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PUT ON THE ARMOR OF GOD: A CORPORATE OR INDIVIDUAL COMMAND?

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Eph 6:11, Paul exhorts his readers to “put on the whole armor of God.” In 6:13 he repeats the command, even though he uses a different but synonymous verb. These are the only times in the NT where believers are commanded to do this.

It is safe to say that in the West, we naturally see these verses in a highly individualistic way. Almost automatically, we assume that Paul is telling each believer to put on the articles of armor he lists in Eph 6:14-17. Many Christians have purchased “armor of God kits” at Christian bookstores for their children, and have seen such toys used in this way in children’s programs in local churches. These kits come with a helmet, a sword, a shield, covering for one’s feet, and a plastic breastplate. Each young person is told to live righteously, share the gospel with others, grow in faith, and study the Word of God. The different pieces of armor represent these different spiritual disciplines.

Adults often interpret these commands in the same way. We measure our own individual spirituality by how well we are wearing the armor Paul discusses. We are to see ourselves as dressed for battle against Satan and make sure that as we confront him, we are taking advantage of the weapons God has given each one of us.

It is not difficult to find support for this understanding in Evangelical commentaries on Ephesians. Stott sees the individual Christian being called to battle here. He warns that there are some Christians who think they can fight against Satan in their own

strength and armor. This is a mistake. Each believer must take advantage of God's enabling power. At the same time, the believer must co-operate with God in the battle. He must decide to put on the armor.¹ Bruce takes a similar view. In his view, Eph 6:10-12 describes individual warfare. In 2 Cor 12:7-9 Paul describes how, through prayer, he took advantage of the resources God gave him to combat Satan. That is an example for all believers to follow. We must have the Lord's help if we want to be victorious in our individual struggle with evil forces.²

Lloyd-Jones takes Paul's admonition in this manner but in an extreme way. In his view, one of the tricks of the devil is to rob the believer of the assurance of his salvation. For each Christian to gain assurance he must have a radical change of life, which Paul illustrates by the armor of God the believer wears. The person who claims to be a believer but does not have the visible signs pictured by the different pieces of armor is a liar.³ Best also takes the view that failure to take up the armor of God determines the final destiny of each individual. For him, failure in this spiritual warfare will result in the loss of eternal salvation.⁴

Whatever view one takes about the subject of these commands, the notion that one must put on the armor of God to either prove one's possession of eternal life or in order to keep it is a mistaken one. Eternal life is given as a free gift by God's grace through faith in Christ alone. As such, it cannot be lost, nor can it be gained by practicing spiritual disciplines.

This article will argue that the command to put on the armor of God is not directed to individual Christians. It is a corporate command, directed towards the Church. Best at least hints at this possibility when he acknowledges that the verses immediately before Eph 6:10-12 are addressed to groups within the Church and not individual

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 266.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, England: Pickering & Inglis, 1973), 217-19.

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 222-26. Lloyd-Jones remarks that the lukewarm people at Laodicea in Rev 3:16 are examples of people who have not put on the armor of God and demonstrate they are not children of God.

⁴ Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 1989), 586.

believers.⁵ Hoehner also maintains that Paul is calling the Church to battle here, even though he says this command by Paul is directed *primarily* to individuals.⁶

As will be discussed below, there is a connection between 6:10-12 and 1:19-21. In considering whether Paul is making a corporate command in 6:11, we note that his discussion in 1:19-21 is relevant. Hughes sees the corporate nature inherent in 1:19-21 when he says that Paul is clearly talking about the Church and that the exalted Christ has given power and gifts to the Church. However, he then says that Paul is addressing individuals.⁷

Both Kitchen and Arnold are more direct in seeing a corporate command here. In Eph 6:10-12, Satan is at war with the Church, in Eph 6:10-12, not with individual Christians.⁸ Paul is calling the Church as a whole to battle against this enemy and his forces.

The idea that Paul is addressing the Church goes against a strong western tradition of individualistic spirituality. To challenge that tradition, this article will first look at the strong corporate emphasis in Ephesians, which suggests that Eph 6:10-12 most naturally points to that emphasis. Then, it will be seen that these verses form an *inclusio* with Eph 1:19-21, where Paul speaks of the Church. A discussion will follow on what Satan's battle with the Church involves. Finally, the article will suggest certain applications of such a corporate command for believers today.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 585. He claims that Paul immediately switches from addressing groups to addressing individuals.

⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 818.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 60.

⁸ Martin Kitchen, *Ephesians, ed. John Court* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 119-26; Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 67.

II. THE CORPORATE EMPHASIS IN EPHESIANS

Even a casual reading of Ephesians leads the reader to see that the Church is the main topic of the book. Paul explains that the Church is a mystery that was not revealed in the OT (1:9; 3:3-9; 5:32; 6:19). In Stott's words, Paul says that Christ through the work of the Spirit has brought about this "new society."⁹

The predestination mentioned in Eph 1:5 does not refer to God's choosing individuals for an eternity in the kingdom or the lake of fire. Instead, Paul's point is that in eternity past God predestined that the Church would be the Body of Christ. This body would be comprised of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Even though it was not revealed in the OT, it was God's determined plan that the Church would rule with Christ when He comes in glory.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, throughout the book, Paul seeks to promote the unity of the body. Specifically, he wants Jewish and Gentile believers to understand that they form a single body. He speaks of Jewish believers who were the "first" to believe in Christ. Paul refers to these Christians as "we" since he was one of them (1:12).

But he quickly adds that "you" (Gentiles) were also "sealed with the Holy Spirit" (1:13). The Church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, is a demonstration of the mystery of God's will (1:9), and is now God's "purchased possession" (1:14).¹¹ After discussing what God has done for the believers at Ephesus, Paul says that the Church is the Body of Christ (1:22-23).

Ephesians 2 continues the idea of unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Both "you" (Gentile believers) and "we" (Jewish believers) have been placed in Christ, that is, His Body (2:1, 3, 6). Together, they are God's "workmanship" (2:10).

The idea of being God's workmanship is traditionally understood to mean that each believer is a work of God. Paul adds that this workmanship was "created in Christ Jesus for good works." This is often interpreted to mean that when a person believes in Jesus, he is a new creation, and God has given each believer good works to do.

⁹ Stott, *Message*, 24.

¹⁰ Shawn Lazar, *Chosen to Serve* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), 201-12. See also William Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 180.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

Some then take this to mean that the good works that a believer does is proof that by His grace God has saved him. God accomplishes these good works in everyone who has been truly saved.¹² The ramifications of seeing an emphasis on the individual in Ephesians becomes apparent. It leads at least some to believe that assurance of salvation is found in good works.

However, even the hint of such false teaching disappears if Paul is dealing with corporate realities. Ephesians 2:10 does not teach that each believer is a “workmanship” of God. The word is in the singular. If Paul was talking about all believers, the word would have been in the plural, as it is in Rom 1:20. In the plural, the point would be that believers are the works of art created by God.

Instead, Paul is speaking of a single work of God. The Church is God’s creation. The meaning is clear. In uniting both Jewish and Gentile believers into one body, God has created His masterpiece, the Church. In the eternal plan of God, He has prepared work for the Church to do. The Church is the instrument through which Christ works in the world today.

The discussion in Ephesians 2 supports this interpretation. Prior to the church age, Gentiles were “far off” regarding the promises God had made to the nation of Israel. But Paul goes on to say that God has made peace between Jews and Gentiles when He formed the Church. The Church is the “new man” God has created. The Church is now the holy temple of God, indwelt by the Spirit (2:13-22).

In Ephesians 3, Paul specifically states that God had revealed the mystery of the Church to him. Gentiles are fellow members of the Body of Christ (3:6). The Church shows the wisdom of God (3:10). Who in the OT could have seen the formation of the Church? Who could have considered that Gentiles would become equal members of the body that would rule with the Messiah in His kingdom? Such is the power and wisdom of God.

Ephesians 4 continues to speak about corporate truths. Believers are to love one another, being at peace and unified. They belong to one body (4:4). The Spirit has given spiritual gifts so that the body can mature and grow to be like the Head of the Body, Christ (4:11-16).

¹² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 61.

The members of the body are to share with one another, edify one another, and forgive one another (4:28-32).

As members of the one body, they are called to walk in love towards one another (5:2). This would impact even the way they speak to each other (5:19). Because of who they were in Christ, they were to be subject to one another in the same body (5:21). This subjection should show itself in how different groups within the Church relate to each other. These groups included husbands and wives, parents and children, and slaves and owners (5:22–6:9).

After all these admonitions that the Jewish and Gentile believers at Ephesus see themselves as a body, and are to live in that way, Paul tells them to put on the whole armor of God (6:10-12). Even though it appeals to our individual self-worth and our cultural sensibilities, to see this as directed to individual believers should cause us to pause. After speaking of the mystery of the Church and the need for unity and peace, would Paul conclude his letter with a command for each individual believer to fight against Satan by himself? Wouldn't that go against the corporate emphasis he had so forcefully advocated? Why would a particular believer need the gifts available in the body if he could rely on his own armor, even if provided by God, to combat the evil forces around him? This understanding of the armor of God seems to promote a picture of Christian warfare carried on by Rambo, who takes on the enemy by himself. Such a picture contradicts what Paul teaches in the book.

The idea that Eph 6:10-12 is speaking to the Church as a body also finds support when one considers it has many similarities with Eph 1:19-21, which clearly speaks of the Church and not individual believers. These two passages form an *inclusio* of the book.

III. THE *INCLUSIO* OF EPH 1:19-21

As Paul begins to close the Book of Ephesians in 6:10-12, it is evident that he reminds his readers of things he discussed in the first chapter. In addition to prepositions and adjectives, there are also six words that are found in both 6:10-12 and 1:19-21. All of these words are uncommon ones, which strongly suggests that their occurrence in both places is more than a coincidence.

The phrase “His mighty power” in 1:19 (*kratous tēs ischuos autou*) contains the same Greek words as the “power of His might” in 6:10 (*kratei tēs ischuos autou*).¹³ In fact, the words for “power” and “might” only occur in these two places in Ephesians. The entire phrase occurs nowhere else in Pauline writings.

The word for “principality” (*archē*) and a different word for “power” (*exousia*) also occur in both 1:21 and 6:12. The reference to “this age” (*aiōn houtos*) also occurs in these same verses. The word for “heavenly” (*epouranios*) is found in both 1:20 and 6:12.¹⁴

Even though they are not the exact same, there are words in the two passages which suggest a link between the two as well. In 1:19, when Paul speaks of the greatness of Christ’s “power,” he uses still another word to describe the strength of the Lord. In 6:10, Paul tells the church at Ephesus to be “strong” in the Lord. In 1:19 the word is a noun. In 6:10 he uses a related verb form of the noun.

Arnold makes an interesting suggestion in reference to another possible connection between 1:19-21 and 6:10-12. In 6:12, Paul mentions “rulers” of darkness. The word only occurs here in the NT (*kosmokratoras*). It seems clear that this refers to some kind of evil angelic forces, like the principalities and powers found in both passages. It is not found in 1:19-21, but in verse 21, Paul does mention that Christ is greater than “every name that is named.” Perhaps the “name” of these evil rulers is an example of what Paul is talking about.¹⁵

To observe the clear connection between these two passages, let us view them side by side. The bold words represent the exact same words and the italics the possible synonymous connections:

and what is the exceeding greatness of His *power* toward us who believe, according to the working of **His mighty power** which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand **in the heavenly places**, far above all **principality and power**

¹³ The phrases use the same word for “power” (*kratous/kratei*); it is in the genitive case in 1:19 and in the dative in 6:10.

¹⁴ The word “places” is placed after “heavenly” in the NKJV in both verses even though it does not occur in the original Greek in either verse. It is a legitimate addition, adding clarification.

¹⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 67. It is also possible that the word for “ruler” in 6:12 is synonymous with the word “dominion” in 1:21 (*kuriotētos*).

and might and dominion, and *every name that is named*, not only in **this age** but also in that which is to come (1:19-21, emphasis added).

Finally, my brethren, be *strong* in the Lord and in the **power of His might**. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against **principalities**, against **powers**, against the *rulers* of the darkness of **this age**, against spiritual hosts of wickedness **in the heavenly places** (6:10-12, emphasis added).

In Ephesians 1, then, Paul says that God had chosen the Church in eternity past. Christ has risen from the dead, far above all heavenly powers. The Lord will reign in the world to come. The Church has been risen with Him. Paul concludes this discussion by saying that Christ has become the Head of the Church. In Him, the Church will also reign (Eph 1:22-23). Such is the power displayed in the Church because of and in Christ.

The similarities of 1:19-21 compel the reader to conclude that Paul has the same ideas in mind in 6:10-12. The Church is to rely on the power of Christ. This power is necessary because the Church is at war with these heavenly forces. If that is the case, it is the Church that is called on to take up the armor of God. This certainly agrees with the emphasis on the Church throughout the Book of Ephesians.

Often, however, Christians do not think in terms of corporate spiritual warfare. It is difficult to understand how a church could take up the armor of God. It would be beneficial to look more closely at what Paul is saying in Eph 6:10-12.

IV. SATAN'S BATTLE WITH THE CHURCH

Satan is not mentioned in Ephesians 1 when Paul discusses the powers and authorities in the heavenly places. The devil is, however, named in 6:11. He is the one behind these heavenly forces. These forces are described as belonging to the darkness of this age (6:12). Their evil nature is also seen in that they are further designated as “spiritual hosts of wickedness.” Specifically, the phrase “spiritual hosts of wickedness” is probably in apposition to the phrase the “rulers of the darkness of this age” and refers to the same group of evil forces.

In 1:21, taken by itself, the principalities and powers could be said to refer to unfallen angels and even human government. However, when considered with the *inclusio* of 6:12, there is little doubt that Paul is describing evil, fallen angels.¹⁶ They have as their leader the devil. They are at war with and are attacking the Church. The word “spiritual” describes the nature of these enemies of the Church. The adjective “heavenly” indicates from where they originate or from where they are able to operate.

In 6:12, when Paul speaks of principalities, powers, and rulers, he may be describing characteristics of Satan and the fallen angels. They have power and the authority to exercise that power. This authority extends over a wide area around the world. If the phrase “spiritual hosts of wickedness” is indeed appositional, it describes the character of these beings who have this extensive power and authority.

It is also possible that these words describe different types of fallen angels. This would mean there is a hierarchy among them, with Satan being their commander.¹⁷ This would not be surprising since there is a hierarchy among the unfallen angels. Some good angels are arch-angels, some cherubim, other seraphim, and many others are what could be called ordinary angels. The satanic evil forces evidently are arranged like an army, with different soldiers in that army possessing different levels of strength, authority, and the sphere in which they can use that power.

The word “rulers” in 6:12 indicates some kind of authority in this world, as does the references to “this age.” Even though these forces are spiritual in nature and originate in the heavens, they exercise authority over men and women on earth. In some sense they have an influence in the affairs and activities of mankind.¹⁸ This includes the affairs of the Church.

The Scriptures do not give much information on the hierarchy of the fallen angels and how they use their power among mankind. The Book of Daniel, however, does give us a glimpse of these unseen realities. In Daniel 10, Daniel prays to God, but there is a delay in the answer given by the Lord because of angelic warfare.

¹⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 279, 826.

¹⁷ William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ Press, 2009), 158; Hughes, *Ephesians*, 215.

¹⁸ Larkin, *Ephesians*, 24.

Daniel 10:10-21 speaks of both unfallen and fallen angels. Those involved in the warfare are called “princes,” a word which speaks of authority and power. A fallen angel is called by this title in v 13. It is clear that this is an evil being since he resists the work of God. Michael, the unfallen, holy angel, is also called a prince in vv 13 and 21.

