

Journal of the  
**GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**  
*“Faith Alone in Christ Alone”*

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**VOLUME 27      Spring 2014      NUMBER 52**

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**Journal of the**  
**GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**  
Published Semiannually by GES

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**Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address** should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S Interstate 35 E, Ste 203, Corinth, TX 76210. You may call us at 940.270.8827 or email [ges@faithalone.org](mailto:ges@faithalone.org). Subscription Rates: single copy, \$9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, \$18.50; 2 years, \$35.00; 3 years, \$49.50; 4 years, \$62.00; \$13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add \$4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and \$8.50 per year for all other international shipping. New subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25; gift subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25.

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Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S Interstate 35 E, Ste 203, Corinth, TX 76210.

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
©2014 Grace Evangelical Society  
ISBN: 978-0-9883472-5-0

# THE NOVELTY OF FREE GRACE THEOLOGY, PART 1

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Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
*Columbia, SC*

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the major objections against Free Grace Theology is the supposed novelty of teachings such as the Judgment Seat of Christ; that there will be rewards and loss of rewards for believers;<sup>1</sup> that assurance is the essence of saving faith; and that true believers can commit and persist in sin. Opponents claim that if such doctrines were true, church history would record them.

Associated with these charges is the contrary assertion that the Lordship Salvation teaching about good works being necessary to obtain final salvation is an old view, and that this is attested by the early church. For example, Wayne Grudem says that, “It is misleading to brand ‘Lordship salvation’ as if it were some new doctrine.” He says that Lordship Salvation has always been the historic, orthodox, view of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

The historical objection against Free Grace views is neatly summarized by D. A. Carson’s remark on Zane Hodges’s understanding of Jas 2:14-17:

...not one significant interpreter of Scripture  
in the entire history of the church has held to  
Hodges’s interpretation of the passages he treats.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Zondervan, 2001), 184-88.

<sup>2</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 714f, n.5.

That does not mean that Hodges is wrong; *but it certainly means he is probably wrong...*<sup>3</sup>

Is this a valid objection? Did the early church teach Lordship Salvation? Did anyone in the early church believe in Free Grace? In this article, I will look at how the early church looked at the Gospel, and attempt to show that the church fathers did not agree with either Free Grace theology or Lordship Salvation theology in important respects.

## II. THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Outside of the NT writings, the earliest record we have of doctrine in the Church is through the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. The dates of these men are a matter of some debate, but most say that they are a small group of writers who lived in the last part of the first century or in the early part of the second century. They obtained the title of Apostolic Fathers because they may have had contact with the original Apostles or heard them speak. They belong to a generation that links the Church with the original Twelve.

It is, of course, impossible for an article this size to discuss all that the Apostolic Fathers wrote concerning justification and works. However, I remember a seminary professor who commented that one of the first things the early Church abandoned was a strong stance on grace. This runs against both the Free Grace and the Lordship positions. Very few, if any, contemporary Lordship Salvation or Free Grace proponents would accept certain things the Apostolic Fathers said about justification, the sacraments, and the role of works in eternal salvation.

### A. *THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS*

The author is unknown, but most agree that it was either written at the end of the first century or the early part of the second. The author receives a number of divine revelations. An older woman appears to him, who then turns into a younger woman.

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 137 (emphasis added). Carson refers to the views expressed in *Dead Faith: What Is It?* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1987).

He also receives revelation from a shepherd (from whom the book gets its title), who turns out to be an angel of repentance.

Repentance, which is clearly turning from and feeling sorry for sins, plays a large role in the book. Believers can only be forgiven if they repent of their sins with their whole heart (*Hermas* 6.4). Baptism is linked with salvation and gives the forgiveness of sins. After a person is baptized they can only repent once. After that, there is no hope for salvation for the person (*Hermas* 31.1ff).

The author is tormented by an angel of punishment, because of the sins of his family. They have repented, but not sufficiently. Forgiveness of sins is not given immediately to the believer who repents during the one opportunity he has. There must be a period of time where the believer torments his or her soul, becomes humble in every way, and experiences tribulations before God will grant forgiveness (*Hermas* 66.4ff).

A practical example of repentance is given. If a believing wife commits adultery and repents, the husband should take her back. But this can only happen once. If she commits adultery again, he is not to take her back (*Hermas* 29.4-8).

It is clear that for the author, a “true” believer can lose his or her salvation. Self-control is necessary for salvation. He also says that some sins are worse sins than others. We evidently see here the beginning of the Catholic Church’s distinction between mortal and venial sins (*Hermas* 38.4-8).

Many in the early Church held *The Shepherd of Hermas* in high esteem. Early Church Fathers at the end of the second century, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, quote from the book authoritatively and as inspired. In the fourth century, Athanasius, who is famous for his orthodox views in church history concerning the deity of Christ and the Trinity, did as well. In addition, the oldest known complete manuscript of the New Testament, the Codex Sinaiticus, includes *The Shepherd of Hermas*.<sup>4</sup> Another book within the *Apostolic Fathers* is similarly present in the Codex Sinaiticus. It also says that baptism results in the forgiveness of sins.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Jardine, “Introduction” to *The Shepherd of Hermas: The Gentile Apocalypse* (Redwood City, CA: Proteus, 1992), 15f.

<sup>5</sup> *Epistle of Barnabas* 11.11.

Clearly Grudem and other Reformed Lordship Salvation advocates do not agree with much that is in *The Shepherd of Hermas*. Indeed, they strongly disagree with much in it.

## B. *THE DIDACHE*

The *Didache* dates from either the first or early second century. It is generally thought to be written by a Christian community in Syria.<sup>6</sup> In the fourth century, Athanasius says that it was said by the Apostolic Fathers that new Christians should read the *Didache* in order to receive instruction in godliness.<sup>7</sup> He evidently says that these writings are the “teachings” of the Apostles and are thus to be held in high regard. Around AD 200 Clement of Alexandria probably quotes it as Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

The *Didache* has 16 chapters and deals with issues such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper. One of the features of its teaching is that it adds to the commands of Scripture. When it comes to baptism, it speaks of when it is appropriate to use cold water or hot water, and when it is appropriate to use running water or not. In addition, the person being baptized, as well as the one performing the baptism, should fast a day or two before the actual event (*Didache* 7.1ff).

It also seems to indicate that baptism results in the forgiveness of sin. Specifically, it states that only those who have been baptized are pure. Only the pure can take the Lord’s Supper (*Didache* 9.5).

*The Didache does not represent the theology of Reformed Lordship Salvation in any shape or form.*

## C. POLYCARP

Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna who suffered martyrdom around AD 155. There are indications that he heard the Apostle John speak. Since he was in his 80s when he died, his life certainly overlapped the lives of some of the Apostles.

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<sup>6</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie R. Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 41.

<sup>7</sup>Athanasius, *Festal Letters* 39.7.

<sup>8</sup>Kurt Niderwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary*, trans. Linda Maloney. Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 4f.

Polycarp wrote a letter to the church at Philippi. The letter has numerous allusions to the Scriptures, with little commentary. As a result, one does not find much on how he interprets the NT.<sup>9</sup> He does, however, seem to indicate that a believer can lose his or her salvation since it is conditional. He tells the Philippians that we (does this include himself?) will be raised *if* we do God's will, keep His commandments, and keep ourselves from all unrighteousness.<sup>10</sup>

In a latter chapter, he seems to support this idea when he says Polycarp and the Philippians will gain the world to come if they please God. However, he may also show inconsistency in the same context, where he is addressing deacons, when he says that they will *also reign* with Christ if they live worthily as Christ's citizens (*Philippians* 5.2). This appears to be a clear allusion to 2 Tim 2:12. Does Polycarp see a difference between living in the coming Kingdom and reigning with Christ and thus indicate some kind of reward for faithfulness?

Perhaps Polycarp is more gracious towards elders. In one instance, an elder named Valens has strayed from the faith due to the love of money. He is clearly not keeping the commandments of Christ. However, Polycarp says that the church is not to treat him as an enemy, but as one who is weak. He hopes the Lord will give Valens repentance so that the church at Philippi may be whole (*Philippians* 11.2-4).

Reformed Lordship Salvation advocates like Grudem do not agree with much that Polycarp wrote. It is hard to see how anyone might claim that Polycarp taught Reformed Lordship Salvation.

#### D. IGNATIUS AND CLEMENT

Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch in the early second century. He wrote a series of letters. In one, he seems to believe that the waters of Christian baptism are purified in some kind of mystical way by the death of Christ.<sup>11</sup> As a military chaplain, I once heard a Presbyterian chaplain use this terminology when baptizing an infant.

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<sup>9</sup> Jack N. Sparks, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Modern Translations of These Early Christian Writings* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1978), 124.

<sup>10</sup> Polycarp, *Philippians* 2.1f.

<sup>11</sup> Ignatius, *Ephesians* 18.2.

In another letter, Ignatius makes a distinction between the elders of a church and the bishop. The local church elders are to be subject to the bishop. Without the bishop there is not a church (*Smyrnaeans* 2:2; 3:1). Baptisms and the Lord's Supper cannot take place without the authority of the bishop. To do anything apart from his knowledge is to worship the Devil (*Smyrnaeans* 8).

Clement was the bishop of Rome at the very end of the first century. He agrees with Ignatius on the importance of baptism. A believer can lose the salvation he gains at baptism. In a letter to the church at Corinth he says that if Christians do not keep their baptism pure with good works, they will not enter the Kingdom (*2 Clem.* 6.3-9). It is of interest that Clement's writings were considered inspired by many later writers, particularly in the east.<sup>12</sup>

Clement of Rome was not a Calvinist in any sense. He believed in works salvation. How Grudem or any Calvinist might claim Clement as an early representative of his theology is hard to fathom.

### III. AFTER THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

The period from the Apostolic Fathers to the Protestant Reformation covers almost fourteen centuries. The vast writings from this period obviously contain many different theological views. As it is in Christendom today, it would be impossible to state what Christians universally believed.

As a low church Dispensationalist, as well as a proponent of Free Grace Theology, whenever I have read the literature of the ancient church, I have looked for statements that supported my theology. I have also read attempts by others to discover such statements.

I have found such attempts unsatisfying. Any possible support was very limited and open to interpretation. If such support were indeed present, it would only be an extremely minor part of the writings of this period. Such support would include teachings on the independence of the local church, the rapture of the Church, a future Millennial Kingdom, salvation by grace

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<sup>12</sup> Clayton N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 100.

through faith alone, assurance of salvation, and a judgment seat of Christ where believers would receive rewards for their faithfulness to Christ.

Instead, what one finds is that the views expressed by the Apostolic Fathers seem to gain strength during the following centuries. Bishops become even more powerful. One does not read of justification by faith alone. Grace and salvation are given through baptism and the Lord's Supper. The loss of eternal salvation is a definite possibility. Superstition, church tradition, and mysticism gain strong footholds.

Perhaps Tertullian, an early church writer and famous Christian apologist in Africa in the third century, is an illustration. He writes that the unbeliever must turn from his sins in order to experience salvation. However, a probation period must be entered into first. The unbeliever must amend his or her life prior to baptism. Evidently following the teachings of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Tertullian says that after baptism one can only repent once. After that, salvation is lost. He suggests that believers should not be told they have the opportunity to repent once because they can use that as excuse to sin.<sup>13</sup>

In looking at the writings of the ancient church, it is not just Free Grace people who find very little support for their beliefs. It seems to this writer that anybody who believes that the Bible is our rule of faith and that it teaches salvation by grace through faith alone that cannot be lost finds little or no support for their views in these writings. This would certainly include those who hold to a Lordship Salvation viewpoint.

To put it bluntly, when it comes to grace and forgiveness, the writings of the ancient church often seem to have been written by men who completely missed the spirit of the NT. There seems to be no understanding of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in John 4, with Nicodemus in John 3, or with Martha in John 11:25-26. The idea that a believer can only find forgiveness after salvation once, or that one believer is to forgive another only once, is completely contrary to the Lord's command that we forgive others as often as they sin against us (seventy times seven) and John's statement that if we simply confess our

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<sup>13</sup>Tertullian, *Of Repentance* 6f. It should be noted that later in his life Tertullian joined the heretical Montanist group. This letter, however, was written during his "orthodox" days.

sins the Lord forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (Matt 18:21-22; 1 John 1:9).

But how can these things be? If indeed the Bible teaches salvation by grace through faith, why don't these ancient writers reflect such teaching? How could men who lived so close to the time of the Apostles, for example, distort what the Apostles taught? Was the gospel lost for at least 15 centuries? There are some possible answers to these questions.

## **IV. THE GOSPEL IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

If, starting from the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, one is exposed to a gospel of works, does this mean that the gospel of grace was not proclaimed and believed during the early Church? No. In fact, it would be impossible for that to be the case because the Lord said His Church would prevail over the gates of hell (Matt 16:16). But how was the Gospel of grace proclaimed? There are a few possibilities.

### **A. THE ANCIENT WRITERS CHANGED THEIR VIEWS**

The Apostolic Fathers cited above may have believed in a gospel of grace in the years before they wrote. All of these men wrote later in their lives. If indeed they were exposed to the teaching of the Apostles, the Fathers could have initially believed the biblical gospel, but changed their views as time went on. A similar situation occurred to the believers addressed in the book of Galatians.

It is also noteworthy that some of the writers exhibit inconsistencies in what they write. They speak of the grace of God and the need for faith in Jesus Christ, but then deny that grace by saying that without works one loses their salvation. This inconsistency was noted in Polycarp's letter. He says in one place that if we don't keep the commandments of Christ we are lost. Later, however, he refers to an elder that has not kept the commandments. He loves money and has fallen from the faith. However, he is not an enemy of the church and should be dealt with in a loving manner. His treatment of this sinning elder is much more gracious than his earlier comments would warrant.

It is a fact concerning all teachers of God's Word that they are sometimes not careful in their teaching. Even today, one often

hears Lordship and even Arminian teachers tell their listeners that all they need to do to have eternal life is believe in Jesus Christ. It is all by grace through faith. Later, they will then say that without works “final salvation” is not possible. Works either prove one’s salvation, are necessary to keep it, or even earn it. In any case, such teachings are inconsistent and can lead to confusion.<sup>14</sup>

Related to the idea that writers and speakers are not careful in choosing their words, it seems that some writings of the early Church were maybe more concerned with practical concerns instead of theological consistency, purity, and accuracy. In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, for example, the author seems to be addressing an audience that was concerned about post-baptismal sins. How should a teacher instruct Christians living in a pagan society about sins committed after they believe? To tell them that God’s grace in these matters is infinite (even if the writer believed it!) would perhaps give a license to sin. But sin is a reality in the life of every Christian, so there must be some grace given. The expedient solution would be to say that you can repent, and grace is available, but there is a limit to God’s grace.<sup>15</sup>

The good news is that in the early church, there would have been times when the common person heard of God’s grace and eternal life in Christ. Most importantly, the Word of God existed during these centuries.

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<sup>14</sup> In my opinion, such inconsistencies and confusion are seen in some of the views expressed in a recent book on the role that works play in the Christian’s eternal salvation, Bob Wilkin’s contribution excepted. See Alan P. Stanley, ed., *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013). Schreiner’s essay seems especially inconsistent.

<sup>15</sup> Tertullian, as cited above, is in agreement with the teachings of the *Shepherd*. He admits that the teacher must be careful not to emphasize the grace of God because that could lead the believer to sin. To this writer, it seems that the writer of the *Shepherd* is also inconsistent. In describing the sins of his own family, he seems to be describing a situation that requires more than one offer of God’s grace after salvation. It makes one wonder if the author believed what he wrote or was simply giving what he saw as practical admonition to a problem he saw in his day. Such teaching, however, presents its own problems. People indeed need grace more than once. In the early church, people exposed to this teaching sometimes waited until their deathbeds, or old age, before being baptized. This would, they believed, limit the time that they would be Christians and therefore they would be less likely to need to repent more than once after baptism.

## B. THE COMMON MAN AND EXPOSURE TO GOD'S WORD

Of course, the extant writings of the Apostolic Fathers and other writers during the first fifteen centuries of the Church represent a very small percentage of Christendom. It would be a mistake to assume that these writings reflected the theological beliefs of all in Christendom, or even a majority. The beliefs of religious people are never monolithic in any age, including our own.

