If we all partake of the one bread, we are all become together one body."<sup>83</sup> While most of Cyril's writings on the Lord's Supper address aspects other than oneness (indeed, even the one before us is not exegeted by him to any significant degree), the underlying assumptions are nevertheless apparent. Cyril assumes the same causal relationship of the bread and unity as does Paul. In similar fashion Cyprian writes:

When the Savior takes the bread that is made from the coming together of many grains, and calls it his body, he shows the unity of our people, which the bread symbolizes. And when he takes the wine that is pressed from many grapes and grains and forms a single liquid, he shows that our flock is composed of many who have been brought into unity.<sup>84</sup>

Some have seen in Cyprian's words an allusion to the *Didache*. Referring to the bread of the Eucharist, the writer of the *Didache* states: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may Thy church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom."<sup>85</sup> While there are similarities in analogies used, and while Cyprian may very well have the words of the *Didache* in mind, the focus of each is decidedly different. For while the focus of Cyprian is a *present, spiritual* unity within the body of Christ, the focus of the *Didache* is clearly an *eschatological* reunion (i.e., a gathering together at the end of the age).

Already we are beginning to see a change of emphasis in the Eucharist, from the bread as the cause of unity to the bread as a symbol of unity. This is true of both bread and wine. Indeed, as one

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participation in the Eucharist produces unity in the body.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 30.

<sup>84</sup> Epist. 69, 5:2, in Raymond Johanny, "Cyprian of Carthage," in *The Eucharist of the Early Christians* (New York, NY: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1978), 172.

<sup>85</sup> *Did.* 9, in Lightfoot and Harmer, 232.

surveys the views of the fathers on this issue one finds a variety of thought about the unity aspect in the Eucharist; from the bread as the cause of unity among the members in each local assembly, to the bread as the cause of unity among the members of the church universal, to the bread as the cause of unity between the church and Christ, to the bread as a mere symbol of unity.

Yet it must be said with equal force that all the fathers who speak on this issue see significance in the physical form of the bread and wine—that it consists in one loaf and one cup. This is clear in the case of Cyprian from his insistence that the bread symbolizes the “unity of our people,” and that the wine “forms a single liquid,” and that this too symbolizes the “many” who are “brought into unity.”

One final father that is worthy of our consideration is Chrysostom. Of all the early fathers who deal with this aspect of the Eucharist, Chrysostom is far and away the most detailed in his exegesis of the oneness of the loaf and cup. In his explanation of Paul’s words in 1 Cor 10:16-17 he writes:

For what is the bread? The body of Christ. What do they become who partake of it? The body of Christ: not many bodies but *one body*. Many grains are made into *one bread* so that the grains appear no more at all, though they are still there. In their joined state their diversity is no longer discernible. In the same way we are also bound up with one another and with Christ. You are not nourished from one body and the next man from a different body, but all from one and the same body. For this reason he adds, “We have all partaken of one bread.” If we eat of the same bread and so *become the same*, why then do we not show the same love and in this also *become one*?<sup>86</sup>

Chrysostom, like Cyril and the writer of the *Didache*, uses the analogy of the individual grains of bread which collectively become one loaf to illustrate how the bread of the Eucharist creates and symbolizes unity among believers who partake of the bread. Unlike Cyril, Chrysostom sees the oneness of the bread (and participation in it) as the cause of unity among believers, not just its symbol. This is especially evident in his assertion that those who partake of the bread “become the same.” That he means “oneness” here seems clear from

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<sup>86</sup> *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 24:4, quoted in Elert, 28.

the parallel about love: “and in this also become one,” hence using the words “same” and “one” synonymously. Those who partake of the bread, therefore (according to Chrysostom), become one.

What was said earlier of Cyril of Alexandria may also be said of the church fathers collectively; namely, that while their writings on the Eucharist (with few exceptions) generally do not include detailed analysis of its unity aspect, what they do include clearly reveals that they see the unity aspect as both vital and widely accepted by the church as a whole. To that extent they testify to the adherence of the early church to Paul’s idea of oneness in the Lord’s Supper.



# THOSE WHO ARE COUNTED WORTHY (LUKE 20:35)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

**I**n Luke 20:34-38, the Lord responds to a question by the Sadducees regarding the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees denied the bodily resurrection and gave an example of how absurd it is to believe in it. Jesus answers them:

The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.

There are a number of interesting elements in this response. However, this article will concentrate on one in particular. How are we to interpret the phrase, “those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection of the dead”? It appears Jesus is saying that if a person is going to be resurrected, he must be considered worthy of the honor. This implies that works of some kind are involved.

Dillow makes the comment that the response of the Lord here is “problematic for all interpreters.”<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, different views of the Lord’s meaning have been offered.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servants Kings* (Monument, CO: Paniym Group, 2012), 1006.

## II. DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS

Many assume that Jesus is speaking here of the requirements for entering the kingdom of God, and that this involves effort. If we take this verse in isolation from the rest of Scriptures, it is easy to see how some would conclude that a believer can lose his salvation if this effort is not present in his life. Matthew Henry takes this view. He says that even though a person is saved from hell by grace, reaching the world to come involves difficulty, and the believer is in danger of “coming short.” He must “run,” that is, live his life in such a way as to obtain final salvation.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, in a similar fashion, there are those who argue this verse is saying that if a person claims to be a believer, but there are insufficient works in that person’s life, this lack of works demonstrates he is not a Christian at all. He was never spiritually saved in the first place. Van Oosterzee says that only those in whom the “moral conditions” for the attainment of resurrection are found will be counted worthy of it.<sup>3</sup>

Both of these views are unsatisfactory. They both require works in order to enter into the kingdom of God. Eternal salvation is completely by grace apart from works. It is a free gift. As such, it cannot be lost, and one does not prove he has it by doing good works (John 4:13-14; Eph 2:8-9).

A more Biblical approach, at least soteriologically speaking, is found in the view that the Lord is speaking about those who will be raptured with the Church. Walvoord points out that those who hold to a partial Rapture use this verse for support. They maintain that while all believers will be in the kingdom, only those believers who are faithful to the Lord will be taken in the Rapture prior to the

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<sup>2</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1897. Thomas Schreiner takes a similar view in regards to gaining “final salvation,” even though he would not say a believer loses salvation. See, Thomas R. Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>J. J. Van Oosterzee, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 309; Ajith Fernando, “Heaven for Persecuted Saints,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 18 (2014): 127–28. The most popular book reflecting that view today would be John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).



Tribulation—not all believers will be counted worthy to be a part of the Rapture.<sup>4</sup>

A related view is expressed by G. H. Lang. He believed there would also be a resurrection which only some believers would experience. Only faithful Christians, those who are worthy, would be resurrected to enter into the Millennial Kingdom. All believers, however, would be a part of the eternal state.<sup>5</sup>

These last two views, while maintaining the freeness of eternal life as a gift that cannot be lost, are defective as well. The Bible does not teach two separate resurrections for Christians, and 1 Thess 5:1-10 states that all Christians will be taken in the Rapture. In addition, Luke 20 is not discussing the Rapture of the Church.

A more satisfactory view is that the phrase “counted worthy” has no connection with the works of the believer. All those who have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life are declared righteous by God. Since the believer is justified in God’s eyes through faith by God’s grace, he is “worthy” to be in the kingdom (Rom 3:21-24).<sup>6</sup> The believer is worthy because of Christ’s work on his behalf.

While this last view is possible, this article will explore another option. This alternative interpretation seems to better fit the context of Luke 20 and finds additional support in the phrases used by the Lord.

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<sup>4</sup> John F. Walvoord, “Premillennialism and the Tribulation: Partial Rapture Theory,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112 (1955): 200-201.

<sup>5</sup> G. H. Lang, *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks* (Haysville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1997), 72.

<sup>6</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “Harmony with God: Part 3 of 3,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 9, (2003):35–36; Alberto S. Valdés, “The Gospel According to Luke,” *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 165; Robert N. Wilkin, “Are Believers Worthy of Entering the Kingdom?,” <https://faithalone.org/magazine/y1989/89june3.html>. Accessed September 4, 2020; Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 502. Stein is a little confusing in discussing his view. He says that those who are worthy are those who enter the kingdom through “repentance and faith.” He does not explain what repentance means. If he means a lifestyle of turning from sins, he would align himself with the view that good works are necessary to prove one’s worthiness of entering the kingdom.

### III. THE CONTEXT OF LUKE 20 SUGGESTS THE ISSUE IS SANCTIFICATION

None of the Synoptic Gospels were written to unbelievers. The Gospel of Luke, for example, was written to a believer named Theophilus who had been instructed in Christian doctrine (Luke 1:1-4). Therefore, the Synoptics contain very little information on how to be justified by faith or how to receive eternal life as a free gift through faith alone. The reason is obvious. They were all written to people who were already justified and already had eternal life. They didn't need to be told how to be spiritually saved. Hodges believes that Luke 18:9-14 is perhaps the only clear presentation of justification by faith in these Gospels. In addition, he believes Luke 20:35 is one of the very few passages in the Synoptics where it is even implicitly taught.<sup>7</sup>

However, the context of Luke 20 probably argues differently. There is nothing there that suggests Jesus is telling His listeners how to come to faith. After the Lord tells the religious leaders that judgment is coming upon them and the nation (20:9-18), there are a number of confrontations between Him and these leaders. They question Him about taxes and the resurrection (20:21-38). He rebukes them for their religious pride (20:45-47). He then contrasts these leaders with a poor widow in the temple (21:1-4).

In each of these cases, the Lord is teaching discipleship truths. There is a difference between salvation from hell and discipleship. The former is free. The latter involves works. Not all believers are disciples. Disciples are those believers who follow the Lord in obedience and desire to follow His teachings and example.

In the question about taxes, Jesus says that disciples should give to God what belongs to Him (20:25). When He rebukes the leaders for their pride, He specifically speaks to the disciples and tells them not to follow the example of these leaders who loved the praise of men (20:45). In the example of the poor widow, it is also clear that He is speaking to His disciples. They should follow her example. She sacrificially gave to the Lord. In all these confrontations, the Lord is telling the disciples how to live, not how to receive eternal life.

In the Lord's response concerning the resurrection, the question posed by the Sadducees is also related to discipleship. It involves

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<sup>7</sup>Hodges, "Harmony," 36.

Levirate marriage. In Deut 25:5-10, the Lord commanded that if a man was married and died without children, his surviving brother is to take his widow and raise up children in the dead brother's name. This custom was practiced in some form even before the giving of the Law. It was a way to keep the dead brother's name alive through the child who would be produced, and it was a way to take care of widows as well. Widows without any children were in dire financial straits.

But this was a costly endeavor for the surviving brother. Any child produced through the union would inherit the dead brother's inheritance, which would otherwise go to the surviving brother. In addition, the surviving brother would have to pay for the upkeep of the widow. Not surprisingly, many men in this situation preferred not to assume this responsibility (Gen 38:6-10; Ruth 4:1-6). In fact, it appears that it was rarely done and was actually discouraged by religious leaders.

But the Sadducees give a hypothetical example of extreme devotion to God's commandment in this matter (Luke 20:28-33). There were seven brothers. The first married a woman and died without children. Each brother in turn took the widow as a wife to raise up children in their dead brother's name. They all died without producing any children. The Sadducees wanted to know whose wife she would be in the resurrection.

The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection and used this example to show how ridiculous it was to believe in it. It would be impossible to sort out such a mess in marital relations! In addition, the Sadducees were rich and focused on this world. They were implying that the sacrifices these brothers made to obey the Lord were foolish. What is the point of obeying what the Lord has commanded when it comes with such a high cost, if there is no resurrection?

Even though the faith of these brothers is not mentioned, it is assumed they were believers.<sup>8</sup> It is part of the story. The Sadducees assume that, if there was a resurrection, these men would be part of it. In His response, the Lord makes the same assumption. Others in the Gospel of Luke who are given as examples of believers without being described specifically as having saving faith would include the

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<sup>8</sup>In the OT, people were saved by believing in the coming Messiah for eternal life. These men would be examples of that faith.

centurion of Luke 7:2-9 and the widow of Luke 21:1-4. All of these people paint a picture of how a disciple of the Lord should live.

The lives of these brothers are indeed commendable. While the religious leaders devour the livelihood of widows (20:45-47), these brothers take compassion on the widow of their brother, at great cost to themselves. They do what God requires of them (20:25).

The point here is that the very question which is posed to the Lord does not deal with how a person “goes to heaven.” It deals with how a person who believes should live. It is a question that involves discipleship truths. As will be seen, this is how the Lord also concludes His response to the Sadducees. He says that they all live for God (v 38). In referring to these brothers, the Lord is speaking of people who do just that.

It is not only the context which suggests that the Lord’s response deals with Christian living and not how one is spiritually saved. The words used by the Lord in His answer do as well.