A good angel attempted to give Daniel the answer to his prayer, but the evil prince of Persia prevented this from happening for twenty-one days. In this case, at least, God allowed this evil angel to hinder the will of God among His people.¹⁹

This evil angel has some type of authority over the nation of Persia. The kingdom of Greece (Dan 10:20) will also be impacted with this angelic combat. Walvoord comments that it is plain that there is evil angelic influence on the political and social conditions in the world. He also maintains that this is what Paul has in mind in Eph 6:10-12.²⁰ Leupold states that this passage in Daniel points out that evil angels exercise a strong influence over nations and governments, even to the point of controlling certain nations’ policies. They do so to thwart the will and work of God.²¹

Daniel also mentions the “prince of Greece” (v 20). The angel who speaks to Daniel said that not only would that angel have to fight against the evil prince of Persia, but also with the one associated with Greece. This most naturally refers to a fallen angel who has influence over Greece. The reference to the prince of Greece could also refer to the coming of Alexander the Great. Evil forces would attempt to play a role in his world-wide conquest.²²

Walvoord makes an interesting observation that speaks of the power of these evil forces as they oppose the work of God. In the Book of Daniel, Greece and Persia are two of the kingdoms that receive much focus (Daniel 2, 7–10, 11). These kingdoms would greatly impact God’s chosen people Israel. Many of the details of God’s prophecy to

¹⁹ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 124-25.

²⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971), 247.

²¹ Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1949), 457-58.

²² Charles L. Feinberg, *Daniel: The Kingdom of the Lord* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1981), 145.

the nation of Israel during this period involved an unseen struggle of angelic forces concerning the will of God.²³ In Ephesians, Paul says that the Church is the people of God in this dispensation, in “this age.” God had determined this in eternity past, and the Church has been given the task of doing the work of the Lord (Eph 2:10). It is not surprising that evil forces would attempt to thwart that work in the world today, just as they did in the time of Daniel.

In Eph 2:2, Paul calls Satan the “prince of the power of the air,” who has influence over the world.²⁴ John says that the whole world lies under his power (1 John 5:19). In 2 Cor 4:4, Paul calls him “the god of this age.” The words “this age” are the same ones used here in Eph 6:12. When Satan tempted the Lord in the wilderness, he offered Him the glory of all the kingdoms of the world if the Lord would worship him (Matt 4:8-9). The Lord does not dispute Satan’s rights in this offer. In all these cases, including Daniel 10, we see that Satan has authority over the nations of the world.

God can and does limit the exercise of the power and authority Satan and his forces have over mankind and the nations of the world. This is seen in the angelic warfare described in Daniel 10, as well as in the account of Job (Job 1:12; 2:6).²⁵ But in this present age, it is correct to say that these evil forces exercise ruling power over the world. This would explain the reason for Satan’s attack on the Church.

A. The Role of the Church in the World to Come

In Eph 1:19-23, Paul says that Christ will rule the world to come. He has been seated at the right hand of the Father (v 20), which appears to be an allusion to Psa 110:1.²⁶ The author of Hebrews explains how this Psalm looks forward to the day when all Christ’s enemies will be defeated and, as a result, He will rule forever.²⁷ These enemies certainly include Satan and his evil forces that wage war against His Church.

²³ Walvoord, *Daniel*, 250.

²⁴ Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 69.

²⁵ Archer, “Daniel,” 125.

²⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 279.

²⁷ Kenneth W. Yates, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 32-33.

Ephesians tells us that the Church is the Body of Christ and will rule with Him in that day (1:22-23). While this does not mean that every individual Christian will rule with Christ, the Body of Christ will. This is the predestined will of God.

God originally created man and woman to rule over the works of His hands (Gen 1:28). In Christ, the Church will fulfill God's created purpose (Psa 8:5-6; Heb 2:5-10).²⁸ Whatever power and authority Satan and his forces have in this present age over the world will be gone when Christ returns with His Church. In this present age, the Church is preparing for the role it will have for eternity.

In eternity past, God predestined the Church for this glorious future. In the Church, God has brought together both Jews and Gentiles to accomplish His created purpose for men and women. The Church shows the power and wisdom of God. In Eph 3:10, Paul specifically states this and connects it with the spiritual warfare of 6:10-12. He uses the same words to describe both the powers attacking the Church and their place of origin: "...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the *principalities and powers in the heavenly places*" (Eph 3:10, emphasis added).

It is to be noted that it is the Church as a whole which teaches fallen angels something. In the Church God demonstrates His wisdom to these evil forces. It is the Church which will have authority in the world to come. In a very real sense, it can be said that the Church will assume the power that Satan and his fallen angels have over the world in this present age. They attack the organization that will replace them. The power that Satan exercises today is limited by what God allows, so the power of the Body of Christ in His eternal kingdom will be even greater. The birth of the Church and its continued existence show Satan and his angels the hidden purpose of God that was a mystery in the OT (Eph 3:9).²⁹

While we cannot understand much about the spiritual world, it is clear that Satan has an intense hatred towards the Church. Evil forces cannot attack Christ personally, so they turn their attention to His Body. Satan wanted to prevent the first Adam from ruling over

²⁸ Ibid., 40-43.

²⁹ E. F. Scott, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (London: MNTC, 1930), 189.

the works of God's hand and certainly resents the fact that the Body of the Second Adam will. He evidently wants to see the Church fail in the works that God has given it (Eph 2:10). Perhaps this is out of jealousy, or perhaps he takes evil pleasure when the Church does not honor its Head. Christ is dishonored when the Church does not function as Paul instructs it to in the Book of Ephesians. One might suggest that Satan enjoys it when the Church does not conduct itself in a way that reflects what it will be.

In the context of the Book of Ephesians, one of the aims of Satan is to create division in the Body of Christ (4:1-3). He attempts to make local assembly members fight with one another. He does not want to see a church where the members love one another (5:2), grow in sound doctrine, and living righteously (4:11-16).

Even though we cannot fully understand the thinking of the evil one or all the reasons for his actions, Paul makes it clear that he and fallen angels have an interest in the Church. This is supported by the fact that good angels do as well.

B. First Peter 1:12

Peter speaks of a salvation in the future for believers (1 Pet 1:9). While many assume this refers to salvation from the lake of fire, it is clear that is not the case. Believers already have eternal life. It is not something they will receive in the future. In addition, this salvation will occur as the result of trials (1 Pet 1:5-9). Eternal life is a free gift and is not gained through trials.

The salvation that Peter talks about here is sharing in the rule of Christ. The soul, or life, that suffers with Christ is saved in the sense that the works done have eternal value and are not lost. It is something in addition to receiving eternal life.³⁰ In speaking about this kind of salvation, Peter comments that "angels desire to look into" this matter (1:12). The phrase pictures the angels as longing to understand something and they try to gaze into the matter to have a clearer view of things. Simply put, even good angels cannot fully comprehend the glorious future of men and women in the Church who will reign with Christ.

³⁰ Gary Derickson, "1 Peter," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 565.

C. Hebrews 1:14

The author of Hebrews also addresses the interest good angels have concerning believing men and women ruling in the world to come. Like Peter, he uses the word “salvation” to describe the honor that will be given to them. Those who rule will be saved from all their trials and enemies after they have suffered with the Lord.³¹

These angels, who are stronger and wiser than human beings, serve these men and women who will rule with Christ. In some ways, the good heavenly beings assist these people as they prepare for their eternal roles of ruling over the works of God’s hands.

It is of interest that in Heb 1:13 the author of Hebrews quotes from Psa 110. All enemies will be put under Christ’s feet. Christ is currently seated at the right hand of God. Paul refers to this in Eph 1:20 when he says that all evil forces will be a part of those defeated. On that day, the Church will rule with Christ. Unfallen angels are amazed at what the Lord has done and will do for believers. Fallen angels are in spiritual warfare against this group of men and women.

V. CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

The Book of Ephesian emphasizes the Church, which was predestined by God to be the Body of the King and has a glorious future. It will rule with Him.

When Paul tells the readers to put on the armor of God, he is telling the Church to do so. The reason the Church needs to put on this armor is that it is under attack. The Church is to see itself as being at war. Satan and his forces understand that the Church will one day rule over creation in place of the power they exercise in a limited way now.

The Church is a display of the power and wisdom of God in accomplishing His purposes. The rule and power of Satan and the fallen angels in the affairs of this world will soon come to an end. The hatred they have towards the coming King is directed towards His Body.

In light of the future the Church will have, it is to conduct itself in a manner that reflects its Head and this glorious future. Like its

³¹ Yates, *Hebrews*, 32-34.

Head, they are called to be a church where the members love and serve one another. The Church is to be unified as a body. It is to grow by the power of the Spirit that united them as one body. As a body, they are to live in a righteous way. This includes growth in sound doctrine through the word of God. These are the pieces of armor the Church is to wear (Eph 6:13-17). In doing so, the Church will become like the King it represents.

This may sound strange to anyone accustomed to hearing about spiritual warfare in individualistic terms. The Book of Ephesians challenges us to take a corporate view of things. How we each do as individuals in our walk with the Lord and how much we are being transformed into His image are certainly important. But it also important how the local church we are attending is doing in these areas.

Where we attend church is important. The doctrine taught in that church is as well. We are to pray for one another and be concerned about how the church is doing spiritually. We can be spiritually immature and lukewarm both as an individual and as a church body.

In the West, we have a tendency to switch churches if that church does not meet some individual need or preference. We may not like the music, or perhaps it does not have enough activities for the children. If my preferences are not being met, I may very well go church shopping. It might not even occur to us that the focus should not be on us as individuals, but on the health of the church as a whole and our role as a member of the Body of Christ.

To a large degree, we have lost the ability to see the importance of the Church. This may explain why we even read Ephesians as though it described individual spiritual realities instead of corporate ones. Almost universally, for example, the mention of predestination is seen as God choosing individuals.

Ephesians forces us to look at things differently. We should see ourselves as part of a body, and not just as an individual. Of primary importance for us in this area should be whether the church we are attending is teaching sound doctrine. Such teaching will play a large role in a church that lives righteously. We should pray that the body grow to be like the Lord and to hear Him say at the Judgment Seat of Christ to the church, "Well done." The evil principalities, powers, and rulers of this age are fighting to prevent that.

DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF SALVATION IN FIVE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS: PART 2

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I. INTRODUCTION

In part 1, we considered the use of *sōtēria* and *sōzō* in Philippians, James, and Romans. In the second and final installment, we will consider the uses of *sōtēria* in the Thessalonian Epistles and in Hebrews.

II. THREE USES OF *SŌTĒRIA* IN 1-2 THESSALONIANS: DELIVERANCE FROM THE TRIBULATION VIA THE RAPTURE

Paul's two letters to the believers in Thessalonica give more details about the Rapture than any other books in the NT. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the three uses of *sōtēria* in the Thessalonian epistles all refer to escaping the Tribulation wrath via the Rapture.

1 Thessalonians 5:8. Paul's first use of *sōtēria* is in the section of *1 Thessalonians* that deals extensively with the Rapture (*1 Thess* 4:13–5:11). In *1 Thess* 5:8, Paul writes, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." Believers are "of the day" in our position. Paul is urging believers to live in keeping with their position. He uses his famous triad of faith, hope, and love.

In what sense is "the hope of salvation" a helmet? In the context of *1 Thess* 4:13–5:11, the soon anticipated deliverance/salvation is the Rapture (cf. 4:16-18; 5:3-4). Believers already have everlasting life as

a present possession (John 5:24). We are eagerly awaiting the Rapture and the return of Christ. As Constable notes,

The salvation they look forward to is deliverance from the wrath to come when the Lord returns, as is clear from the context. It is not a wishful longing that someday they might be saved eternally. Such a thought is entirely foreign to the New Testament. Followers of Christ have a sure hope; they are not as others who have no hope.¹

Green takes the same view:

The hope they enjoyed is specifically linked with their future salvation (cf. Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Rom. 5:9–10; 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Tim. 4:18), which here, as in Romans 5:9–10, is deliverance from the wrath of God, as the following verse shows. The hope of salvation is not a vague expectation but rather the settled assurance of future deliverance (see 1:10; Rom. 8:24).²

This understanding is confirmed by the use of *sōtēria* in the very next verse.

1 Thessalonians 5:9. Verse 9 begins with an explanatory *gar* (*for*): “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation [*sōtēria*] through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The wrath in context is the Tribulation. The way in which believers will obtain salvation from the Tribulation is by means of the Rapture.

Green comments, “the present concern is with deliverance from the divine chastisement that will come upon those who rebel against God’s way...The Lord is the one who will deliver believers from the coming wrath (1:10 and commentary).”³ Constable adds, “The wrath of God referred to here clearly refers to the Tribulation; the context makes this apparent. Deliverance from that wrath is God’s appointment for believers...through the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴

God did not appoint church age believers to go through the wrath that is the Tribulation. He appointed us to escape it via the Rapture.

¹ Thomas L. Constable, “1 Thessalonians” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 706.

² Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 241.

³ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁴ Constable, “1 Thessalonians,” 707.

2 *Thessalonians 2:13*. After the Rapture occurs, “God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie” (2 Thess 2:11). Paul then says that he is “bound to give thanks to God always for you” because “God from the beginning chose you for salvation [*sōtēria*] through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess 2:13). While those who believe in the Calvinist view of election typically interpret this to be a reference to election to everlasting life,⁵ the context does not support such an interpretation. The church age believer has been chosen by God to be saved from the Tribulation via the Rapture. Compare 1 Thess 5:9.

The end of v 13 needs some comment. Why is this selection for salvation “through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth”? Paul is giving the divine and human aspects of our selection to be raptured. The word *sanctification* refers to *being set apart*. The Holy Spirit positionally sets the believer apart. This is sometimes called *past sanctification*. That past sanctification occurs at the moment that a person has “belief in the truth” concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶

The three uses of *sōtēria* in 1-2 Thessalonians refer to being delivered from the Tribulation via the Rapture.

III. SEVEN USES OF *SŌTĒRIA* IN HEBREWS: BECOMING ONE OF CHRIST’S PARTNERS IN THE LIFE TO COME

As is true of nearly every book in the Bible, one’s perception of the purpose of Hebrews is vital to interpret it correctly. And that certainly is true of interpreting the word *sōtēria* in Hebrews.

Hebrews 1:14. Being the first use of *sōtēria* in Hebrews, this reference is especially important. The author says that angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.” This salvation is typically understood as *final salvation* or *the completion of our salvation when we are glorified*. Ellingworth says regarding *sōtēria*

⁵ E.g., Green, *Thessalonians*, 325-26; Constable, “1 Thessalonians,” 721.

⁶ Most commentators understand the salvation here as regeneration and the sanctification as referring to present sanctification. See, for example, Constable, “2 Thessalonians,” 721; Green, *Thessalonians*, 326; Gregory K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 226.

in 1:14, “The term is never explained (cf. 2:3) and must be considered traditional.”⁷

Bruce writes,

The salvation here spoken of lies in the future; it is yet to be inherited, even if its blessings can already be enjoyed in anticipation. That is to say, it is that eschatological salvation which, in Paul’s words, is “nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11) or, in Peter’s words, is “ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5).⁸

Rayburn adds, “Throughout Hebrews salvation is viewed in terms of its future consummation. Its present dimensions are not emphasized, since they are not immediately relevant to the author’s purpose, which is to call his readers to that persevering faith which alone obtains entrance to the heavenly country (10:35-39).”⁹

However, there are contextual clues that this future *sōtēria* refers to being Christ’s partners (*metochoi*) in the life to come. As Tanner writes,

By salvation, our author is thinking not of our Lord’s saving work on the Cross, but a future salvation associated with His Second Coming (emphasized in chap. 1). This is quite clear in light of his use of “salvation” in 9:28, as well as his explicit mention in 2:5 of “the world to come.”¹⁰

Tanner made clear in his comments on Heb 1:9 that he considers this future salvation to refer to being one of Christ’s companions in the life to come.¹¹

The word *metochoi* (1:9) is translated *partners* in Luke 5:7. It is used in Heb 3:14 in an eschatological sense: “For we have become partakers [*metochoi*] of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our

⁷ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 133.