A danger to be avoided is to assume that Christians throughout history had copies of, and read, the writings of church leaders. To assume that is to assume a level of literacy that probably did not exist. Ehrman, relying on the work of Harris, states that until the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century only a small percentage of people could read and write. He suggests that in the first century it would have been only around ten percent.<sup>16</sup>

As Harris points out, to state such statistics requires that we define terms. Some people were completely illiterate, some semi-literate, and others proficiently literate. In other words, some could only write their names and read simple sentences. Craftsmen were literate in their fields, but only as needed. There was no need for the majority of people to be able to read and write, especially on a very proficient level. With the coming of Christianity and the emphasis on the inspired writings of the Apostles, there was probably a slight increase in such proficiency, but only among the professional clergy and the especially pious.<sup>17</sup>

Related to this issue is the availability of books/parchments/codexes. At the beginning of the Church, most people did not have a personal copy, for example, of the Old Testament. It would have been very expensive and bulky.<sup>18</sup> Harris refers to the statements by Eusebius and his son Jerome in the fourth

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<sup>16</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005), 37-39.

<sup>17</sup> William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4f, 19, 220, 322.

<sup>18</sup> A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 79.

and fifth centuries that copies of the books of the Bible were difficult to come by in Palestine.<sup>19</sup>

Even though most people did not have copies of the writings of the early writers or even the Bible, and wouldn't have been able to read them on a proficient level if they did, they were still exposed to the gospel. Justin Martyr, in the second century, tells us that the Scriptures were read publicly in the churches (*1 Apology* 67). The NT also bears this out (1 Thess 5:26-27; Col 4:16; 1 Tim 4:13). Harris points out that even though most people did not have copies of books and literacy rates were low, Christianity brought about an important change. Prior to Christianity, among the pagans, the written word was not important in matters of religion.<sup>20</sup> To Christians, the Scriptures were important and were read aloud in worship services.

This reading of God's Word would have allowed the gospel of God's grace to be heard. When people heard the account of Nicodemus in John 3, the woman at the well in John 4, John 5, John 6, Jesus' words with Martha at Lazarus' tomb, Paul's encounter with the Philippian jailor in Acts 16, or Paul's instruction to the Ephesian Church in Eph 2:8-9, they would have heard a message of grace.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to reveal truth to the minds of unbelievers (John 16:8-11). The mind of unbelievers are supernaturally darkened concerning God's grace in the Gospel of Christ (2 Cor 4:4), but the Spirit of God can, and does, lift that blindness.

We should not underestimate the ability of God's Spirit to reveal the truth of the Biblical gospel to people who heard it proclaimed in God's Word throughout the centuries. That Word proclaims a gospel of grace. The Spirit of God was at work in the process. The gates of hell would not prevail against the Church. As a result, untold numbers of people believed.

### C. AN ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE?

Admittedly, to say that there were people in the first fifteen centuries of the church that believed they were saved by grace alone through faith alone, or that they knew they had eternal life, is an argument from silence. The fact is, we do not have

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<sup>19</sup>Harris, *Literacy*, 299; Jerome, *Adv. Rufin* 1.9.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 220.

any clear writings that reflect such an understanding of the gospel. However, it is also an argument from silence to claim that no one held Free Grace views. The illiterate masses did not leave a record of what they believed.

Moreover, even though certain church leaders taught certain things, history and experience tells us that people do not always believe what the leaders of their day expound. Millions of Christians were not exposed to the writings of the Church Fathers. Throughout the history of the church, and even today, lay people and ordinary pastors have come to an understanding of God's Word on their own.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the extant writings of the Apostolic and Church Fathers, one is hard pressed to find a Free Grace understanding of the gospel. Assurance of salvation, eternal security, and justification by faith apart from works all seem to be foreign concepts.

However, it seems clear to this writer that the same could be said about Lordship Salvation. It seems strange to me that Grudem would claim that a Lordship view is the historic view of the ancient Church<sup>21</sup> since the Church Fathers teach many things with which both Grudem and MacArthur (and Carson) would strongly disagree. Lordship advocates teach that salvation cannot be lost and that baptism is not required for justification. They reject that grace is given through the elements of communion, that salvation can only come after a probationary period, or that forgiveness is only offered to the believer once after salvation. While they agree with the extant early church writers that works are necessary for salvation, there are still major differences.<sup>22</sup> It is also safe to assume that the vast

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<sup>21</sup> He refers to MacArthur's writings, and indeed MacArthur makes that point. He finds support for his theology in the *Didache*, as well as in the writings of Ignatius and Clement. See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?*(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 254.

<sup>22</sup> Some Lordship advocates admit the necessity of works, but most would say that they are not the cause of salvation, but the result. Practically, however, there is no difference. Without works, one would not enter into the kingdom.

majority of Lordship teachers would find troublesome the lack of grace in the extant writings of the early Church.

Simply put, the gospel as understood by Lordship Salvation proponents is not found in the extant writings of the early church. The same charge they direct towards Free Grace teachers can be charged to them. If the view argued above, that a Free Grace understanding of the gospel existed in the church, is an argument from silence, then the same is true of a Lordship understanding. In fact, the same could be said about any gospel that claims justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, or that teaches salvation cannot be lost.<sup>23</sup> Lordship adherents would also disagree with the power that the bishop has in early Church writings as well.

However, some would argue that during the Reformation things changed.

They would say that at that time, Lordship Salvation came to the forefront. The Reformers, it is maintained, give a relative basis for the antiquity of, and thus validity to such theology. Part two of this series will take up that issue.

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<sup>23</sup>I spent over twenty years in the military as a chaplain and worked with people from many different denominations, including Catholic chaplains. I have witnessed people convert from different Protestant denominations to Catholicism. Sometimes the reason given is that for the first fifteen centuries of the Church a gospel of justification by faith alone with eternal security was not preached. The whole Protestant movement, it is claimed, is a new invention. Salvation, according to these “converts,” was always taught as coming through the Catholic Church, with its understanding of the sacraments and repentance. History, it is said, is not on the side of any Protestant understanding of the gospel.



# A RESPONSE TO THOMAS R. SCHREINER'S OBJECTION TO MY PRESENTATION IN *FOUR VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF WORKS AT THE FINAL JUDGMENT*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In July of 2013, Zondervan released *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*.<sup>1</sup> I had been invited to defend the view that there is no final judgment for believers, only a presentation at the Judgment Seat of Christ to determine eternal rewards. The three other contributors argued that believers will face a final judgment where their works will determine their final destiny in some way. Each of us wrote 10,000 words defending our view. Only after submitting our own chapters did we see what the others wrote. We were then allowed 2,000 word responses to each of the other essays.

I appreciate the gracious responses to my chapter by the other contributors. While they had major differences with my understanding of Scripture, their remarks were generally kind. In the interests of continuing the debate, this article analyzes Thomas R. Schreiner's response to my presentation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, ed. Alan P. Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

## II. WHO IS THOMAS R. SCHREINER?

Tom Schreiner is one of the leading American NT scholars. Indeed, as Alan P. Stanley points out, he is “one of the *world’s* leading New Testament Pauline scholars” (p. 24, italics added). He teaches NT at Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY. He has published over a dozen books, including commentaries on Romans, Galatians, 1–2 Peter, and Jude.

*JOTGES* readers might find it interesting that Tom was mentored by Earl Radmacher at Western Seminary. For a time, Tom’s thinking was in line with Earl’s and mine. Further education led him down a different path.

## III. THE NATURE OF SCHREINER’S CRITICISMS OF MY ARTICLE

Schreiner’s criticisms of my views are primarily philosophical, not exegetical. Rarely does he actually explain why my interpretation of a passage is off base. He does say, “his (Wilkin’s) exegetical support for his thesis is singularly unconvincing.” But then, before discussing my exegetical support, he mentions some areas of agreement (p. 51).

After two paragraphs of agreements, he then begins with areas of disagreement. Surprisingly for me, he does not discuss *exegetical* disagreements, but instead *theological* disagreements. I say this is surprising since he said my *exegetical support is singularly unconvincing*. Thus I expected him to explain, for example, why John 5:24 doesn’t really mean that believers will not come into judgment regarding their eternal destiny, or why the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27) does not teach a separate judgment for believers and unbelievers. Yet this is not what we find.

## IV. SCHREINER’S CHARGE OF EXTRAORDINARY PRESUPPOSITIONS

Under this heading Schreiner writes, “Now I come to the fundamental and most serious problem with Wilkin’s essay: he forces every text to fit his paradigm.”

I can just see an Arminian say the same thing about Schreiner: he forces every text to fit his view of perseverance for the elect. Or someone who believes in infant baptism (a paedobaptist) might say that Schreiner forces every text to fit his view of believer's baptism. Without proof of how I have forced my paradigm on the texts, this is an empty charge which need not be taken seriously.

I heartily agree when Schreiner writes, "We must be willing to listen to the text and ask ourselves if we have adopted a system that is alien to the scriptural text" (p. 53). But this cuts both ways.

Is it really an extraordinary presupposition to say that all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for everlasting life are eternally secure no matter what they do or fail to do in the future? For Schreiner it is. But was it for the Lord and His Apostles? Is that not what we see over and over again in texts like John 1:12; 3:16; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:28-29, 35, 37, 39, 47; 11:25-26; 20:30-31; Acts 16:31; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; and Rev 22:17?

Let me explain my paradigm with a syllogism:

Major Premise:	All who believe in Jesus Christ have everlasting life that can never be lost.
Minor Premise:	I believe in Jesus Christ.
Conclusion:	I have everlasting life that can never be lost.

Now here is Schreiner's paradigm:

Major Premise:	All who do a sufficient amount of good works will obtain everlasting life at the final judgment.
Minor Premise:	I do not know if I will do enough good works.
Conclusion:	I do not know if I will obtain everlasting life at the final judgment.

You be the judge. Which view is listening to the Scriptures?

## V. JAMES 2:19

Schreiner begins his response by discussing “the nature of saving faith” (pp. 51-52). Concerning faith and salvation in James, something I briefly discussed exegetically in my chapter, Schreiner says, “Space is lacking to engage the texts fully here” (p. 52). This seems like a dodge to me. He could pick a few key texts and write a paragraph about each one. While that might not be a full discussion, it would be exegetical. Instead, Schreiner gives *no exegetical discussion at all*. Here is what he says about James 2: “Believing that there is one God doesn’t save, for demons believe such but they don’t belong to God (Jas 2:19)” (p. 52). I did not actually address that verse. However, if I had, as I have elsewhere, I would have said that belief in monotheism is not saving and that Christ did not die for demons and hence there is no salvation for demons no matter what they believe.

What I did briefly mention in my article is that in Jas 2:13 we find the Greek word *krisis*, judgment. I said,

John 5:24 refutes the notion that believers will appear at the final judgment. That is where eternal destinies are decided, and Jesus specifically taught that believers “shall not come into judgment (*krisis*).” The eternal destiny of believers has already been decided. Unfortunately, many commentators maintain that believers *will come into* judgment (*krisis*). For example, many say that references to judgment (*krisis*) in James 2:13 and to salvation in 2:14 mean that brothers and sisters in Christ who are without works will be condemned at the final judgment. But none of these commentators attempt to show how this can be so in light of John 5:24 (pp. 48-49).

I find it remarkable that when he is responding to my only reference to James 2 in my entire chapter he fails to discuss my comment on *krisis*, judgment. If believers will not come into judgment regarding their eternal destiny, then how can Jas 2:13-14 refer to the judgment of believers to determine their eternal destinies? In fact, nowhere in Schreiner’s response does he discuss what the Lord Jesus meant in John 5:24.

## VI. JOHN 2:23-25 AND JOHN 8:30-32

Schreiner writes, “Despite Wilkin’s protestations, the scenarios in John 2:23-25 and 8:31-59 illustrate the truth that there is a kind of faith that isn’t saving” (p. 52). What were my “protestations”? He doesn’t say. Nor does he show how they were “singularly unconvincing.” He merely decrees it so.

Here is what I said about those two passages in John:

John 2:23-25 and 8:30-32 are often cited as proof that more than “intellectual belief” is required for salvation. I argue elsewhere that sanctification is in view and not justification/conversion; see *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 372-73, 408 (p. 27, note 11).

If you consult my commentary on John, here is the exegetical support I gave for my view:

1. John says that “many believed in His name” (2:23) and “many believed in Him” (8:30). This is not their own professions of faith. This is an inspired statement that they “believed in His name” and “believed in Him.”
2. Elsewhere John says that whoever “believes in His name” has been born of God (John 1:12-13) and that “whoever believes in Him” has everlasting life and shall never perish (John 3:16).
3. The idea of Jesus *committing* or *not committing* Himself to someone is never used in John or the NT as a reference to the new birth. It refers to Him giving additional truth to people (cf. John 14:21; 15:14-15).
4. Nicodemus in John 3 illustrates a new believer who does not confess Christ (John 3:1-21; 7:50; 19:39) and John the Baptist illustrates a believer who does confess Him (John 3:22-36).
5. Being set free from sin’s bondage in one’s experience requires abiding in Jesus’ word (John 8:31-32). The issue there is not freedom from eternal condemnation.

None of these exegetical statements are shown to be unconvincing. Indeed, Schreiner discusses none of these points.

If “whoever believes in Him” has everlasting life and John says that the people in John 8:30-32 “believed in Him,” then how could anyone possibly conclude they were not born again? If *whoever* “believes in His name” is born of God, and John says the people of John 2:23 “believed in His name,” how could anyone conclude they were not born of God? Does this not beg explanation? Of course, Schreiner did not need to mention these passages. But once he does, he is obligated either to give his exegesis, or else point us to a place where he exegeted them. And surely if my exegesis is singularly unconvincing, he could easily show that.

## VII. REVELATION 20:11-15

I gave a fair amount of discussion on this key text. After mentioning my view that the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46) is restricted to the judgment of Gentiles who survive the Tribulation and that the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) is limited to unbelievers, he says, “I would suggest it is difficult to remember such distinctions because they have no textual warrant” (p. 53).

That is an amazing admission. Does Schreiner find it difficult to remember which passages in the NT deal with justification and which deal with sanctification? If not, then he already sees a textual warrant for different types of conditions and different types of consequences. If yes, then he blends justification and sanctification into a sort of free gift that we work to obtain.

Does Schreiner not see *any verses at all* in the Bible that deal with some judgment of believers other than what he calls *final judgment*? Does he not believe in temporal judgment? Surely he does. If so, he must have found a way to remember which is which. But if all judgment in the Bible is eschatological, and if all eschatological judgment concerns eternal destiny, then it is easy to see why Schreiner is confused.

Schreiner gives zero exegetical support for his contention that the judgment of the sheep and the goats and the Great White Throne Judgment refer to judgments of *all people*, believers and unbelievers, at what he calls *the final judgment*. Nor does he comment at all on the exegetical points I made. I said,

If we carefully observe what the text says, being found in the book of life is the only requirement. Since the sole condition of having eternal life, and thus being found in the book of life, is faith in Christ (e.g., John 3:16; 6:35), the Great White Throne Judgment underscores the promise of life to all who simply believe (p. 47).

Is that exegetically wrong? If so, why? We are not told.

### VIII. MATTHEW 8:11-12

Here, Schreiner amazingly picks a text which I did not even mention in my article. However, I am happy to respond to it. The text reads,

“And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here is how Schreiner interprets that passage:

It is patently clear in Matthew that those who weep and gnash their teeth are cast into hell. They won't sit at the banquet with Abraham and the patriarchs (Matt. 8:11-12) (p. 53).

Is that “patently clear”? Schreiner fails to mention that the expression “the sons of the kingdom,” only occurs one other time in Matthew's Gospel (and in the teaching of Jesus). There, the Lord says, “The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one” (Matt 13:38).

If the only other use of this expression in Matthew equates the “sons of the kingdom” with the “good seeds,” doesn't that at least deserve explanation? Does Schreiner think that the good seed represents one type of unbeliever and the tares another type of unbeliever? Or does he think the sons of the kingdom represent believers in Matt 13:38 but not in the only other use in Matthew?

And, by the way, would not the expression “the sons of the kingdom” tend to imply those who will be *in the kingdom*?

According to Schreiner, “being a child of God is another way of saying that one belongs to God, that one is a member of his people” (p. 54). He sees being a child of God as always referring to believers. Wouldn’t being “sons of the kingdom” then also always refer to believers under his own way of thinking? If not, why not? Schreiner seems to like to throw out provocative statements, with no proof, and without response to my exegetical arguments, and then to pretend that he has responded to what I wrote. The emperor has no clothes.