#### **IV. WORDS OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE LORD’S RESPONSE**

When Jesus responds to the question of the Sadducees in regard to these brothers, He uses a number of phrases that strongly suggest He is discussing discipleship and not simply describing people who will enter the kingdom. These words point to the fact that those who live lives of obedience to the Lord will not only be in the kingdom, but will be rewarded in that kingdom.

These phrases are: “counted worthy;” “attain that age;” “sons of God;” “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;” and “live to Him.”

##### **A. Counted Worthy (v 35)**

The Lord refers to those who are “counted worthy.” While, as discussed above, some take this to refer to those who are declared righteous by God through faith and to have nothing to do with works, the way this word is used in the NT suggests otherwise.

The Greek verb is *kataxioō*. It is a fairly rare word, only occurring three other times in the NT (Luke 21:36;<sup>9</sup> Acts 5:41; 2 Thess 1:5).

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<sup>9</sup> The Majority Text here has the verb, but the Critical Text does not. The Critical Text reads

The word has the meaning of considering somebody worthy to receive some privilege, benefit, or recognition and clearly carries the idea that this is the result of something the person has done.<sup>10</sup>

The other three instances of the verb in the NT bear this out. In Luke 21:36 the Lord is talking about the coming Great Tribulation on the earth. Believers are to live righteously in light of that coming day (v 34). He tells them to be alert and not to live immorally. They should live this way in order to be counted worthy to stand before the Son of God without shame when He returns. This is a reference to a positive experience at the Judgment Seat of Christ.<sup>11</sup> It is there that the Lord will evaluate the works of the believer in order to determine what rewards he will receive in eternity.

Acts 5:41 also involves works of obedience. The apostles were obedient to the Lord and continued preaching about Him even though the religious authorities commanded them not to do so. The leaders flogged them as a result. The apostles rejoiced that they had been “counted worthy” to suffer for the Lord.

In 2 Thess 1:5, Paul also speaks of suffering for the Lord (v 4). The believers at Thessalonica are given this opportunity in order that they may be “counted worthy” of the kingdom of God. One does not have to suffer in order to “go to heaven.” This verse is talking about rewards and an inheritance in the coming kingdom. It refers to reigning with Christ.<sup>12</sup> To do so, one must suffer with Him (2 Tim 2:12). As will be seen, this use of the verb in 2 Thess 1:5 is especially relevant to its use in Luke 20:35

An example of the Greek verb outside the NT also supports this meaning. The Fourth Book of Maccabees, written about the same time as the NT, speaks of the sufferings of Jews, including martyrdom, during the time of the Maccabees. Such sufferings made those who went through them “worthy” of a divine inheritance.<sup>13</sup>

In Luke 20:35 when the Lord speaks of those who are counted worthy, the verb used strongly suggests that they are worthy *because*

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“may be able.” The Critical Text is the reason many English translations are rendered that way.

<sup>10</sup> BDAG, 523.

<sup>11</sup> Valdés, “Luke,” 167.

<sup>12</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, “2 Thessalonians,” *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 468.

<sup>13</sup> *4 Maccabees* 18:3.

*of their works.* The sacrifices paid by the seven hypothetical brothers in the question of the Sadducees also support this view. They certainly did good works.

### **B. Attain That Age (v 35)**

The Lord speaks of those who are considered worthy to “attain” that age. The Greek verb *tunchanō*, “attain,” means to gain something, and in the NT it often means to gain it through effort.<sup>14</sup> In Heb 8:6, for example, Christ “obtained” a better ministry than the high priests of the OT because He suffered and offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross.

In 2 Tim 2:10, Paul exerts great effort so that the Jewish people would “obtain” a salvation that includes eternal reward (glory). This reward is received by enduring suffering with Christ (v 12).<sup>15</sup> The reward is reigning with Christ. While all believers will be in the kingdom, not all believers will obtain this privilege.

Of particular interest is the use of the word in Heb 11:35. This is the only place in the NT, other than Luke 20:35, where it is used in connection with the word “resurrection.” The author of Hebrews speaks of believers who endured torture and martyrdom in order to “obtain” a better resurrection. This “better” resurrection, as in 2 Timothy 2, is the reward of reigning with Christ.<sup>16</sup> Some believers will have a better resurrection because they will gain/attain this reward.

Those who are considered worthy will gain “that age.” The Lord says they will also experience the resurrection from the dead. There is a difference between attaining that age and being resurrected. *Attaining that age refers to gaining an inheritance in the age to come.* This would also, as in 2 Tim 2:10-12 and Heb 11:35, refer to reigning with Christ in that world.<sup>17</sup> Those who reign with Him will reign over a certain number of cities (Luke 19:16-26). That is what they will

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<sup>14</sup> BDAG, 1019.

<sup>15</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, “2 Timothy,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. by Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 492.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth W. Yates, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 188. In Hebrews, the word to describe a believer who will reign with Christ is *metochos*, which means a close partner.

<sup>17</sup> The word for “age” is translated “world” in Rom 12:2.

“obtain” in that age. They will actually own a part of the kingdom. *But this is only given to those who walk in obedience to the Lord.*

### **C. Sons of God (v 36)**

These victorious believers are also called “sons of God” by the Lord. In Rom 8:14-16 Paul makes it clear that there is a difference between being a child (*teknon*) of God and a son (*huios*) of God. All believers are children of God, but only those believers who live by the power of the Spirit in this life will experience the exalted status of being “sons of God” and “sons of the resurrection” in the life to come. All believers are sons of God in their position (e.g., Gal 3:26; 4:1-7). However, in Romans, and here in Luke 20:36, sonship is experiential. That is, only mature believers are sons of God in their experience now. They reflect the character of their spiritual Father. And in the coming kingdom, they will enjoy an exalted experience as *sons of God*.

Paul says that those believers who walk by the Spirit will suffer with Christ. The outcome of that life is that they will reign with the Lord (Rom 8:17). Jesus is “the” Son of God who will rule over the age to come. Those who are obedient and suffer with Him will be sons who rule with Him.

The Apostle John makes this point in the Book of Revelation. John wrote five books in the NT and never calls a believer a “son” of God. He always uses the word “child.” The only exception to that rule is Rev 21:7. John says that in eternity the believer who overcomes will inherit (gain!) the world to come and will be called the “son” of God.

The Lord Himself also spoke of the requirement to be a son of God. Those believers who are peacemakers will be called by this title (Matt 5:9). It is difficult to determine in Matthew 5 if the Lord means they will be called sons in this age or the age to come. We could say that both are true. As believers walk by the Spirit, they manifest a righteous life and can be called the sons of God now. However, no believer can do this perfectly since we all live in a body of flesh. In the resurrection, that limitation will no longer exist. At that time, the imperfect mature status of believers who walk by the Spirit will be on full and perfect display when they receive their resurrected bodies.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 228

Therefore, all believers are sons of God in this life. But in the age to come obedient believers will be His sons in a perfect sense. The same could be said about the Lord also calling these believers “sons of the resurrection.” These are men and women who lived their lives in light of the age to come. The resurrection power of the risen Lord is seen in their lives.<sup>19</sup> They looked forward to the resurrection, and that determined the manner in which they lived. They looked for the reward. The seven brothers referred to in the question posed by the Sadducees made the decisions they did based upon the resurrection. In the resurrection, they will reign with Christ. The resurrected power of the Lord seen in their lives in an imperfect way will also be on full display after the resurrection of their bodies.

Attaining the age to come and being a son of God involves work. So does being like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

#### **D. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v 37)**

In demonstrating to the Sadducees that the dead will be resurrected, the Lord quotes from Exod 3:6. In this verse, concerning the burning bush, God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus then says that God is the God of the living and not the dead.

A common interpretation of this saying by the Lord is that since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for many centuries when God said these things to Moses, this shows that these men were still alive and not dead. They were with God and therefore God was going to raise them from the dead. The fact that they were still alive proves that there will be a physical resurrection.

But does it? Could one not argue that even if these three men were alive spiritually in the presence of God that it is just as possible that they would remain in that state forever? They remained alive for centuries without a physical resurrection, so how does that argue that their bodies will rise from the dead?

As a result of these questions, Lane takes a different view. He says that Jesus is arguing that God had made a covenant with these men. He had taken care of them through all of their lives, including times of difficulties. How could He not save them through their greatest

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<sup>19</sup> John Niemelä, “That I May Attain to Whose Resurrection? Philippians 3:11,” *JOTGES* 25 (2012): 31. Niemelä writes that Paul in Phil 3:11 desires to live through the resurrected power of Christ in his daily life.



misfortune, which is death? The covenant God made with them implies that He will raise their bodies from the dead.<sup>20</sup>

Related to the covenant God made with these men is the idea of rewards. God had promised certain things to them. These promises included certain earthly blessings for them and their descendants. They would possess the land of Israel forever (Gen 17:8). They would also bless all the nations of the earth (Gen 22:17).

The author of Hebrews points out that these men were men of faith who looked for the rewards God promised (Heb 11:6). Abraham looked for a city to live in that was built by God (Heb 11:10). That never happened in his earthly life. As they faced death, both Isaac and Jacob blessed their children concerning things to come. Jacob's son Joseph ordered the sons of Israel to take his bones back to Egypt because he knew of these promises (Heb 11:20-22). He believed those bones would be resurrected in the future.

The promises God made to these men and the rewards for which they lived cannot be fulfilled if they live forever as spirits without bodies. Their bodies must be resurrected and live on the earth in the future Millennial Kingdom and new earth.<sup>21</sup> Since God promised these things to these men, the very character of God requires a bodily resurrection.

These three men walked in obedience to the Lord. They were men of great faith because they lived for the age to come. Abraham left his hometown to follow the Lord's commands. He was willing to sacrifice his own son. All three of these men were pilgrims in a foreign land. In that sense, the seven brothers in the Sadducees' question were like that. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as these brothers, were men who were "counted worthy" by the way they lived their lives.

In Matt 8:10-11, the Lord points out that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were men of *great* faith. When the kingdom of God comes, men such as this will sit in positions of honor at the wedding feast of the Lord. This will be one of the rewards they will receive. The centurion of Matthew 8 is one who demonstrates a similar kind of faith.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 430.

<sup>21</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 259.

<sup>22</sup> Hal Haller, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 27.

The only other time Luke mentions these three men together is in a passage parallel to Matt 8:10-11 (Luke 13:28-30). The point is the same. To make it clear that He is talking about rewards, after discussing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord says many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first. Not everyone in the kingdom of God will be equally rewarded.<sup>23</sup> Some believers will be greater than others. Those who follow the Lord in discipleship will be greater than those who do not.

The mention of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob supports the idea that the Lord is not speaking simply about those who “go to heaven.” Those who are counted worthy are people like these three men. They obey the Lord and walk by faith by believing there is a new age coming in which those who do so will be greatly rewarded.

### **E. Live to Him (v 38)**

The Lord ends His response to the Sadducees concerning the certainty of the bodily resurrection of believers by saying, “they all live to Him.” Since these are His final words on the question, they carry extra weight. It is a summary of His entire response to the Sadducees. Jesus is not speaking of how a person is justified by faith, but how a believer should “live.” He should live like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the seven brothers mentioned in the question.

The word translated “to Him” clearly refers to God. God is mentioned in the previous verse as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Greek pronoun is in the dative case and is best taken as a dative of interest. God takes an interest in how His people live their lives.<sup>24</sup> In light of the idea of rewards in the Lord’s response, Heb 11:6

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<sup>23</sup> Luke does mention Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Luke 3:34, but this involves the genealogy of Christ. Many interpreters reject the idea that the picture of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the wedding feast teaches about rewards. Since the Lord mentions “weeping and gnashing of teeth” they feel it is describing the experience of people in the lake of fire. However, this is a parable and speaks of the remorse believers will experience at the Judgment Seat of Christ because of the loss of eternal rewards. For further study, the reader is encouraged to see Zane C. Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2011), 364 and Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 775-76. Hodges and Dillow speak of the Matthew 8 passage. But the same could be said of the parallel passage in Luke. The parable speaks of a meal in which some believers will not be able to partake even though they are in the kingdom (Matt 22:2-14).

<sup>24</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 142.

comes to mind. Those who want to please God must believe that He rewards those who seek Him.

The idea of living to/for God is a theme that the Apostle Paul takes up in his letter to the Romans. It appears twice in Rom 6:10-11. In the first instance in v 10, it refers to Jesus Christ. After Jesus bore the sin of the world while He was on the cross, sin no longer has any attachment to Him. In His resurrection life, the life He lives is completely oriented towards God.<sup>25</sup>

In the very next verse, Paul says that believers should live in the same way. In Christ and the resurrection power available to the believer because of his union with Him, the believer also can “live to God.”

It is significant that this concept of living for God occurs in Romans 6. Romans 5–8 is a long section in Romans which deals with Christian living. The concept of justification by faith occurs in Romans 1–4. So, for Paul, living for God is a doctrine that belongs to discipleship and is not related to how a person is justified before God or receives eternal life.