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 25.

⁹ Robert S. Rayburn, “Hebrews,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 1133.

¹⁰ J. Paul Tanner, “The Epistle to the Hebrews” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. by Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1036.

¹¹ Ibid.: “[the OT citation in 1:9] mentions the king’s ‘companions’ (*metochous*), a term he later applies to believers who participate in the heavenly calling to the New Jerusalem of the New Covenant.” See also, Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 782.

confidence to the end.” To be Christ’s partner in the life to come, one must hold fast to the end of his life (cf. 1 Cor 15:2; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26). Everlasting life is secure the moment one believes in Christ (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35; 11:26). But future partnership with Christ requires endurance (cf. 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26).

Angels are not sent out by God to help all believers. He sends them out to help believers *who are walking in fellowship*, those who are Christ’s partners and will remain so forever if they hold fast in their Christian experience.

Hebrews 2:3. This second use of *sōtēria* in Hebrews helps explain the first. It is within the first warning passage in Heb (2:1-4). The author asks, “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...?” The salvation (*sōtēria*) of which he is speaking is the same as that in Heb 1:14.

Since most commentators understand the salvation in Heb 1:14 to refer to entering Christ’s eschatological kingdom, they also understand *sōtēria* here in that way. Ellingworth says, “the message about Christ is an event which brings salvation to those who believe.”¹² Bruce writes,

But the great salvation proclaimed in the gospel was brought to earth by no angel, but by the Son of God himself. To treat it lightly, therefore, must expose one to sanctions even more awful than those which safeguarded the law...This is the first of several places in the epistle where an inference is drawn *a fortiori* from law to gospel.¹³

However, the first-person plural shows that the author is speaking to believers about something bad that could happen to them if they continue to “drift away” (2:1). While believers cannot lose everlasting life (Heb 10:10, 14), they can lose the opportunity to be Christ’s partners, co-rulers, in the life to come (Heb 3:14).

Hebrews 2:10. In the third use of *sōtēria* in Hebrews, Jesus is called, “the captain of their salvation.” He was “made perfect [or *made complete*] through sufferings.” The Lord Jesus was sent to suffer and then to die. He would not finish the work the Father sent Him to do until He died on the cross. The night before the cross, He said, “Now

¹² Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 141.

¹³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 29.

My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose, I came to this hour” (John 12:27).

Many commentators understand the author to be saying that Jesus is our Savior. Bruce, for example, writes, “He is the Savior who blazed the trail of salvation...As His people’s representative and forerunner He has now entered into the presence of God to secure their entry there.”¹⁴

However, the text says that He is “the captain of [the] salvation” of *all believers who follow Him on the path of suffering* (cf. Matt 16:24-28; Heb 5:9). Only by following Him on that path will we become His partners in the life to come. This is not a promise to all believers.

It should be noted that He is leading believers who follow Him “to glory.” In Hebrews and in this context, future glory is reserved only for enduring believers. Christ’s partners will share in His rule and in His glory. Tanner comments,

The word *glory* recalls Psalm 8 again (see Heb 2:7) and how Christ experienced glory in resurrection and exaltation. To bring *many sons to glory* looks at God’s plan for believers also to share in glory, as Christ Himself did after successfully completing His earthly pilgrimage. Because of their faith in Him, they will eventually receive the glory of resurrection and (if they do not neglect the “so great a salvation”) a sharing in the glorious reign and dominion of the Son. The latter privilege is conditional in light of 2:1–4 (cf. 4:1ff).¹⁵

Hebrews 5:9. This is the fourth use of *sōtēria* in Hebrews and the first use since Heb 2:10. The author, speaking of Jesus, says, “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...” To refer to Him as “the author of eternal salvation” is similar to the previous reference to Him as “the captain of their salvation.” As with chap 2, the author indicates that He will give this *salvation* only to those “who obey Him.”

This is the only use of the expression *eternal salvation* in the entire NT.¹⁶ And it is conditioned not upon faith, but upon obedience.

¹⁴ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 43.

¹⁵ Tanner, “Hebrews,” 1039.

¹⁶ It is found once in the OT in Isa 45:17. There it refers to the future reign of the Messiah and of Israel over all the countries of the world.

Hughes says, without explanation, “Here again, then, they are being reminded, as previously they have more forcefully been reminded (cf. 2:3; 3:12ff.; 4:11), that this great salvation belongs only to those who persevere in obedience to Christ.”¹⁷ Bruce takes the same view, once again without an explanation as to how this harmonizes with salvation by faith alone in over a hundred NT verses.¹⁸ He does note, however, that the author is linking the obedience of Christ in Heb 5:8 to the obedience of those to whom He will give eternal salvation.¹⁹

Once it is recognized that this salvation is obtained by obedience and not by faith, it should be obvious that this salvation does not refer to regeneration and escaping eternal condemnation since that is conditioned upon faith alone, not obedience.

Tanner gives four reasons why “*eternal salvation* in this verse does not refer to redemption from sin based on Christ’s atonement”:

First, of seven occurrences of “salvation” in Hebrews... not once does it clearly mean *salvation from sin*... Second, Christ’s experience in 5:7-8 is meant to parallel that of believers... Third, the context has not been talking about a sinner’s need for salvation from sin... Fourth, the obedience mentioned in 5:9 must be seen in light of the preceding verse. The word “obey” in v 9 (from *hupakouō*) is clearly associated with the word “obedience” in v 8 (from the related noun, *hupokoē*).²⁰

Tanner goes on to suggest that this *eternal salvation* refers to “*shar[ing]* in Christ’s inheritance and reign[ing] with Him.”²¹

Hodges agrees, writing,

[This eternal salvation] should not be confused with the acquisition of eternal life which is conditioned not on obedience but on faith (cf. John 3:16, etc.). Once again, the author had in mind final deliverance from and victory over all enemies and the consequent enjoyment of the “glory” of the many sons and daughters. This kind of salvation

¹⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 188.

¹⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 105-106.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Tanner, “Hebrews,” 1050.

²¹ *Ibid.*

is explicitly contingent on obedience and indeed on an obedience modeled after that of Jesus who also suffered.²²

Hebrews 6:9. After giving the third warning (Heb 5:11–6:8), the author then says in this fifth use of *sōtēria* that he is confident the readers will not fall away, but that they would do well concerning “things that accompany salvation.” The things which the author is confident they will continue to do are the good works that flow from the Word of God when a believer receives it (Heb 6:7).

The *salvation* of which the author speaks is once again often seen as referring to regeneration. Bruce writes, “the fruits of righteousness had beyond all question manifested themselves in their lives. Those fruits, being the natural concomitants of salvation, bore witness that the people in whom they appeared were genuine heirs of salvation.”²³ Koester agrees: “The sharpness of the reproof in 5:11–6:3 and of the warning in 6:4–8 does not mean that the author has lost hope for the listeners. His words are designed to motivate listeners to persevere, not to drive them to despair of God.”²⁴ In his view only those who persevere will enter Christ’s kingdom.²⁵

However, there is nothing in 6:4–8 that implies that the eternal destiny of anyone who fails to persevere is being threatened. The warning, like all the warnings in Hebrews, concerns temporal judgment and the possibility of missing out on ruling with Christ in the life to come. The illustration of Heb 6:7–8 is that we burn the worthless overgrowth of fields. The field represents the believer. His worthless overgrowth represents works that are burned. But the field remains. There is no reason to see *salvation* in Heb 6:9 as anything other than what it has been in the whole book thus far, that is, becoming Christ’s partners in the life to come.²⁶

Hebrews 9:28. In his sixth use of *sōtēria*, the author says that Christ “was offered once to bear the sins of many” during His first coming. Then when he refers to Christ’s Second Coming, he brings in the

²² Hodges, “Hebrews,” 792.

²³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 126.

²⁴ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 316.

²⁵ Koester’s discussion of 3:14 as well as 6:11–12 confirms that he understands the author of Hebrews to be saying that only those who persevere in the faith will enter Christ’s kingdom.

²⁶ See J. Paul Tanner, “But If It Yields Thorns and Thistles: An Exposition of Hebrews 5:11–6:12,” *JOTGES* (Spring 2001): 19–42.

theme of future salvation for faithful believers: “To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”

Bruce represents most commentators who see this future salvation as entering Christ’s kingdom: “So, our author thinks of Jesus as going into the heavenly holy of holies, to reappear one day in order to confirm finally to his people the salvation which his perfect offering has procured for them.”²⁷ A bit later he makes clear that he interprets salvation in Hebrews to require perseverance: “All the blessings which he [Jesus] won for his people at his first appearing will be theirs to enjoy in perpetual fulness at his second appearing. Therefore, let them not grow faint and weary but persevere in patience and faith.”²⁸

Not all believers will receive this future salvation. It is only “those who eagerly wait for Him.” Compare 2 Tim 4:8 in which Paul says that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give “the crown of righteousness” to him “on that Day [the Judgment Seat of Christ], and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” The salvation of Heb 9:28 is the same as it has been in the entire letter. It is Christ’s future selection of those who will be His partners in His kingdom.

Hodges writes,

Deftly the author implied that “those who are waiting for Him” constitute a smaller circle than those whom His death has benefited. They are, as all his previous exhortations reveal, the ones who “hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first” (3:14). The “salvation” He will bring them at His second coming will be the “eternal inheritance” of which they are heirs (cf. 9:15; 1:14).²⁹

Hebrews 11:7. This seventh and final use of *sōtēria* is a bit of an outlier. The author says, “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” The salvation here refers to the physical salvation of Noah and his family from death in the flood.

²⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 224.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Hodges, “Hebrews,” 803.

Ellingworth represents the view of most commentators regarding salvation in Hebrews in general and Heb 11:7 in particular:

Elsewhere in Hebrews (cf. 1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9) the reference is to eternal salvation, connected as here with obedience in 6:9; 9:28; only here is there reference to a temporal escape from drowning, and even here the wider implications are perhaps not entirely absent, since Noah's rescue from the flood is an essential link in God's purpose for his people.³⁰

Hodges ties his understanding of Heb 11:7 to his understanding that salvation in the entire letter refers to becoming Christ's partners in the life to come:

That God does reward those who seek Him is suggested by the career of Noah, who became an heir of righteousness by faith. What he inherited was, in fact, the new world after the Flood as the readers might inherit "the world to come" (cf. 2:5). The reference here to Noah saving his household recalls the writer's stress on a Christian's salvation-inheritance. It further suggests that a man's personal faith can be fruitful in his family, as they share it together.³¹

Except for the one reference to deliverance from death in Heb 11:7, all the uses of *sōtēria* in Hebrews refer to being Christ's partners in the life to come. And, as Hodges suggests, even that reference may allude to ruling with Christ in the world to come. That privilege will not be for all believers, but only for those who endure to the end of their Christian lives in faith and good works.

IV. CONCLUSION

Doing word studies is a vital aspect of hermeneutics. We cannot understand the Bible correctly unless we understand the meaning of key Biblical terms. That is certainly true of the words *sōtēria* and *sōzō*. Often new or untaught believers routinely understand the words *salvation* and *save* to refer to escaping eternal condemnation. That results in terrible confusion.

³⁰ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 579.

³¹ Hodges, "Hebrews," 808.

In some books of the Bible, these words are used in precisely the same sense in all or nearly all of their uses. Once one grasps that fact, the interpretation of the books opens up. Hebrews, Romans, Philippians, James, and 1-2 Thessalonians are all examples of cases in which the authors use *sōtēria* and *sōzō* with one uniform sense (and not the sense of salvation from eternal condemnation).

The reader is urged to do this study for himself. Check out all the uses of *sōtēria* and *sōzō* in these five books and in the entire NT.

THE TABLE OF THE LORD, PART 3¹

ERIC SVENDSEN

I. THE MEANING OF “TO BREAK BREAD”

The meal instituted by Jesus for His church goes by a variety of titles in the NT, including *Lord’s Supper* and *Agape*. Another designation is “the breaking of bread.” It eventually came to refer to the meal proper, at least in Christian circles.

There is general agreement among scholars that the phrase “break bread” refers in the NT to participation in an entire meal.² Most of the references to the phrase “break bread” come from Luke’s writings.

A. The Meaning of “To Break Bread” in Acts

Luke uses the phrase “break bread” five times in Acts. Four of these include probable references to the Lord’s Supper, while the last is more likely a common meal. It is all but certain that, in the former, Luke uses this phrase as a virtual synonym for the eucharistic meal.³

B. Evidence for a Sole Tradition⁴

While we may appreciate the differences that we encounter in the various Last Supper accounts, as well as the attempt to explain these differences, it must be noted that variations in how an event has been

¹ 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. The first two parts were printed in the last two editions of the *JOTGES*. This is the final part. Due to length constraints, some sentences and sections are omitted or shortened. Some explanations found in footnotes are also omitted. There are also format changes, such as the numbering of sections and the transliteration of Greek words. 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. Used by permission.

² R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1964), 122; I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 130.

³ Editor’s note: Omitted here is Svendsen’s discussion of Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35. He argued that Luke means the same thing as Paul does with his use of the phrase in 1 Cor 10:16. All occurrences refer to a full meal.

⁴ Editor’s note: Omitted here is Svendsen pointing out differences in how the Gospels, Paul, and Luke deal with the Lord’s Supper.

handed down do not necessarily imply different traditions. Several factors must be kept in mind when wading through these variations. First, not everything that Jesus said at the Last Supper was recorded. Second, it cannot be ruled out *a priori* that Jesus may very well have spoken *all* of the recorded sayings at various stages in the meal. On this view it is quite possible that Jesus Himself elaborated on initial statements at the request of His disciples.

Some differences may be due to each writer's explanation of the obvious intent of Jesus. For instance, it is not difficult to see how the phrase "poured out for many" could be interpreted by another writer as "for the forgiveness of sins." There is no substantial difference in meaning between the two phrases. Other differences may be due to the natural semantic field which each writer would encounter when translating Jesus' words from Aramaic to Greek.⁵ Though the accounts are independent narratives, all of them "descended from the same original tradition."⁶

The term "break bread," when used in the context of the Christian assembly, seems always to designate the Lord's Supper, celebrated with bread and cup and in the form of a full meal. All the evidence examined thus far seems to point in the direction of a sole apostolic tradition—one in which the eucharistic elements (bread and wine) are combined with a meal. Although there are various designations for this feast (Lord's Supper, breaking bread, or *Agape*), they all refer to the same thing. It is likely, then, that the entire package together forms the apostolic tradition of the Eucharist.

What impact does a uniform tradition have on the setting of the Lord's Supper? It is difficult to escape the theological implications of a uniform meal-setting of the Supper. Why, for instance, should there be *any* uniform setting if the setting itself is insignificant? In fact, there are many reasons for this uniform setting, all of which are steeped in theology.

⁵ Marshall, *Last Supper*, 41.