## IX. COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

Here, Schreiner makes another unguarded statement. In responding to my view that this passage refers to an eschatological presentation before Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ for reward, Schreiner says,

He may very well be right about this, but it is a distinction without a difference for the discussion we are having, for holiness is necessary to obtain the final reward, to receive eternal life (p. 54).

Notice here that he calls the reception of eternal life “the final reward.” Surely he does not mean that. Does Schreiner really believe that everlasting life is a reward for work done? I don’t think he typically puts it that baldly. But he does here.

Schreiner goes on to respond to some of the evidence I cited, sort of. I said, “*Blamelessness* is exemplified by the 144,000 who ‘stand without fault (*amōmos*) before the throne of God’ (Rev. 14:4-5)” (p. 46). Instead of responding to that passage, he throws out a few of his own, Phil 2:15 and Jude 24. I am happy to respond to these, but why didn’t he respond to the passages I cited regarding “holy, blameless, and beyond reproach”? He only picks one of the three words to respond to, and then he doesn’t even respond to the example I chose.

I have an entire article on Jude 24.<sup>2</sup> In the article, I show that keeping us from falling is not something God guarantees. Believers do fall. But God is able to keep us from falling. If we take advantage of His enabling power through His Word and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y1994/94A3.html>. That article is entitled, “He Is Able to Keep You from Stumbling.”

the indwelling Holy Spirit, then and only then, will we not fall and will He present us “faultless with exceeding joy.”

What evidence does Schreiner cite that shows that “in Jude 24 ‘without fault’ (*amōmous*) does not refer to reward but represents the character of those who stand before God” (p. 54)? He cites no evidence. He just decrees that to be true. That is not exegesis.

If all believers will stand *without fault* before Christ, what evidence shows this to be true?

Schreiner suggests that Phil 2:15 supports his contention:

in Philippians 2:15 “without fault” (*amōma*), which must not be confused with sinlessness, is necessary to belong to the “children of God” (p. 54).

But what in Phil 2:15 shows that? We are not told. Here is the text of Phil 2:14-15:

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...”

Notice Paul speaks of the readers *becoming blameless and harmless, children of God without fault...* He does not say that they are that now. They are to become that by doing all things without complaining and disputing.

Is it true that believers do not complain? Do they not dispute? If you have ever been involved in church ministry, you know that at least *some* of the brethren seem to do a fair amount of complaining and disputing.

Paul is not speaking here of being children of God as Schreiner suggests. He is speaking of becoming blameless and harmless *in the future*, that is, becoming children of God who are without fault.

I cited the conclusion of an article on this passage by Charlie Bing in *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Bing concluded,

When Colossians 1:21-23 is studied in the context of the entire epistle, it is clear that Paul wrote to believers who were in danger of having their assurance undermined by the false and legalistic

doctrines of certain teachers. If they moved away from the truth of the gospel and the hope that is based on it, they would lose the prospect of a good presentation and therefore a good evaluation before the judgment seat of Christ, because hope is inexorably related to the believer's practical relationship to God and others.

What is Schreiner's response to that? He does not say. He merely decrees that my exegesis and Bing's is wrong, without actually interacting with any of it.

## X. GALATIANS 6:7-9

Schreiner gets particularly worked up by my explanation of this passage, saying, "These verses serve as another example of a jaundiced reading of the text" (p. 54). Surely if my interpretation were jaundiced, he should point out why.

Several times in this section Schreiner says that good works are necessary to obtain everlasting life. He does not say that good works *prove* one has everlasting life, which in itself is a view which cannot be shown from Scripture. But he goes further, saying, "This (reaping everlasting life by work done) seems to be a clear example of the necessity of good works and life in the Spirit to obtain everlasting life" (p. 54).

Notice that he says that a person must have both good works "and life in the Spirit" in order "to obtain everlasting life." Is that not a tautology? Must a person have everlasting life ("life in the Spirit") in order to obtain everlasting life? What would that mean? Schreiner does not explain.

The book contains my chart contrasting Gal 6:7-9 and Eph 2:8-9. Surprisingly, Schreiner does not comment on this exegetical argument other than to make the comment, "Ephesians 2:8-9 doesn't speak of everlasting life. Paul refers to God's past saving work here and doesn't use the expression 'everlasting life'" (p. 54).

As a NT scholar, Schreiner is certainly aware that the expression "by grace you have been saved" does not first appear in Eph 2:8. It is first found in Eph 2:5. There, Paul says, "even when we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Surely Schreiner

understands “made alive together with Christ” in Eph 2:5 as referring to the new birth and the reception of everlasting life. Thus, the reference to salvation in Eph 2:8 clearly refers to everlasting life. What other type of salvation does Schreiner think is in view? He does not say.

If Paul says that everlasting life is “not of works, so that no one may boast,” then how can Schreiner say that we need good works in order to obtain everlasting life?

Schreiner says, “No evidence could ever be adduced that would prove the contrary” to me (p. 55). That is, he is saying that no evidence could be shown to prove works salvation to me. Correct. I assume there are lots of things I could say about him in the same way. No evidence could convince Schreiner that atheism is true, that Jesus is not God, that men are sinless, that the Bible is not God’s Word, that hell does not exist, etc. Why? Not because he is jaundiced. But because he sees theism, the deity of Christ, the sinfulness of man, the inerrancy of the Bible, and the existence of hell as clearly taught in Scripture. So do I. But I also see clearly taught that everlasting life is not of works.

His own statement applies equally well to him. “No evidence could ever be adduced that would prove the contrary” to Schreiner, that good works are not a condition of everlasting life. So how does he explain John 3:16; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:28-29, 35, 37, 39-40, 47; 11:25-27; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Rev 21:6 and a host of other texts? He doesn’t explain any of those texts.

I suppose jaundice is in the eye of the beholder.

## XI. HEBREWS 10:36

Schreiner criticizes me for suggesting that everlasting life is not in view here. He writes, “The promise is clearly eschatological rescue, for it is contrasted a few verses later (10:39) with a typical word for eschatological destruction (*apōleia*)” (p. 55).

In the first place, something can be eschatological and not pertain to eternal destiny. The Judgment Seat of Christ is eschatological, but everlasting rewards are in view there (unless one takes Schreiner’s view that the Judgment Seat of Christ is another name for the Great White Throne Judgment).

In the second place, *apōleia* is not “a typical word for eschatological destruction.” *Apōleia* occurs 19 times in the NT outside of Heb 10:39. Clearly it refers to *temporal* loss, waste, or death at least fifteen times: Matt 26:8 (wasted fragrant oil); Mark 14:4 (wasted ointment); Acts 8:20 (money that is destroyed); Acts 25:16 (delivering a man to die by execution); Rom 9:22 (vessels of wrath prepared for *destruction*); Phil 1:28 (destruction of the ungodly in the Tribulation versus the deliverance of believers from the Tribulation); 1 Tim 6:9 (men who desire to be rich experience foolish and harmful lusts which drown them in ruin and *destruction*); 2 Pet 2:1 (*destructive* heresies and swift *destruction*); 2 Pet 2:2, 3 (*destructive* ways, their *destruction*); 2 Pet 3:7 (the *destruction* of ungodly men); 2 Pet 3:16 (their own *destruction*); Rev 17:8, 11 (the beast will come out of the bottomless pit to earth and then will go to *destruction* [i.e., death] at the end of the Tribulation). It probably refers to eternal condemnation in Matt 7:13 (the broad way that leads to *destruction*); John 17:12 (Judas was the son of *perdition*); and 2 Thess 2:3 (the man of sin will be the son of *perdition*). That is only 15% of the twenty NT uses. The use in Phil 3:19 might refer either to temporal destruction or eternal destruction (“whose end is *destruction*”).

Schreiner mentions none of this. He simply claims that *apōleia* is “a typical word for eschatological destruction.” But the evidence shows that only about one in five times does *apōleia* refer to eternal condemnation. Some other uses refer to temporal judgment that will occur during the Tribulation or Millennium and hence could be called eschatological destruction, but not in the sense that Schreiner means. It is thus hardly a word that is a technical term for eternal condemnation.

In the third place, Schreiner ignores my evidence. I said,

The promise cannot refer to “final salvation” for these readers are already eternally secure. They are “holy brothers, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1); they “have a great High Priest...Jesus Christ” (4:14), and “by this time... ought to be teachers” (5:12). Hence they are “partakers of the Holy Spirit” (6:4) who “have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10).

Why does he not comment on this evidence? Were the readers not “partakers of the heavenly calling”? Did they not “have a great High Priest...Jesus Christ”? Is it not true that by the time the author wrote they “ought to be teachers”? Is it not true that they were “partakers of the Holy Spirit”? Is it not true that the readers had already been “sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”? If these statements are not true, then why not? Schreiner cannot simply ignore the evidence with the wave of his hand.

He also did not comment on other evidence I cited:

The promise, then, rather than referring to “final salvation,” refers to being Christ’s partners (*metochoi*) in the life to come (cf. 1:9, 14). This, however, is not automatic. Only believers who persevere will be partners (*metochoi*) with Christ (3:14)—a matter to be decided at the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 10:39). Thus J. Paul Tanner writes, “The Lord’s return should mean good news for believers, but for some it could mean shame (cf. 1 John 2:28).”<sup>3</sup> Tanner rejects the *final salvation* option:

Any thought, however, that [Heb.] 10:39 might have *soteriological faith* in view must certainly be rejected in light of the fact that the author clearly portrays in chap. 11 that the faith he has in mind is *a life of walking by faith* in which one pleases God.<sup>4</sup>

If my exegesis and that of Tanner is wrong, then show that it is wrong. But to fail to even comment on the proofs I cite is like a tennis player who refuses to return the serve. Instead of returning the ball hit to him, this player hits a different ball back that he pulls out of his pocket.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Paul Tanner, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1077f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1078, italics his.

## XII. REVELATION 3:5

Schreiner sees a connection between Rev 3:5 and Matt 10:33 and 2 Tim 2:12 (p. 56). I heartily agree. However, Schreiner quotes a poor translation of Matt 10:33 in order to support his view. Why did he not translate it himself, as I did the verses which I cited in my article, and which he typically did in his response? Nowhere else in his entire response does he cite a translation.

The NIV rendering of Matt 10:33 is a commentary on the verse and not a translation at all, as Schreiner would certainly admit. The NIV reads, “But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.” Yet the Greek says nothing about *disowning* Jesus or Him *disowning* us. The Greek conveys the sense of denial: “But he who denies (*arnēsētai*) Me before men, him will I also deny (*arnēsomai*) before My Father who is in heaven.” Peter denied Christ three times. The same Greek word is used.

One wonders how an unbeliever could *deny* Christ. If a person does not believe in Jesus, then denying Christ is not really a possibility for him. Only someone who believes in Jesus can deny his faith in Christ.

Jesus’ point, picked up by Paul in 2 Tim 2:12, is that if we as believers endure in our confession of our faith in Christ, then we will rule with Christ in the life to come. If we instead deny our faith in Him, He will deny us the privilege of ruling with Him.

Of course, this does not fit Schreiner’s paradigm, since in his view failure is not possible for a genuine believer. To fail to endure in one’s confession of Christ would represent failure. If believers cannot fail, then all believers will endure in their confession of Christ.

This raises many questions unanswered by Schreiner. Why does Paul use the first person plural (“we”) in 2 Tim 2:12? What does 2 Tim 2:13 mean? If Peter had died after his three denials of Christ, would he have eventually failed to obtain everlasting life at the final judgment? If the Lord Jesus said that everlasting life is a present possession which can never be lost, then how can those who have that life fail to keep it if they fail to endure in their confession of Christ?

### XIII. WHAT HE FAILS TO DISCUSS

I realize that 2,000 words, our word limit on responses, is not enough to cover every passage or every topic in an article. However, there are some things which one would think that someone disagreeing with my article would need to at least comment on.

Not only did Schreiner fail to criticize any of the specific exegetical arguments I made (other than saying that the words *everlasting life* do not appear in Eph 2:8-9), he also failed to discuss any of my applications.

I said that assurance is impossible if you believe, as he does, that perseverance in faith and good works is necessary for “final salvation” (p. 49). No response was given. But clearly if only those who produce a sufficient amount of good works will obtain everlasting life at the final judgment, then we cannot be sure of our eternal destiny.

Evangelism is garbled, I argued, if one argues that works are necessary to obtain everlasting life, as Schreiner says (p. 49). Again, no response.

What is the motivation to live the Christian life if our eternal destiny depends on our producing a sufficient amount of good works? Would it not be fear of hell (pp. 49-50)? This does appear to be the motivation Schreiner promotes. But he fails to comment on this point directly.

Finally, I argue that the Bible becomes unintelligible if spending eternity with the Lord in His kingdom is conditioned upon faith in Him, apart from works, and, in addition, works we do. No response was given to this practical concern either.

Note the very last line of Schreiner’s response to my article: “A better approach [than Wilkin’s] would be to integrate the necessity of good works for final salvation with the claim that eternal life is the gift of God” (p. 56). In that one sentence he confirms all four of the practical concerns I outline above and in my chapter. Assurance, evangelism, motivation, and the ability to make sense of the Bible all are damaged or destroyed under that way of thinking.

Some of those who will be the next generation of Southern Baptist pastors are being taught by Schreiner that good works are necessary to obtain everlasting life at the final judgment. Gone will be the singing of “Just As I Am” and “Whosoever

Surely Meaneth Me” for those whom he influences. Gone will be the preaching of John 3:16 and 5:24 as well.

Permit me to revise Schreiner’s last line: “A better approach [than Schreiner’s] would be to integrate the necessity of good works *for eternal rewards* with the promise of everlasting life as a gift to all who believe in Jesus.”

# THE TWO MODES OF HUMANITY, PART 2: THE HISTORY OF THE VIEW

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a continuing stream among dispensational premillennialists from the 19th century to the present upholding the view of an eternal destiny for a sanctified natural humanity. They will be capable of reproduction and live on the new earth (and perhaps eventually colonizing other planets). There will also be a sanctified and resurrected/glorified humanity, no longer marrying and reproducing, with the overcomers within that group ruling with Christ over the new heaven and new earth and the capital city New Jerusalem. Some interpreters have also strongly objected to this view. This article will survey the supportive tradition, beginning with John Nelson Darby and continuing to the present day.

## II. NINETEENTH CENTURY ADVOCATES

### A. JOHN NELSON DARBY (1800–1882)

Darby was an influential figure among the Plymouth Brethren and an early dispensational premillennialist. F. S. Elmore cites him as a progenitor of the view of two modes of humanity in the eternal state. “Hoyt agreed with Darby that there would be saints living in their natural state forever, thus allowing

for two modes of life in the eternal state.”<sup>1</sup> The two following quotes from the collected works of Darby suggest that he was an adherent of the view:

Because when, for us at any rate, “immortality sets in,” and that is the proper hope of our calling, there will be saints on earth in quite a different state.<sup>2</sup>

The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the Gentiles... Those that are in the city find food in its fruit, and from its leaves proceed the resources of life for those who are still on the earth.<sup>3</sup>

### B. GEORGE N. H. PETERS (1825–1909)

Peters was an American Lutheran minister and author of *The Theocratic Kingdom*. Published in 1884 by Funk and Wagnalls, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, a three-volume defense of dispensational premillennial theology, was Peter’s major work. It was reprinted in 1952 and 1972 by Kregel Publications. In the preface of the 1952 edition, Wilbur E. Smith calls it “the most exhaustive, thoroughly annotated and logically arranged study of Biblical prophecy that appeared in our country during the nineteenth century.” In this work Peters presents an extensive discussion of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state.<sup>4</sup> He summarizes his view:

*Observation*. 2. While thus firmly holding to and advocating the perpetuation of the race *after* the Second Advent in a condition similar (not attained at once but gradually) to that before the

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<sup>1</sup> Floyd Sanders Elmore, “A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 305.

<sup>2</sup> John Nelson Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, ed. William Kelly, 2nd ed., 34 vols. (Sunbury, PA.: Believers Bookshelf, 1971), 10:251.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:103.

<sup>4</sup> Peters develops his argument concerning the Theocratic Kingdom through a series of Propositions. Proposition 152 is entitled, “This Kingdom is connected with the perpetuation of the human race.” The three volumes are available on the internet at <http://theocratickingdom.info/StrangerandPilgrims/PetersKingdom.html> (accessed 10/25/12).

fall, yet, to avoid misapprehension, it is necessary to define our position more accurately.