In Romans 6, Paul is arguing that after being justified by faith, the believer has the power to live a life that pleases God. It is through the power of the Spirit who dwells within the Christian. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to the believer to live that kind of life. It is a life of resurrection power (Rom 6:5; 8:11).

Even a casual reading of Romans 5–8 demonstrates a connection with the response the Lord gives to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34-38. As we have just seen, Paul speaks of “living for God” (cf. Luke 20:38). In the concept of the life of resurrection, one is reminded that those who are considered worthy are “sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36) In this section of Christian living/discipleship in Romans, Paul also speaks of the “sons of God” as those who walk by the power of the Spirit (Rom 8:14; Luke 20:36).

Even though he uses different words, the apostle also speaks of gaining an inheritance in the world to come. For those believers who are sons of God and walk by the Spirit and thus suffer with the Lord, they will reign in His kingdom (Rom 8:17).<sup>26</sup> This reminds the reader of those who “attain” the age to come (Luke 20:35).

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<sup>25</sup> Hodges, *Romans*, 174.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-25.

As argued in this article, the response of the Lord to the Sadducees has a heavy emphasis on rewards in the coming kingdom of God. In Rom 8:18, the idea of sharing in Christ's glory refers to the same thing. This glory is reigning with Him in His kingdom. This is for those believers who suffer with Christ.<sup>27</sup>

To find such parallels between Romans 5–8 and Luke 20:34–38 is not surprising. In the Book of Acts, Luke was the traveling companion of Paul. It is natural that the theology of Paul would be reflected in Luke's writings.

## V. CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Luke was written to believers. The vast majority of Luke's Gospel concerns how Christians should live. This is what discipleship is all about.

Even during the last week of Jesus' life, He was teaching these vital truths to His disciples. As the opposition to Him grew, the religious leaders asked Him questions in order to trip Him up. They wanted to diminish Him in the eyes of the people and His disciples. These questions involved tricky political and theological issues.

In answering these questions, the Lord did not simply point out the errors of His enemies. He also taught His disciples things they needed to know. When it came to the issue of the resurrection of the body, the Sadducees clearly felt that any sacrifice for the Lord was a waste of time and effort. The seven brothers involved in their hypothetical situation paid a great price to obey Deut 25:5-10, but it was all for nothing. The reason was simple: our physical bodies will not rise and therefore what we do with them is of no importance.

But the Lord responds and says that the exact opposite is the case. Following the Lord in discipleship is indeed costly, but it is more than worth it. Nobody enters into the kingdom of God by works, whether those works are prior, during, or after salvation. But works are indeed important. Those who are faithful to the teachings of the Lord will be "counted worthy" of great reward in the kingdom of God. They will rightly be called mature "sons of God," and as sons of

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<sup>27</sup> Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 86, 127

the resurrection, their exalted status in the kingdom will reflect the way they lived.

This, of course, provides a contrast with the Sadducees. They were rich and had positions of authority in this present age. Along with other religious leaders, as we see in the context of Luke 20, they loved their money and privilege (Luke 20:45-47).

Disciples of the Lord do not live that way. They live for the world to come. They live for wealth and authority in that age. God has promised these things, and to fulfill these promises, God must raise them from the dead.

They will “attain” the age to come in the sense that they will actually inherit a portion of that age and rule over it with Christ. Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they will have these positions of honor because of the way they lived. The religious leaders wanted positions of honor at feasts in this world (Luke 20:46), but disciples look for positions of honor at a feast with the Lord in His kingdom. But just as in the case of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this takes faith. It is a faith which causes one to live in such a way as to lay up treasures in a world and age we cannot see.

To put it simply, the Sadducees were saying men and women should live for themselves; we should grab whatever this world has to offer. But the Lord teaches His disciples to “live for God.” While this is not a requirement for gaining eternal life, it is a requirement for being a disciple. It is a requirement for being counted worthy to gain riches in the age to come.



# BREAKING BREAD: THE CENTRALITY OF EATING TO NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH LIFE

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**W**hat role did eating play in the NT church? While that may not seem like a particularly interesting question, my growing conviction is that theology should emphasize what the Bible emphasizes, and there are at least eight important connections between eating and a healthy NT church life. This article will survey eight ways that the otherwise common act of eating ought to be a part of that life.

## I. EATING AND FELLOWSHIP

First, eating was an expression of fellowship between believers. “One of the simplest and the oldest acts of fellowship in the world is that of eating together,” William Barclay said. “To share a common meal, especially if the act of sharing the meal also involves the sharing of a common memory, is one of the basic expressions of human fellowship.”<sup>1</sup> That expression is evident throughout the NT.

For example, eating with others was such a prominent mark of Jesus’ ministry that it became a source of criticism. Religious leaders faulted Jesus for eating with “tax collectors and sinners” (Mark 2:16) and spread the rumor that He was too gluttonous to be a genuine prophet (Matt 11:19). Jesus obviously ate with a wide variety of people.<sup>2</sup> Pohl noted that both Jesus’ teaching on hospitality (e.g., Luke 14:12-14) and His practice challenged “narrow definitions and dimensions of hospitality and presses them outward to include those

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Lord’s Supper* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Craig Keener, *Acts* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 171.

with whom one least desires to have connections.”<sup>3</sup> Eating was an expression of how radical Christian fellowship could be, reaching to people who would normally be outcasts.

And the Lord’s pattern of eating with others for ministry was followed by the first believers:

*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers...So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart (Acts 2:42, 46).*

Notice the apostles continued steadfastly in both doctrine and in “the breaking of bread.” Keener explains that this is “a metonymy for a meal” which “presumably includes the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>4</sup> The Lord’s Supper expressed both the believer’s participation in Christ and the sharing together of that life in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

More generally, Pohl notes that Paul (Rom 12:13), Hebrews (Heb 13:2), and 1 Peter (1 Pet 4:9) show that hospitality to others, especially to those outside the Christian community, was an obligatory expression of concrete love.<sup>6</sup>

But the act of eating together as believers raised problems. For example, Jews and Gentiles found it hard to eat together because of Jewish food restrictions.<sup>7</sup> Then God gave Peter a vision that all foods were clean (Acts 10:9-16). However, some time later, despite that vision, Peter once again refused to eat with Gentiles, prompting Paul to rebuke him for acting inconsistently “with the truth of the gospel” (cf. Gal 2:11-14). For Paul, the gospel message had implications for fellowship between Jews and Gentiles as expressed in eating together.

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<sup>3</sup>Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 21.

<sup>4</sup>Keener, *Acts*, 171. See also, I Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 83.

<sup>5</sup>David Horrell, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth and in the Church Today,” *Theology* 98 (1995): 201.

<sup>6</sup>Pohl, *Making Room*, 31.

<sup>7</sup>Vincent Branick, *The House Church in the Writings of Paul* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 32.



## II. EATING AND THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH MEETING

Second, eating was part of meeting as the church. When the early believers met to eat, it was not simply for fellowship or for socializing outside of the church. Instead, they ate when they gathered as a church. That is evident in what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11.

### A. Meeting *En Ekklēsia*

*For first of all, when you come together [sunerchomenōn] as a church [en ekklēsia], I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it (1 Cor 11:18).*

Notice that Paul addressed the Corinthians concerning their gathering “as a church.” Obviously, Christians can meet together without its being an official meeting of the church. What makes something a meeting *en ekklēsia*? At the very least, that requires an intentional choice to gather for that purpose. And 1 Corinthians 11 shows what believers did when they met:

*Therefore when you come together [sunerchomenōn] in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you (1 Cor 11:20-22).*

What did these believers do when they gathered *en ekklēsia*? They gathered to eat. Specifically, they came together to eat the Lord’s Supper. As Henderson notes, “the very purpose of the community’s gathering is defined by the verb *phagein*. It is not too much to say that eating a ‘real meal’ is part and parcel of the Corinthians’ gathering together.”<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Bryant concludes that the eating of the Supper is what constitutes meeting as the church: “This evidence led us to ponder if there was any New Testament reference to a regular church meeting

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<sup>8</sup> Suzanne Watts Henderson, “‘If Anyone Hungers...’: An Integrated Reading of 1 Cor 11.17–34,” *New Testament Studies* (48): 206. Greek transliterated.

that didn't include the Lord's Supper. And after 25 years we still have found none."<sup>9</sup>

## B. The Supper Was a Supper

If the church met to eat the Lord's Supper, we should understand what that involved. Here is how Paul describes it:

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes (1 Cor 11:23-26).*

How many elements does this celebration have? The traditional answer is two: the bread and the cup (i.e., wine). However, notice that Paul actually mentioned *three* elements. Jesus began by breaking the bread, then they ate supper, and then the Lord "took the cup *after supper*" (v 25, emphasis added). Theissen notes what is often overlooked: "The formula presumes that there is a meal *between* the word over the bread and that spoken over the cup."<sup>10</sup> In other words, Paul described the Lord's Supper as including a full meal.<sup>11</sup>

Most commentators, such as Marshall, acknowledge that the Lord's Supper was originally celebrated *with* a meal: "The Lord's Supper was held in the context of a church meal."<sup>12</sup> However, if Theissen

<sup>9</sup> See Bob Bryant, "Rediscovering the Lord's Supper: One Church's Journey" *Grace in Focus* (July-August 2000): 6.

<sup>10</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 152

<sup>11</sup> Branick, *House Church*, 98. While virtually all commentators admit that the Lord's Supper was eaten with a meal, few say the meal was itself part of the Lord's Supper. Fee says, "The words 'after supper' indicate that at the Last Supper the bread and cup sayings were separated by the meal itself (or at least part of it); given their continuing but otherwise unnecessary role in the tradition, it seems probable that this early pattern persisted in the early church." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987, 2014), 613.

<sup>12</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1980, 2006), 108. See also G. H. Lang, *The Churches of God* (Shoals, IN: Kingsley Press, 2012), 70; Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "An Exegetical Case for Close(d) Communion:

is correct, the Lord's Supper was not merely observed *with* a "social meal" but was, itself, a real supper. As Meeks says, "the basic act is the eating of a common meal, at which it is possible that 'one goes hungry, another is drunk' (1 Cor 11:21)."<sup>13</sup>

That is not only suggested by Paul's description of the Supper, but also by the meaning of the Greek word for *supper* itself. Barclay comments:

The word is *deipnon*. It may be that to western ideas the word *Supper* is misleading, for in the west supper is a light meal. But in Greece and in Palestine the *deipnon* was the evening meal, and it was the only main meal of the day. Breakfast was no more than bread taken with water or with diluted wine. The midday meal was likely to be eaten in the street in the open air and not at home at all. It was not more than a picnic snack. The *deipnon* was the evening meal, eaten by the family at home, the one main and principal meal of the day.<sup>14</sup>

As a *deipnon*, the Lord's Supper was not just a ritualized token meal, but the main meal of the day, eaten in the evening.<sup>15</sup> This may be why Jude refers to a *love feast* (Jude 1:12), evidently a full meal, which some take to be another name for the Lord's Supper.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, later ritualized versions of the Lord's Supper bear little resemblance to how it was originally celebrated. As Barclay says, "There can be no two things more different than the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a Christian home in the first century and in a cathedral in the twentieth century. The things are so different that it is almost possible to say that they bear no relationship to each other whatsoever."<sup>17</sup>

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1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 11:17-34," *Concordia Journal* (April 1995):156; Robert Jewett, "Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church: The Implications of a Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10," *Biblical Research* 38 (1993): 32; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 66.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 158.

<sup>14</sup> Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, 60-61.

<sup>15</sup> Branick, *House Church*, 98.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 110. See also, Jewett, *Romans*, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, 111-12.

### C. The Supper Was a Family Meal

Interestingly, Branick says Paul’s description “recalls a family meal in a Jewish home.”<sup>18</sup> Marshall describes it this way:

The commencement of the meal was marked by the head of the household taking a piece of bread in his hands and saying a prayer of thanks over it...The bread was then broken into pieces and shared among all those present... Similarly, at the end of the meal the host took a cup of wine, known as “the cup of blessing,” and gave thanks to God for it, after which all present drank.<sup>19</sup>

That is very similar to Paul’s description of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Given that model, here is Peter Stuhlmacher’s reconstruction of a Lord’s Supper meeting:

The participants greeted one another with the greeting of peace and the holy kiss; people who did not love the Lord (the unbaptized?) were not allowed to participate in the meal (cf. 1 Cor 16:21-22 with *Did* 9:5; 10:6). Then the eulogy or eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving was spoken over the (one) loaf of bread (1 Cor 10:16), and with the breaking and distribution of the bread, the full meal began. At its conclusion the cup of wine was taken; the eulogy or prayer of thanksgiving was spoken over it as well, and the wine was distributed to all present.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, the evidence suggests the Lord’s Supper was originally a full meal that followed the sequence of bread > supper > cup.