⁶ A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament*, SBT 6 (London: SCM, 1952), 24.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEAL FOR COMMUNITY

Having shown what the setting of the Lord's Supper is in the NT church (i.e., a full meal with one loaf of bread and one cup), it remains to be seen what theological significance there is to this setting. If the setting of the Lord's Supper as practiced by the NT church is void of any real and abiding significance, there is no compelling reason to hold to that setting. If, on the other hand, it can be shown that the setting itself (not simply the principles resulting in this setting) conveys theological truth about the Supper, then the setting is a significant part of the Supper. The extent to which the setting of the Lord's Supper contributed to this community-aspect in the NT church may be measured in three areas: concern for the poor, dissolution of class distinctions, and a barometer of right-standing in the community.

A. An Expression of Concern for the Poor

Paul chides the Corinthian practice of the Supper because some of the members remained hungry even though there was plenty of food available. It is here that Paul begins to show the importance of the unity-aspect in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34). The implication is that one aspect of the Supper is provision for the poor.⁷ Obviously the situation for "those who have nothing" in Corinth would have improved little by removing the meal-aspect from the Supper—they still would have been hungry.

B. An Expression of Equality of Status

Another aspect related to concern for the poor is in regard to differing status at the meal. Theissen points out that the social organizations of the ancient world were typically "homogeneous" and exclusively "class-specific," and even more so in religious associations.⁸ This is in marked contrast to the social structure of the Lord's Supper. The norm for the Lord's Supper was to be the opposite.

⁷ Marshall, *Last Supper*, 154.

⁸ Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 146.

All of this, of course, implies social significance for the meal aspect of the Lord's Supper. During this meal all social, economic, and spiritual distinctions necessarily come to an end. The participants become one body and, hence, had one status. Any distinction is not only discouraged, but condemned.

C. An Indicator of the Extent of Participation in the Community

One final social aspect of the Supper may be seen in its use as a barometer of right-standing in the community. Fellowship in the NT community found its apex in common participation in the meal. Exclusion from table fellowship meant exclusion from the community as a whole.⁹

There is a tendency among all people to be homogeneous and to hesitate in associating with others who are different in some way. The Lord's Supper as a meal forces its participants to erase all social, ethnic, and economic barriers.¹⁰

III. THE LORD'S SUPPER AS A PREFIGURE TO THE MESSIANIC BANQUET

In Matt 8:11 Jesus says: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus here is referring to a feast that will occur at the end of the age. This feast, properly called the "Messianic Banquet," is found throughout Jesus' teachings, but seems to be confined to the Synoptics (cf. Matt 22:1-14; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 14:16-24; 22:16, 18, 29-30). It is significant that wherever the words of institution of the Lord's Supper are found in the Synoptics, they are never without this reference to the Messianic Feast.

⁹G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Eucharist in Bible and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 63-64. Editor's note: Svendsen point out that in 1 Cor 5:9-11, to be excommunicated meant not being able to take part in the Lord's Supper.

¹⁰Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 544.

A. Old Testament Antecedents to the Messianic Banquet

Old Testament references to this banquet are sparse at best. Jeremiah sees Ps 118:25-29 as the only genuine antecedent to the idea of eschatological anticipation in the Lord's Supper.¹¹

The concept of the Messianic Banquet, although based on a select number of OT passages, nevertheless became embellished in later Judaism.¹² By the time of Jesus the teaching about the Messianic Banquet had developed significantly, especially at Qumran.

B. New Testament Antecedents to the Messianic Banquet

The NT is replete with allusions to an eschatological feast. Luke 12:35-38 speaks of the *parousia* parabolically as a wedding banquet (the parable of the master/servant), as does Matt 25:1-13 (the parable of the ten virgins). Luke 15:22-32 recounts how the Father will celebrate by holding a feast when His prodigal son returns. Jesus gives us a preview of this provision in the feeding of the crowds (Matt 14:15-21; 15:32-38 and parallels). He demonstrates His messiahship here (as in the Messianic Banquet) by virtue of providing an abundance of food. Indeed, the very first sign which Jesus performs is replete with eschatological and Messianic significance (John 2:1-11).

C. The Meaning of "In Remembrance of Me"

What does Luke mean by the phrase "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19)? The focus of the Supper has traditionally been derived from this phrase, which in turn has been interpreted to mean that the Supper is to be a time during which we are to focus on the death of Christ; a conscious reliving of what Christ had to suffer in order to redeem us. This suggests that the Supper, by extension, be a time of solemn reflection. The focus then is historical; a looking back, as it were, to the horrors of the cross. There are, however, problems with this understanding.

¹¹ J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1966), 36. Editor's note: Svendsen says that Isa 25:6 also prefigures the Messianic banquet.

¹² D. A. "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Vol. 8. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 202. Editor's note: Svendsen points out the emphasis in the writings at Qumran concerning the Messianic banquet when the Christ comes.

One such problem may be found in Acts 2:46. Here Luke recounts the practice of the early churches; that they “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” It is noteworthy that Luke here describes the general mood of the early church as they partook of the Lord’s Supper. It was not with solemn reflection, but rather with “gladness” that they ate the Supper.

Moreover, the context of Luke 22:14-20 itself hardly favors an interpretation which views the Lord’s Supper as a focusing on the past. On the contrary, the tenor of this passage is eschatological. We have already noted that Luke twice records Jesus’ eschatological prospect of eating and drinking again in the kingdom (Luke 22:16, 18).¹³ In light of this, it seems odd that Jesus would then abruptly shift the focus of the Supper to a memorial of Him (i.e., a looking back) that does not also include an eschatological element.

Since the Last Supper was (at least for Luke) a Passover, it seems certain that Jesus’ words were meant as a play on [a] customary petition to God. All their lives the disciples had learned that the Passover was an opportunity to petition God to send the Messiah—now here He was, eating the Passover with them! Jesus is in effect saying, “You have been petitioning God to send the Messiah? Very well, here I am. Now I am going away, but I will be back once again to eat this meal with you in My kingdom. In the meantime, continue to eat this meal as a reminder (petition) to Me that this meal is yet unfulfilled.” It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the content of the “reminder” is for Christ to come again and to inaugurate the Messianic Banquet in fulfillment of the Lord’s Supper currently being inaugurated.

By repeatedly partaking of the Supper (the cult meal of the New Covenant) we are “reminding” Christ of our plight that we are still without a host at our banquet and that the Banquet itself is still in its unfulfilled state. The Lord’s Supper, then, is an appeal to Christ—a reminder, as it were—to return and bring this meal to its fulfillment.¹⁴

¹³Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 217.

¹⁴D. R. Jones, “Ἀναμνήσις” in the LXX and the Interpretation of 1 Cor 11:25,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1955): 191.

D. The Eschatological Focus in the Pauline Tradition

But what of the obvious connection of the “remembrance” to Christ’s death in 1 Cor 11:23-26? The “remembrance” is for Paul a “proclamation of the Lord’s death.” But does this not suggest (as the *memorial* view holds) that the “remembrance” has a historical rather than eschatological focus? There are many indicators given by Paul in this very passage that his theology of the Lord’s Supper is little different than what we have argued is Luke’s theology.¹⁵ For instance, it is difficult to determine, if we are to adopt the *memorial* view (viz., that we are to remember Christ’s death), to whom we are “proclaiming” Christ’s death. To unbelievers?¹⁶ To ourselves? The former seems unlikely because in the early church the meetings were made up almost exclusively of believers.¹⁷ While the latter seems possible, it is not without difficulties. It would seem strange that Christians are to “remind” each other that Christ died. Moreover, just what form this proclamation would take is not readily apparent.¹⁸ While neither of these objections is conclusive, both of them militate against the *memorial* view to some degree.

In light of Luke’s eschatological focus, Paul’s words make equally good sense if we view this “proclamation” as a petition to Christ. Christ’s death in the Lord’s Supper texts is virtually synonymous with the initiation of the New Covenant: “This cup is the new covenant *in my blood*” (1 Cor 11:25; cf. Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). It does not seem too far wrong, then, to say that this “proclamation” acts as a “reminder” to Christ; that is to say, whenever we partake of the Lord’s Supper we are “proclaiming” to Christ (reminding Him) that He has initiated the New Covenant *by means of His death*,¹⁹ and that we now want Him to bring it to its consummation by coming again and inaugurating the Messianic Banquet in His kingdom.²⁰ Hence, the purpose of celebrating the Lord’s Supper is to sound a

¹⁵ Peter K. Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship: A Study of Luke 22:24-30*. SBL Dissertation Series 138 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 229.

¹⁶ Marshall, *Last Supper*, 113.

¹⁷ Church meetings were in private homes.

¹⁸ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1968), 270.

¹⁹ David Wenham, “How Jesus Understood the Last Supper: A Parable in Action,” *Themelios* 20 (1995): 14.

²⁰ Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 253

plea for the Second Coming: “As often as the death of the Lord is proclaimed at the Lord’s Supper, and the *maranatha* rises upwards, God is reminded of the unfulfilled climax of the work of salvation ‘until (the goal is reached, that) He comes.’”²¹ As Wainwright notes: “At every eucharist the church is in fact praying that the *parousia* may take place at that very moment.”²² Each time the church comes together for the Lord’s Supper, Christ is reminded that He is still not “eating” and not “drinking” (Luke 22:16-18), and that the heavenly banquet which the Lord’s Supper prefigures has not yet been “fulfilled in the kingdom.”²³

E. Maranatha and the Lord’s Supper

At the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes the somewhat disjointed exclamation, *maranatha* (“Come, O Lord!”), a phrase which Higgins and others believe accompanied the Lord’s Supper.²⁴ There is some question as to whether *maranatha* here is to be taken as an imperative or a perfect. The former (“Our Lord, come!”) would refer to the *parousia*, while the latter (“Our Lord has come!”) would refer to the incarnation. Still others take the perfect as present-referring and see in this phrase a statement of the “cultic presence of Christ” in the Eucharist.²⁵

In spite of all the uncertainties surrounding this word, it seems best to take it as an imperative paralleling the statement found in Rev 22:20, (“Come Lord Jesus!”).²⁶ The earliest church writings seem to have taken it this way.²⁷ The *Didache* gives explicit instructions for the activities surrounding the Lord’s Supper.²⁸ Remarkably though,

²¹ Ibid.

²² Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1981), 67.

²³ Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 255.

²⁴ Higgins, *The Lord’s Supper*, 60. So also F. F. Bruce, *First and Second Corinthians*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1971), 114; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 271; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Herm. ed. G. W. Macrae, trans. J. W. Leitch (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1975), 202.

²⁵ Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 70.

²⁶ Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 70. See also Wilhelm Mundle, “Maranatha,” *NIDNTT*, 896.

²⁷ Although later church writings almost uniformly take it in the perfect sense (Mundle, 896).

²⁸ Chaps. 9, 10 & 14, J.B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harner, eds. *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 232-34.

in those places where the Supper is most mentioned it is never connected with the death of Christ. Yet, as Goguel notes, there are at least two places where the instructions for the Lord's Supper in the *Didache* have eschatological dimensions.²⁹

It is likely that the writer understood *maranatha* in the imperative sense ("Our Lord, come!") rather than in the perfect sense ("Our Lord has come!") for several reasons. As Goguel has noted, there is a conspicuous absence of anything resembling a historic outlook here.³⁰ On the contrary, everything in these passages seems to point to a future hope. An appeal is made to God to "gather together" the church "into thy kingdom." God is implored to "remember" His church and to "deliver" it from "all evil." Another appeal is made for grace to come and for the present world to pass away (an obvious request for the inauguration of the kingdom). The exclamation "hossanna!" is historically tied to the *hallel* of the Passover and means "O, save," indicating "an imploring cry to Yahweh to bring to reality that which the liturgy has depicted."³¹ The fact that *maranatha* falls so closely on the heels of all this makes the imperative meaning ("Our Lord, come!") likely. Indeed, the perfect ("Our Lord has come!") follows awkwardly at best.

To summarize, then, the Lord's Supper is eschatologically oriented, not simply (nor even primarily) historically oriented. It is intended to prefigure the feast that we will enjoy with the Lord Himself at the Messianic Banquet. Until the Messianic Banquet comes at the inauguration of the kingdom we are to partake of this banquet—as *a banquet*—in absentia, via the Lord's Supper, as a petition and a reminder to Christ to return. We petition Him by *proclaiming* to Him that His *death* has initiated the New Covenant and that we long for Him to bring it to its consummation ("Maranatha!"). Each time the Lord's Supper is celebrated it *reminds* Christ that the Messianic banquet remains in its prefigure form (i.e., as the Lord's Supper), that He is still "not eating" and "not drinking" with His church, and that the "fulfillment" of the Supper has not yet come. The implications

²⁹ M. Goguel, *The Primitive Church*, trans. H. C. Snape (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1964), 346.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ J.A. Motyer, "Hosanna," *NIDNTT*, 100.

of such a focus for the community-setting of the Lord's Supper are addressed below.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMMUNAL FORM OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper, as we have seen, looks forward to the coming Messianic Banquet in the kingdom. It anticipates and prefigures that banquet and is therefore intended to foreshadow it.³² "In its entire execution," therefore, "the eucharist should be a foretaste of the coming kingdom of God."³³

A. The Lord's Supper as a Banquet

The most obvious implication of this principle is that the Lord's Supper itself should take the form of a banquet. The Biblical imagery associated with the eschatological banquet is one of celebration and abundance of food (Isa 25:6-8; Matt 22:4; Luke 15:22-32; Rev 19:9); and indeed, this is just what we find in the apostolic practice of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:46). As we have already shown, the word *supper* in every instance in the NT refers to nothing less than a full meal—and arguably always refers to a banquet or feast. Nor will it do to view the Lord's Supper as merely a *symbolic* meal, for what Paul calls the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:20 is nothing less than a full-blown meal held in common.

In spite of this emphasis in the NT, some scholars reject the notion that the Lord's Supper must take the form of a full meal. Stagg for instance observes that, "the supper anticipates the messianic banquet at the end of the age, but it is not itself that banquet."³⁴ This is true, but the reason it anticipates the banquet is precisely because it prefigures it. A symbolic meal can prefigure the banquet only with difficulty. It would not be too far wrong to say that only a banquet

³² The Lord's Supper "anticipates the heavenly banquet of God's eternal realm," Sharon H. Ringe, "Hospitality, Justice, and Community: Paul's Teaching on the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34," *Prism* 1 (1986): 59.

³³ Walter Kasper, "The Unity and Multiplicity of Aspects in the Eucharist," *Communio* 12 (1985): 136.

³⁴ Frank Stagg, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," *Review and Expositor* 66 (1969): 7.

can *meaningfully* prefigure a banquet. This may be compared to other Biblical promise/fulfillment concepts. The sacrificial death of Christ was prefigured by a *real* death, not a symbolic one. The eternal rest into which we enter when we come to Christ was foreshadowed by a *real* sabbath rest (Heb 4:1-11). The church as a whole has not “usually done justice to the theological implications of the fact that the eucharist is a meal.”³⁵

One may still question whether this association of a meal with the Eucharist is a valid one. Could it not be argued, for instance, that a meal was the proper expression of community for the social setting of the first-century world, but that other expressions of community may be more appropriate for social settings of different times and places? It must be conceded up front that this is indeed possible. If this is adopted, on the other hand, one must ask larger questions of Biblical imagery. Is there really going to be a Messianic Banquet at the end of the age, or is the idea of a banquet merely an illustrative device designed to convey festive joy in the kingdom? (If indeed “kingdom” itself is not merely the first-century expression of God’s reign—perhaps a more appropriate term might be used in non-monarchical societies). Is the culture of the church at this point based on the surrounding culture or is it based on eschatological reality? If in fact there is going to be a Messianic Banquet at the end of the age, and if that banquet (as we have seen) is rooted in eschatological reality, then we must see the Biblical imagery of a communal banquet as independent of Hellenistic society: “The notion of the Eucharist as a presiding of the Messiah over the banquet table in the kingdom must be kept strong because it is scriptural.”³⁶ But if this is the case, then it is difficult to imagine how one can argue that the meal-aspect of the Lord’s Supper is culturally relative. On the contrary, it seems rather that the meal aspect of the Lord’s Supper, insofar as it prefigures the Messianic Banquet, is as timeless as the Banquet itself: “Even now God’s lost children may come home and sit down at their Father’s table.”³⁷ Indeed, even today there are very few societies that do not view table fellowship as a rich expression of community.