Holding to a restoration of the race to that which was forfeited by sin, our opinion is guided mainly by the account preceding the fall. Able writers (as D. N. Lord, Rev. Newton, etc.), contend for an eternal, everlasting perpetuation of the race, perpetual and strictly never-ending, and rely exclusively upon the words rendered "eternal," "perpetual," "forever," etc. The argument thus presented looks plausible and weighty; sufficiently so, that while not fully accepting of it, we at the same time do not deny it.

The reasons which influence us to this caution are the following: The words depended upon (as eternal, perpetual, etc.) have sometimes, as critics of the most diverse sentiments state, a limited meaning, denoting simply a long duration, or a duration coequal with existing orderings or dispensations. The fact that actual eternity, never-ending succession, is meant, must be derived from a more detailed statement, in which this is asserted.

Now, it is not stated that if Adam had not fallen his posterity would have gone on perpetually and forever increasing. This is only inferred. The announcement before the fall is simply to "multiply and replenish the earth," and the inference might be made (as some theologians suggested), that at some remote future period, when the earth was filled with inhabitants, a general glorification would cause the multiplication of the race to cease, etc. If never-ending generations had been promised to Adam, then indeed the argument in favor of this view would be valid, *for restitution would then embrace it.*

Then again, coming to the close of the Bible, where the fact is admitted of generations witnessing and enjoying the light and glory of the New Jerusalem state, and the decided impression is made *for ages even*, yet nothing specific is asserted of never-ending generations.

Our position is this: We are satisfied to end the discussion where *the Bible ends it*, viz., with

a portion of the race glorified and the race itself redeemed from the curse, passing on to higher stages of blessedness, and entering *into the eternal ages* in this happy condition. If Adam forfeited never-ending generations—if this was part of God's original design—then the restitution will restore and carry it out; but if not, *then only* that wonderful increase commensurate with God's design will be produced. Here we stop: that the race is perpetuated *after* the Advent is true; that this will continue on *after* the thousand years (which only limits Satan's binding, etc.), is most certain; that it even may continue on forever may, for aught we know, be also correct (seeing that some language can scarcely be interpreted otherwise), but as to the latter, not feeling positive, we stop with "*the many generations*" of Isa. 60:15.

The doctrine is not essential in our argument in that form, for if we show, as the Bible does, a completed restitution of all things, that is all that is required to perfect our system—the rest can well be left for the succeeding or eternal ages to develop. Desirous, on the one hand, not to limit the mighty power of God, and on the other hand not to pass beyond that which is positively (not merely inferentially) asserted, we proceed, with this expressed caution, in our argument, with the simple remark added, that such a posture accords best with the ideas of the primitive church on the subject. So far as the ordering of God in the matter is concerned, we are willing cordially to accept of the same, whatever it may be.<sup>5</sup>

### C. ELIJAH RICHARDSON CRAVEN (1824–1908)

Craven was a premillennial Presbyterian pastor. He received his B.A. in 1842 at College of New Jersey (Princeton); and then completed Princeton Seminary in 1848. He was pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Newark from 1854–87 and then served as secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Publication

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<sup>5</sup> Proposition 152, observation 2," in Peters, *Theocratic*, 2:538. Note that Peters mentions "able writers" who held the view of the two humanities continuing forever.

and Sabbath School Word from 1887–1904. He was an editor who enlarged Lange’s commentary on the book of Revelation. In this work, Craven supplied many comments on premillennialism. Concerning the two humanities in the eternal state he commented:

We should distinguish between the citizens of the city and the nations. The former are risen and glorified saints who constitute the Bride, the governors of the new creation. The later are probably men in the flesh who “walk in the light of the city,” who “bring their glory and honor into it,” and who are healed (or kept in health) by the leaves of the Tree of Life...

The nations will consist of men in the flesh, freed from sin and the curse, begetting a holy seed and dwelling in blessedness under the government of the New Jerusalem. They will not be the offspring of the glorified saints, who “neither marry nor are given in marriage,” but the descendants of those who live in the period of the millennial kingdom...<sup>6</sup>

#### D. JOSEPH AUGUSTUS SEISS (1823–1904)

Seiss was an American Lutheran minister and one of the founders of the General Council of the Lutheran Church. He edited *Prophetic Times* and was the author of *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, which was published in 1900 by George C. Cooke and reprinted several times by Zondervan Publishing House. The following quotes are from the 1977 Zondervan reprint:

I therefore hold it to be a necessary and integral part of the Scriptural doctrine of human redemption, that our race, as a self-multiplying order of beings, will never cease either to exist or to possess the earth.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Peter Lange, *The Revelation of John*, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: Clark, 1870; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 391. Peters, *Theocratic*, 2:549, quotes Craven in "Proposition 152, observation 6, note 3."

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), 483. See <http://www.indywatchman.com/>

When discussing the inhabitants of “The Redeemed World” (new heaven and new earth) he distinguishes between “the holy people of God from Abel to the last martyr under the Antichrist” and “the still ongoing race”:

All these are there [the resurrected/glorified saints], not in flesh and blood, not returned to an earthly corporeal life, but in resurrection transfiguration, made like to the angels, like to their Redeemer now in glory, and having their home-place and palace in the Golden City for which they looked, and wrought, and waited, and suffered when on earth. These are there, as occupants of the new heavens, the dwellers in the new city, the sublime and heavenly kings and priests of the eternal nations and generations.<sup>8</sup>

*And the still ongoing race redeemed is there.* Many can think of none but glorified saints in this grand picture; but the terms of the record will not construe with that idea.<sup>9</sup>

There is not a word which asserts any purpose of God to terminate the perpetuity of humanity as an ever-expanding race. It was constituted and given command for unending perpetuity before sin touched it. If it fails to go on forever, it can only be in consequence of the introduction of sin. But there has been promised and constituted a Redeemer to ransom it from all captivity to sin and corruption. And if his redemption does not go far enough to exempt the ongoing race from being finally extinguished, then it is not redemption, and the Destroyer beats out the Almighty Redeemer. There is no escape from this alternative if we do not allow that the race of man as a race continues in the new earth, and there realizes its complete and final recovery from all the effects and ill consequences of the fall. Ransomed nations in the flesh are therefore

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wp-content/uploads/2008/12/The-Apocalypse-Joseph-Seiss.pdf for the commentary on the internet (accessed 10/25/12). Note especially Lectures 48-50.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 491.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

among the occupants of the new earth, and the blessed and happy dwellers in it, as Adam and Eve dwelt in Paradise.<sup>10</sup>

Two classes of people are thus distinctly recognized in the new heaven and earth; — a class in glory who get the fruits of the Tree of Life, and a class in the estate of “nations” who get the leaves; but, whether fruits or leaves, a great and glorious blessing. As there will always be need for the ministrations of these celestial king-priests to those dwelling on the earth so will those ministrations also bring them the healing leaves from the Tree of Life. As the Life-waters are not wholly shut up in the city, but descend in a form to men on the earth; so the Life-tree, in a form, yields its benefits to them too. The meaning is not that the nations are full of sicknesses and ailments; for these remains of the curse are gone then, though it may be from the virtue of these leaves. The meaning rather is the preservation of health and comfort, and not that maladies then exist to be removed. The Life-leaves are for the conservation and augmentation of Life-blessedness of men on earth, as the Life-fruits are for the joy of the saints in heaven.<sup>11</sup>

“*And they shall reign to the ages of the ages.*” Not for the thousand years only, but forever shall their glory and dominion last. This tells at once their eternal dignity, and the eternal perpetuity of men in the flesh. If they are to be kings forever, they must have subjects forever; and their subjects, whom they shepherdize, over whom they rule, and for whom they hold the dominion, are everywhere described as “*the nations*”— “all people, languages, and nations under the whole heaven.” (Revelation 2:26; 12:5; 22:1; 24:26; Daniel 7:14, 27; Matthew 19:28, 29; 1 Corinthians 6:2.) Either, then, their kingdom must come to an end for want of subjects, or nations, peoples, and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 507.

men on the earth must continue in the flesh, as Adam and Eve before the fall. But these glorified ones are to “reign to the ages of the ages,” and their “kingdom is an everlasting kingdom;” and as they cannot reign without subjects, so nations on earth must last coequally with their regency. Both their office, and the activities in which their sublimest happiness is located, must fail them, if the nations over whom their rule is, ever cease to be. They neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for they are as the angels of God; but their subjects are of a different order, and their dominion and glory shall grow forever, by the ceaseless augmentation of the number of their subjects throughout unending generations.<sup>12</sup>

### **E. ALEXANDER PATTERSON (MID 19<sup>TH</sup>–EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)**

Patterson provides an extended discussion of a natural and glorified humanity in the eternal state in the book *The Greater Life and Work of Christ*, published by the Fleming H. Revell Company in 1896.<sup>13</sup> The concluding chapter, “Christ in the Eternal Future,” sets forth the details. The following quotes exemplify his view:

These are then *restored humanity* entering the new earth. They are what Adam was before he fell, and therefore are fit for the presence of God, who can now resume the original fellowship of Eden so long interrupted. This will be the perfect restoration of humanity never before secured...The great restoration of the race gives him spirituality and immortality in his own sphere. It makes natural man superior to the power of death and sin. There is bestowed upon the restored race more than Adam enjoyed...By the eternal edict from the Throne, that in man which responds to the attack of temptation, is

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 511.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Patterson, *The Greater Life and Work of Christ: As Revealed in Scripture, Man and Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming, 1896). The book is available on the internet at <http://archive.org/details/greaterlife-worko00patt> (accessed 11/6/2012).

removed. Man will be physically, psychically, and spiritually perfect...To lay man aside in the hour of final victory, would be to acknowledge a mistake in his creation or a defeat in his redemption.<sup>14</sup>

There seems at first something incongruous in the idea of there being a race of human beings living as now, and increasing in the eternal ages. This comes partly from preconceived opinions as to the future state. There is nothing in Scripture forbidding the idea of material beings in the eternal ages. It is the leaven of heathenism in our Christianity, which deprecates the material as inherently sinful...what was right and fitting in the original Eden, is also fitting in the new earth. There was here contemplated the holy increase of the race of man, and their gradual filling of the earth.<sup>15</sup>

In the Fatherhood of God there will be established the perfect theocracy—God reigning absolutely and directly over all...The order is God the Father, Christ, the glorified saints arranged in closer or wider circles in the New Jerusalem, then the angelic hosts of many and varying offices, then the myriads of humanity and innumerable worlds of organic and inorganic nature, all permeated by the Spirit of God, and living, moving, and having their being by the life of God...<sup>16</sup>

## F. EDWARD HENRY BICKERSTETH (1825–1906)

Bickersteth offers in verse an early reference to a natural humanity in the eternal state. A graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, he served as Vicar of Christ Church, Hampstead, Dean of Gloucester, and Bishop of Exeter. He edited three hymnals, and wrote at least thirty hymns of his own including *Nearer My God to Thee*. His work, *Yesterday, Today and*

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 389.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 390-39.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 405.

*Forever: A Poem, in Twelve Books* contains the following verses:<sup>17</sup>

And yet the earth through all her vast expanse  
 Of golden plains and rich umbrageous hills  
 Already seem'd too narrow for the growth  
 Of her great human family; so quick  
 The virtue of her Maker's law, when once  
 Sin's crushing interdict was disannull'd,  
 That primal law, "Be fruitful; multiply  
 Your joys; replenish and subdue the earth."  
 Blest mandate! Blest obedience! Earth was full  
 Of goodness, full of glory, full of grace:<sup>18</sup>

The increase of that government and peace,  
 Messiah's heritage and ours. For as  
 Our native orb ere long too strait became  
 For its blest habitants...  
 But at the voice of God, the stars, which rolled  
 Innumerable in the azure firmament,  
 By thousands and ten thousands, as he spake  
 Six words of power, the seventh, it was done,  
 Were mantled and prepared as seats of life;  
 And it was ours to bear from earth and plant,  
 Like Adam, in some paradise of fruits  
 The ancestors of many a newborn world,  
 Like Adam, but far different issue now,  
 Sin and the curse and death forever crushed.  
 And thus from planet on to planet spread...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Henry Bickersteth, *Yesterday, To-Day, and For Ever: A Poem, in Twelve Books*, 7th ed. (London: Rivingstons, 1872). That edition is on the internet at [http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23362761M/Yesterday\\_to-day\\_and\\_for\\_ever](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23362761M/Yesterday_to-day_and_for_ever) (accessed 11/6/2012).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 379 (book xii, lines 493-502).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 382-83 (book xii, lines 601-617). Peters, *Theocratic*, 2:549, quotes Bickersteth in Proposition 152, observation 6, note 3, as one who is correct in this view.

### G. ROBERT GOVETT (1813–1901)

Govett was a British theologian and Pastor of Surrey Chapel, Norwich, England. He wrote many brochures and several books. His best-known book is *The Apocalypse: Expounded by Scripture* (1861–65), written under the pen-name Matheetees. The following quotes on his view of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state are taken from *The New Jerusalem Our Eternal Home* and *Govett on Revelation*.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, then, I would gather into one focus the notices found in the two last chapters of the Apocalypse, in proof of *the twofoldness of the saved*. The two classes, then, (1) THE RISEN, (2) THE NATIONS, differ in their relation to God...<sup>21</sup>

As the nations are still *men in the flesh*, “the glory of the terrestrial” is different from “the glory of the celestial” (1 Cor. Xv.), while both will have their place in the eternal kingdom of God. They do not dwell with the risen. God has provided different abodes for the two; and abodes suited to the differences implied in their condition. The risen dwell in the city of God (rev. xxii. 14, 19), in which there is no night. But that would not suit men of bodies like ours. There must be in their case need of rest, and suited season in which to take it; that is, there will be alternation of day and night. That alternation will go on forever.<sup>22</sup>

Thus also among mankind as settled in the new earth, there are two great classes: the risen, and those still in the flesh. To the risen sons of men belong the fruits: and they give of the leaves to the nations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Govett, *The New Jerusalem Our Eternal Home* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle, 1985); Robert Govett (under the pseudonym Matheetees), *The Apocalypse: Expounded By Scripture* (London: 1861), reprinted as *Govett on Revelation* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Govett, *New Jerusalem*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>23</sup> Govett, *Revelation*, 4:472.

### III. EARLY TO MID- TWENTIETH CENTURY

#### A. CLARENCE LARKIN (1850–1924)

Larkin was an American Baptist pastor known for his many dispensational premillennial writings and charts. In answer to the question “Who Are to Be the Happy Inhabitants of This New Earth?” he wrote:

Where did the people who inhabited the earth *after the Flood* come from? They were the lineal descendants of Noah, how did they escape the Flood? They were saved in an Ark which *God Provided*. Gen. 6:13-16. Shall not God then during the “Renovation of the *Earth by Fire*,” in some manner, not as yet revealed, take of righteous representatives of the Millennial nations that He purposes to save, and when the earth is again fit to be the abode of men, place them back on the New Earth, that they may increase and multiply and *replenish* it, as Adam (Gen. 1:27, 28), and Noah (Gen. 9:1), were told to *multiply and replenish* the present earth.<sup>24</sup>

It seems clear from the presence of the *Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden*, that God intended the human race to populate the Earth, and when it became too thickly populated, to use the surplus population to colonize other spheres. Our “Solar System” is only in its infancy. The Earth is the only one of its planets as yet habitable. Where are the inhabitants for the other planets to come from? Think you that the planets of our *Solar System*, and the planets of other solar systems, of which the stars are the suns, were made simply to adorn the heavens for our little earth? God does not plan things on a *Small Scale*, and it magnifies His power and wisdom to believe that

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<sup>24</sup> Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation* (Glenside, PA: Larkin Estate, 1919), 206. The commentary can be found on the internet at <http://www.davidcox.com.mx/library/L/Larkin,%20Clarence%20-%20Book%20of%20Revelation.pdf> (accessed 11/6/2012).