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<sup>18</sup> Branick, *House Church*, 99. See also Keener, *Acts*, 171; Craig Blomberg, “Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2009), 55.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall, *Last Supper*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 401. Viola and Barna have a similar reconstruction: “For the early Christians, the Lord’s Supper was a festive communal meal. The mood was one of celebration and joy. When believers first gathered for the meal, they broke bread and passed it around. Then they ate their meal, which then concluded after the cup was passed around. The Lord’s Supper was essentially a Christian banquet.” See Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (N.P.:Tyndale, 2002, 2008), 192. See also John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA:Fortress Press, 1985), 67.

### III. EATING AND THE LOCATION OF THE MEETING

Third, eating influenced *where* Christians would meet.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Christians in later centuries, the early believers did not focus on building sacred spaces such as synagogues, churches, or temples. Where, then, did they meet?

#### A. The Early Believers Met in Homes

We know that early believers sometimes met in rented rooms<sup>22</sup> (Mark 14:15; Acts 1:13). And while they certainly *debated* in synagogues and perhaps also in schools<sup>23</sup> (Acts 19:8-10), there is no evidence they worshipped in those places (Acts 19:9). Instead, it is widely recognized that “From the beginning of the church, believers gathered in homes.”<sup>24</sup> For example, the NT mentions several house churches:

*The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house (1 Cor 16:19).*

*Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house (Col 4:15).*

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<sup>21</sup> Where they met would depend on what they did when they met. See Gregory Linton, “House Church Meetings in the New Testament Era,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 8 (Fall 2005): 229.

<sup>22</sup> Linton says, “Perhaps the disciples rented a room that was part of a domestic residence, or maybe a believer donated it for their use. Many houses in Palestine had rooms on the upper floors accessible by an exterior stairway. Rabbinic writings indicate that Pharisees used such rooms as meeting places for study.” Linton, “House Church Meetings,” 231.

<sup>23</sup> Billings notes that it is often assumed that Paul “either rented or was provided a lecture hall owned by a certain Tyrannus;” however, the school may not have been a physical place at all, but an informal gathering of students around their teacher, Tyrannus. “Most such orators found an audience for their activities in public spaces, such as the gymnasia and baths, etc.” See Bradley S. Billings, “From House Church to Tenement Church,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (2) (October 2011): 546.

<sup>24</sup> Linton, “House Church Meetings,” 231. See also Branick, *The House Church*, 13. This is a widely shared view. See also Jon Zens, *Jesus Is Family* (Orange, CA: Quoir, 2017), 24; Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Household and House Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 32; Robert and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home: A New Basis for Community and Mission* (Claremont, CA: Albatross Books, 1986), 39.

*to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house (Philem 1:2).*

*Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ (Rom 16:5).*

To give you some idea of what such a house was like—a typical Roman home had several rooms facing a central *atrium*, among which was a dining room called a *triclinium* with enough space for nine people to recline on couches. Branick estimates that, at most, twenty people could fit in the *triclinium* and another fifty in the *atrium*. However, the house would be overcrowded at those numbers. Instead, Branick suggests a Roman atrium house could comfortably hold between thirty and forty people, providing the upper limit for a typical house church.<sup>25</sup>

However, other scholars point out that few people lived in houses. As much as 90% of the population lived in large, multi-story, overcrowded, fire-prone apartment buildings called *insulae* (“islands”).<sup>26</sup> Lower apartments were larger and housed higher-income families, while upper apartments were smaller and housed the poor.<sup>27</sup> Could Christians have met in these tenements, too? That seems likely. For example, the Christians in Troas met in a third-story apartment, from which Eutychus fell and died (Acts 20:7-12). Was that a “tenement church?” It seems likely. As Jewett suggests, “at least in Rome and Thessalonica the numerical preponderance of groups fell in the category of tenement churches.”<sup>28</sup>

## **B. Greeks and Romans Ate Supper at Home**

If the church met to eat the Lord’s Supper, a true *deipnon*, it would be convenient to meet in homes because that is where they would

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<sup>25</sup> Branick, *House Church*, 39-42. See also Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archeology*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed., (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983, 2002), 180-82.

<sup>26</sup> Jewett, “Tenement Churches,” 26; Branick, *House Church*, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Linton, “House Church Meetings,” 235. The top floors were less desirable because when fires broke out, people in the top floors were the last to know. See Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 69.

cook and eat the *deipnon*.<sup>29</sup> No wonder Linton reports, “Research on the physical setting of early Christian gatherings reveals the centrality of meals in house-church meetings. The residential facilities in which Christians met were well-suited for the preparation and administration of banquets.”<sup>30</sup> The centrality of meals (i.e., the Lord’s Supper) for worship influenced where Christians met. Presumably, once the Lord’s Supper changed from being a *deipnon* to a ritualized token meal, it was no longer necessary to meet where the *deipnon* would normally be prepared (i.e., the home).

## IV. EATING AND MINISTRY

Fourth, eating was also central to doing Christian ministry and promoting a robust church life.

### A. Jesus Ministered During Meals

For example, during His earthly ministry, Jesus often ate with disciples and inquirers, and He used those occasions to teach at the dinner table. “Our Lord used table talk effectively to engage people in spiritual discussions and life-changing encounters.”<sup>31</sup> You see that throughout Jesus’ ministry, but to give just a few examples: when Jesus ate with some Pharisees, and a sinful woman came to anoint His feet, it became an occasion to talk about love and forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50). When He ate at Martha and Mary’s house, He taught about spiritual priorities (Luke 10:38-42). And when He ate with another Pharisee who was shocked that Jesus did not wash His hands before eating, the Lord gave a lesson about the greater importance of inward cleanliness (Luke 11:37-53). If you listed all the meals that Jesus had with other people, you could come up with a list of topics for potential discipleship conversations. “Jesus is the prime example of someone who reached people through the door of hospitality,” Strauch notes.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Billings, “From House Church to Tenement Church,” 567.

<sup>30</sup> Linton, “House Church Meetings,” 229.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1993), 22.

<sup>32</sup> Strauch, *Hospitality*, 22.

## B. You Can Support Ministry by Feeding Ministers

Eating is not just a way for Christians to *do* ministry, but also a way to *support* ministry. When Jesus traveled around Israel, He and the disciples were supported by people who showed them hospitality. Similarly, when Jesus sent out the seventy, He told them not to bring their own provisions, but to stay at the first house that welcomed them (and presumably fed them, Matt 10:11).

Branick notes that Paul's missionary strategy centered around converting a household and establishing a house church there:

Most probably the conversion of a household and the consequent formation of a house church formed the key element in Paul's strategic plan to spread the Gospel to the world. If we follow Acts in this matter, Paul had little success preaching in the synagogues. His method then shifted to establishing himself with a prominent family, which then formed his base of operations in a given city (cf. Acts 16:13-34; 17:2-9; 18:1-11).

Paul's missionary strategy depended on hospitality.<sup>33</sup> He and the apostolic workers would be housed and fed and supported so they could continue to minister in that city.

Later in the apostolic period, when John was writing his third epistle, he praised Gaius for supporting traveling teachers:

*Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brothers and sisters, and especially when they are strangers; who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well (3 John 1:5-6).*

Although food is not explicitly mentioned, it is surely implied. As Hodges says, "Thus [Gaius] will need to furnish the missionaries with appropriate food and lodging, taking care to see that all their needs are attended to."<sup>34</sup>

Feeding traveling teachers is still something that happens today, as many guest speakers can attest. Strauch says, "In practical terms today, Christian hospitality for traveling evangelists and teachers means providing food, washing and caring for their clothes, supplying

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<sup>33</sup> Branick, *House Church in the Writings of Paul*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Zane Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 282.



financial help for future travel expenses, giving directions, and caring for their car if that is their means of transportation.”<sup>35</sup>

### C. Eating Can Create Opportunities for Evangelism

It can be awkward to invite someone to a contemporary church service. People are reluctant to offer the invitation, and unbelievers are reluctant to accept. I have often urged congregations to invite their friends to church but have seldom seen it happen. By contrast, most people have no trouble inviting others to a party at their house. If a church meeting occurs in a home, around a meal, then inviting people to attend becomes normal and not at all intimidating. “For the early Christians, the home was the most natural setting for proclaiming Christ to their families, neighbors, and friends.”<sup>36</sup> Hence, in Paul’s description of the Lord’s Supper, he assumes there will be unbelievers present:

*For otherwise, if you bless God in the spirit only, how will the one who occupies the place of the outsider know to say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you are saying? (1 Cor 14:16 NASB).*

*Therefore if the whole church gathers together and all the people speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are insane? (1 Cor 14:23 NASB).*

Morris notes there are three classes of people present: *believers* (“the whole church”), *inquirers* (“outsiders,” *idiōtai*) whom he says “were interested and had thus ceased to be merely ‘unbelievers,’” and finally, *unbelievers*.<sup>37</sup> However, Fee does not draw as strong a distinction between the outsiders and the unbelievers, seeing them both as unbelievers, but he recognizes that means the gathering was “accessible to unbelievers,” and suggests “Paul may very well have in mind an unbelieving spouse accompanying the believer to their place of worship. Such a person is both outside of Christ and as yet uninstructed in Christ.”<sup>38</sup> In any case, unbelievers were welcome at the meeting of the church.

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<sup>35</sup> Strauch, *Hospitality*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Strauch, *Hospitality*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985, 2001), 191.

<sup>38</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 758-59; Carson says the two words “probably refer to the same kinds of people: non-Christians.” D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological*

## D. Eating and Love

Robert Jewett thinks the association between the admonitions to love (“agape”) and the language of the love feasts (“agape feasts”) may have been intended for “support and participation in the sacramental celebration.”<sup>39</sup> Certainly, the very language of a *love feast* shows that the meal is meant to express and to develop loving relationships within the local church. “I don’t think most Christians today understand how essential hospitality is to fanning the flames of love and strengthening the Christian family,” Strauch said. “Unless we open the doors of our homes to one another, the reality of the local church as a close-knit family of loving brothers and sisters is only a theory.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, eating together helps fulfill the many love commands of Scripture.

## V. EATING AND ALMS TO THE POOR

Fifth, eating was an important aspect of Christian service to the poor. Jesus called his disciples to invite the poor for supper:

*“But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13).*

In the ancient world, most people were poor. Sakari Häkkinen estimated that nine out of ten people in Galilee lived at or below a subsistence level of poverty.<sup>41</sup> Jesus Himself would probably be included as a landless peasant who worked as a manual laborer in a small village (of some 200-400 people).<sup>42</sup> According to Häkkinen, most Galileans lacked food security and lived from meal to meal, and only an elite had “moderate surplus resources” or more. That means many of the first Christians were poor, too. Providing food for the poor to eat became an important aspect of showing Christian love and charity, just as Jesus commanded. When Christians ate together, they were expected to feed hungry brothers and sisters in Christ:

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*Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 115-16.

<sup>39</sup> Jewett, “Tenement Churches,” 33.

<sup>40</sup> Strauch, *Hospitality*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Sakari Häkkinen, “Poverty in the first-century Galilee,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/HTS Theological Studies* 72(4): 1. See <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v72n4/46.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

*If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (Jas 2:15-16).*

*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17).*

Poverty was especially prevalent among widows, and the believers in Jerusalem cared for them. However, there were problems in the supply chain, and the widows were not being treated equally:

*Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food (Acts 6:1 NASB).*

Obviously, providing food to the poor was considered an important job for the church. And those practical needs could be naturally filled if the church met to eat a supper.

But even outside of Jerusalem, there were problems. When Paul corrected the Corinthians in their celebration of the Lord's Supper, that criticism included concern for the poor:

*Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you (1 Cor 11:20-22).*

What, exactly, was the problem? Blue argues that the larger context was a famine in Corinth, so that Paul urged the believers with ample food to share with those who did not.<sup>43</sup> It could be that the rich ate a sumptuous supper on their own *before* the poor could arrive to celebrate the Lord's Supper.<sup>44</sup> Or perhaps the rich did not share their abundant food with the poor, who then went hungry.<sup>45</sup> Instead of inviting the

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<sup>43</sup> Bradley B. Blue, "The House Church at Corinth and the Lord's Supper: Famine, Food Supply, and the Present Distress," *Criswell Theological Review* 5.2 (1991): 237.

<sup>44</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 67.