³⁵ Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 18.

³⁶ G. S. Sloyan, “The Holy Eucharist as an Eschatological Meal,” *Worship* 36 (1962): 450.

³⁷ Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 262.

B. The Primary Focus of the Lord's Supper

R. P. Martin has identified three features of the Lord's Supper in the early church: (1) a common meal; (2) the bread and wine; (3) an eschatological hope.³⁸ This eschatological focus of the Lord's Supper in the early Christian community can be seen in Acts 2:46 which speaks of the "gladness" ("Messianic joy") with which the early Christians partook of their meals together. Cullman rightly sees this jubilation as incompatible with the idea of recalling the somber events of the Last Supper.³⁹

Yet, as Higgins observes, this eschatological element of the Lord's Supper has often been excluded in the modern church.⁴⁰ Käsemann, too, discerns a shift in the focus of the Lord's Supper from a primarily eschatological outlook (an anticipation of the Messianic Banquet) to an inter-advent ordinance "tied to the 'time of the church'" which pertains only to the church while here on earth.⁴¹ This current focus has acted to "minimize...the believers' present communion with one another and with the risen Lord and their anticipation of the messianic banquet at the second coming of the Lord."⁴² This is unfortunate for the church and detrimental to the theology of the Lord's Supper. Once the church abandons the outward expression of a NT practice, all too often the underlying theology of that practice is likewise abandoned. This is the case with the Supper as well. Since anything resembling the eschatological banquet is rarely to be found in the context of the Supper within the modern church, so too the accompanying eschatological joy is rarely to be found. Instead, the mood is much more that of a funeral. Rather than the early-church practice of "praying that the *parousia* may take place at that very moment"⁴³ in an attempt to "speed His coming" (2 Pet 3:12), many

³⁸ Martin, *Worship*, 122.

³⁹ Oscar Cullmann, "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper in Primitive Christianity," in *Essays on the Lord's Supper*, eds. J. G. Davies and A. R. George, trans. J. G. Davies (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), 9.

⁴⁰ Higgins, *The Lord's Supper*, 54.

⁴¹ Käsemann, E. "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," in *Essays on New Testament Themes. Studies in Biblical Theology* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), 122.

⁴² John Newport, "The Purpose of the Church," in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church*, eds. Paul Basden and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1991), 26.

⁴³ Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 67.

(most?) churches today focus on the historical element of Christ's death and the recalling of personal sin in the lives of the recipients. The eschatological element, it seems, can be found only within the ivory towers of the scholarly world; and, sadly, this is where it is likely to remain.

C. The Intended Frequency and Centrality of the Lord's Supper

Since one of the primary foci of the Lord's Supper is an eschatological plea for the *eschaton*, one might assume that its practice should be frequent. After all, if it is true that our Lord left His church with the means to *remind* Him to fulfill His covenant promises then it would seem that those who "love His appearing" (2 Tim 4:8) would want to use it often to remind Him often. Does the NT give us any indication as to the frequency with which the Lord's Supper was—or, *is to be*—practiced?

Some have looked to Paul's words in 1 Cor 11:25 for the answer: "do this, *as often as* you drink it, in remembrance of me." Grosheide sees here an injunction of sorts to partake of the Lord's Supper often: "Drink frequently the cup of the Lord and do so always in remembrance of me."⁴⁴ But this is to go beyond Paul's intent. There is no injunction to "do this *often*" here, nor in Luke, nor anywhere else in the NT. The most that can be gleaned from these words is that Paul *assumed* there would be regular repetition of the Lord's Supper.⁴⁵ Just how frequent this repetition was or should be is not told us here.

But to ask whether there is an injunction that shows the frequency of the Lord's Supper is perhaps to ask the wrong question. It seems evident that the early church partook of the Lord's Supper on either a daily basis or a weekly basis.⁴⁶ Luke records of the church: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46). This verse traditionally has been understood to mean that the early church partook of the Lord's Supper on a *daily* basis, at least at the beginning and at least in Jerusalem. Kilpatrick, however,

⁴⁴ F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 272.

⁴⁵ Fee, *Corinthians*, 555.

⁴⁶ Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 62.

suggests an alternative way of taking this verse, according to which “daily” is not seen as applying to the verse as a whole but only to “meeting in the temple.”⁴⁷ If we are to adopt this view we must then look elsewhere to ascertain how frequently the early church partook of the Supper.

Perhaps the best place to look is Acts 20:7: “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.” Several observations can be made about this passage. First, Luke likely intends to record more than mere historical narrative here. While it is true that Luke is recording the history of the church, he certainly does not include *all* that the church did. Instead, he is selective about what he records, including only those events that would best meet his redactional need of instructing the early churches in apostolic teaching. He makes a point to mention that it was on the “first day of the week” that they came together and that the activity included “breaking bread.” It is not so much the mere mention of this early-church practice that is significant here; rather, it is the way it is presented. True, Luke mentions the practice only once; but his one mention betrays an *assumption* that this was an ongoing practice. Luke’s point is not simply that the church met together, and incidentally this week it happened to be on Sunday. Rather, Luke’s statement is more accurately rendered as, “On the first day of the week, when [as normal] we assembled to break bread.”⁴⁸

This passage has direct implications for the frequency of the Lord’s Supper. Luke does not tell us merely that the normal practice of the church is to meet on the first day of the week; he also tells us the *purpose* of that meeting—“to break bread.” The infinitive here is telic and is more accurately rendered, “*in order to* break bread.” This purpose for the meeting occurs also in Paul. In 1 Cor 11:17, Paul introduces his discussion about the Lord’s Supper. He begins by chiding the Corinthians because their “meetings” do more harm than good. That Paul has in mind the normal, regular meetings of the church is clear from v 18 where he speaks of the divisions that prevail when they “come together as a church.” In v 20 Paul picks up on that same idea,

⁴⁷ Kilpatrick, *The Eucharist*, 37.

⁴⁸ A. T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 383.

but this time connects it with the Supper: “*When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat.*”⁴⁹ What is significant here is that the telic infinitive is again used. The church was to come together—“*in order to eat the Lord’s Supper.*”

This purpose clause occurs once more at the end of this pericope, again showing that the purpose of the church meeting is to partake of the Lord’s Supper: “So then, my brothers, when you *come together to eat, wait for each other*” (11:33). Interestingly, these three passages (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20, 33) are *the only places in the entire NT that use a purpose clause in relation to the meeting of the church.* Whatever other purpose the church may have had for coming together (worship, mutual edification, etc.), no purpose clause is ever used for any activity except the Lord’s Supper.

The foregoing point is significant because it links (perhaps even inextricably) the Lord’s Supper with the meeting of the church. One cannot speak about the frequency of observance of the Lord’s Supper without also speaking of the frequency of the church meeting itself. Put another way, once we have determined that the *purpose* of the church meeting is to partake of the Lord’s Supper, then in order to determine the frequency of the Supper we need only determine the frequency of the church meeting. As Marshall notes: “In line with what appears to have been the practice of the early church in the New Testament the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated frequently in the church, and there is good reason for doing so on each Lord’s Day.”⁵⁰

Indeed, that reason may very well be bound up in the similarity of titles for both the Supper and the Day. As we have already seen, the church adopted the first day of the week as the regular day of meeting for the church, even assigning it a specialized title—the “Lord’s Day.”⁵¹ While we do not know with certainty why this day was chosen, it is likely due to its association with the resurrection of Christ and His subsequent appearances to His disciples, as well as to the belief of the early church that the *eschaton* and the general resurrection would likewise occur on that day.⁵² Whatever the reason for the title, it remains clear that the word “the Lord’s Day” (Rev 1:10)

⁴⁹ Ervin Bishop, “The Assembly,” *Restoration Quarterly* 18 (1975): 225.

⁵⁰ Marshall, *Last Supper*, 155.

⁵¹ Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” 222-245.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 240-245.

is found in only one other place (1 Cor 11:20) where it is used in the title, “the Lord’s Supper.” It may very well be the case that the reason the same word is used for both the Supper and the Day—and never in any other context in the NT—is precisely because the Supper and the Day are inextricably linked to each other.⁵³ The Lord’s Day is so called because it is the day that the Lord’s Supper—the precursor to the Messianic Banquet—is enjoyed. Conversely, the Lord’s Supper is so called because it is the supper that is celebrated on the Lord’s Day. The Lord’s Day commemorates the resurrection of Christ, whose resurrection guarantees the promise of the eschatological resurrection. The Lord’s Supper likewise anticipates the second coming and offers a plea toward that end. The Lord’s Day is the day the church comes together to petition Christ to return; the Lord’s Supper is the means to that petition. As Wainwright notes: “[The] link between the day and the meal is already made in the New Testament and is of importance for the eschatological content and bearing of the eucharist.”⁵⁴ In light of this emphasis on the connection between the Lord’s Day and the Lord’s Supper—both in the practice of the apostolic church and in the practice of the post-apostolic church—Evangelicals should perhaps “rethink the order of worship toward...an increased use of the Lord’s Supper as the focal point of worship.”⁵⁵

D. The Significance of the Church Setting for Community in the Lord’s Supper

One final consideration that should be mentioned here is the physical setting of the church when partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Perhaps one of the reasons that the modern church has largely abandoned the community aspect of the Lord’s Supper (a meal held in common) is because its structure is ill-conducive to such a practice. One must not underestimate the importance of size and structure when considering the feasibility of any practice of the early church. As Filson notes:

The New Testament Church would be better understood, if more attention were paid to the actual physical

⁵³ Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers*, 223.

⁵⁴ Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 75.

⁵⁵ Newport, “The Purpose of the Church,” 26-27.

conditions under which the first Christians met and lived. In particular, the importance and function of the house church should be carefully considered.⁵⁶

One of the reasons that the Lord's Supper as a meal could be conducted with so little difficulty in the early church is because the physical setting lent itself to such activities: "Private homes provided the meeting places for the distinctive Christian acts of worship."⁵⁷ The NT portrays the church in terms of a family. The church collectively is the "household of God."⁵⁸ Individually, we are the "children of God" born into his family.⁵⁹ Consequently, we are to relate to one another as brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. No other setting can bear the theological implications of *church as family* like the home. Indeed, it might well be argued that "it was the hospitality of these homes which made possible the Christian worship, common meals, and courage-sustaining fellowship of the group."⁶⁰ It should come as no surprise then that the setting for the early church meeting was the simplicity of the homes of its members.⁶¹

Nor should it be of great surprise that the Lord's Supper was a primary activity of these home meetings. Luke informs us that the early churches "broke bread in their homes" (Acts 2:46). The setting was small and intimate,⁶² which itself contributed to the fellowship of community around the Lord's Table:

Thus the meal that they shared together not only reminded the members of their relationship with Christ and one another but actually deepened it, much as participation in a common meal by a family or group not only symbolizes but really cements the bond between them.⁶³

⁵⁶ F. V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," *JBL* 58 (1939): 105-106.

⁵⁷ G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 349.

⁵⁸ Ephesians 2:19; cf. Gal 6:10.

⁵⁹ John 1:12-13; 1 Tim 5:1-2; Rom 16:13.

⁶⁰ Filson, "House Churches," 109.

⁶¹ Acts 2:46; 5:42; 16:40; 20:20; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1-2; 2 John 10.

⁶² Ladd, 349. Cf. also Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 41-42.

⁶³ Banks, *Paul's Idea*, 86.

While the modern evangelical church longs to emulate the NT church in its theology and practice of the Lord's Supper, the community-aspect of the Supper remains conspicuously absent. No doubt the church setting plays a prominent role in this. Indeed, it would be exceedingly difficult and impractical—if not altogether impossible—to adopt the apostolic practice of the Lord's Supper in the large church, for such a setting militates against the intimate community that was such an integral part of the Supper. Instead, the modern church has *adapted* the Lord's Supper to fit the setting. This is unfortunate, for adaptation normally entails the loss of theological significance (whether intentional or not). For instance, the adaptation of the Supper to accommodate a large community requires that intimacy of table fellowship be sacrificed. Similarly, the singularity of the bread and cup which we have seen *causes* unity in the body has given way to bread that is already broken and wine that is poured beforehand; hence, the form of the bread and wine in the modern church is not only incapable of *causing* bodily unity, but is also incapable of *symbolizing* unity. The meal-aspect which prefigures the Messianic Banquet must be substituted with a token (or *symbolic*) meal. In short, theological significance has been displaced by logistics.

None of this is to lay blame on the modern church; to a very large extent the church today is merely a product of its forerunners. We have inherited the problem. Indeed, the theological shortcomings of the current practice of the Lord's Supper can hardly be avoided given the setting of the modern church. The church has likely done its level best to faithfully carry out the practice of the NT church in the context in which it finds itself. Perhaps, though, the answer lies not in adapting the Lord's Supper to accommodate the current setting of the church; perhaps instead it lies in adapting the current setting of the church to accommodate the theology of the Lord's Supper.

V. CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to show how the community-aspect of the early church held significance and was operative in the context of the Lord's Supper. Most of what we know about this aspect of the Supper comes from the pen of Paul who defines the Lord's Supper in a number of very specific ways. At the very outset, the Supper

must enjoy the voluntary unity of its participants, without which it ceases to be the Lord's Supper. Yet voluntary unity is not enough. The Supper must also visibly express that unity through the singularity of the bread and cup.

When this visible expression is present, we find that the singularity of the bread and cup actually *causes* bodily unity. This unity aspect persists throughout the early existence of the church and finds support in a number of patristic sources as well.

Perhaps the most important aspect for community in the Lord's Supper is the fact that the Supper was originally a full meal. Indeed, what Paul refers to when he coins the title "Lord's Supper" is the *meal*, of which the bread and wine are prominent elements, and apart from which the Lord's Supper cannot properly be called a "supper." The separation of the meal from the elements occurred sometime after the apostolic age and, contrary to popular belief, was quite unintended by Paul. Whatever may have been the relationship between the bread and wine and the meal in a later age, "they belonged together in New Testament times."⁶⁴ This meal, also known as the *Agape*, is alluded to by both Jude and Peter, and was widely practiced by the early post-apostolic church. The fact that the Supper received no fewer than two specialized names argues strongly for its apostolic endorsement. These two names, in addition to other phrases assigned to the Supper (such as "breaking bread"), show the universal acceptance of the Supper in the early church, so that it will not do to postulate that the meal-aspect of the Supper was characteristic of Pauline churches only.

The Supper held a wide range of purposes. First, it served as an expression of concern for the poor in the believing community. In all likelihood, the Supper was a potluck of sorts provided by the rich to show their love for less fortunate Christians. It is probably this purpose that resulted in the adoption of the title *Agape*. A second dimension of the Supper is that it compelled the Christian community to live out the theology of equality of status in Christ, violating the Hellenistic societal norm to hold homogenous banquets where class distinctions were acutely recognized. Closely related to this, the Supper also erased ethnic divisions between Jew and Gentile, forcing the Jewish Christians to regard as "clean" what God himself has declared clean.

⁶⁴ Marshall, *Last Supper*, 145.