He created man in His own likeness... with the power of *Procreation*, that He might by means of him populate the Universe. This magnifies the Scheme of Redemption.<sup>25</sup>

No, God will not permit Satan to block His plan for peopling this earth with a *Sinless Human Race*. The death of Christ was not merely to redeem a few millions of the human race, but to redeem the *Earth*, and the *Race Itself* from the curse of sin, and the dominion of Satan.<sup>26</sup>

When this Earth shall have gone through its “Baptism of Fire,” and shall be again fit for the occupancy of man, the representatives of the “Saved Nations” (Rev. 21:24) will be men and women in whom no taint of sin will remain, and who cannot therefore impart it to their offspring, who will be like the offspring of Adam and Eve would have been if they had not sinned. This magnifies the whole scheme of redemption, and justifies God in the creation of the human race.<sup>27</sup>

## **B. LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER (1871–1952)**

Chafar founded and served as the first president of Dallas Theological Seminary. He does not make an explicit statement concerning an eternal sanctified natural humanity but there is perhaps an implicit statement in his *Systematic Theology* where he comments on the Gentiles of the Kingdom in the eternal state:

A peculiar and distinguished group of Gentiles are those of the last generation which appear before the throne of Christ’s glory at the end of the tribulation, and on the basis of their ministry to Israel are received into the earthly kingdom. This kingdom, it is said by the King, is one prepared for these Gentiles from the foundation of the world. A purpose which thus originates in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

eternity past may well be expected to continue into eternity to come. It is evidently given to these Gentiles to continue with Israel in the new earth under the everlasting reign of Messiah... Those Gentiles who are of one generation and who enter Israel's kingdom and continue with Israel forever, will be distinguished from those gentiles who throughout this age have been called and saved into heavenly glory.<sup>28</sup>

## IV. LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO DATE

### A. HERMAN A. HOYT (1909–2000)

Hoyt was one of the founding professors of Grace Theological Seminary. He was president of Grace College and Seminary from 1962 to 1976. He wrote expositions of the book of Romans, Hebrews, and Revelation along with works on theology. The book *The End Times* includes a chapter on the eternal state that presents his view of the two modes of humanity.

The identification of the redeemed includes two classes of humanity.

*Those who are glorified.* There are the redeemed of mankind who have experienced glorification either through the channel of death and resurrection, or through the channel of transformation. The church constitutes one company of the redeemed. This company will be constituted of those who experience glorification by resurrection and transformation (I Cor. 15:51-54). So far as the Scriptures reveal, no other group will experience transformation. The Old Testament saints and the martyred tribulation saints will experience glorification by resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6; Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19-21). These all will have special relation to the New Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-24).

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<sup>28</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:416.

*Those with complete salvation.* There are also the redeemed of mankind who have experienced complete salvation (Rev. 21:24). This great company is made up of both Jews and Gentiles who were saved during the tribulation period (Rev. 7:1-8; Matt. 25:1-13, 31-46), and constituted the nations that populated the millennium. From the children born of these people during the millennium the vast majority are saved during the most favorable period of mankind and enter the eternal state (Isa. 11:9; Rev. 21:25). From the reading of the text, it appears that they have access to the New Jerusalem but will live in the broad expanse of the restored earth. It would seem that they live in natural bodies in which there is no longer any sin nature, as Adam once was before the fall, and as Christ lived during the days of His flesh (Heb. 4:15; 22 Cor. 5:21)... Moreover, it would also seem that there will be procreation as well, the multiplication of a sinless humanity, as God originally intended (Gen. 1:28).

Some may hesitate at the possibility of overpopulation of the earth. But it must be remembered that there will be more than eight times the present land surface for supporting this population because there will be no more sea (Rev. 21:1), and that same area will be productive beyond the fondest dreams of men. There is also the added possibility that surplus population will be transferred to other spheres in this vast universe. The creation of the new heaven may provide other habitable spheres just as will the creation of the new earth.<sup>29</sup>

The condition of the redeemed is amply described in the Bible.

*Spiritual.* The spiritual condition of the redeemed is that of complete salvation. This is true of the glorified and the naturalized, for all have access to the New Jerusalem, and all must

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<sup>29</sup> Herman A. Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), 229f.

be written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27). Inasmuch as the former things are passed away, this can only mean that the sinful nature is also gone forever...

*Physical.* The physical condition of the redeemed is that of complete health. This is clear concerning the glorified (I Cor. 15:35-54) from what is known of the resurrection body. But it is also true of the naturalized. There will be no curse, pain or death (Rev. 21:4; 22:3). But more than that, the tree of life through its leaves will preserve the health of these nations.<sup>30</sup>

## B. ROBERT L. THOMAS (1928–)

Thomas (ThD, Dallas Theological Seminary) was chairman of the New Testament Department at Talbot Theological Seminary from 1959 to 1987. In 1987 he became Professor of New Testament at The Master's Seminary. Moody Press published his two-volume commentary on Revelation in 1995. His comments on Rev 21:24 address the issue of the identity of the nations in the eternal state.

The change of character of the nations and the kings prompts an investigation regarding their identity...None of the earlier proposals has any direct support. In fact, this is an issue on which the text of Revelation is silent, but there is one further theory which seems to satisfy the available criteria best. (10) This opinion holds that "the nations" are composed of saved people who survive the millennial kingdom without dying and without joining Satan's rebellion and who undergo some sort of transformation that suits them for life in the eternal state. They will be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall (cf. Govett, Seiss). They will be unresurrected human beings who will inhabit the new earth, Paradise restored (22:1-5), throughout eternity. These will be the ones over whom God's resurrected saints will reign (22:5). Nations, peoples, and men on earth must

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 231.

continue in the flesh as Adam and Eve did before the Fall (Seiss).<sup>31</sup>

### C. HENRY M. MORRIS (1918–2006)

Morris was a professor of Civil Engineering at Virginia Tech and one of the founders of the Creation Research Society and the Institute for Creation Research. Among his many works is a commentary on the Book of Revelation and *The Defender's Study Bible*. Concerning humanity in the eternal state, he commented:

Another possibility is that all true believers among the earthly nations and kings will still be in their natural flesh, having been translated (like Enoch and Elijah) into the heavenly city before the holocaust and then returned to the new earth, finally to fill it and have godly dominion over it as God originally commanded Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:26-28). This would help explain the occasional Biblical references to “perpetual generations” (e.g., Genesis 9:12) and similar expressions (Genesis 22:17; Isaiah 9:7; Ephesians 3:21). Once the earth was “filled,” then future generations could be sent to colonize other planets, and so on, forever. At this time, we simply don't know.<sup>32</sup>

### D. DAVID REAGAN (1938–)

Reagan is the founder and director of Lamb and Lion ministries. His book, *Wrath and Glory*, covers the book of Revelation.<sup>33</sup> He comments on Rev 21:24:

Perhaps the greatest mystery of Bible prophecy is introduced in verse Revelation 21:24 where it states that “the nations shall walk by its light

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<sup>31</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 476-78.

<sup>32</sup> Henry M. Morris, *The New Defender's Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2006), note on Revelation 21:24. The complete note can be viewed on the internet at <http://www.icr.org/bible/Revelation/21/24/> (accessed 11/8/2012).

<sup>33</sup> David Reagan, *Wrath and Glory* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf, 2001).

[the light emanating from the Shekinah glory in the city], and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.” Who are these nations and kings outside the New Jerusalem on the new earth? They must be in fleshly bodies, for we are told in chapter 22 that the leaves of the tree of life inside the city will be used “for the healing of the nations” (22:2).

We, the redeemed, are assured that we will reign with Jesus “forever” (Revelation 1:6, 11:15, and 22:5) In order to reign, there must be someone to reign over. We know who that will be during the Millennium. But who are these people on the new earth in the eternal state? Are they people who accepted Jesus during the Millennium? I ask that because we are never told what will become of those who receive Jesus during His millennial reign.

I once browsed through over 60 commentaries on the book of Revelation looking for an answer to this intriguing question. About 90% simply ignored the issue. Some tried to argue that this was a flashback to the Millennium, but that idea is clearly invalid for the whole context of Revelation 21 is the eternal state. A couple of writers suggested that these might be people saved during the Millennium who are brought into the eternal state in their fleshly bodies and allowed to propagate new beings over whom the Redeemed will reign.

I have this question at the top of a list that I intend to ask the Lord when we stand face-to-face.<sup>34</sup>

### **E. TONY EVANS (1949–)**

Evans is the Pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, the head of The Urban Alternative, and a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary (ThM and ThD). In his book *The Best Is Yet to Come*, he comments:

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<sup>34</sup>This comment can be found on the internet at [http://www.lambliion.com/articles/articles\\_revelation20.php](http://www.lambliion.com/articles/articles_revelation20.php) (accessed 11/8/2012).

There is only one group of people left on earth to go into eternity in their physical bodies—those who were true to Jesus Christ and served Him during His millennial kingdom. They go into eternity after the millennium with physical glorified bodies, not spiritual glorified bodies like we will have, because they did not experience death and resurrection.<sup>35</sup>

The Bible indicates that the new, renovated earth will be occupied in eternity. This group from the millennium will fill the earth because they will be able to procreate. These will make up the nations who do not live in the New Jerusalem, but will have access to the city.

Why? To pay homage to God and bring Him their worship, and because they will need the leaves of the tree of life for their continued health and well-being.<sup>36</sup>

### **F. KEITH KRELL (1971–)**

Krell is the Pastor of Emmanuel Bible Fellowship in Olympia, Washington. He is a graduate of Multnomah University and Biblical Seminary, Talbot School of Theology, and University of Bristol (PhD); and has taught classes for Multnomah University and Moody Bible Institute-Spokane. In an article on Rev 21:1–22:5 published on Bible.org, he makes a comment partially adapted from Tony Evans:

The identity of these nations and kings is difficult to determine. It is clear from the context that John is talking about a group of people who have access to the New Jerusalem but who don't live there. There is only one group of people left on earth to go into eternity in their physical, bodies—believers that served Christ during His millennium kingdom. They go into eternity in their physical, glorified bodies, not spiritual,

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<sup>35</sup>Tony Evans, *The Best Is Yet to Come: Bible Prophecies Through the Ages* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2002), 283. Chapter 17 “What Is Heaven Like?” is well worth reading. Note especially the section “The Life of the Nations.”

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 284.

glorified bodies like we will have because they did not experience death and resurrection. These people will go into eternity with bodies like Adam and Eve had at their creation before they were flawed by sin. Their physical bodies will be maintained through a special provision from God (“the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations,” 22:2b). In the New Jerusalem the gates will never close; anyone can enter anytime (21:25-26). These nations and kings, therefore, may enter whenever they wish, pay homage to God, and seek out the leaves of the Tree of Life for their continued health and well-being.<sup>37</sup>

### G. ROBERT L. BRYANT (1949–)

Bryant, Pastor of Cypress Valley Bible Church in Marshall, Texas, presented a session entitled, “The Unique, Eternal role of Resurrected People” at the 2009 Grace Evangelical Society Conference. He stated in the message manuscript:

The nations on the new earth are spoken of in Revelation 21:22– 22:3. It seems that the people referred to as *the nations*, will be people in natural bodies, not glorified bodies; will be without sin, like unfallen Adam and Eve; will marry and have children who will populate the new earth; and will give glory to God for all eternity for what they see He has done for saved, resurrected people...And the number of resurrected people will be a tiny, tiny fixed number in comparison to the ever-expanding population of natural-bodied people...Resurrected people will be the special trophies of His grace who will bring glory to Him as God of creation, God of salvation, and God of resurrection. This is the unique, ever-expanding, eternal, major role of resurrected people...<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Keith Krell, “It Just Doesn’t Get Any Better Than This!—Revelation 21:1–22:5” (Created 2006). The article can be found on the internet at <http://bible.org/print/book/export/html/3815> (accessed 11/8/2012).

<sup>38</sup> A message by Bob Bryant on the topic can be heard on the internet at <http://old.cypressvalley.org/audio/2009-04-26-message.mp3> (accessed 11/8/2012). The message outline is found at <http://old.cypressvalley.org/>

**H. ROBERT VACENDAK (1960–)**

Vacendak, Pastor of Ridge Pointe Fellowship, Dallas, Texas, authored the commentary on Revelation in the *The Grace New Testament Commentary*. Concerning “the nations” of Rev 21:24 and 22:2, he wrote:

Most speculate that the *nations* refer only to the masses of regenerate and resurrected saints. Another possibility is that God will create human beings to live on the new earth just as He created Adam and Eve—sinless people whose status and condition will be similar to Adam and Eve’s before the Fall (see comments on 22:2). More likely, believers who are alive on earth at the end of the Millennium will be brought into the new heavens and earth in their unresurrected bodies to populate it. These bodies will be transformed into sinless bodies, but will not have been resurrected. They will be like Adam and Eve before they sinned, but without the ability to sin. As such, they will procreate and populate the new heavens and the new earth, and so they will form *the nations*.<sup>39</sup>

However, the *leaves of the tree of life* will perform an additional function as well. They are *for the healing of the nations*. In that day, even though there will be no death or disease because of sin, it may still be possible for people who do not possess glorified bodies to be injured or hurt. The *leaves of the tree of life* will bring healing and restoration.<sup>40</sup>

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outline/2009-04-26-outline.htm (accessed 11/8/2012). William H. Lee, a pastor and author of *Grace Recovered: How Reading the Bible Led Me Away from Tulip* (Corinth, TX: Light Point Press, 2012), also presented a workshop at the 2012 Grace Evangelical Society Conference on the topic entitled “Counting the Stars: The Descendants of Abraham.”

<sup>39</sup> Robert Vacendak, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1329f.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1331.

### I. ROBERT N. WILKIN (1952–)

Wilkin, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary (ThM and PhD) and the Executive Director of the Grace Evangelical Society wrote in his book, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*:

It is possible, though highly speculative, that there will be children born forever. If so, the Church, fixed in number, would become more and more of a minority in the kingdom as Israel and the nations would expand forever. The way in which this could happen would be if people from Israel and the nations in natural bodies will go from the Millennium on to the new earth, but without sin natures and without the ability to pass on a sin nature to their children... Christians, in glorified bodies, would thus rule over people in natural bodies, not primarily over other glorified saints.<sup>41</sup>

### J. MARTY CAULEY (1960–)

Cauley, in the two volume *The Outer Darkness*, presents an extensive discussion of the proposition that the nations in Rev 21:24-26 and 22:4 are comprised of perfected people in flesh and blood bodies in the eternal state that procreate.<sup>42</sup> He quotes and interacts with several of the supporters and detractors of the view. He provides support for the view from the OT and NT backgrounds and answers some of the objections. He gives this summary:

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<sup>41</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 80f. I think it's unnecessary for Wilkin to characterize the view as "highly speculative." It unintentionally minimizes the validity of the view as a plausible theological inference suggested by scriptural texts. The science of theology involves making inferences. For good discussions concerning theological inferences see "Rules of Affinity" by Paul Henebury at <http://sharperiron.org/tags/series-affinity> and "Theological Inferences" by Malcom Yarnell at <http://baptisttheologians.blogspot.com/2012/06/theological-inferences-be-careful-when.html> (accessed 11/27/2012).

<sup>42</sup> Marty A. Cauley, *The Outer Darkness* (Sylva, NC: Mithological Press, 2012), 643-56.

In conclusion, procreation will continue so that mankind can inhabit and rule the whole creation. No rulership can exist without subjects to be ruled. A distinction must be made between the nations and those who rule over them in the millennial age (Rev 2:26). This distinction extends into the eternal age. Yet the transition from one age to the other will bring a change. Whereas the millennial nations will be composed of men and women in *sinful* fleshly bodies who reproduce offspring with sin natures, the eternal nations will be composed of men and women in *sinless* flesh and blood bodies who likewise reproduce sinless offspring. Correspondingly, a change in the nature of the rule will occur that reflects the change in the nature of the subjects. Ruling with a rod of iron and forcing submission will no longer be necessary (Rev 2:27). In eternity their subjects will submit joyfully to the serving rulership of their rulers.<sup>43</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Proponents of the view that there will be childbearing after the Millennium span the time from the nineteenth century to the present.<sup>44</sup> They come from Europe and America. They represent various denominations. Many are accomplished academicians from respected theological institutions. A significant number are writers and pastors.

That there are many such adherents of the view does not prove its validity. It does, however, establish the view as one with a significant history that should be accurately represented, respectfully engaged, and whether agreed with or not, humbly

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 650.

<sup>44</sup> It is possible that there are proponents of the view in earlier centuries. William Watson, Professor of History at Colorado Christian University, presented a paper at the 2012 Pre-Trib Study Group Conference, "Pretribulational Rapture in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century England," that documents such references contrary to the common view that it originated 150 years ago with John Nelson Darby. He searched Early English Books Online (EEBO) to find them. Perhaps a search using some terms of the time that could reflect two modes of humanity in the eternal state would yield supportive references to the view.

acknowledged as a plausible theological inference concerning the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

# WORSHIP WARS: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HYMNODY AMONG EARLY EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

**T**he evangelical church has suffered from the “Worship Wars” over the last few decades, causing untold conflict in some churches, and leading to some painful church splits. Theologically, this battle usually concerns, on the one hand, the concern to be relevant to contemporary culture so that more people can be reached for Christ (i.e., to be all things to all people so that by all means we may win some, 1 Cor 9:22). On the other side, there are concerns to maintain fidelity to the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3), and to practice separation from the world (2 Cor 6:17) by avoiding bringing worldly practices into the church (John 17:11-18; Jas 1:27; 1 John 2:15-17).