<sup>45</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 599. Craig Blomberg describes the problem this way: "The minority of well-to-do believers (1:26), including the major financial supporters and owners of

poor to their feasts, as Jesus commanded (Luke 14:13), the haves were excluding the have-nots, and that kind of discrimination needed immediate correction. Thus, the Lord's Supper was an occasion for the rich to minister to the poor by sharing good food with them. As Michael Eaton summarizes, "It was a genuine meal in the early church, and an occasion of expressing much love towards each other. Widows and needy people were cared for."<sup>46</sup> Clearly, then, the act of eating together was also a means of caring for the "unwanted, needy people who cannot reciprocate."<sup>47</sup> In fact, Lampe says sharing food with the poor, and thereby "giving ourselves up to others," is part of how Christ is proclaimed in the Lord's Supper.<sup>48</sup>

## VI. EATING AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Sixth, when a church is looking for a new pastor/teacher/elder, the top two questions people usually ask are: can he teach, and has he been divorced? But Paul lists several more qualifications that make greater sense within the context of a house church where believers gathered to eat.

### A. Elders

If you remember the context of a house church where believers met together to eat a full meal, Paul's description of the overseer takes on new meaning. It may be important to point out that a house church would have had a sponsor, patron, or patroness—the *paterfamilias* of the house (see Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 1:11; 16:15, 19). Branick says the title

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the homes in which the believers met, would have had the leisure-time and resources to arrive earlier and bring larger quantities and finer food than the rest of the congregation. Following the practice of housing festive gatherings in ancient Corinth, they would have quickly filled the small private dining room. Latecomers (the majority, who, probably had to finish work before coming on Saturday or Sunday evening—there was as of yet no legalized day off in the Roman empire) would be seated separately in the adjacent atrium or courtyard. Those that could not afford to bring a full meal, or a very good one, did not have the opportunity to share with the rest in the way that Christian unity demanded." See Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 228.

<sup>46</sup> Michael A. Eaton, "Jude," *The Branch Exposition of the Bible: A Preacher's Commentary of the New Testament* (Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2020), 1189.

<sup>47</sup> Strauch, *Hospitality*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Lampe, "The Corinthian Eucharistic Dinner Party: Exegesis of a Cultural Context (1 Cor. 11:17-34)," *Affirmation* 4/2 (1991):10-11.

*episkopos* could mean “patron” who graciously oversaw and protected those under his care.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, Jewett says that such a patron would normally exercise some authority over the group and even bear legal responsibility for it.<sup>50</sup> Jewett quotes Theissen’s description of this as “love-patriarchalism,” where “the hierarchical social order is retained while mutual respect and love are being fostered by patrons serving as leaders of the congregations in their houses.”<sup>51</sup>

With that context, eating was related to two qualifications for being an elder in the church. For example:

*It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching, not overindulging in wine, not a bully, but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money... (1 Tim 3:1-3 NASB).*

Notice that, besides his teaching ability and marital status, the candidate must also be *hospitable* and should not *overindulge in wine*. Paul did not randomly choose those qualities to emphasize. Hospitality meant welcoming strangers into your home and feeding them. Hence, Branick explains, “Someone or some group had to provide a place or places for the assemblies. Someone had to provide room and board for the traveling brethren, to provide funds for traveling.”<sup>52</sup> No wonder, then, that overseers needed to be hospitable. “In the absence of Paul, everything favored the emergence of the host as the most influential member at the Lord’s supper and hence the most likely presider.”<sup>53</sup>

Likewise, if the meeting of the *ekklēsia* involved eating a Lord’s Supper with a full meal which included wine, and given that drunkenness had been a problem in the past (cf. 1 Cor 11:21), it would be important for Paul to emphasize that an overseer should also be in control of his drinking.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Branick, *House Church*, 89.

<sup>50</sup> Jewett, “Tenement Churches,” 25.

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

<sup>52</sup> Branick, *House Church*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>54</sup> If you read on, you will note that most of Paul’s qualifications for an overseer, including the title itself, take on new meaning in light of the house church. If it is understood

## B. Deacons

The role of deacons takes on clearer meaning if you picture a house church meeting where believers have gathered together to eat a full supper. The original proto-deacons, like Stephen, were chosen specifically to wait on tables to establish fairness in the distribution of food because the Hellenistic widows were being short-changed in favor of the Hebrew widows.<sup>55</sup> The problem of equally distributing food also became a problem in Corinth, where the rich were not sharing with the poor. Could the function of the deacons have been as basic as literally waiting tables, serving the food, making sure it was distributed equally to all, and helping to set up and clean up afterwards? Jewett notes that “the eucharistic liturgy was combined with diaconal service, understood as serving meals in celebration with the faith community.”<sup>56</sup> If that is right, no wonder, then, that Paul opens the role to both men and women, or better still, to married teams, who know what it means to have a well-run household, and who have control of their drinking, among other virtues (1 Tim 3:8, 12).

## VII. EATING AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Seventh, eating was involved in church discipline. If the meeting of the church centered around eating a supper, it makes sense that church discipline would include excluding someone from partaking in it. When a man in Corinth had a sexual relationship with “his father’s wife” (his stepmother?), Paul said:

*But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person (1 Cor 5:11).*

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that the early believers worshipped together by eating together in homes, no wonder a man overseeing such a gathering in his home better have a good relationship with his wife and should rule his house well. A chaotic household would not be an ideal place to host a meeting. And given the financial disparities between believers that had expressed themselves in Corinth, where, as Craig Blomberg explains, “wealthy patrons” would have been “accustomed to being treated unequally” (Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 228), such a man should not be greedy or covetous, so as to side with the rich against the poor.

<sup>55</sup> Branick, *House Church*, 88-89.

<sup>56</sup> Jewett, “Tenement Churches,” 32.

Do not eat with that brother. Gordon Fee understands this to mean “that the incestuous man is to be excluded from Christian fellowship meals, including the Lord’s Table.”<sup>57</sup> However, Fee does not believe Paul meant to also exclude this man from private meals. But Strauch thinks Paul does have in mind not showing private hospitality: “we are to refuse hospitality to a professing Christian who lives in unrepentant moral evil.”<sup>58</sup> He adds, “We cannot act as if nothing is wrong and invite such a Christian into our homes to eat.”<sup>59</sup>

Jude may also refer to disciplining people by excluding them from the love feast:

*These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots (Jude 1:12).*

It sounds as though Jude expects them to remove the “spot” from their feasts.

Yet another example, is John’s prohibition of showing hospitality to traveling teachers who contradict his doctrine:

*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him (2 John 1:10).*

Many commentators take 2 Thess 3:10b (“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat”) as a popular maxim “of good old workshop morality.”<sup>60</sup> However, Jewett thinks it is another example of “community discipline” and refers to being excluded from a communal meal.<sup>61</sup>

The wording thus implies a sanction in which deprivation of food as such is in view, not temporary exclusion from a particular meal. The most obvious point about this sanction has never been pointed out, so far as I can tell, and it is crucial for understanding the place of the common meal in the Thessalonian congregations. The sanction must be enforceable for the regulation to be effective. This means that the community must have had jurisdiction

<sup>57</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 247.

<sup>58</sup> Strauch, *Hospitality*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>60</sup> Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 146.

<sup>61</sup> Jewett, “Tenement Churches,” 33-34. See also Jewett, *Romans*, 67-68

over the regular eating of its members, which would only have been possible if the community was participating in a common meal on an ongoing basis.<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, Paul's mention that he labored night and day so "that we might not be a burden to any of you" (1 Thess 2:9) might be best understood in the context of Christians meeting to eat together on a regular basis: "He provided what he could for the Agape meals, rather than relying on patrons to do it for him."<sup>63</sup>

## VIII. EATING AND ESCHATOLOGY

Eighth, eating also formed the early Christian's expectations for the future. As Jewett said, "Such meals were marked by eschatological joy at the presence of a new age and of a Master who had triumphed over the principalities and powers."<sup>64</sup> For context, Koenig explains how supper imagery fit into early Jewish eschatological expectations:

Undergirding the great importance attached to openness toward guests was a hope shared by many first-century Jews that God would act as bountiful host at the end of time by entertaining Israel at an endless feast (Amos 9:13-15; Joel 3:18; T. Levi 18:11; 1 Enoch 62:14; Midr. Exod 25:7-8). In the expansive vision of Isaiah this blessed meal would include "all peoples" (Isa 25:6-8).<sup>65</sup>

I think this kind of expectation is evident in the NT, too, where eating helped to form Christian expectations for the next life. For example, notice the connection that Paul draws between the Lord's Supper and the Second Coming:

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor 11:26; cf. Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18 ).*

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<sup>62</sup> Jewett, "Tenement Churches," 37. See also Mal Couch, *The Hope of Christ's Return: Premillennial Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2001), 253.

<sup>63</sup> Jewett, "Tenement Churches," 41.

<sup>64</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 66. However, Jewett also notes how an "overly realized eschatology" led to excesses and "licentious behavior."

<sup>65</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 16.



How long will the Church celebrate the Lord's Supper? Until He comes. For Paul, the Lord's Supper is not only a reminder of what He did, but also of what He will do, i.e., return again. Meeks says, "some connection with Jesus' eschatological coming is found in all versions of the early Eucharistic tradition, though in varied verbal formulations."<sup>66</sup> But why would a *supper* have that kind of eschatological connection? In part, because a Biblical image for life in the Messianic age was sitting at a grand banquet with the heroes of the faith:

*"And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 8:11).*

*"They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).*

Leon Morris comments, "*Sit at table* employs the imagery of the Messianic banquet, a symbol of the joy of the end of time greatly beloved by the Jews."<sup>67</sup> In pointing to the return of the Messiah, the Lord's Supper is an anticipation of that Messianic banquet. The realization of the banquet is pictured in Revelation:

*Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (Rev 19:9).*

Thomas notes that the "marriage supper" is a *deipnon*, as is the Lord's Supper. However, he also notes that these two *deipna* are distinct: "the Lord's Supper is not the same as the marriage supper of the Lamb which fulfills the commemorative suppers practiced by local churches and is exclusively future in connection with Christ's second advent. The Lord promised Laodicean overcomers the privilege of participation in this supper (3:20)."<sup>68</sup> Thus, the idea of a supper could also be a reminder and motivation to work for eternal rewards.

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<sup>66</sup> Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 158-59. See also Horrell, "The Lord's Supper at Corinth," 201.

<sup>67</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974, 1988), 248.

<sup>68</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1995), 373.

In sum, the idea of eating a supper was an important illustration of future salvation and the Messianic banquet to come.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The picture of the importance of eating to normal church life as seen in the Bible, and as noted in the academic literature, may strike you as different from how church is practiced today. Why the difference? As Emil Brunner once noted:

In the last 50 or 100 years New Testament research has unremittingly and successfully addressed itself to the task of elucidating for us what was known as the *Ecclesia* in primitive Christianity—so very different from what is to-day called the Church both in the Roman and Protestant camps. It is, however, a well-known fact that dogmatists and Church leaders often pay but small attention to the results of New Testament research.<sup>69</sup>

Instead of facing this “distressing problem,” the dogmatists appeal to “development” to explain the difference between the NT *ekklēsia* and today’s church.

By contrast, it is important for Biblicists to face the issues raised in the role of eating to NT church life. If your practices differ from the Biblical ones, what should you do? Of course, the obvious answer is to return to Biblical practices. Horrell suggests at least experimenting with such a return: “Perhaps the occasional reincorporation of the Lord’s supper [sic] into the context of a real shared meal might be worth experimenting with.”<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Jewett says we ought to “seek new ways of integrating the Lord’s Supper into revitalized forms of potluck meals.”<sup>71</sup> Simply put, begin eating together. Some people may object that church has not been conducted like that for many centuries. When Roland Allen faced similar opposition after explaining how Paul’s missionary methods differed from modern methods, he would give this response: “All I can say is ‘This is the way of Christ

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<sup>69</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 5.

<sup>70</sup> See Horrell, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth,” 201.

<sup>71</sup> Jewett, “Tenement Churches and Pauline Love Feasts,” *Quarterly Review* (Spring 1994): 55-56.

and His Apostles.’ If any man answers, ‘That is out of date,’ or ‘Times have changed’...I can only repeat ‘This is the way of Christ and His Apostles,’ and leave him to face that issue.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), ii.



## BOOK REVIEWS

In the last issue of the *JOTGES* we ran a review of Ron Merryman's book *Understanding Biblical Election*. We wrongly indicated that the price of the book is \$17.95. Actually, Merryman Ministries has the policy that "All materials are distributed without charge on a grace basis." They add that, "At the request of a number of constituents, we have included a suggested gift which includes mailing only in the contiguous U.S." Under the listing of the book they put, "Cost basis: \$17.95, which includes postage." We apologize for erroneously indicating that the book sells for \$17.95.

Kenneth W. Yates  
Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***God has Chosen: The Doctrine of Election through Christian History.*** By Mark R. Lindsay. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. 235 pp. Softcover, \$22.49.

Mark Lindsay is professor of historical theology at Trinity College Theological School at the University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia. He is an historical theologian, professor, and Anglican priest with research interests and expertise in the historical development and intersection of ecclesiology and election, eschatology, the Holocaust, and the theology of Karl Barth. This Barthian scholar has written several books and articles and in this new book offers a unique approach to election history that diverges from the often-bifurcated discussions on the subject in conservative circles. Lindsay does not have a dog in that fight.