Another very important, yet oft-missed aspect of the Supper is its eschatological focus. The Lord's Supper prefigures the Messianic Banquet and acts as a means to petition Messiah to come again. The Supper is to be repeated on a regular basis in order to sound this petition and to give the participants the opportunity to proclaim with one voice, *Maranatha!* This is not far different from the practice of Israel during the *hallel* of the Passover *Haggadah* to petition God to send the Messiah the first time.

This focus has direct implications for the form, frequency, and centrality of the Supper. If the Supper is to prefigure the abundance of food in the Messianic Banquet, then the Supper itself must have the form of an actual meal. Moreover, if the focus of the Supper is to sound a plea for the *parousia*, then it is natural to suppose that the church practiced it whenever it met together. As it turns out, the regular gathering of the church in the NT seems to be on a weekly basis, and on the first day of the week. We also find that the very purpose of the regular meeting of the church was to partake of the Supper, and this leads us to believe that the Supper, too, was practiced on a weekly basis. This is not surprising, however, given that both the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day have very similar titles, perhaps even by design.

Finally, we found that the physical setting of the church played a significant role in the early practice of the Lord's Supper:

The Lord's Supper in the New Testament is a meal. The appropriate setting for the sacrament is a table...The linking of the Supper with a meal may offer a form of fellowship that could contribute to the edification of the church today.⁶⁵

The house church was conducive to the kind of intimate table fellowship demanded by the Supper. Because this setting is absent in most evangelical churches today, the intended theology of community at the Supper is also conspicuously absent. What is needed is not more adaptation of the Supper to accommodate our contemporary settings; what is needed is more of a willingness to conform our structures to accommodate the Lord's Supper. Until we do, much of

⁶⁵ Ibid.

the theology of the Supper will remain lost to us—and with it, its benefits for community.

WE BELIEVE IN: SANCTIFICATION¹

ARTHUR L. FARSTAD

(1935-1998)

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16).

I. INTRODUCTION

Blue-eyed British monk Pelagius (ca. AD 360-420) taught that if we *should*, we *can*. Denying original sin, he made grace essentially equal just to forgiveness, and he maintained that man was capable of doing good on his own. Pelagius naturally clashed head-on with Augustine (AD 354-430). The latter taught that man can do *no good* in God’s eyes on his own, that his will is bound by Satan, and that only God’s grace can set people free.

Augustine won the day. By the end of the 6th century Pelagianism had largely disappeared. Later in church history, however, semi-Pelagianism triumphed over Augustinianism in Western Christendom. This is a modified form of grace plus works, and is still popular today, especially in Roman Catholicism.

The verse quoted at the head of our article is addressed to the saved—the *saints*. And yet how difficult it is to practice this command—yes, impossible to do so perfectly or at all on our own.

We who have read the NT know what the standards are: Christ, and the glory of God. It is hard to see how *anyone* could believe in Pelagius’s views and the NT at the same time.

Many people can and do believe in semi-Pelagianism, however. “We’re sinful,” they say, “but not *that* bad!” With the help of the sacraments and by “co-operating” with God’s grace, they think

¹ This article is reprinted from *JOTGES* (Autumn 1992):3-9.

they can earn God's favor. Others, in Protestantism, believe similarly. To them sanctification is not *all* of God's grace. Some even teach that we can attain Christian perfection while here on earth. They say we can be totally sanctified on a practical level.

One of my father's favorite stories on the subject of sanctification was about a large interdenominational testimony meeting in New York City, probably before World War I.² A man was on his feet facing the front of the auditorium. He announced to the assembled believers:

"I praise the Lord that I haven't sinned once for six months."

Some were impressed. Others were skeptical because they realized that his definition of sin would have had to be severely restricted to make this even a remotely credible possibility. Suddenly a feminine voice was raised from the back row of seats, along with a wave of a hand:

"Yoo-hoo, John—I'm here!"

Crestfallen, the speaker sat down in some confusion. He hadn't realized that his wife had also come to this testimony meeting!

Neither the Bible nor experience offers any encouragement to us to expect Christian perfection in this life. However, the fact that we can't expect to be sinlessly perfect until we are glorified should not be used as an excuse not to strive to be ever more holy each month and year. If we aim low, we will not hit a high target!

Many well-meaning Christians are not well taught on this supremely important and practical subject. A common phrase heard in Christendom (and sadly even by supposedly evangelical Christians) is 'I'm a *Christian*, but I'm no *saint*.' The idea is that while we can expect a person to go to church, give, and keep away from the grosser sins, don't expect too much more.

Actually, if you're not a *saint*, you're not *saved*! Don't misunderstand this: we are not saying if you're not very *saintly* you're not saved.

First Corinthians is addressed to the church "at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who

² My late father, although not a preacher, missionary, or theologian, remains one of my best sources of illustrations for sermons and articles. It was his privilege for about thirty years in New York, at the then well-known "Tent Evangel" and elsewhere, to hear some of the most influential speakers in evangelicalism, such as Fanny Crosby, W. H. Griffith Thomas, and Billy Sunday. And he remembered so much.

in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Cor 1:2). Yet just read the epistle! The Corinthians were proud, divisive, litigious, careless and selfish at the Lord’s Supper and *agape* (love feast), and permissive of gross sin (incest) in one of the believers.³

Why would Paul call the Corinthians “saints” if they were so unsaintly? The answer lies in the different usages of the root words that are used for *sanctification* in both Testaments.

English, unfortunately for us, used Anglo-Saxon-based words (holy, holiness) and Latin-based (sanctify, sanctification, saint, saintly) to translate the same cluster of words in the original. In the OT the words are from the Semitic root *qdsb*. In the NT they translate words with the *hagi-* root.⁴ The basic meaning of all these words is the same: “to set apart for a special use.” In contexts of “sanctification,” this will be for a good use, and one for God’s will and pleasure.⁵

Sanctification involves a believer’s conduct and character. It is both *negative* and *positive*. Too many conservative Christians accentuate the negative, as in the somewhat light-hearted (but often accurate) summary of some people’s idea of sanctification: “I don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t chew, or run with those who do.”

To be sure, there is a strong negative side to the doctrine. We *are* to be separated or set apart from evil. First Thessalonians 4:3 speaks of progressive sanctification as having to do with turning away from immorality—so rampant in today’s culture, as it was in the days when the NT was written.

However, we should not merely become set apart from *evil* but we should be positively set apart and dedicated *to God*. In OT times a person could sanctify his house (Lev 27:14), part of his field (Lev 27:16), or his firstborn (Num 8:17). If the OT believers could do so, surely we NT believers should be able to set apart our homes, cars, and possessions, for God’s use! We can dedicate our children

³There is no suggestion that the incestuous man was unsaved, but rather that he might be removed in death if he didn’t change his ways.

⁴As in our English derivative, *hagiography* (a biography of a saint). This double set of root words needlessly complicates things, although giving a richer vocabulary than possessed by any other tongue.

⁵That the word doesn’t always mean “make *saintly*” is clear from the fact that the Hebrew root *qdsb* is used for those set aside to be cult prostitutes, including sodomites!

through prayer and a consistent example. In the final analysis, though, they will have to consecrate their *own* lives to Christ's holy service.

Since God is all-holy, the word *sanctify* cannot mean "make holy" when applied to Him. On the practical level, sometimes progressive sanctification does mean this for us. In Ezek 36:23 the Lord speaks of Himself as sanctified, or set apart from all unholiness: "When I am hallowed in you before their eyes." God is infinitely holy, but only as this is reflected in the lives of his saints will the world ever believe it. Likewise in the so-called "Lord's Prayer" (better, "the *Disciple's* Prayer," since Christ could not pray for forgiveness, being sinless) we pray that God's name would be "hallowed" (*hagiazō*, the same verb usually translated "sanctify").

It is already a most holy or sanctified name. Our part is to regard it as such ourselves and influence others to set it apart as holy as well. For example, this rules out all false remarks in His name and any light or "vain" use of God's name. The Son of God, likewise, was *sanctified* when the Father sent Him into the world for our salvation (John 10:36). He consecrated Himself or set Himself apart to the great task of redemption. Because He has redeemed us by grace we can indeed practice holiness (= set apartness).

Our story of the man who thought he had reached sinless perfection illustrates the difference between what we are as set apart in Christ (perfect) and what we are in everyday life (hopefully progressing on a practical level toward holiness, but still plagued by many "warts" on our character). A little poem that illustrates the difference between our daily progress in practical sanctification and our final sanctification goes like this:

To dwell above with those we love,
That will indeed be glory;
But here below with some I know,
Well, that's another story!

Yes, it is sadly true. Born-again Christians (the only kind there are, really) can be hard to get along with, and downright mean at times. Also, we are only too aware of some of these flaws in ourselves, if we are honest. But there are usually other blemishes that are "blind spots." Unfortunately, those closest to us are not blind to these unholy "warts."

But just *knowing* that sanctification is not just one generalized, vague concept can really help us to understand other Christians' failings—not to mention *our own!*

II. THREE PHASES OF SANCTIFICATION

God's Word presents three different aspects of sanctification: (1) Positional Sanctification; (2) Progressive Sanctification and (3) Perfected (or Final) Sanctification.

In this first study only a brief summary of all three will be given.

A. Positional Sanctification

First Corinthians 1:30 is a good verse to summarize our sanctified, or set-apart, position in Christ: "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

This is an absolute, perfect, and objective thing. Positional sanctification takes place instantaneously at salvation, irrespective of how little it may or may not immediately show up in our lives. The Corinthians, who had a long way to go before they would be considered "saintly" by outside observers (and who did, after all, often have rather rough backgrounds), are addressed by Paul in these words: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were *sanctified*, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11, emphasis supplied).

Many evangelicals hesitate to use the word *saint* for all Christians, letting the Mormons, the so-called "Latter-day Saints," have a corner on the word.⁶ The NT has no such reticence, because of the doctrine of positional sanctification. Whereas the word *Christian* occurs only *three* times in the NT, the word *saints* (plural, not "Saint John" or "Saint Paul") as a term for all believers is *widespread* (e.g., Acts 9:13; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 4:12; Phil 4:22; Col 1:4; Phlm 7; Heb 6:10; Rev 13:7).

⁶ In a street meeting in Utah, Dr. H. A. Ironside was once angrily challenged from the crowd by a man who said, "I'm an elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints!" Dr. Ironside answered pleasantly, but with truth, "I'm a *junior* in the Church of Jesus Christ of *former-day* saints!"

William Evans writes bluntly, but truthfully, on this question of being a “saint”: “If a man is not a saint he is not a Christian; if he is a Christian he is a saint.”⁷

B. Progressive Sanctification

John 17:17, in our Lord’s high-priestly prayer for his saints, is a good introduction⁸ to the practical or experiential side of sanctification: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”

Although the Lord Jesus had been ministering to His disciples for *three* years, and eleven of them had indeed been already sanctified (positionally) by grace through faith in Him,⁹ He still prays for their sanctification through the application of the Word of God.

C. Perfected Sanctification

Final, ultimate, or perfect sanctification does not take place till we leave this planet through death or the Rapture. It is an event yet to come. First John 3:2 is a central passage for this:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.¹⁰

III. THE TENSES OF SANCTIFICATION

Like salvation, which has a past, a present, and a future aspect,¹¹ sanctification does as well.

⁷ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1912, revised 1939 and 1949), 166. He adds, for the sake of those who obscure this truth with their doctrines of works and human merit: “In some quarters people are canonized after they are dead; the NT canonizes believers while they are alive” (!). Ibid.

⁸ Other verses on this aspect are 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 5:25-26; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 3:18.

⁹ Judas Iscariot, the “son of perdition” (John 17:12), was never sanctified at all.

¹⁰ Another important verse on future sanctification is Rom 8:29.

¹¹ We were saved from the *penalty* of sin when we put our faith in Christ for salvation (*past*); we are being saved from the *power* of sin each day (*present*); we shall ultimately be saved from the *presence* of sin at our death or the coming of Christ in the Rapture (*future*).

A. Past Sanctification

Positional sanctification is *past* (and permanent): we were set apart in Christ at our conversion.

B. Present Sanctification

Progressive sanctification is *present*: we are daily being more and more conformed to His image in holiness.

C. Future Sanctification

Ultimate sanctification is future: one day we shall see Him as He is and we shall be like Him. There will be no more sin in thought, word, or deed—and no “old man” to make us even *want* a shred of that old, shoddy condition.

IV. CONCLUSION

This, then, is sanctification: a setting apart from a profane, secular, or sinful purpose and a dedicating of a person or thing *to* the service and glory of a thrice-holy God (Isa 6:3).

We must not confuse the past, present, and future aspects of sanctification if we expect to understand NT doctrine.

We close with some words penned many decades ago by William Evans:

The believer grows *in* sanctification rather than *into* sanctification out of something else. By a simple act of faith in Christ the believer is at once put into a state of sanctification. Every Christian is a sanctified man. The same act that ushers him into a state of justification admits him at once into the state of sanctification, in which he is to grow until he reaches the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ.¹²

¹² Evans, *Great Doctrines*, 166

AUTHOR INDEX OF THE *JOURNAL OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY* (1988–2021)

JOHN YANTIS

I. EDITOR'S NOTE

The first part of these indexes of the *JOTGES* was published in the autumn 2021 journal. This completes the indexes. There is a subject index and a contributing authors index. There is also a listing of the editorial staff since the founding of the *Journal* as well as an issue cross reference. GES plans on putting these indexes online while keeping them up to date.

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IV. ISSUE CROSS-REFERENCE

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BOOK REVIEWS

Beyond Prewrath: End-Time Prophecy. By Robert Parker. Winter Garden, FL: Robert's Trumpet, LLC, 2021. 139 pp. Paper, \$19.95.

Robert Parker is a student of the Bible and has a background in mathematics/engineering. Both of these aspects of his life come through in this book on Biblical prophecy. As a result of his studies, he posits a new understanding of the prewrath Rapture of the church. The old prewrath view maintains that the church will go through most of the seven-year Tribulation, but will be raptured before God pours out His wrath on the world at Armageddon. Believers will experience the persecution of the Antichrist prior to the rapture.

For most students of prophecy, Parker's book will be hard to follow. It would have been helpful if he had included a concluding chapter of his view that summarized all of his findings.

Parker sees three raptures in the Book of Revelation (Rev 8:5; 11:19; 16:18; p. 5). The 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7 represent the church raptured in Rev 8:5 (p. 17). To arrive at his conclusions Parker often employs mathematical formulas, using ratios regarding Daniel's 70 week to determine literal time in the book of Revelation (pp. 20, 37, 39). A half hour of silence in heaven in Rev 8:1 equates to about 7.5 days on earth. Few readers will be convinced of his reasoning.

Parker also uses OT analogies to support his conclusions. Most readers will probably see these references as being highly subjective. For example, Parker says that in Lev 16:13 God told the priest to burn incense when he entered the Holy of Holies to prevent the priest from dying. This is parallel to Rev 8:3-4 where believers are not to die before the rapture in Rev 8:5 (p. 20).

According to this view, the second rapture will include those who believe after the first rapture, as well as believing Jews in the Tribulation. This is described in Rev 11:19. Revelation 19:1-5 describes the arrival of these believers in heaven with the Lord. Parker also says that all these believers will be a part of the bride of Christ (p. 90).

There is a discussion of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Parker rightly concludes that this judgment will not be one that deals with eternal

condemnation. Both the church of today and Jewish believers from the Tribulation will appear at this judgment to give an account of how they lived their lives (p. 92).

One of the strangest parts of the book is the discussion on the third rapture. In Rev 16:18, those during the Tribulation who did not take the mark of the beast but are still unbelievers will be raptured. This involves the sheep and the goats of Matt 25:31-40. They are spiritually unsaved, but can enter the kingdom if they showed mercy to Jews during the Tribulation (p. 94). In other words, the sheep are unbelievers who enter into the kingdom because of their works.