Is this the first time the church has confronted these issues? No. In fact, church history is replete with worship wars. As we reflect on the worship wars of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, perhaps we can gain perspective and guidance on the worship wars of the present-day church.

## II. WORSHIP WARS I: CHANGES IN THE WORSHIP OF THE EARLY REFORMERS IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Early evangelical hymnody and worship underwent a slow but constant evolution, with two key stages—first, as the Reformers reacted against the Roman Catholic worship traditions (especially its heavily artistic elements) in establishing a new pattern for Reformation worship; and second, within the Reformation tradition itself as evangelical worship traditions evolved from the time of the Reformation to the Great Awakenings. The change from the Roman Catholic patterns, which took place rather quickly in the first decades of the Reformation in the early to mid-sixteenth century, involved changes in the architecture of worship spaces, the use of musical instruments in worship, the language of the hymnody, and the tunes utilized in hymnody.

### A. CHANGES IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF WORSHIP SPACES

In most cases, the Reformers simply took over the cathedrals that had been utilized by the Catholics. For example, Zwingli centered his part of the Reformation at the Grossmünster Church in Zurich, which had previously been a Catholic cathedral. The different vision that the Protestants had for worship informed how they radically reoriented the shape of the sacred spaces they utilized for worship.

#### *1. The priority of the Word (over communion)*

Because of their belief in transubstantiation, the central focus of Roman Catholic worship was the mass. The elements of the mass were front and center in virtually every cathedral. The pulpits were usually on one side. The centrality of the preaching of the Word was a central belief of the Reformers. The pulpit was thus usually placed in the center of the altar area, supplementing or supplanting the Eucharist table. While the Lord's Supper was significant for the Reformers, they denied transubstantiation. Their views of the Supper differed with each other, however, affirming variously consubstantiation, the spiritual presence view, or the memorial view of communion. So the Lord's Supper elements were in the front, but not in a way

that upstaged the pulpit. One aspect of the architecture that was more difficult to overcome was that the cathedrals had been built to maximize the acoustics for music, not for the spoken voice. As Protestants began to build churches, they tended to build churches better suited for the spoken voice.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. *Stained glass windows*

Since the traditional Catholic service was in Latin, and many of the worshipers did not understand the language and/or were illiterate, the Biblical stories were often depicted in stained glass windows for the common people. As the Reformers adapted the Catholic cathedrals, when possible, the stained glass windows were removed to allow light into the cathedral so that the Word could be read more easily. The classic evangelical church in America became a white frame building with clear windows.

### 3. *Iconoclasm*

Veneration of the saints was another significant aspect of Catholic worship. Icons and statues were utilized both to communicate the Biblical message and to venerate saints. The Reformers strongly opposed the veneration and prayer to saints, asserting that Jesus is the only true Mediator between God and man. The early Reformers, especially Zwingli, were thus iconoclasts, removing the icons and statuary with the belief that they functionally encouraged idol worship. Zwingli had organs, icons, and statuary shattered in the churches under his direction.<sup>2</sup>

## B. THE USE OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN WORSHIP

The Catholic churches utilized musical instruments in their worship, particularly large, many-ranked organs. As evidenced by their support of the building arts—including architecture, stained glass, sculpture, paintings, and icons—the Catholic Church was one of the strongest patrons of the arts. The magisterial Reformers differed on this issue, in part because of their various hermeneutical approaches. In the Reformed tradition,

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent article detailing how the art forms of Gothic architecture and musical polyphony articulated Thomistic Catholic theology, see Thomas Franklin O'Meara, "Art and Music as Illustrators of Theology," *ATR* 55 (July 1973), 267-77.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh McElrath, "Music in the History of the Church," *Review and Expositor* 60 (Spring 1972), 152f.

Calvin and Zwingli banned all the arts—poetry, instrumental music, painting, statuary, icons, and stained glass windows, among others. Ulrich Zwingli was perhaps the strongest opponent of musical instruments in worship, requiring that the singing in church be *a capella*, although he was himself an instrumental musician. His hermeneutic underscored doing only that which was commanded in the New Testament. Although instrumental music was obviously used throughout the OT era, it is not mentioned in the NT. Today, we associate this hermeneutic and rejection of musical instruments in worship with the Church of Christ tradition.

However, Martin Luther never had a problem with instrumental music or other Christian expressions of the arts. Again, Luther's hermeneutic impacted his perspective. Rather than requiring direct or indirect commands from the NT for authorization of a practice, Luther assumed that unless something is forbidden in Scripture, it is permitted. He was thus much more open to utilizing the arts in worship. Luther said, "I would fain see all arts, especially music, in the service of Him who created them."<sup>3</sup> Germany thus became an important early source for hymns and church music, with much of the best-known classical Christian music coming from German Lutheran composers. Later the classical music of Bach, Pachelbel, and Handel, who fused sacred lyrics with secular music (utilizing organs and other instruments), came to be called "the Protestant Solution."<sup>4</sup> Works such as Handel's *Messiah* came to typify the best of Christian music.

### C. THE LANGUAGE OF HYMNODY

The Roman Catholic Church utilized Latin in most of its worship services. Since the common people did not know Latin, they understood little of what was said. When the bread of the Eucharist was being transformed in transubstantiation from bread to the literal body of Jesus, the priest was speaking the Latin, "*Hoc est corpus meum*" ("this is My body"). For the

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in John Brownlie, *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church Hymnary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), 55.

<sup>4</sup> McElrath, "Music," 153f.

listeners, this “magic” phrase came to be vulgarized as *hocus pocus*.<sup>5</sup> However, translating the Bible into the language of the people from the Latin Vulgate was a central tenet of the Protestant Reformation, and its hymnody followed suit.

#### D. THE TUNES OF HYMNODY

Although earlier Catholic worship had utilized Gregorian chants, the church had employed more artistic music such as polyphonic organum (utilizing troping) and Gothic motets (polyphonic voices in the *Ars Nova* tradition). In reaction against the perceived worldliness of the Catholic hymnody, the early Reformers desired to “get back to basics.” They rejected the artistic Catholic music and sought to return to singing simple unison songs that did not have “worldly” connotations. One of the forerunners of the Reformation, the Czech reformer John Huss, rejected polyphonic and instrumental music in favor of simple unison songs, sometimes using tunes from Gregorian chants or Czech tunes. He desired to replace the polyphonic, “worldly,” artistic Catholic hymnody with a return to the simpler, sincere singing of the early church. He also believed that hymn singing should be democratic, accessible to everyone (including children), not just well-trained musicians. This Hussite hymnody impacted the Bohemian and Moravian directly, and more broadly the reforms of Zwingli and Calvin.<sup>6</sup>

The simple unaccompanied unison songs had appeal for most of the early evangelical traditions in England. However, this practice did not last long. Not only did Luther and his successors utilize secular and folk tunes in Lutheran hymnody, this is an area that John Calvin also compromised. Calvin famously said, “Why should the devil have all the good tunes?” Reformed musicians began utilizing folk and popular tunes which had a more interesting beat. Some had the rhythm of dances, which led Queen Elizabeth I (among others) to famously label the Reformed tunes (somewhat disapprovingly) as “Geneva jigs” because of their lively beat in comparison with the previous

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<sup>5</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary. [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com) (accessed June 6, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> McElrath, “Music,” 151f.

austere hymnody of the church.<sup>7</sup> However, this trend continued, becoming even stronger through the Great Awakening and the music of revivalism. Most of the evangelical hymnody utilized tunes that would be attractive for a secular audience.

### III. WORSHIP WARS II: CHANGES IN THE WORSHIP OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Several factors continued the drive for change in the worship practices of evangelical churches in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. First of all, more distance in time from every church practicing the Roman Catholic liturgy created more “space” for creativity. In other words, the early Reformers were limited practically in how fast they could make changes and how far they could go with their reforms. Their pace of change was not fast enough and the degree of their reform from Catholicism was not sufficient enough for the Radical Reformers such as the Anabaptists. However, the Anabaptists were not bound by the limitation of working hand-in-hand with town councils and civil government, as were the magisterial Reformers. Change can only go so fast and so far without “future shock.” But as time went along, changes that would have been radical decades before were more doable.

Second, a number of other societal factors probably played significant roles in the development of evangelical hymnody, though each of these begs a more thorough study for direct evidence. For example, dissenters and nonconformists (such as the early Baptists in England, and in America before the adoption of the First Amendment of the Constitution) often worshiped in secret in house churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to avoid persecution by the authorities. When religious toleration became more commonplace it allowed these traditions, which were less committed to maintaining the religious

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<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 1:67. Other words to describe the new tunes were “common,” “barbaric,” and “primitive.” Others were concerned about the tunes leading to mental associations with popular “profane” and “lascivious” love songs.

traditions of the Catholic past and more open to change than were other Christian traditions, to make their unique contribution to hymnody.

The invention and utilization of the printing press and faster transportation such as railroads allowed new hymns to be disseminated more quickly and more broadly than was previously possible. The democratization in America would be among other societal factors that probably played at least an unconscious role in extending singing to the congregation.

Third, it is difficult to overstate the impact that evangelical revivals, especially the First and Second Great Awakenings, brought to the hymnody of the church. This new stream of hymnody was more evangelical, more personal, and more popular in musical style than had been practiced previously in the churches, and it brought significant change to the overall canon of hymnody. The following are some of the areas of change in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the worship practices of evangelical churches.

## A. CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

The early Baptists, General and Particular Baptists alike, were reluctant to allow congregations to sing hymns. However, Benjamin Keach was described as “a pioneer of congregational hymn singing”<sup>8</sup> because of his conviction that hymns should be sung by the congregation to educate them in the exposition of Scripture. In *The Breach Repair’d in God’s Worship*, Keach asserted that the breach in worship was the lack of congregational song.<sup>9</sup> Keach, originally a General Baptist (who were open to singing earlier than Particular Baptists), became a Particular Baptist minister at the Horselydown church in Southwark, and introduced congregational singing there. Keach opened a “crack in the door” by singing a congregational hymn after the Lord’s Supper in about 1673, and continued expanding this practice.<sup>10</sup> Six years later, the church agreed to sing on public

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<sup>8</sup> Hugh Martin, *Benjamin Keach, A Pioneer of Congregational Hymn Singing* (London: Independent, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Keach, *The Breach Repaired in God’s Worship* (London:, n.p., 1691).

<sup>10</sup> Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England, Vol II: From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603–1690* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1975), 510.

thanksgiving days, and by 1690 agreed to sing every Lord's Day.<sup>11</sup> A group of those opposed to singing within Keach's church split the Horselydown church by withdrawing to form another church that had no congregational singing. This was a practice it continued for the next forty years. However, in 1741, when the son of the founding pastor was asked to pastor the church, he did so only on the condition that singing would be introduced, and the congregation relented.<sup>12</sup>

Keach's congregational singing was opposed by Isaac Marlow in *A Brief Discourse concerning Singing in the Publick Worship of God in the Gospel Church* (London, 1690). Keach responded with *The Breach Repair'd in God's Worship, or Singing of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Proved to be an Holy Ordinance of Jesus Christ* (London, 1691). Marlow replied with *The Truth Soberly Defended* (1692), and wrote nine additional treatises on the subject. The Calvinistic Baptist pastor John Gill came into the controversy in 1734 with a *Discourse on Singing of Psalms*, taking the conservative stance that although hymns might be useful, they were largely "unnecessary" and should be conformed to Scripture.<sup>13</sup> The theological/hermeneutical objections that those who opposed congregational singing included the following: (a) using a pre-composed hymn (like a written prayer) harkened back to the formalism of Catholic liturgy; (b) singing was often accompanied in Scripture with spiritual gifts which cessationists deemed to no longer be given; (c) allowing unbelievers to sing hymns undermines the purity of the church; (d) singing in the NT was only by a single voice; and (e) singing by women in a congregation violates the admonition that women should keep silent in the church (1 Cor 14:14; 1 Tim 2:11-12).<sup>14</sup>

Keach asked the First General Assembly of Particular Baptists in 1689 to debate the question of congregational singing, but they declined. This was, of course, the year the Assembly approved the Second London Confession, which largely copied the Westminster Confession except the points at which Baptists

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<sup>11</sup> Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915), 96.

<sup>12</sup> Edwin M. Long, *Illustrated History of Hymns and Their Authors*, 2nd ed (Philadelphia, PA: Ziegler, 1876), 505.

<sup>13</sup> Benson, *English Hymn*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 87.

could not agree. The controversy continued, and became so heated that it had to be dealt with in 1692. Both parties were censured for their acrimonious arguments, and a call for peace was made, allowing each church to pursue its own pattern of worship.<sup>15</sup>

The British worship wars were transported to America as well. Second Baptist Church in Newport, RI, constituted in 1656 when twenty-one members withdrew from First Baptist Church because they “disapproved of hymnody,” did not allow congregational singing for over a century. In 1765, the church voted to sing one hymn at the commencement of each worship service, but a group of members waited outside until it was over before entering the building. In 1771 a group withdrew and formed yet another church, one in which “singing was not tolerated.”<sup>16</sup> Likewise, a Baptist church in New York City split over public singing in June 1771. A contemporary article reported, “Singing in public worship was an innovation which the withdrawing party never could tolerate.”<sup>17</sup> The Calvinistic Philadelphia Baptist Association’s famous confession in 1742, which followed the London Confession of 1644 rather closely, added two articles, one of which affirmed “singing in worship as a holy ordinance of Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

The new engagement of the church in singing brought a transition from the “Usual Singing” or the “Old Way” to the new “Regular Singing” or the “New Way,” often associated with the utilization of Isaac Watts’ hymnals. There was increased need for training voices, which was done through the singing school movement and the development of choirs, which exploded on the scene in the 1740s. Young people, and indeed the entire church, became much more engaged in congregational worship.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 86-89; Benson, *English Hymn*, 98.

<sup>16</sup> Long, *Illustrated History*, 504.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 505. See also William H. Parker, *The Psalmody of the Church: Its Authors, Singers, and Uses* (Chicago, IL: Hack & Anderson, 1899), 106f.

<sup>18</sup> Edward T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1894), 527.

<sup>19</sup> Esther Rothenbusch Crookshank, “‘We’re Marching to Zion’: Isaac Watts in Early America,” in *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology*, ed. Richard J. Mouw and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 26.

## B. THE LYRICS OF HYMNODY

John Calvin had essentially limited the lyrics of church song to *sola Scriptura*—the 150 Psalms in the OT, sung in unaccompanied unison metrical songs.<sup>20</sup> The classic hymnal used by many churches in the Reformed tradition was *Sternhold and Hopkins*, which put all 150 Psalms in meter to be sung.<sup>21</sup> Later, churches in the Reformed tradition utilized *Tate and Brady's New Version of the Psalms*,<sup>22</sup> and in America the *Bay Psalm Book*,<sup>23</sup> which in 1640 was the first book published in America.<sup>24</sup> The “independents,” nonconformers or dissenters, were the first to initiate songbooks and hymns.<sup>25</sup> Isaac Watts was one of the first to begin this transition away from the Psalms. His *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* was composed of three sections, each of which represented a step farther away from singing the Psalms. First, there were paraphrases of the Psalms. Watts was convinced that most laypeople did not understand some of the words in the old hymnody, so he wrote paraphrases of all 150 Psalms. Second, he had communion hymns. Communion hymns were permitted because a hymn was sung at the institution of the first Lord's Supper (Matt 26:30). The third and most radical section of his hymnal was what he called “hymns whose form is mere human composure”—that is, hymns written by humans rather than the Psalms written by God.<sup>26</sup> Watts' hymnal was very popular, but was eventually replaced in popularity by *Rippon's Selections*, which also highlighted many of Watts' works.<sup>27</sup>

Watts' approach to hymnody was intentional and comprehensive. In the “Preface, or An Enquiry into the Right Way of

<sup>20</sup> McElrath, “Music,” 152-53.

<sup>21</sup> Long, *Illustrated History*, 105.