The author admits right away that this book is not in any way a comprehensive treatment or a genealogy of the doctrine, but instead he offers a few "snapshots-in-time" of ways in which notable theologians framed election from Scripture, tradition, and their own unique context. He shows points of similarity and sometimes a radical departure from the norm. Lindsay starts by briefly surveying a handful of key OT and NT texts which have shaped election thought. Chapter 2 begins with election in the patristic period from

the apostolic fathers to Augustine, stopping along the way to give snapshots from Irenaeus, Origen, and Cyprian. The focus is on the relationship of election to the developing ecclesiology of these early Christians.

Chapter 3 covers the Middle Ages and concerns two men with two very different ideas of election: Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. The Dark Ages, aptly named, sees a complete blurring of the distinction between church and state. Election finds its home in the visible established church/state, with Jews and Muslims playing the role of the reprobates. In chap. 4, the violent rending of the established church wrought by the Reformation and post-Reformation feuds is surveyed through the agitators of the period: Luther, Calvin, Arminius, and their theological offspring. Election and the nature of justification come into laser focus. Chapter 5 jumps to the nineteenth century with the radically divergent election doctrine of Friedrich Schleiermacher and his refusal to accept the established *order of decrees* framework. Next, Lindsay moves interestingly to John Nelson Darby, who usually comes up in arguments over Dispensational and Covenant theologies but rarely when discussing election; his sharp distinction between the election of Israel and the election of the Church is highlighted. Chapter 6 consists entirely of Karl Barth's reconsideration of election. Barth sees Christ as the electing God and the elected man. Barth brings a Christocentric and corporate view of election back to the forefront of election thought. Barth sees all men as elected in Christ, and men need only to realize their election. Many contend that this view leads to universalist sympathies, which Barth seems neither to deny nor affirm clearly.

Though unintentional perhaps, Barth's theology flew in the face of Nazism which leads to the interesting last chapter of the book. Chapter 7 turns to another interest of Lindsay, namely the idea of the "chosenness" of the Jewish people in view of the Holocaust. Christian views of the role of Israel as the chosen of God take many forms throughout history, and most are unfavorable. He turns the discussion to show how Jewish scholars understood their election over time. He then shifts the focus back on Christianity, showing the Catholic Church's official change of heart regarding the Jewish people that had long been a schizophrenic message of love for the world while harboring a robust anti-Semitism. The regathering of

Israel and the shock of the Holocaust forces the world to reassess the role of the Jewish people in God's economy. Lindsay concludes the book by encouraging readers to resist their urge to form tribal groups and refuse to see election as a bifurcation of who is in and who is out, elect and reprobate. Instead, Christians should humbly recognize that they cannot fully know the mind of God regarding the vexing concept of election. They have come to the edge of that knowability.

There is value in Lindsay's brief survey of election. First, he offers a perspective from outside conservative, Evangelical circles. His views stem from a true Barthian vision of election that is foreign to most conservatives. While the Neo-orthodox Barth is sometimes vilified, often deservedly so, he brings a Christ-centered and corporate view of election back to the forefront of modern theology, despite the strange directions he takes the doctrine. Lindsay steers the discussion of the history of election through the lane of his views of Barth. Hence, he is concerned with how those of the past viewed election Christologically and ecclesologically. It is in some ways a refreshing approach as the author avoids the usual vitriol that comes from discussions of election.

While there is benefit in the book for those interested in election, some criticisms are worthy of note. First, while Lindsay offers a fresh perspective, his approach is restrictive and myopic. He only approaches issues of election through his lenses of pre-understanding, which he admits. This is done to the neglect of some of the major issues in the history of theology. He speaks of Augustine's elective views as they relate to the visible church, while avoiding the monumental paradigm shift from the views of the patristics to a deterministic individual election launched by Augustine. This shift abruptly changed the course of Christian theology, as did many Augustinian concoctions. Second, Lindsay continues through the Reformation, giving less space to Calvin, Luther, and Arminius than he did later to Barth, who has his own chapter. The book is saturated with Barth, whom the author references in almost every chapter. He ends the book by challenging readers to shake off traditional dogma and view election as only positive and (actually, not potentially) inclusive of all people, following Barth's view that all people are elect and only need to realize it. This view of election lends itself to inclusivism and universalism and will be unpalatable to conservative readers. Finally, the chapter on the Holocaust seems somewhat out of place in a historical theology book.

Mark Lindsay offers fresh perspectives on the doctrine of election in Christian history through the eyes of a Neo-orthodox, Barthian theologian and Anglican priest. Notwithstanding, those who are interested in historical theology, or in gaining insight into how the past informs the present conflict on election and adjacent issues among conservative Evangelicals, are encouraged to look elsewhere.

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***The House Church in the Writings of Paul.*** By Vincent Branick. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989, 2012). 144 pp. Paper, \$20.00.

Where and how did the early churches meet? In this slim volume, Vincent Branick summarizes the academic literature on house churches in Paul's writings. Along the way, he also explains the many different connections houses had to early church life. "The study of the house church, we will see, takes us to the heart of many basic issues in early Christianity" (p. 10). The book has many interesting insights.

Chapter 1 explores the role of households in the early church. For example, according to Branick, hospitality was crucial for supporting itinerant teachers such as Paul, and homes were also where itinerant teachers gave Christian instruction. If a household converted, it "functioned as the nucleus of the Christian community" (p. 20). Moreover, a Roman or Greek home had a head of the household, and as Branick notes, the office of "presbyter-bishops" were "judged by their ability to function as a *paterfamilias*" (p. 21; cf. 1 Tim 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). The prominent role of women in Paul's writings and in the early church also makes sense in the context of house churches (e.g., Nympha in Col 4:15).

Interestingly, Branick also notes that Paul can talk about both individual house churches and a city-wide church (e.g., "the church in Corinth," 1 Cor 1:2). However, when Paul refers to Christians in an area larger than a city, such as in a province, he usually uses the



plural, such as “the churches of Galatia” (1 Cor 16:1; Gal 1:2) or “the churches of Asia” (1 Cor 16:19)”(p. 29).

Chapters 2–4 look at practical issues such as the size and layout of typical Roman homes (e.g., they could hold up to 50 people), the prominent people whom Paul mentions as connected to house churches (e.g., Prisca and Aquila, Titius Justice [sic], Crispus, and Gaius), and how positions of leadership such as *diakanoi* and *episkopoi* were normal and minor offices in ancient voluntary associations, and we should not read later, technical meanings of those terms into Pauline texts.

Chapter 5 examines the details of the church gathering. Branick recognizes the Lord’s Supper was a full meal (p. 98), not unlike a normal family meal in a Jewish home (p. 99). He discusses whether the celebration of the Lord’s Supper was a different meeting than a “sharing the gift” assembly, but thinks they were one meeting, with the sharing following the meal (p. 110). He says there might have been separate disciplinary gatherings of the city-wide church (p. 113).

Chapter 6 describes the demise of the house church. When the church was small, it could meet in a single house. But as it multiplied to many house churches within the same city, the city-wide church became more prominent. For example, the church in Ephesus became large enough that Paul sent only for the elders (Acts 20:17, 28). There is archeological evidence for house churches continuing for some time. Then something dramatic changed. Branick quotes Eusebius as writing that, in the late third century, “vast collections of men flocked to the religion of Christ,” and “not content with the ancient buildings, they erected spacious churches from the foundation in all the cities” (p. 132). The new converts were not content with the house churches but built distinct church buildings, complete with “thrones for the presidents and benches for the clergy and a lattice-work chancel to allow the laity to see these leaders” (p. 132). Also, the Lord’s Supper stopped being a supper and became a “stylized meal seen as a cultic ritual” (p. 133). That changed the nature of the church meeting. Rather than being a head of the family celebrating a family meal, the presider was to be a “cultic leader who mediated God to the assembly.” And when the Eucharist became thought of as a sacrifice, “the leader was seen as a priest,” developing into a clergy/laity distinction (p. 133). In sum, “The church sought to reappropriate the cult of

the Old Testament. The community sought a temple with an altar” (p. 133). That transformed the Christian meeting up to today, even in Protestant churches.

In sum, this is an excellent survey of early church life as seen in Paul’s writings. It demonstrates that later forms of church meetings—whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—are significantly different from how churches met in the NT. Branick provides helpful context to some of Paul’s comments and instructions about the church. This book gave me much to think about. Highly recommended.

Shawn Lazar

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don’t Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.*** By Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener. Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2019. 236 pp. Paper, \$15.99.

Michael Brown is the founder and president of FIRE School of Ministry in Concord, NC, and host of the daily radio program *The Line of Fire*. He is also a noted proponent of the Charismatic movement and claims to speak in tongues (p. 43).

Craig Keener is a professor of Biblical studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, the editor of the *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, and has served as president of the Evangelical Theological Society. He also claims to speak in tongues. In regards to the pretribulation Rapture, he says that those verses used to support it are taken out of context (p. 25).

*Not Afraid of the Antichrist* is divided into three parts: why many doubt “Left Behind” theology; what does the Bible say?; and implications for us today. Each part contains four chapters. It has endnotes but no bibliography.

Keener is known for his academic writing, but *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* is a different kind of work for him. Not only does he have a co-author; his style is very condescending. The style is not academic, as he acknowledges in the preface, and the forty-nine endnotes are indeed “few and far between” (p. 15). The book is “addressed to a wide audience” (p. 36) and is meant to “inspire” (p. 15).

Both Brown and Keener, in their “earliest days as believers” (p. 14), attended churches which taught a pretribulation Rapture. Although they are now “convinced that this teaching is not found in Scripture,” they “never divide from others over the subject” (p. 14). Yet Christians who argue for it make “extra assumptions beyond what any passage says” (p. 23), “construct secondary arguments” (p. 36), and are “cult-like” because they “discount the clear testimony of hundreds of Scriptures because of a questionable system of interpretation” (pp. 187-88).

Keener gets to the crux of the issue in his introduction. Based on their reading of 1 Thess 4:17, the authors do believe in a Rapture. However, the question is “whether this catching up happens before or after the final time of Tribulation” (p. 24). They feel it simply isn’t fair that the last generation of Western believers escape the Tribulation when previous generations of Christians have suffered persecution in this life.

In the first section of *Not Afraid of the Antichrist*, the authors raise some questions about the pretribulation Rapture, explain why they left behind their “Left Behind” theology, explore views about the end times throughout church history, and reject Dispensationalism. Section two examines support for a pretribulation Rapture in the OT, makes the case that the Rapture and the Second Coming are one and the same, evaluates some pretribulation arguments, and presents some post-tribulation passages. Section three discusses the coming Tribulation, tells us how to live in light of post-tribulationism and the return of Christ, and reminds us that even though we will face tribulation, we should “live in expectation of God’s promise for a renewed world where suffering and death will be no more” (p. 219).

The authors maintain that the doctrine of a pretribulation Rapture began with John Nelson Darby around 1830. Keener brings up the work of Dave MacPherson and his claim that Darby got his idea for it from Edward Irving who got it from Margaret MacDonald who got it in a vision. But then he acknowledges that MacDonald’s prophecy “sounds more post-Tribulation” (p. 61). So why bring it up?

But the guilt by association does not stop there. We are told that “The Way International, a cult that denies Jesus’ deity, is pre-Tribulation” (p. 63). Pretribulationism is termed *Left Behind* theology to identify it with the novels and movies of that name.

Edgar Whisenant's book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, which all serious pretribulationist advocates repudiated when it was published, even garners a mention.

In his chapter on OT support for a pretribulationist Rapture, Brown fails to mention Enoch as a type, a living man taken by God from earth to heaven, who never dies. He views God protecting the children of Israel from the death of the firstborn as confirming "the post-Tribulation position, namely, that God can preserve His people *here on the earth* while He pours out His wrath *on the very same earth*" (p. 89). But the question is not about what God *can* do, but what God *will* do.

God can "multitask" (p. 98), says Brown. He can deal with "the Church and Israel at the same time" (p. 98) during the Tribulation period, and the argument that the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) is for Israel is "specious" (p. 98). So, which is it? Does God want the last generation of Western believers to experience tribulation, or does He want to preserve them on earth while others experience tribulation? Brown's "most decisive OT text in our discussion" is Isa 26:20-21 and the larger context of "the Apocalypse of Isaiah" in chaps. 24-27 (p. 94). But here he equates Israel with all believers.

Chapter 6 of *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* tells us that "the idea that the Rapture and the Second Coming are two distinct events is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures" (p. 101). Yet even the authors believe that "there is one Second Coming, and it has different aspects to it" (p. 107). Much ado is made over the fact that the same Greek words (like *parousia*) "are used to describe two supposedly separate and quite different events" (p. 102). An appearing (*epiphaneia*) and a revealing (*apokalupsis*) "must be visible" (pp. 114-15), so these words can't possibly refer to a pretribulationist "secret" Rapture. The authors believe that Christians are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but then they descend to earth together with Him as He "defeats his enemies and establishes His Kingdom on the earth" (p. 107).