The old prewrath view, as well as Parker's new wrinkles to it, both maintain that the church will go through most of the Tribulation. He says that believers who commits apostasy during the persecution of the Antichrist will lose their salvation (p. 126). During the first half of the Tribulation believers will need to store up food and medicine. Believers today need to be looking forward to the beginning of the Tribulation in order to begin this hoarding. A clue that it is time will be if there is a multinational treaty signed with Israel (p. 127).

It is difficult to determine exactly what Parker believes one must do to be saved from hell, even though he believes one can lose that salvation. He says that we must understand that we are sinners and deserve eternal death. However, God offers us the gift of eternal life. We need to tell Him we want the free gift. Then, we need to confess that Jesus is Lord by telling others we believe He is Lord and that God has raised Him from the dead. Finally, we must be baptized (p. 125). He also mentions repentance and Acts 2:38. It may be that Parker sees water baptism as nothing more than publicly proclaiming one's faith and not a necessary work. At the very least, his gospel is very confusing.

Clearly, a person who believes in the pretribulational Rapture of the church will have serious reservations about this book. So will anybody who believes that a believer cannot lose their eternal salvation and that eternal life is given as a free gift. Parker's methodology is not built on solid ground. On a positive note, it is clear he has studied this topic at length. He is not arrogant. However, I would be very surprised if many people are convinced by Parker's arguments. The person in the pew will be overwhelmed trying to understand the OT analogies and the math needed to understand what is being said. If

one is a student of eschatology and is looking for information on the prewrath view of the Rapture and specifically has an interest in what others are saying, this book may have some value. Otherwise, I do not recommend it.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Spirituality According to John: Abiding in Christ in the Johannine Writings. By Rodney R. Reeves. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2021. 280 pp. Paper, \$28.00.

Rodney Reeves has a PhD in NT from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and is a lifelong Southern Baptist. He is a gifted communicator and uses a number of stories and illustrations. This book is easy to read. It is divided into three parts: John's Gospel, John's Letters, and John's Revelation.

For Reeves, abiding in Christ and discipleship are equivalent to being a Christian (p. 2). One must obey the teachings of Christ in order to be eternally saved (pp. 132-33). There is no better way to learn how to abide in Christ than to hear or read the Gospel of John. He says that John wrote the Gospel so that we might see and believe in Christ and have eternal life. But the Gospel was also written for those who have already believed, telling them how they are to act after He has left (p. 3). John uses stories in his Gospel because we are not just to focus on doctrinal purity. It takes a lot of imagination to follow Christ as we fill in the gaps in the stories (p. 9).

The author accurately points out that John has very little material on Christian living, which is in contrast to the Synoptics (pp. 81, 144). Instead, the reader is to learn from the examples of the disciples. In these examples, John shows us that it takes time to become a Christian. It is not a one-time conversion. It is only at the end of our lives that our conversion will be revealed. Until then we are to look for signs that God is working in us (pp. 23-25).

Reeves offers a number of personal insights into the different encounters the Lord has with individuals in the Gospel of John. When Jesus applied mud to the eyes of the blind man, it reminds the reader of Gen 2:7 when God created man from dirt/mud. The Lord was

going to create through dirt once again. This time, He was going to create sight. In addition, the man with mud on his eyes comes to see, while the Pharisees become blind by what the Lord does through the mud (pp. 72-73). Another example is when Mary anointed Jesus' feet. She offended the guests because the pungent smell would have ruined the taste of the food (p. 91).

Even though Reeves believes in the inspiration of John's writings, he also believes that an "editor" wrote chapter 21. He maintains that we don't know with certainty who wrote the Gospel of John either (pp. 99-100).

In the Epistles of John, John's community of believers can only abide in the Word of God by hearing John's Gospel. Abiding in Christ means to remain in the church and through the Gospel of John, learn how to live like Christ lived. True believers will do both (p. 103). Following Christ is something we do corporately (p. 108).

The antichrists in 1 John show they were unbelievers by leaving the church. If anybody leaves the church after denying Christ, there is no hope, having committed the sin unto death (p. 136). The antichrists in 1 John reject the teaching of the Gospel of John. Reeves believes that the anointing in 1 John 2:20 refers to the Gospel of John (p. 131).

True believers also confess their sins (p. 112). They walk in the light, which is equivalent to hearing and obeying the Gospel of John (p. 115). Reeves maintains that this confession of sins is to be public, in front of the church (p. 117). All real Christians will keep the commandments of Christ, especially to love one another (1 John 2:4; p. 143).

Reeves has a very inclusive view of the gospel. Catholics, Anglicans, Arminians, and denominations that require water baptism all proclaim a message that saves. We must be accepting of such views (pp. 156-59).

According to Reeves, the church is a major focus in the book of Revelation. The purpose of the church is to bear witness of Christ until He comes (p. 180). Reeves does not believe in a Rapture, a future Tribulation, or millennial kingdom. Instead, Christ is currently reigning in heaven, and the church is called to reign upon the earth as a kingdom of priests (p. 189). Much of the book of Revelation deals with the Roman Empire and the conditions of the church in the first

century. But we can apply the things written to what is happening in our day. When the church meets to worship God, we wage war against the forces of evil, just like in the book of Revelation (p. 204).

An interesting part of the discussion on Revelation is Reeves' extreme dislike for many Republican policies. According to him, Christians who supported Trump's policies regarding immigration were engaged in a denial of the faith. Trump also caused the death of many when he downplayed the threat of Covid for political purposes and caused an insurrection and threatened democracy on Jan 6, 2021. Trump became an idol to many Christians. He says support for gun rights also runs counter to the teachings of Christ (pp. 210-11, 216, 249). America was the modern-day Babylon of Revelation when it bombed Iraq during the Gulf War (p. 248).

The idols of Revelation are seen today in the idols of Wall Street, nature, the military, patriotism, entertainers, politicians, and medical experts (p. 228). Reeves does a good job of showing how churches often give too much adoration to such people and institutions.

Reeves has a good discussion on loving by deeds and not words (p. 168). He points out the importance of the corporate body as well as listening to the Word of God. Many will agree with some of his insights in the Lord's discussions with various people in the Gospel of John. He also accurately points out how Christians on both sides of the political aisle can be blinded by our political views. This is particularly helpful in these times of political turmoil. For those interested in how a non-dispensationalist might interpret Revelation, this book will be helpful. I recommend this book for readers looking for such things.

However, there are many things to dislike about this book. Reeves' gospel is definitely a gospel of salvation by works. In his view, some people have committed a sin that disqualifies them from receiving eternal life. He makes no distinction between having eternal life and being a disciple of the Lord. He repeatedly says that true believers hold on to the end. A reader of this book who agrees with the author will have no assurance of salvation. Reeves believes that those in the seven churches in Revelation that Jesus says need to repent are not believers (p. 240). In the final analysis, he completely misunderstands what abiding in Christ means for John. Reeves says that he did not want to focus on theological issues. For those looking for those

things—specifically what John has to say about receiving eternal life as a free gift through faith as opposed to abiding in Christ—I do not recommend this book.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

A Guide to Theological Reflection: A Fresh Approach for Practical Ministry Courses and Theological Field Education. By Jim L. Wilson and Earl Waggoner. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020. 192 pp. Paper, \$18.99.

Wilson and Waggoner have written a welcome guide to theological reflection for Evangelicals. The book is divided into two sections: the first presents their model of theological reflection, while the second offers tools for implementing the model.

Most books on theological reflection are predominantly written from a mainline and liberal perspective, with commitments often at odds with Evangelical ones. Recognizing this, the authors note that other models of doing theological reflection “elevate subjective observations to the level of authoritative insights,” (p. 30), see “action as a primary source of theological knowledge” (p. 35), and allow situations and ministers to “determine what theology is” (p. 41), all of which positions Evangelicals are unlikely to accept.

By contrast, Wilson and Waggoner say their model of doing theological reflection take the Bible as their primary source of reflection, is ministry-focused, and has the goal of transforming future ministry.

Wilson and Waggoner say that theological reflection happens during “the pause” (p. 22). This is the pause that occurs *after* you have acted and *before* you act again. This is known as the “action—reflection—action” approach (p. 23).

Unlike mainline approaches, Wilson and Waggoner say they put Scripture at the center of their model of theological reflection. “Scripture should be the first and primary source for the reflection process” (p. 32). But they are careful to clarify that the primacy of Scripture does not exclude “using truth outside the Bible as a resource for theological reflection” (p. 34). Insights into a situation can also

be found in sources such as “social sciences, literature, the arts, and philosophy” (p. 34). To give my own example, the primacy of Scripture does not mean a pastor ministering to someone with childhood trauma cannot also learn from the discoveries of psychologists and counselors.

Wilson and Waggoner call their model “the reflection loop” (p. 37), and summarize their approach with the words *identify*, *align*, and *explore*.

First, you *identify* the gap between “operational beliefs” and “confessed beliefs” (pp. 45-46). People do not always act according to what they believe, and their actions might even contradict what they are supposed to believe. Hence, there is a gap that needs to be identified, which requires reflection. Suggested questions to ask include, “What beliefs drove my actions?” “What beliefs should have driven my actions?” And, “What are the appropriate doctrinal themes that inform this ministry situation?”

Second, you seek to *align* your actions with the best theological understanding of the practice. Instead of changing truth to better fit your ministry, you want what you do in ministry to better reflect theological truth. At this stage, reflection questions might include: “In what ways can I better match what I did with what I believe and think?” “What are the issues?” And, “What are the blind spots?” (p. 49).

Third, you *explore* the different possibilities of responding in future ministry (p. 51). This does not mean already deciding how to act but imagining the possible ways someone could act. Reflection questions include: “How have I navigated similar situations in the past effectively?” “What is the most fitting course of action and why?” “How can we live Christianly in this situation?”

Being familiar with some of the mainline models of theological reflection, I welcome Wilson and Waggoner’s more Evangelical alternative. A slight criticism of this section is that while the authors claim the Bible should be the primary source for theological reflection, they only appeal to Scripture by way of quick illustrations. The authors could improve their proposal by including a chapter developing a Biblical theology of theological reflection. And they could add a chapter explaining how using the Bible for theological reflection

led them away from mainline models. I want a practical example of Bible-driven theological reflection in action.

The second section suggests different ways of encouraging and supporting theological reflection. These chapters cover topics such as dialoguing with mentors, peer groups, and ministry recipients; writing a journal; making verbatim records of ministry events; and setting realistic goals for professional and personal growth, all of which help to provide material for reflection.

Each chapter makes good practical suggestions. For example, the authors emphasize that theological reflection happens in community. That is important to remember, because it is so easy to stay trapped in your own head, and to forget that God has gifted the Body of Christ to do ministry.

By way of criticism, I highly doubt many readers will put most of their suggestions into practice (which should not surprise anyone in ministry!). For example, as an avid reader of Quaker spiritual journals, and as a journal-keeper myself, I strongly agree that it is a useful theological practice. However, the authors' "journal samples" are so detailed, and so involved, I think most readers will find it too overwhelming or intimidating to put into practice.

Compared to other works on theological reflection, this is not very academic. Depending on the audience, that can either be a strength or a weakness. This book will be helpful to Evangelical seminary professors looking to assign an introductory reading on theological reflection. It may also help ministers who want guidance on improving their ability to reflect upon their ministry. I recommend it for those audiences.

Shawn Lazar
Associate Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Practical Faith & Active Love: Meditations on the Epistle to James. By Joel W. Huffstetler. Berkeley, CA: The Apocryphile Press. 2020. 109 pp. Paper, \$16.95.

Joel Huffstetler is an Episcopal priest. This book originally caught my eye because I was curious as to how somebody from his

background would interpret the book of James. Most Evangelicals are accustomed to a Lordship view of understanding the book.

This is a short book, but Huffstetler refers to many different evangelical scholars. It is not a commentary on James. Instead, the author gives meditations about how the teachings in James relate to the current COVID-19 crisis and racial social unrest. Huffstetler says that the teaching in James can help the church, the culture, and the nation.

Readers of *JOTGES* will be disappointed that Huffstetler does not have a high view of inspiration. He says that there is a “possibility” that the author was the brother of the Lord and lived in the first century. However, it is interesting that he says the book is a NT example of Wisdom Literature and is concerned about physical health (p. xiv). Throughout the book he notices how there are many parallels with James and the Sermon on the Mount. For Huffstetler, it is clear that he sees James as helpful in the area of discipleship. This is a departure from most Evangelicals.

Huffstetler does not have an interest in the Lordship theology debate surrounding the book, so it is significant that he says that James deals with how a Christian can mature in the faith. God uses trials to produce that maturity (p. 2). Unfortunately, he applies this to the nation, and not just the individual believer. COVID-19 is a trial for our country and James teaches that we as a nation can come through this as a better country. In his meditation on Jas 1:16-18, Huffstetler does not even mention the new birth for the individual.

The major weakness of the book is that it does not address the exegetical meaning of any of the verses. Time and time again, it speaks of the turmoil in our country. Huffstetler never mentions eternal life. He does, however, talk about putting our Christian faith in action, specifically how we can respond to the current crises (p. 18).

Huffstetler rightly sees that James speaks at length about the damage the tongue can do (p. 23). In addition, Jas 2:1-9 warns against making distinctions between people based upon wealth. However, he does not see this as a warning about how we treat those within the church. Instead, he sees the application of these things in the death of black men at the hands of police and racists (p. 32).

When it comes to James 2, Huffstetler says that our faith should lead to good deeds and that our deeds reflect our faith (p. 34). He does

not fall into the trap of many Evangelicals who say that a faith that does not produce works never existed. James is speaking of a practical faith that makes a difference in the lives of others. Christians should concern themselves about how they can do that (p. 38).

The author says that James is as practical today as it was when it was written. The sins of the tongue can be committed on social platforms like Facebook and email. James himself was tempted to misuse his tongue, and we can be especially tempted in such environments to speak too quickly and in an unloving manner.

In discussing Jas 3:13-18, where James speaks of wisdom as being peaceable, Huffstetler demonstrates what is the biggest weakness of the book. He does not apply this wisdom to situations among believers. Instead, he says that we must be willing to change our minds about social and political things, such as the racism we see in the culture today (p. 50).

Free Grace readers will appreciate that Huffstetler takes the view that Christians can fail to persevere in good works to the end of their lives. He says that James addresses believing readers as the “sinners” in Jas 4:8, and that believers may indeed find themselves in situations where they need to repent (pp. 53-54). Huffstetler says that James teaches us that believers can be guilty of murder if they are greedy and withhold what is necessary for living to those who are economically disadvantaged (p. 69). The point is that believers need to have a social conscience.

This book is a mixed bag. Huffstetler is very liturgical in his faith. He often speaks of *The Book of Common Prayer*, and how the meditations of this book can be used in the liturgy of the church. He also is very ecumenical. When he applies the teachings in the book of James to the righteousness of the BLM movement and how social unrest in our nation should be addressed, he is taking teachings meant for the church and forcing them onto situations involving unbelievers. These are all negative aspects of the book.

But there are also some positive things. Huffstetler recognizes that the book of James is a practical book and one that teaches believers how they can mature in their faith through trials. He rightly sees it as Wisdom Literature. It is good to see that someone not involved in the Free Grace/Lordship debate understands that believers can fail in the issues James discusses. James wants his readers to be wise. He wants

believers' actions to reflect what they believe. Our faith can mature, but there is no guarantee it will. For these reasons, I recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

My Vertical Neighborhood: How Strangers Became a Community. By Lynda MacGibbon. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021. 160 pp. Paper, \$17.00.