<sup>22</sup> Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady, *Tate and Brady's New Version of the Psalms* (London: Eyre & Strahan, 1696, reprint, 1821).

<sup>23</sup> *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre* (Cambridge, MA: Daye, 1640), facsimile reprint as *The Bay Psalm Book* (New York, NY: Dodd & Mead, 1905).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, “Introduction,” viii.

<sup>25</sup> Long, *Illustrated History*, 25, 105.

<sup>26</sup> Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (London: L. Stranan, 1773), xi in the “Preface.”

<sup>27</sup> John Rippon, *Dr. Watt's Psalms and Hymns, with Dr. Rippon's Selection* (London: William Whittamore, and Houlston, and Stoneman, 1718).

Fitting the Book of Psalms for Christian Worship,” Watts voiced this “chief” rationale for why Davidic Psalms were inappropriate for Christian worship:

When we as Christians sing the same lines, we express nothing but the character, the concerns, and the religion of the Jewish king, while our own circumstances, and our own religion, which are so widely different from his, have little to do in the sacred song...<sup>28</sup>

Watts thus wanted to “Christianize” David in his own hymnody.<sup>29</sup> His “grand design” was to teach the author (David) to speak like a Christian:

For why should I now address God my Savior in a song, with burnt-sacrifices of fatlings, and with the incense of rams? Why should I pray to be sprinkled with hyssop, or recur to the blood of bullocks and goats? Why should I bind my sacrifice with cords of the horns of an altar, or sing the praises of God to high-sounding cymbals, when the gospel has shown me a nobler atonement for sin, and appointed a purer and more spiritual worship? Why must I join with David in his legal or prophetic language, to curse my enemies, when my Savior, in his sermons, has taught me to love and bless them? Why may not a Christian omit all those passages of a Jewish psalmist, that tend to fill the mind with overwhelming sorrows, despairing thoughts, or bitter personal resentments, none of which are well suited to the spirit of Christianity, which is a dispensation of hope, and joy, and love? What need is there that I should wrap up the shining honors of my Redeemer in the dark and shadowy language of a religion that is now for ever abolished; especially when Christians are so vehemently warned, in the epistles of St. Paul,

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<sup>28</sup> Isaac Watts, “Preface, or, An Enquiry into the Right Way of Fitting the Book of Psalms for Christian Worship,” to *The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to the Christian State and Worship*, in *The Works of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: Longman, Hurst, Nees, Orme, & Brown, *et al.*, 1813), 9:27.

<sup>29</sup> Crookshank, “We’re Marching to Zion,” 20.

against a Judaizing spirit, in their worship as well as doctrine? And what fault can there be in enlarging a little on the more useful subjects in the style of the gospel, where the psalm gives any occasion, since the whole religion of the Jews is censured often in the New Testament as a defective and imperfect thing?<sup>30</sup>

For Watts, the Psalms were so inadequate for the church that “if the brightest genius on earth, or an angel from heaven” translated them, and kept close to their sense and style we would only get a bright and heavenly copy of the devotions of a Jewish king. It could never be appropriate for a Christian people.<sup>31</sup> Watts was thus a pioneer in transitioning hymnody from merely Biblical Psalms to Biblical paraphrases and newly written hymns voicing the worship of contemporary Christians.

### C. THE SONGS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

It is common for persons from a Reformed perspective to espouse “God-centered” hymns and to decry “anthropocentric” hymns written from a human perspective. Michael Horton of Westminster Seminary has criticized the shift from classic hymns that reflect “Reformation categories” (God, sin and grace, Christ’s saving work, the Word, church, sacraments, etc.) to “Romantic individualism.”<sup>32</sup> Horton further asserts that the shift is from the “objective truth in Scripture” in the hymns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to a “self-centered” focus on “personal experience,” riddled with “sloppy theology,” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century hymnody, in which “it is my heart, not God and his saving work, that receives top billing.”<sup>33</sup> In particular, Horton dismissed “Pietism” as “a reaction against Reformation orthodoxy” that “represented a turn inward, from God to self.” While Horton acknowledged that “no cardinal evangelical truth was rejected” in these hymns, “the objective focus on Christ’s

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<sup>30</sup> Watts, “Preface,” 9:33.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:36.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Horton, “Are Your Hymns Too Spiritual?” *Modern Reformation*, no. 4 (July–August 1995).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

justification of the sinner was subverted by the subjective focus on the experience of the believer.”<sup>34</sup>

In hymnology, this distinction is sometimes described as “systematic” hymns more focused on theology versus “narrative” hymns more focused on human experience. For example, “Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed” was originally penned as a theological/doctrinal hymn by the Calvinist hymn writer Isaac Watts in 1707. As such, it was *pro forma* a hymn expressing systematic theology.<sup>35</sup> However, in 1885, Ralph E. Hudson (an evangelistic hymn writer associated with the Methodist church and the Salvation Army, both Arminian in orientation) adapted it to a narrative hymn by adding the chorus repeated after each verse:

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away,  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day!

Although Watts’ version did not ignore human experience, it focused on a logical progression in Systematic Theology. By adding the repeated chorus, Hudson reoriented the hymn from the perspective of Systematic Theology to the perspective of the experience of the individual believer, and thus perhaps more suited for evangelistic efforts.

It should be noted that in reality the theological/narrative bifurcation is not as sharp as some scholars might suggest. In the 150 most reprinted hymns in Stephen Marini’s American Protestant Hymns Project database, eighteen of Isaac Watts’ systematic hymns are included, but also ten narrative hymns. The evangelistic Wesleys contributed eleven narrative hymns, but also four systematic hymns.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, one of Watts’ justifications for writing hymns of human composure, as opposed to the expressions of David and Asaph in the Psalms, was that the

<sup>34</sup>Michael Horton, “Leading the Church into the 20th Century,” a paper presented at the 1997 Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals meeting in Philadelphia, PA, cited in Susan Wise Bauer, “Stories and Syllogisms: Protestant Hymns, Syllogisms, and Heresies,” in *Wonderful Words of Life*, ed. Mouw and Noll, 206.

<sup>35</sup>Bauer, in *Wonderful Words of Life*, 214f. Bauer further describes this hymn as “syllogistic,” since Watts builds his theological case in a logical, systematic way, a process he affirmed in Isaac Watts, *The Right Use of Reason in the Inquiry after Truth* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996).

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 208, 225f, 253-64.

worship of a “Jewish king” was insufficient for us, “but when we sing, especially unto God, our chief design is, or should be, to speak our own thoughts and our words to God.” He added that our “songs are generally expressions of our own experiences. We breathe out our own souls toward Him, and make our addresses of praise and acknowledgements to Him.”<sup>37</sup>

In the churches, something of a blended worship service between the more formal theological hymns and those of personal experience came to be practiced. One summer, Jonathan Edwards was away from his Northampton church for an extended period of time. He preferred singing metrical Psalms, in the tradition of Calvin. While he was away, the congregation began singing exclusively from Watts’ hymns. When Edwards returned, he compromised, and the church sang songs from both hymnals (singing a Watts hymn at the end of each service).<sup>38</sup> It was an early example of a blended worship service!

#### D. THE THEOLOGY OF HYMNODY

Perhaps the most interesting worship war of this era was a war of words—those affirming Arminian or Calvinist theology.<sup>39</sup> Nowhere was this war of words more real than the battle between the Calvinist hymn writer Augustus Toplady and the brothers John and Charles Wesley, who shared the Arminian perspective. Toplady originally had Arminian leanings, but became a stern and combative Calvinist. As Toplady described it:

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<sup>37</sup> Isaac Watts, “An Essay on the Improvement of Hymnody,” in *The Works of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.*, 9:7.

<sup>38</sup> Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 13; and Crookshank, “We’re Marching to Zion,” 28f.

<sup>39</sup> I am profoundly indebted for many of the insights and raw data cited in this section to two sources: first, from a paper presented by Charles Edward White of Spring Arbor University at the 2011 national Evangelical Theological Society meeting in San Francisco, entitled, “Ye Need Not One Be Left Behind/For God Hath Bidden All Mankind: Charles Wesley’s Response to the Doctrine of Limited Atonement,” the text of which Dr. White graciously shared with me; and for several reflections on Calvinist and Arminian hymnody in conversations with my friend Matt Pinson, President of Welch College (formerly known as Free Will Baptist Bible College). It was largely my being intrigued with the information identified by these two sources about the battles between Arminian and Calvinist hymnody that originally motivated the research for this paper.

I was awakened in the month of August, 1755, but not as has been falsely represented under Mr. John Wesley...I was not led into the pure and clear view of the doctrines of grace till the year 1758, when through the great goodness of God my Arminian prejudices received an effectual shock in reading Mr. Manton's sermon on the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. John.<sup>40</sup>

Toplady's best-known hymn, "Rock of Ages," was penned after an experience in which he sought shelter in a storm under some large limestone rocks. But even in that hymn, Toplady had a polemical purpose against the Wesleys. His original subtitle for the song, "A living and dying prayer for the holiest believer in the world," was intended as a sarcastic slap at Wesley's doctrine of perfectionism.<sup>41</sup>

The Wesleys evidently disdained Toplady. When he published a pamphlet entitled *The Doctrine of Predestination, Stated and Asserted* in 1760, a parody of the pamphlet came out which changed the doctrine expressed but still attributed it to Toplady. Toplady wrote the Wesleys an angry letter accusing them of forgery, but the Wesleys did not acknowledge that they did it.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, the Wesleys were polemical in their hymns, poems, and sermons as well. When John Wesley published a hymnal entitled *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*,<sup>43</sup> which included many of his brother's hymns, the first song was his brother's anthem, *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*. After praising God in the first few stanzas, the polemical element comes out in stanza six, in which the lyrics read, "Look and be saved by grace alone/Be justified by faith,"<sup>44</sup> evidently targeting Roman Catholicism. And in stanza seven, the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement is opposed with its reference to the Lamb of God being slain for "every" soul of man:

<sup>40</sup> Brownlie, *Hymns*, 163.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Brown, *Arminian Inconsistencies and Errors* (Philadelphia, PA: Marietain, 1856), 297-303.

<sup>43</sup> John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (London: John Haddon, 1875), also included in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerledge, vol. 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

See all your sins on Jesus laid:  
 The Lamb of God was slain,  
 His soul was once an offering made  
 For every soul of man.<sup>45</sup>

The second hymn in the *Collection* also challenges the doctrine of limited atonement, which alludes to the parable of the feast in Luke 14:16-24. In its first stanza we find:

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;  
 Let every soul be Jesu's guest;  
 Ye need not one be left behind,  
 For God hath bidden all mankind.<sup>46</sup>

This appeal for the unlimited atonement is made again in the last stanza with the claim that Jesus has died for all, not just a few:

This is the time: no more delay!  
 This is the acceptable day;  
 Come in this moment at his call  
 And live for him who died for all!<sup>47</sup>

That "God hath bidden all mankind," and "every soul" is bidden, such that "not one be left behind" all affirm the universal atonement.

Over forty of Charles Wesley's hymns in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* were polemical hymns against Calvinism, most of which related to the doctrine of limited atonement.<sup>48</sup> He also published over forty additional polemical hymns against Calvinism in two other hymnals entitled *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* to address "the poison of Calvin."<sup>49</sup> The second hymn in one of these volumes had these strong words:

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Hymn 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Hymns 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 22, 23, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 41, 80, 83, 84, 89, 111, 114, 123, 125, 140, 162, 163, 175, 186, 193, 194, 206, 207, 305, 369, 426, 427, 431, 432, 433, 435, and 451.

<sup>49</sup> The phrase about Calvin is taken from Charles Wesley's *Journal*, quoted by Randy Maddox in the "Editorial Introduction" to "Charles Wesley's *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (1741)" on website of The Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition at Duke Divinity School ([http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/cswt/07\\_Hymns\\_on\\_God%27s\\_Everlasting\\_Love\\_%281741%29.pdf](http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/cswt/07_Hymns_on_God%27s_Everlasting_Love_%281741%29.pdf)). The two hymnals are Charles Wesley,

Still shall the *hellish doctrine stand?*  
 And thee for its dire author claim?  
 No—let it sink at thy command  
 Down to the pit from whence it came (emphasis  
 added).

Perhaps two of the most pointed polemical hymns in those two collections are “Free Grace” and “The Horrible Decree,” both of which, along with the 36 stanza poem “Universal Redemption” (cited later), are in a section of *Charles Wesley Seen in His Finer and Less Familiar Poems* in the section of his works entitled “Doctrinal and Polemic.”<sup>50</sup> “Free Grace” exalts the love of God in atoning for all persons throughout its six stanzas, most noticeably in the first stanza:

My dear Redeemer and my God,  
 I stake my soul on Thy Free Grace:  
 Take back my interest in Thy Blood,  
 Unless it streamed for *all* the race. I stake my  
 soul on this alone,  
*Thy blood did once for all atone* (emphasis  
 added).<sup>51</sup>

The same concern for defending the character of God is voiced in “The Horrible Decree,” though in such strident and inflammatory language that we are not surprised that it evoked strong protests from the Calvinist evangelist George Whitefield.<sup>52</sup> Wesley likens the Reformed portrayal of God to be mocking the lost with a “fruitless call,” “ineffectual call,” and “insufficient grace.” The “horrible decree” is described as a “hellish blasphemy,” and “satanic sophistry,” trampling on the blood of Christ. To “limit” His atonement is to “blaspheme Thee to Thy face.” The “God of truth” and the “God of love . . . did not do the

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*Hymns on God's Everlasting Love; To which is Added the Cry of a Reprobate and the Horrible Decree* (Bristol: Farley, 1741); and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (London: Strahan, 1742).

<sup>50</sup> Frederic Bird, ed., *Charles Wesley Seen in His Finer and Less Familiar Poems* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1867), 159-214.

<sup>51</sup> Bird, *Charles Wesley*, 192*f*. This hymn originally appeared in Wesley's hymnal *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* in 1741. Italics are mine to underscore the key language voicing Wesley's Arminian doctrines.

<sup>52</sup> Whitefield protested Wesley's exclaiming “against the horrible decree” in his recent “hymn book” in a letter to John Wesley dated December 24, 1740, from Bethesda, Georgia. John Gillies, ed., *Memoirs of Rev. George Whitefield* (New Haven, CT: Whitmore & Buckingham, 1834), 641.

deed,” so He should cast this devilish doctrine “into the burning pit” in order to vindicate His own name.

The Wesleys were very explicit in insisting that they did not want the lyrics of any of their hymns changed. John Wesley, in the “Preface” to *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, gave permission for the hymns to be reprinted in other hymnals “provided they print them just as they are.”<sup>53</sup> This request was not always honored. In some cases, that was a good thing. George Whitefield (and others) did Wesley a favor by amending a few key words in his carol “Hymn for Christmas Day” or “Hark, How All the Welkin Rings” to become what we now think of as Wesley’s best known Christmas carol, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.”<sup>54</sup> These changes were for improved wording, not significantly changing the Theology of the hymn.

Changing other composers’ lyrics was quite common in the early evangelical hymnals. Christophers notes that, “Among these menders John Wesley was perhaps one of the best. He was positively sure that nobody could mend his own hymns.” However, he was not scrupulous in the mending of others.<sup>55</sup> Wesley did work with the hymns of Watts on numerous occasions. The changes the Wesleys made were often not merely for smoother wording, but for theological reasons. For example, note Charles Wesley’s proposed changes to stanza one are largely superficial changes in wording, but the wording changes in stanza four reflect a theological change. Wesley altars the thundering, stormy image of God that Watts portrays with an equally sovereign God, but Wesley portrays Him as surveying the earth through His providential care and calming the roaring seas. Wesley’s image of God is more loving and caring than Watts’ wording suggested.

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<sup>53</sup> John Wesley, “Preface,” *A Collection of Hymns*, vi.

<sup>54</sup> Wren, *Praying*, 301-305.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Woolcock Christophers, *Hymn-Writers and Their Hymns* (London: Partridge, n.d.), 156.

**Watt's Original Version**

**Wesley's Amended Version**

Come, we that love the Lord,  
 And let our joys be known;  
 Join in a song with sweet accord,  
 And thus surround the throne

Come, ye that love the Lord,  
 And let your joys be known,  
 E'ven in a song with sweet  
 accord,  
 While ye surround His throne.

The God that rules on high,  
 And thunders when He please,  
 That rides upon the stormy sky,  
 And manages the seas.

The God that rules on high,  
 That all the earth surveys  
 That rides upon the stormy  
 sky,  
 And calms the roaring seas.