The authors misrepresent pretribulationism. Christ meeting believers in the clouds (1 Thess 4:17) is certainly an actual presence and arrival that is a visible appearing and revealing *to believers*. Regarding the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, OT saints are not "in Christ" (1 Thess 4:16) and neither do they "sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess 4:14). Yet, in

the post-tribulational system, saints of all ages are raptured to meet Jesus as He returns to earth.

In the chapters on “evaluating some pre-Tribulational arguments” and “post-Tribulational passages,” the authors are hopelessly confused because they make no distinction between Israel and the Church and attempt to lump together Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4. The authors believe that “the view that Christians are raptured and thus resurrected before the Tribulation makes Biblical prophecy far more complex than it needs to be” (p. 29).

However, rejecting a pretribulational Rapture and forcing all prophetic events together is what makes Biblical prophecy far more complex than it needs to be. Things that are different are not the same. The Rapture is not the Second Coming. The Church has not replaced Israel. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not the White Throne Judgment.

Chapter 10 of the book is entitled “How to Live in Light of Post-Tribulationalism.” It reads instead like “How to Live in Light of Postmillennialism.” It closes with the statement that “the Gospel is spreading through the world at an ever-increasing pace, *with* the Spirit’s help, not *without* the Spirit’s help, and in the midst of great darkness and evil and apostasy, God’s light is shining brighter by the day” (p. 199). This chapter also contains some very dubious statistics on how many people are coming to faith today (pp. 196-98).

I note also that the authors believe that “Jesus’ true followers must persevere to the end” (p. 206).

I can only recommend *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* to seasoned and grounded pretribulational pastors and teachers who need to see what opponents are currently saying.

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***40 Questions about Calvinism.*** By Shawn D. Wright. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2019. 303 pp. Paper, \$24.99.

On my bookshelves, I have several books in the Kregel Academic “*40 Questions*” series and find the format very practical, even if I don’t fully agree with all of the answers given to every question. However,

*40 Questions about Calvinism* is quite different from the other titles in the series. It is a polemic for Calvinism, as much as Loraine Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*.

I should have known this was the case because of the book's blurbs. It is recommended by Thomas Schreiner, Wayne Grudem, and Ligon Duncan. Duncan is the chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary. The Arminian Matthew Pinson, who also contributed a blurb, says that he highly recommends, "this erudite and well-written volume for those who want to gain a fuller understanding of the Calvinistic system of thought." And that is exactly what the book presents as true—the Calvinistic system of thought.

Shawn D. Wright is professor of church history at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and one of the pastors at Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. In 2007, he co-edited, with Thomas Schreiner, *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*.

*40 Questions about Calvinism* is divided into four parts: Introductory Questions; Questions about Salvation; Additional Theological Questions; and Practical Questions. Parts 1 and 2, which contain the bulk of the questions, are further subdivided into sections. Each section generally concludes with a summary and five "reflections questions." Some of the questions are split into two parts to help the author arrive at a total of forty questions (11 & 12, 16 & 17, and 24 & 25). The four parts of the book are preceded by an introduction. The book also contains a Scripture index and a "select" bibliography of "twelve resources—eleven books and one introduction to a book—arguing for Calvinism in a biblical manner as well as a recent comprehensive defense of the Arminian position" (p. 297). The one Arminian source cited is Roger Olson's *Arminian Theology*. There are no books mentioned in the bibliography, text, or footnotes that present the Biblicist position which rejects both Calvinism and Arminianism.

The structure of the book is deceptive. The five points of Calvinism are introduced in Question 2 and expanded upon in Questions 18-30. This occupies more than a third of the book. Other questions could easily be incorporated into the questions relating to the five points of Calvinism.

*40 Questions about Calvinism* contains every teaching of Calvinism found in any book in defense of Calvinism: Calvinism is equated with the gospel; to deny Calvinism is to deny salvation by grace alone;

one is either a Calvinist or an Arminian; the Westminster Confession and Canons of Dort are authoritative documents; regeneration precedes faith; God must grant repentance and faith to the elect so they can believe; lordship salvation; salvation is not certain until the final judgment; God made a decree or decrees in eternity past; God has foreordained everything; God is not responsible for sin even though He foreordained everything; the “world” doesn’t really mean the “world”; “all men” doesn’t really mean “all men”; election and predestination are to eternal salvation; and free will is an illusion.

The author doesn’t hide the fact that this is a book to promote Calvinism. In fact, on the first page of his introduction he says: “My hope is that after reading this book, you’ll be convinced that Calvinism is correct because you see its contours clearly taught throughout Scripture” (p. 9). Although the other books in the “40 Questions” series that I have seen are generally valuable books, *40 Questions about Calvinism* is not one of them. I do not recommend it.

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***Without a Doubt: How to Know for Certain That You’re Good with God.*** By Dean Inserra. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020. 79 pp. Paper, \$7.99.

Great title. Great subtitle. But then I read the book.

There are some Calvinists like David Engelsma who believe in the certainty of everlasting life. Calvinists like Engelsma base assurance solely on the promise of everlasting life that the Lord Jesus makes to all who believe in Him. However, most Calvinists, including Inserra, are on a lifelong quest for assurance. Engelsma calls the evangelistic message of such Calvinists “a gospel of doubt.”

Inserra implies in the title and subtitle that it is possible to be certain of one’s eternal destiny. In several places in this short book, Inserra says that believers can and should be sure. For example, the last sentence of the book reads, “Trust in Christ, repent of your sins, and never have to wonder where you stand with God again” (p. 75). As can be seen, Inserra does not mention there believing the promise

of life. He mentions trusting in Christ and repenting of your sins. And he does not say that if you do those things, you will be certain. He says if you do those things, then you never need to wonder. In the rest of the book he explains what you need to do to avoid wondering where you stand.

The first difficulty, as seen in the quote just cited, is that Inserra believes that trusting in Christ (faith in Christ?) is not enough to be born again. You must also repent of your sins. Of course, that raises questions of subjectivity. I did not know all my sins in the past. Nor do I know all my sins in the present. If turning from my sins is a condition of the new birth, then I will always wonder if I have turned from enough of them.

The second difficulty is that Inserra says, quoting another author (Menikoff) favorably, "Though this belief is more than intellectual adherence to sound doctrine, it is not less" (p. 38). Inserra says that one must intellectually adhere to the facts that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, rose bodily from the dead, and appeared to many (1 Cor 15:3-11). He is not clear what other aspects of "sound doctrine" one must be convinced are true. But faith in Christ is "more than intellectual adherence" to the facts. A few pages later he indicated what more besides faith is required: "While believing in Jesus and His gospel are essential, He also included the call to repent, to turn from one's sin and follow Jesus and His teachings" (p. 42). How does one know if he is following Jesus and His teachings well enough?

Most Calvinists are not quite as clear as Inserra on degrees of assurance. He favorably quotes an author (Ferguson) who says, "high degrees of Christian assurance are simply not compatible with low levels of obedience" (p. 43). That is clever. But the point is disturbing. The more obedience one has, the higher his degree of assurance. The less obedience, the less assurance. The conclusion is unmistakable that the only way one could be sure is if he had perfect obedience. But wait. Even then, one could not be sure he would not sin in the future.

The last chapter before the conclusion is entitled, "Marks of a Transformed Life" (p. 63). In this chapter Inserra says, "I believe it is important to give tangible examples of what a life lived by a saving faith actually looks like, rather than simply talk in theoretical terms"



(p. 65). He then asks, “What are the fruits we should see in our lives that demonstrate a saving faith?”

Inserra gives seven evidences that one is truly born again: 1) manifesting “a life of repentance” (p. 66); 2) being “eternally minded” (p. 67); 3) believing “sound doctrine” (pp. 67-68); 4) practicing the “spiritual disciplines” (p. 68); 5) demonstrating “generosity” (p. 69); 6) having a “heart for those who don’t know Christ” (pp. 69-70); and 7) having “love for God and His church” (p. 70).

If those are the evidences that one is born again, then no one can be sure that he is born again until he dies. Of course, anyone who holds to a strong view of the perseverance of the saints cannot be sure since even if one was highly confident he met those seven standards *now*, he could not be sure that he would continue to do so *until death*. Remember you need “a life of repentance,” not a decade or two of repentance. You need all these seven criteria to be true of yourself until you die. If you fell away one day before you died, you would not find yourself with the Lord when you died.

The author gives his own testimony, indicating he was born again at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes retreat, simply by “a belief in the gospel of Christ,” apart from any works on his part (p. 23). It sounds like he may well have believed in Christ for everlasting life and only later come under the teaching of Calvinism. Sadly, however, instead of proclaiming the message he believed in order to be born again, he is proclaiming the message of Calvinism he later learned.

I find it odd that an author and a major publisher would put out a book which promotes the possibility of certainty that one is eternally secure when in fact that book teaches that certainty is impossible. I would think that anyone reading this book would feel that he was deceived. The actual title of this book should be: *Keeping Doubts Manageable: How to Have a High Level of Confidence That You Have the Marks of a True Christian*.

Assurance is by faith. I recommend that anyone lacking assurance ask God for it and then read John’s Gospel. That book will give assurance of everlasting life to anyone who is prayerful and open to believing it (e.g., John 3:14-18; 5:24; 6:35, 37, 39, 47; 11:25-27). (Both Shawn Lazar and I have books on assurance available at [faithalone.org](http://faithalone.org). However, while they are helpful, all that is needed to gain assurance is persistent prayer and God’s Word, especially John’s Gospel.)

I do not recommend Inserra's book *Without a Doubt*.

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Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel.*** By Dean Inserra. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019. 203 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

I have often said and written that most Evangelicals need evangelizing. So, I agree *in principle* with Inserra. However, there is a major difference in how he and I identify an Evangelical who is unregenerate.

Inserra identifies unsaved Christians *by their failure to live holy lives*. The born-again person is self-sacrificing, obedient, and is continually surrendering and submitting to Christ (pp. 38-39). He differentiates between *those who admire Jesus* and *those who are following Him* (pp. 38-40). The cultural Christian, the unregenerate churchgoer, admires Jesus, but does not follow Him faithfully. The born-again Christian follows Christ. Inserra does not discuss how well one must follow Christ to be saved. That opens the door for an inability to be sure of one's eternal destiny. If one bases his assurance on his lifestyle, then he is looking to himself and not to Christ alone for his salvation.

The Bible, by contrast, identifies the unsaved Christian as a person who identifies himself as a Christian both verbally and by going to church and yet who has never believed in Jesus for everlasting life that cannot be lost (cf. Matt 7:21-23; John 5:39-40; 6:28-29; Gal 1:8-9 [compare 5:4 regarding the false teachers]). *The issue is a lack of faith in Christ for the salvation He promises*, not a lack of commitment, obedience, and perseverance.

Inserra goes so far as to say, "Do you want to go to heaven when you die?" is the wrong question to ask (p. 109). Though he never *explicitly* tells us what the right question is, he is clear via his repeated calls for the need to follow Christ for a lifetime that the correct question is: *Have you decided to follow Christ as His disciple for your lifetime?* (pp. 110, 111, 112, 169, 170). He says, for example, "Faith in Christ is costly. Jesus wasn't looking for crowds but rather a commitment" (p. 111). In the closing part of his chapter on "Making

Decisions vs. Making Disciples” (pp. 105-117), Inserra writes, “Make a decision to obey or follow God with an awareness that choosing to do so might be costly” (p. 112). On the previous page he had said that “Faith in Christ is costly.” Why he now says that it *might be costly* is confusing. But the point is clear. In order to be a saved Christian, one must follow Christ for life.

When discussing false assurance (pp. 63-71), he favorably cites John Stott as saying that “nothing less than this [total commitment] will do” (p. 63). What is “total commitment”? Obviously, one’s commitment cannot be measured, partial or total. Inserra says that one’s commitment is seen in the fruit that a person produces (pp. 67-68). There is truth in that. But since commitment is not the condition of everlasting life or of assurance of everlasting life, Inserra is promoting a basis of assurance that can never produce assurance. In fact, his concluding chapter is entitled: “A Heart Check for Us All: How Do I know I’m Not a Cultural Christian?” (p. 187). He then proceeds to give a checklist that presumably can give us assurance by examining our lives to see if we have “A Life of Repentance” (pp. 188-89), if we are “Eternally Minded” (p. 189), if we believe “Sound Doctrine” (pp. 189-90), if we practice the “Spiritual Disciplines” (p. 190), if we practice “Generosity” (p. 190), if we have a “Heart for the Lost” (pp. 190-91), and if we have “Love for God and His Church” (p. 191).