We are all surrounded by neighbors, but how do you get to know them? In *My Vertical Neighborhood*, former journalist Lynda MacGibbon tells the story of moving from rural New Brunswick to take a job in urban Toronto where she found herself living in an apartment building with hundreds of other tenants she did not know. As a Christian, MacGibbon understood that Jesus called her to love her neighbors. She also knew that loneliness was a huge problem in the modern world. As she says, “In both Canada and the United States, polls reveal that between 40 and 50 percent of people spend more time alone than they want to. They wish they had someone to talk to regularly—but they don’t” (p. 93). So how should she act on that knowledge? What follows is her easy-to-read narrative of how a relatively shy and private woman went about befriending the neighbors in her building.

Her efforts began with an open invitation to a regular Monday night dinner. It grew by adding a monthly Writer’s Group meeting. Neither activity was explicitly religious—just loving. And then, after some time, she nervously invited her neighbors to a Saturday morning Bible Study (“Will they think I’m a fanatic if I invite them?” [p. 70]). In each case, the key was consistency. Along with her friend Rachel, MacGibbon held these events on a regular basis, whether anyone else showed up or not. Sometimes they were alone. Other times they had only one other person. There never seemed to be more than 10-12 people at a time. It was small-scale ministry—the kind anyone can do. And over time she formed deeper friendships with some of the most unlikely people, most of whom were unbelievers.

One of her closest friends was an extroverted homosexual man she calls “Brian.” Unlike MacGibbon, who was shy about revealing details of her life, Brian was very open about his oftentimes shocking private life, such as his promiscuity and drug overdoses (pp. 49-50). Of course, she deeply disagreed with his choices and personal philosophy, but that did not stop her from continuing the friendship with him. “I had many questions, but surprisingly, whether or not to continue in friendship with Brian wasn’t one of them” (p. 50). In time, Brian proved to be one of her most influential friends.

He was also a key player in supporting the meetings, often inviting new people to attend. However, when MacGibbon started a Bible study, Brian initially refused. Not only did he not believe in God—he didn’t even believe Jesus was a historical person. But then, in an odd twist, Brian’s culturally Muslim boyfriend challenged him to join the study, which he did. And what’s more, Brian continued his practice of inviting others to attend. As MacGibbon reports, he would tell people, “Hey, we have a Bible study...I’m not religious—I’m just interested in history. You should come” (p. 71). And people did come. They took twenty-two months to go through the Gospel of John (p. 73). Although Brian did not come to faith at the end of that study, he apparently did start believing in God, and his relationship to MacGibbon progressed to the point of having spiritual discussions together, and openly praying. The needle moved, if only a little.

By the end of the book, there is no dramatic breakthrough or conversion stories. A revival did not break out in her apartment building, and no more than a few dozen people were involved. People came and went. Friendships blossomed and withered. There were missteps along the way. But what comes through the narrative, and what I found helpful, was how this ordinary Christian woman was stretched beyond her comfort zone to reach out and love her neighbors, just as Jesus commanded.

MacGibbon’s book brought back many memories of Canada. The secular culture, the privacy, the sense of social reserve, the hesitation at talking to other people about Jesus, and the fear of appearing crazy by inviting neighbors to a Bible study, were all very familiar. I was also not surprised by her experience of secular people accepting the invitation to study the Bible. I know first-hand that people who have

grown up without Christianity do not have hard feelings against it and are open to learning more, if only for “historical” interest.

Who would benefit from reading this book? First, anyone who has looked out their window and wondered how to reach their neighbors. Second, anyone considering starting a house church but who might feel intimidated by that prospect. Although MacGibbon did not plant a church, the principles are similar. It starts by inviting your neighbors over to eat and then it grows from there. Recommended.

Shawn Lazar
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary. By Robert Alter. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018. 3500 pp. Hardcover, \$125.00.

Christian interpreters of the OT run into two common struggles when reading the OT. The first is the tendency to read our Christian perspective into passages where it is not warranted. The second is a deep familiarity with much of the OT which then causes us to miss illuminating details. I believe every Christian pastor, teacher, and student of the Word can easily fall into those two traps. And Robert Alter provides a helpful guard against both of these struggles. For that reason, *The Hebrew Bible* should be counted as a must-own for all students of the OT today.

The Hebrew Bible is an impressive three-volume work containing Alter’s English translation of the Hebrew Bible and his commentary on the text. Alter’s translation is one of the great feats of OT scholarship, and his commentary should be consulted alongside one’s own study of the Hebrew text.

As an example of Alter’s work, he translates Gen 15:2 as “...what can You give me when I am going to my end childless...” Alter’s choice of “going to my end” stands apart from every other English translation. Some leave the Hebrew *halak* untranslated, while others translate it as *remain*, *continue*, or *go*. The common English translations focus on Abram’s remaining or continuing childless. I believe Alter correctly interprets *halak* to mean that Abram is fearful of going to his grave childless. This helps the reader to understand the despair

in Abram's heart, something recognized by the Lord, who came to Abram with a message of "Fear not" in v 1.

Throughout the translation, Alter picks up on small points and details that others often overlook and brings them to light for greater understanding.

The key to the value of Alter's work is his relative independence from other translations. For example, his rendering of Joseph's technicolor coat didn't follow the majority of English Bibles with "many colors" but with a more accurate "ornamented tunic."

In Ezek 18:2, the children's teeth are blunted by their father's unripe fruit instead of being set on edge by sour grapes, as rendered in other English Bibles.

Alter's work is far superior to other translations in several passages. There are many instances in the OT where scholars follow tradition more than the text even in the latest translations. But Alter does not need to follow Christian traditions in his translation of the Hebrew Bible.

Alter's commentary is nearly as helpful as his translation. My conservative views on inerrancy, historicity, and the fulfillment of OT prophecy in Christ's two advents, cause me to often disagree with Alter. At the same time, his unique perspective, compared to my Christian commentaries, provides a helpful guard for the Christian interpreter. On some occasions, such as Isaiah 53, Alter will reference Christian interpretations of a passage, but he rejects a Christian understanding of OT prophecies. Hence, the reader should feel free to disagree with Alter whenever he runs afoul of the NT.

At the same time, when the NT doesn't expressly point out a reference to Christ or interpret a passage as prophetic, Alter helps the reader to see how it would be viewed from a strictly Jewish perspective. His interpretation of Ezekiel's temple defends the view that Ezekiel was describing a physical temple but one not in line with Solomon's or any other temple recorded in the Bible. The temple is not an illustration of the Messiah, but Ezekiel was looking forward to a bold and new reconstruction of the temple, which he last saw as a child. At times, our Christian perspective imposes a Christian understanding on the text that changes the author's intended meaning.

No one serious about examining the Hebrew Bible's finer points and determining the author's meaning of the text should pass up on Alter's translation and commentary. It is more than worth the cost.

Shawn Willson
Pastor
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Five Things Theologians Wish Biblical Scholars Knew. By Hans Boersma. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021. 152 pp. Paper, \$15.59.

Boersma is a deacon in the Anglican church. In general terms, a Biblical scholar is seen in the book as one who uses historical-grammatical exegesis to find the authorial intent of the Biblical author. He attempts to determine the meaning of the text apart from church traditions. Boersma says this is the incorrect way to use the Bible. Exegetical work must include Christology, metaphysics, providence, ecclesiology, heavenly contemplation, as well as philosophical and doctrinal presuppositions. These other considerations are used by theologians. The primary task of theologians is not to explain the historical meaning of a particular text in the Bible, but to use the Scriptures as “a means of grace in drawing the reader to Jesus Christ” (p. 5). The theologian sees the Bible as a sacramental means that is used to enter into the mystery of God and then is able to impart divine life. The soul is able to see God and have communion with Him through intuition and not inductive study (pp. 6-7). The Bible is not to be seen as a mere source of historical and doctrinal truths.

The study of the Scriptures must take into account the church fathers, as well as Catholic and Anglican traditions. This teaches us to move past the historical level of the text to the allegorical, moral and eschatological level. It is only then that we can see the Word of God, which is Christ. Boersma specifically states that the Scriptures are not the Word of God itself (p. 8). Evangelical Biblical scholars often substitute knowing a book for knowing God in Christ.

In keeping with the title of the book, Boersma has five chapters. In chapter one he wants the Biblical scholar to realize “No Christ, No

Scripture.” Only when we see Christ as Scripture’s true content does it become Scripture (pp. 13-38).

Chapter two is entitled, “No Plato, No Scripture.” We all approach the Bible with a metaphysical lens and Christian Platonism is the only way we can see Christ as the sacramental reality in the text (pp. 39-63).

Chapter three is “No Providence, No Scripture.” Providence speaks of the care and guidance of God. Through that care God has given us the Scriptures, in which the Word of God is seen more clearly than in any other human witness (pp. 64-86).

At the same time, the interpretation of the Scriptures must involve an ecclesial mode of reading it, allowing for canon, liturgy, and church creeds to shape how we understand the Bible. This is the only way to uphold the high position the Scriptures have as a witness of Christ. Chapter four discusses this and is entitled, “No Church, No Scripture” (pp. 87-111).

The fifth chapter is “No Heaven, No Scripture.” Boersma says that Scripture is sacramental and does not present itself as the ultimate end. Its truth is contemplative and heavenly. We study Scripture to obtain the beatific vision of God in Christ. This keeps us from using the Bible for political and social justice concerns (pp. 112-34).

A few comments in each chapter caught this reviewer’s attention. In chapter one, Boersma says that those who rely on *sola scriptura* do not treat exegesis as a spiritual discipline (p. 37). In addition, since Jesus is not specifically mentioned in the OT, Biblical exegesis cannot lead to seeing the presence of Christ in those books.

In chapter two, the author says that without the metaphysics of Plato, one cannot retain the teaching of Scripture (p. 39). It is a metaphysics with the characteristics of antimaterialism, antirelativism, and antiskepticism (p. 43). Boersma claims it is only through this metaphysics that the church fathers were able to develop the doctrine of the Trinity and a proper Christology. The Macedonian call in Acts 16:6-10 shows the necessity of combining Biblical faith and Greek inquiry (p. 62).

Concerning providence, Boersma says we need to recognize that the Spirit is linked to books other than the Bible (p. 84). For example, the writings of the church fathers, the decisions of the councils, and the canons of the church are also inspired.

Chapter five maintains that we cannot understand the Bible without the guidance of the universal church (p. 87). Our exegesis must be open to how the church has understood the doctrine being discussed. Biblical exegesis is communal and takes place in the liturgy and creeds in the church. Boersma says that Evangelical exegesis that focuses on authorial intent places the church at the mercy of intellectual elites, Biblical scholars, who tell us what the Bible says (p. 111). These scholars have replaced the authority of the church.

Furthermore, Boersma complains that the rise in historical-grammatical exegesis has resulted in the neglect of contemplation and turned our focus from heaven. In other words, Biblical exegesis leads to the Bible losing its divinely given purpose (pp. 132-33). In Boersma's view, Evangelical Biblical scholarship does not require a relationship with God since it is mechanical and does not operate in an otherworldly way (p. 134).

The vast majority of the readers of the *JOTGES* will reject most of what Boersma has to say about the role of the Bible in the Christian's life. They will find it strange. However, the principles he espouses have found their way into much of Protestant Evangelical thinking. He says that our chief aim is not to find the intent of the authors of the Scriptures and their historical meanings, but the contemplative life. Through this contemplation we see God in Christ and heavenly realities. Many Evangelicals have indeed called for us to develop a contemplative life modeled after Christian mystics of the past.

It is also common to hear Protestant Evangelicals argue for what Boersma is promoting. We are told that to understand what the Bible is saying we must consider what the church fathers said. Free Grace theology is often rejected because we cannot find it in the teachings of the patristic church. We are told that dispensationalism and the doctrine of the Rapture cannot be true for the same reason. We should not put too much emphasis on the historical context of the texts we are studying. Biblical exegesis cannot lead to a single meaning of a verse. Christians must be able to discover their own meaning, especially if it agrees with what the universal church of the day, or the majority, is teaching.

The bottom line for this book is authority. Is the Bible the Word of God, or, as Boersma maintains, is it a means by which we can catch a heavenly vision through the teachings of the church and

contemplation? In a postmodern world, the latter view will become more and more appealing. I recommend this book to better understand that trend.

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Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction. By Timothy K. Beougher. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2021. 403 pp. Cloth, \$39.99.

Beougher is the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism and the associate dean of the Billy Graham School at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His book is endorsed by many people from that seminary, including President Al Mohler, as well as a host of pastors, evangelists, and parachurch workers.

There are a number of positive aspects to this book including the fact that he gives a very thorough bibliography on evangelism that covers 35 pages and lists over 1,200 books. While there are no books by Zane Hodges or any Free Grace authors, this is still a very impressive list.

His chapter on the history of evangelism (chap. 5, pp. 59-87) is excellent (except for the fact that he does not speak much about the message that was preached in most of these time periods).

I really appreciated the ideas he shared about giving away stuff that would call people's attention to Christ (pp. 235-37). He talked about giving away lightbulbs (Jesus is the light of the world), free quarters for the laundromat (Jesus washes our sins away), free Christmas gift wrapping in the mall (Jesus is the reason for the season), and free water bottles (Jesus is the living water). The entire chapter on servant evangelism (chap. 19) is helpful.

However, there are some major concerns with this book as well.

The biggest problem is that Beougher gives a very confused presentation of what one must do to be saved. He repeatedly says that both repentance and faith are required to be born again (e.g., pp. 9, 50, 253, 257, 358). He defines repentance as "turning from sin and turning to God" (p. 110). And we must believe, that is be persuaded,

of several things including the sovereignty and holiness of God (pp. 103-105), “the horrific nature of [our] sin” (pp. 106-107), and that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for us, rose bodily from the dead, and ascended to heaven” (pp. 107-109). However, Beougher also claims that faith is “more than a general belief” since “Even the devil believes in God” (p. 111). What is this faith? It is “Only when we have repented and believed that we can say, ‘Christ is my Savior and my Lord’” (p. 111).

It is confusing that Beougher sees certain things we must be convinced are true, but in addition, we must have a different kind of faith, a faith that results in us yielding to Christ as Lord.

He favorably quotes Leighton Ford as saying that we need to “ask people to commit their lives for time and eternity” (p. 250). He says that “believing in Christ intellectually” is not enough to be saved. One must also “trust him as their personal Savior and Lord” (p. 252).

It is great that there is a chapter on assurance. But he follows the confusing Reformed idea that we gain assurance from not only the “promises of God,” but also the “inner witness of the Holy Spirit” and “evidence of a changing life” (pp. 252-57). He even has a section entitled, “Direction, Not Perfection” (pp. 257-58). The problem is no one could have certainty of his eternal destiny by following Beougher’s suggestions, especially since he also favorably quotes Greear who wrote, “The mark, however, of someone who is saved is *that they maintain their profession of faith until the end of their lives...* salvation is a posture of repentance and faith *that you begin in a moment and maintain for the rest of your life*” (p. 257, emphasis added).

This book presents a very confusing saving message. For that reason, I can only recommend it for those who are well-grounded in the faith. There is enough good material in this book that well-grounded people might find it helpful.

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

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 church goer, 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 re. 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 that 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 is 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

Grace, Faith, Free Will—Contrasting View of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism. By Robert E. Picirilli. Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2002. 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 Reformed Arminianism (e.g., pp. i, iii, 1, 17, 140, 235). Since Jacobus Arminius was a Reformed pastor, that makes 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 and 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 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 Calvinist do, including "more than mere intellectual persuasion or convincement [sic] of truth" (p. 167). "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 Reformed 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 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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