That is the typical approach Lordship Salvation people have to assurance. No one could ever be certain of his eternal destiny based on assurance by lifestyle analysis since none of us are perfect.

The way in which a false professor is identified is by what he believes, not by what he does. We are called believers, not behavers.

I do not recommend this book by Inserra for anyone wanting to know the truth. However, I do recommend it for pastors, elders, deacons, and Bible teachers who wish to be able to identify the confusion and error that is so prevalent in our pulpits, Bible colleges, and seminaries today.

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***Grace, Faith, Free Will—Contrasting View of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism.*** By Robert E. Picirilli. Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2002. 245 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

Normally we do not review books that were published more than a few years ago. However, I just came across this book. It is by someone who calls his view Reformation Arminianism (e.g., pp. i, iii, 1, 17, 140, 235). Since Jacobus Arminius was himself a Calvinist, that makes a lot of sense.

Picirilli shows that the Reformed version of Arminianism is somewhat compatible with modern Reformed thought. The Reformed Arminian view is essentially Calvinism without determinism but with free will.

Rather than a corporate view of election as held by many Arminians, Picirilli advocates for individual election based on God foreseeing faith in a person (pp. 48-58, 83-84). Election is conditioned upon foreseen faith.

He has an excellent discussion of unlimited atonement (pp. 123-38). He also has excellent material discussing whether John Calvin himself believed in limited or unlimited atonement (pp. 87-88). He seems to hold the view, in agreement with M. Charles Bell, that Calvin was unclear on the question, but that he taught that Christ's death "was offered for all" and that "more than that is difficult to state with certainty" (p. 88).

Picirilli defines faith as most Calvinists do, including "more than mere intellectual persuasion or convincement [sic] of truth" (p. 167) in his definition. "It requires a 'decision,' a positive commitment, a willful entrusting of one's circumstances and destiny into the hands of God in Christ" (p. 167). (He does say that the Spirit works "*to convince and persuade* the sinner of the nature of his condition and of the truth of the gospel," p. 181, emphasis added. But he immediately indicates that such conviction "is required before faith," p. 181.)

Eternal security is also conditional. One's eternal salvation will be lost if one is guilty of "neglect, indifference, or unbelief" (pp. 201-202).

In the Reformation Arminian view, apostasy is possible, and if one apostatizes, then he loses everlasting life (pp. 199-208). Interestingly, since Calvinists agree that apostates cannot get into the kingdom,

Picirilli shows from Scripture that apostasy is possible (pp. 199-200). However, he fails to prove that apostasy results in the loss of everlasting life.

Like Lordship Salvation Calvinists, Picirilli says, “the Bible offers us no encouragement to provide assurance of salvation to those whose lives are characterized by sinful practices” (p. 207).

Picirilli makes this excellent point in the Afterword:

We must make no mistake on this: *the traditional Calvinist position is that salvation is not by faith*, and the various elements in the theology of salvation make this clear. When the Calvinist looks back into eternity to explore God’s plan, he sees salvation by election without regard to any decision by man. Having made such a decision, God sends Christ to ransom those chosen and those only. When it comes their time, in human history, to experience that redemption, God’s Spirit first regenerates them so that He can give them the faith He requires. Certainly the summary is overly simplified, but it is accurate (p. 235, emphasis added).

The author talks about people whom he calls *sub-Calvinists* (pp. 193-96). He says these people affirm eternal security even if a person fails to persevere. While he specifically mentions “many Southern and Independent Baptists” (p. 193), Free Grace people certainly would be included in the people he is discussing. In fact, he may have Free Grace people in mind when he cites Gerstner as “blaming dispensationalism for all the problems (including that which is caused by *the so-called ‘anti-Lordship’ salvation view*) he lays at its doorstep” (pp. 195-96). That he calls our view “the so-called ‘anti-Lordship’ salvation view” is encouraging.

It is easy to see that the key element in both 5-point Calvinism and Reformation Arminianism is the idea that only those who persevere in faith and good works until the end of their lives will make it into Christ’s kingdom. Eternal security apart from perseverance is an alien doctrine for both.

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***Forged from Reformation: How Dispensational Thought Advances the Reformed Legacy.*** Edited by Christopher Cone and James I. Fazio. El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary Press, 2017. 582 pp. Paper, \$39.95.

In addition to an introduction and conclusion, this book is made up of 16 essays by various writers (Thomas Ice, Patrick Belvill, James I. Fazio, Cory M. Marsh, Kevin D. Zuber, Brian Moulton, Andy Woods, Ron J. Bigalke, Thomas S. Baurain, Jeremiah Mutie, Grant Hawley, Glenn R. Krieder, Paul J. Scharf, Christopher Cone, and Luther Smith). The essays are divided into two main parts. The first forms a historical and contextual backdrop of key issues related to the Protestant Reformation and how these issues have developed since the 1500s. The second part addresses the five *solas* upon which the Reformation was based. The point is to show how Dispensational thought is in conformity with the beginnings of the Reformation and that this conformity is often greater than what is expressed in the Reformed tradition itself.

Thomas Ice argues that the reforms of the Protestant Reformation led to Dispensational thought. One major reason is that both used the grammatical-historical hermeneutic in exegesis. This, among other things, leads the exegete to conclude that God is not finished with the nation of Israel. The NT does not interpret the OT but is a continuation of the OT as it begins to be fulfilled (pp. 19-22). Dispensational theologians followed the Reformation's insistence on a literal interpretation of the Bible and rejection of the allegorical method. This hermeneutic led to certain conclusions. At the end of the Reformation period, there was widespread belief in the conversion of the Jews. These things eventually led to premillennial Dispensationalism (pp. 30-33). Dispensationalism, with its recognition of a difference between Israel and the Church, developed in the Reformed community, especially within Calvinistic circles (p. 39).

I particularly enjoyed James Fazio's chapter on J. N. Darby. He argues that Darby was heavily influenced by the principles of the Reformation. Darby advanced these principles. It was not an accident that Darby was a harsh critic of Roman Catholicism (p. 83). He was also a critic of the state church to which he belonged when he started

in ministry. Like the original Reformers, this Irish Reformer stood for the truth as he understood it and exhibited bravery in the face of opposition (p. 94).

Like Luther, Darby held to a literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic and the priesthood of every believer (p. 98). As is well-known, he strongly supported the idea of independent, local assemblies. This father of modern-day Dispensationalism had a major influence on people like Moody, Scofield, and Lewis Sperry Chafer.

Readers of the *JOTGES* will appreciate Jeremiah Mutie's essay on how the Reformation influenced the Dispensational view of *sola Scriptura*. He argues that both Reformed and Lutheran traditions have left the Reformation's teaching that the Scriptures are clear on what God wants a person to know (pp. 362-65). They have replaced such a view with the idea that the Scriptures are "sufficient."

There is an interesting historical discussion on the millenarian Millerites of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which led to Adventism. They desired to return to the clear teachings of the Scriptures, but did so with a "woodenly-literal" hermeneutic (p. 366). Darby and the Plymouth Brethren arose at the same time in Europe and were also millenarian in their beliefs. Mutie's view is that only the Dispensationalists maintained a consistent, literal hermeneutic. This led them to reject the idea of setting a date for the return of the Lord, which the Millerites did.

Glenn Kreider discusses another issue close to the heart of Free Grace advocates. His essay is on the issue of *sola fide*. It discusses how there has been confusion when it comes to Dispensationalism and the means of eternal salvation in the OT. Kreider says that Dispensationalism maintains that salvation has always been by grace through faith and was made possible by the death of Christ (p. 423).

There is a great historical discussion on how opponents of Dispensationalism have mistakenly charged it with teaching different means of salvation in different dispensations. This was the result of "unguarded" comments by people like Darby, Chafer and Scofield (pp. 426-34). Kreider believes that if these men wrote today, they would be more careful in how they worded certain things in this area.

Kreider does not discuss the idea that people in the OT were saved by faith in the coming Messiah. He seems to accept the view of monergism, that man is unable to believe and therefore even faith

is a work of God. This would conform with the Reformation's view that man is incapable of saving himself in any way. That salvation is by grace through faith comes from a literal hermeneutic birthed in the Reformation (p. 425).

Kreider approvingly quotes from Charles Ryrie and says that the "object of faith in every age is God" (p. 434). This is an unguarded comment in itself, since the object is Christ. Kreider is correct, however, when he says that the content of that faith is dependent upon progressive revelation. What the OT believer knew about the coming Christ is different from what a person knows of Him after His ministry.

Although Kreider appears to accept the idea that faith is a gift of God, he says that there are differences among Dispensationalists. In a footnote, he discusses the different views of what faith is and includes in his discussion the writings of Zane Hodges (pp. 436-37)

This book is a great mixture of theology and history. It shows that in the final analysis what drove the development of Dispensationalism was not a desire *to form a system of eschatology*. That would be putting the cart before the horse. Instead, it was a desire *to get back to the clear teachings of the Scriptures*. A consistent, literal hermeneutic led to the teachings of Dispensationalism. This was also a hallmark of the Reformation. As a result, Dispensationalism has more in common with the beginnings of the Reformation than the later developments of Reformed thought. This book is easy to read, and the layman can understand the points being made. I recommend it.

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Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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***The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land.*** Edited by Gerald R. McDermott. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 349 pp. Paper, \$22.55.

This book is made up of twelve articles by ten different authors. These articles are in four parts: theology and the history of Christian Zionism; theology and the Bible; theology and its implications; and theology and the future.



When the authors refer to Christian Zionism, they say it means that the people and land of Israel are central to the story of the Bible. The return of the Jews to the land is a part of Biblical prophecy. In addition, they believe that God saves the world through Israel and the “perfect Israelite,” Jesus Christ (pp. 11-12). However, they make it clear that they reject traditional Dispensationalism. At least two of the contributors are progressive dispensationalists. At the same time, they also reject the idea that the Church has replaced Israel.

Christian Zionism maintains that Jesus fulfilled the OT and that the current state of Israel in the land represents a “provisional and proleptic fulfillment of the promises” of the world to come (p. 27). Gentiles will be saved only by being attached to Israel. The new earth will be centered in Israel (pp. 182-86).

Gerald McDermott maintains that Christian Zionism is eighteen centuries older than Dispensationalism. The covenants of the OT also support it. In addition, many Christian Zionists today are not Dispensationalists (p. 46). The land promises to the Jews play a prominent role in the OT (p. 48). The early church held to Zionism, and it was not rejected until the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures came to the forefront as a result of Origen (early third century), who spiritualized the land promises made to the Jews. Augustine’s amillennialism in the fourth century had a huge impact on the rejection of a future for Israel and the Jews in the plan of God (pp. 55-56). The Reformation’s insistence on a literal reading of the Bible eventually led to a renewed interest in the role of Israel in eschatology (p. 66), even among those who were not premillennialists. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, most Zionists were postmillennialists (p. 75).

Craig Blasing argues that Romans 11 shows that Israel’s current hardness towards the gospel will be reversed. Israel plays a vital role in the Messianic kingdom (p. 94). The current possession of the land by the Jews is a divine act (p. 102).

I found Mark Tooley’s discussion on theology and the churches (chap. 7) very interesting. He says that Christian Zionism in the United States had the support of the majority of mainline Protestant churches in the past. This changed when they abandoned theological orthodoxy (p. 197). After that happened, Evangelicals took up the banner of support for Israel’s being in the land. Today, those

mainline denominations denounce Zionism as heresy (p. 216). He also has a fascinating discussion on how Zionism affected politics in our country. Truman's recognition of Israel after World War II is a case in point (p. 202). President Truman was a Baptist who accepted Zionism based upon his own reading of the Bible (p. 70).

Tooley also issues a warning. He sees a trend among Evangelicals in that they are following the lead of mainline denominations in their attitude towards Israel. The hostility towards the Jewish people is coupled in these denominations with indifference towards human rights violations. These attitudes are the result of heretical beliefs (p. 219).

Darrell Bock points out that an important aspect of Christian Zionism is that its focus is not on the spiritual salvation of Jews, but on the idea that Israel has a corporate future in God's plan as a nation which has a right to the land in the Middle East. It does not say, however, that Jews are saved by keeping the Law (pp. 308-309).

This book looks, from many different perspectives, at the case for Israel having the right to be a nation in the land. These are moral, theological, historical, Biblical, political, and legal. The contributors come from different backgrounds, with one being a Jewish rabbi and one being a member of the Israeli Defense Forces. Not all have a high view of inerrancy (p. 51). Many readers of the *JOTGES* will probably wish that the writers would make it clearer that the Jew must believe in Jesus for eternal life in order to be a part of the future kingdom. But at least Blaising (p. 104) and Bock do. This is a fascinating book which shows that even those who are not Dispensationalists recognize that, according to the Bible, God will keep His promises to the Jewish people and that the early church did as well. I highly recommend this book.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*