Some of the word changes by the hymn editors are slight but significant. In a William Cowper hymn entitled “Lovest Thou Me?” just one word has been changed in the fifth stanza. Cowper, a Calvinist, had worded it, “When the work of *grace* is done.” It was changed by an evidently Arminian editor in a Methodist hymnal to, “When the work of *faith* is done.”<sup>56</sup>

Even in contemporary hymnody, some hymns have been changed or the wording adapted to reflect the theology of the denomination in whose hymnal the hymn is included. For example, in a recent Together for the Gospel conference, the hymn CD included Isaac Watts’ hymn “How Sweet and Awful Is the Place.”<sup>57</sup> The second and third stanzas pose a question answered in the fourth stanza:

(2<sup>nd</sup> stanza)

Each of us cries, with thankful tongue,  
 ‘Lord, why was I a guest?’”

(3<sup>rd</sup> stanza)

“Why was I made to hear thy voice,  
 And enter while there’s room,  
 When thousands make a wretched choice,  
 And rather starve than come.”

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<sup>56</sup> Charles S. Nutter and Wilbur F. Tillet, *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church: An Annotated Edition of the Methodist Hymnal* (New York, NY: Methodist, 1907), 165.

<sup>57</sup> This material regarding “How Sweet and Awful Is the Place” was shared with me from the research of Matt Pinson, as noted earlier.

(4<sup>th</sup> stanza)

'Twas the same love that spread the feast  
That sweetly *drew us in*...

The words of this last line were changed in hymnals from Watts' own lyrics between 1820 and 1860. The original words that appeared universally in the hymnals of Reformed denominations before the mid-1800s were: "That sweetly *forc'd us in*."<sup>58</sup> Obviously, the language of being "forced" smacks of irresistible grace.

Changing the lyrics of songs for theological reasons is not the sole province of one perspective. A recent "Indelible Grace" recording, published by Reformed University Fellowship, featured a hymn by Charles Wesley, "Arise, My Soul, Arise." The Indelible Grace recording had changed Wesley's original lyrics, "His blood atoned for all the race," to "His blood atoned for every race," thus adjusting it to fit their limited atonement Calvinist theology.<sup>59</sup>

Another Wesleyan hymn in which the lyrics have often been changed is his well-known "A Charge to Keep":

A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify,  
A never-dying soul to save,  
And fit it for the sky.

To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfill:  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master's will!

Arm me with jealous care,  
As in Thy sight to live;  
And O Thy servant, Lord, prepare  
A strict account to give!

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<sup>58</sup> Pinson discovered that a Free Will Baptist hymnal from 1853 deleted Watts' third stanza, as well as making the above adjustment in the fourth stanza.

<sup>59</sup> I am again indebted to Matt Pinson for pointing out this change of lyrics. The hymn was being sung in the Free Will Baptist Bible College chapel (now Welch College). When the change of wording was discovered, it was changed back.

However, Wesley's original final verse, which is deleted in most modern hymnals, gives this sober warning of the consequences of apostasy:

Help me to watch and pray,  
And on Thyself rely,  
Assured, if I my trust betray,  
I shall forever die.

*The American Hymnal*, a well-known hymnal published in 1913, changed the last verse to the following:

Help me to watch and pray,  
Be with me in the strife,  
Thine every word may I obey  
And find in thee my life.

According to Eric Routley and Peter Cutts, the last verse was commonly changed to read as follows:

And let me ne'er my trust betray  
but press to realms on high,  
So shall I not my trust betray  
nor shall I ever die," (or, as...)  
So shall I not my trust betray  
nor love within me die.<sup>60</sup>

Likewise, A. M. Townsend's *Baptist Standard Hymnal* (1924) completes the stanza in this way:

By faith assured I will obey  
For I shall never die.

So, the word changes often reflected the theology of the denomination(s) targeted by each hymnal, and hymns were used as tools to promote and teach various theologies, as well as to argue against the opposing perspective, particularly in the Arminianism and Calvinism debate.

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<sup>60</sup> Eric Routley and Peter Cutts, *An English-Speaking Hymnal Guide* (Chicago, IL: GIA, 2005), 1.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Perhaps this historical survey suggests some implications that we should take into account as we deal with the worship wars of our own day. Listed here are four suggestions.

### A. WORSHIP WARS ARE WITH US ALWAYS

Jesus pointed out to His disciples that poverty was a perennial human problem (John 12:8). It would seem that worship wars are as well. This is true because the church lives in the tension between two poles: (a) remaining faithful to a tradition that has been received; and (b) maintaining relevance to the contemporary generation. The specific details from which new innovations arise do change—instrumental music, congregational singing, rock beat, etc.—but the problem is perennial. We should not be surprised when it arises, as it has in each prior generation of the church to some degree, and we should seek to work through it graciously for all concerned without harming the unity of the church. Each generation must be patient as bridges are erected from an earlier worship style to one more suited for the next generation.

### B. WORSHIP SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT OUR VALUES

Another way of depicting this tension is that between leaning toward being world-affirming or world-denying. The church gets out of balance when it goes so far toward one pole that it neglects the other pole. The world-affirming church may be seen as relevant, but it runs the danger of coming loose from its moorings to its own tradition and heritage. The world-denying church may maintain its core beliefs and traditions, but lose its relevance to the next generation. The ideal is somewhere between these two extremes. The trajectory throughout this history, however, is toward the world-affirming side. We've come a long way from Gregorian hymns, brother! We do need to be aware that we may be approaching a point that the pendulum should swing back somewhat toward our tradition, as many churches are already discovering. Style matters. As Marshall McLuhan famously said, "The medium is the message." We need to be careful about what message we are communicating through our style.

### C. SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY MATTER

Each of these decisions about worship form is not merely a decision about taste or preference. Each fundamental methodological decision reveals something about the church's understanding of key Biblical texts, about their ecclesiology, about their theology, and about their ethic (particularly what the proper relationship should be between the church and culture). Each of the major decisions made in this historical survey—Zwingli's decision to ban instrumental music, Luther's decision to allow artistic music, Keach's advocacy of congregational singing, and Watts' insistence on a Christological focus for hymnody, just to name a few—are all driven by Scriptural and theological reasons. We must ground our contemporary decisions about worship by our convictions about Scripture and theology as well. For example, much of the contemporary hymnody focuses on praising the God of creation, but often gives comparatively short shrift to doctrines such as the sacrificial blood atonement of Jesus on the cross or the return of Christ, when compared with the music of an earlier generation. Worship leaders must be intentional that the theology of the hymns that a congregation sings are theologically and Biblically sound, and that they maintain an adequate focus on the person and work of Christ.

### D. HYMNODY MUST VOICE OUR WORSHIP

As Keach pointed out, the worship of an ancient Jew was instructive but not exactly the same as Keach's own worship as a Christian. Churches must find their own voice in worship. For any individual church, that might mean a traditional, contemporary, or blended service. But a worship service cannot be for people who are not there. It must give voice to the people who worship there. Guests will sense the eagerness and joy of a congregation that has found a comfort level in voicing its worship. They will equally sense if the worship leader is pushing a worship style on the congregation for which they are ambivalent or find distasteful. God is honored and the spiritual needs of a congregation are met when the most suitable style of worship is settled upon for *that* congregation.



# GETTING SANCTIFICATION DONE: THE PRIMACY OF NARRATIVE IN TIM KELLER'S EXEGETICAL METHOD<sup>1</sup>

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*Huntsville, AL*

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a person in the *avant-garde* Evangelical culture, whose name is a household name, whose books are ubiquitous on home, office and Christian retail bookshelves, who is quoted from the pulpit, in Sunday school classes, on church retreats, new membership classes, home Bible studies, small group fellowships, and science and political think tanks. His books are promoted on the “top shelf” at Christian and secular booksellers, both “click” and “mortar.” This person, Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, PCA, in New York City, hardly needs an introduction. His ever-present, congenial, gregarious personality endears him to his listeners, whether on Vimeo™, YouTube™, iTunes™, or in the pews of New York. He is intelligent, well read and well studied, having received his Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and his Doctor of Ministry from Westminster Theological Seminary. His ministry, Redeemer City to City—[redeemercitytocity.com](http://redeemercitytocity.com)—is savvy, well organized, international and intercontinental, professional, and demonstrates a clear

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the *The Trinity Review* 311 (May–June 2013). Except for certain changes in format, the article remains unchanged. The footnotes also remain as written but for the addition of a few editor's notes. The original article also had a small update on the Presbyterian Church in America at the conclusion of this article. This update was deleted since it did not relate to the article in question. Used by permission.

grasp of the media rich mobile communication preferences of the now maturing digital generation.

In the last five years, he has released, among other books, *The Meaning of Marriage* (2008), *Prodigal God* (2008), *The Reason for God* (2008), *Counterfeit Gods* (2009), *Generous Justice* (2010), *Gospel in Life Study Guide* (2010), *King's Cross* (2011), *Center Church* (2012), *Every Good Endeavor* (2012), *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness* (2012), and most recently (at the time of this writing), *Galatians for You* (2013). His whitepapers are equally numerous: "The Centrality of the Gospel" (2001), "Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople" (2009), and "What's So Great about the PCA" (2010), to name a few. They are cited widely and authoritatively, and some congregations even model or shift their ministry, organization, focus, and operations based on his opinions. Tim Keller, to state the obvious, is simply an extremely influential personality on the evangelical stage.

I very rarely encounter someone who does not know of him and has not read or heard at least some of his materials. When a personality becomes so pervasive, prevalent, and influential in the culture, it may be worth taking a second look at what the man is made of. What drives him, what motivates him? What is the framework through which he develops and delivers his message, and what, exactly, is the message?

These questions became more pressing to me over the last decades as Keller himself has turned into a veritable book factory, turning sermons into chapters, sermon series into books, and philosophical meanderings into position papers. These manifold works have been and still are recommended by friends and acquaintances because of their winsome tone and their intellectual acuity. They are truly cutting edge. Unfortunately, it does not take long to discover a pattern of eisegetical license<sup>2</sup> in Keller's works, a license he affords to himself as the need may arise in order to support his prevailing narrative, whatever it may be. This pattern was especially odd because of Keller's admonition to his hearers that we must "be true to the text,

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's note: exegesis is the art and science of determining what the authors of Scripture intended by what they wrote (getting the meaning out of the text). The term *eisegesis* refers to reading one's own beliefs into the Scriptures rather than allowing the Scriptures to speak to us. Thus by the expression *eisegetical license* Kauffman means that Keller is misusing the Word of God, albeit with good intentions.

listening as carefully as we can to the meaning of the inspired author.”<sup>3</sup> As the examples in the following section will show, his advice is more of a suggestion than a rule.

## II. “WHAT IS TRUTH?” (JOHN 18:38)

In *The Reason for God*, Keller explains that he is writing the book in order to show how he implemented a “moderate or conservative” church in a “liberal and edgy” city (xiii). With that in mind, it is easy to see why he cited Matt 21:31 to his readers saying, “It was the Bible-believing religious establishment who put Jesus to death.”<sup>4</sup> There is some tangible benefit to casting the religious establishment of Jesus’ day as “Bible-believing” to his liberal and edgy readers. But the problem is that Matt 21:32, the very next verse, declares that “the religious establishment” did not believe at all, and they certainly were not “Bible-believing” (see also, John 5:46). Was it the intent of the inspired author to portray the Pharisees as “Bible believing”? Of course not. The NT repeatedly portrays those who rejected Jesus as the unbelievers (John 8:45-46; Rom 3:3; 10:21, 11:20; 1 Tim 1:13; 1 Pet 2:7-8). But the context of the passage and the consistent testimony of the NT was no barrier to Keller who needed a narrative for his book.

In *Prodigal God*,<sup>5</sup> Keller wanted to show that the parable of the Prodigal Son contains “the secret heart of Christianity” (xiii), and adds this paradox for good measure: “one of the signs that you may not grasp the unique, radical nature of the gospel is that you are certain that you do” (xi). To underscore this theme, he uses Matt 21:31 again to show that Jesus’ teaching attracted the irreligious while “offending the Bible-believing, religious people of his day” who “studied and obeyed the Scripture” (*Prodigal God*, 8, 15, 29-30). It hardly seems to matter to him that Jesus described His bride, not the Pharisees, as the obedient Bible-believers who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 12:17, 14:12). The consistent testimony

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<sup>3</sup> Keller, *Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople* (2009), part 2, The BioLogos Foundation blog, posted March 3, 2012 <[biologos.org/blog/series/creation-evolution-laypeople-series](http://biologos.org/blog/series/creation-evolution-laypeople-series)>.

<sup>4</sup> Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2008), 58f.

<sup>5</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2008), 8, 15, 29f.

of the NT is that Jesus was rejected by those rife with disobedience and unbelief. But Keller needed a narrative to carry the message of the book, and the original context of the passage did not seem to matter.

In *Counterfeit Gods*,<sup>6</sup> Keller's objective is to show that we moderns are tempted by heart idols like "beauty, power, money and achievement" (xii). Indeed, we are. Keller uses Ezek 14:3a to suggest that the elders of Israel were struggling with heart idols, not physical idols, and indeed were not even aware of, and could not see, any physical idols in their midst:

In Ezekiel 14:3, God says about the elders of Israel, 'these men have set up their idols in their hearts.' Like us, the elders must have responded to this charge, "Idols? What idols? I don't see any idols." God was saying that the human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things (*Counterfeit Gods*, xiv).

But the second half of Ezek 14:3 states explicitly that their idols were in plain sight, "before their face." The Israelites had not forsaken "the idols of Egypt" (20:8), and were offering incense to their idols "round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak" (6:3).

Who can possibly read Ezekiel and then have the elders of Israel saying "Idols? What idols? I don't see any idols"? But this plain context of Ezek 14:3 was no constraint to Keller's narrative. He was writing about heart idols, and it served his purpose to cast the elders of Israel as puzzled and ignorant, unaware that they were worshiping physical images.

In *The Meaning of Marriage*,<sup>7</sup> Keller sought to apply the Scripture to the institution of marriage, promising to adhere to "a straightforward reading of Biblical texts" (16). But within four pages, Keller had already recast Paul's words in Eph 5:32,

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<sup>6</sup>Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2009), xiv.

<sup>7</sup>Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2011), 21.

"This is a profound mystery," as if Paul was stating that the institution of marriage is the mystery:

[I]t is not surprising that the only phrase in Paul's famous discourse on marriage in Ephesians 5 that many couples can relate to is verse 32.... Sometimes you fall into bed, after a long, hard day of trying to understand each other, and you can only sigh, "This is all a profound mystery!" At times, your marriage seems to be an unsolvable puzzle, a maze in which you feel lost (*Meaning of Marriage*, 21).

The context, however, is that Paul is explicitly referring to Christ's affection for His church, and not to the legal union of the husband and wife. The reformers battled Rome on this very point, as Calvin shows, saying, "no man should understand him as speaking of marriage" in Eph 5:32, but rather that the "profound mystery" is "the spiritual union between Christ and the church."<sup>8</sup> But this was no constraint to Keller. When writing a book sub-titled "Facing the Complexities of Commitment," his overarching narrative needed a verse that made marriage the unsolved mystery, irrespective of the context.

I could go on and on with examples, for there are many. I could also spend considerable time showing that in spite of these lapses, Keller actually states many things that are true. That Christ is preached, we rejoice, and Keller on many occasions does so. But to understand just what latitude Keller allows himself, it is necessary to produce more than a passing sample of his license. Because Keller is one who is quick to dismiss the opinions of others because their opinions violate "authorial intent,"<sup>9</sup> it is valuable to know whether he exhibits a reasonable duty of care when handling "authorial intent" himself.

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<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. Rev. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854), 324-26.

<sup>9</sup> Keller, *Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople*, part 2.

### III. WHAT THE AUTHOR IS TRYING TO SAY: KELLER AND CLOWNEY ON PREACHING CHRIST IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

The purpose of this article is to consider this issue by examining the self-revelation of Tim Keller through his works. It is no small task, as his writings are prolific. It would not be possible to review and evaluate them all here. There is, however, a very helpful and excellent summary of Tim Keller's personal framework available from iTunesU<sup>™</sup>, and it contains the answer to the questions posed above. In 2008, iTunes released the audio of Tim Keller's and Edmund Clowney's (1917-2005) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World*,<sup>10</sup> an 18-session course for instructing pastors on how to preach Christ "from every passage of the Bible" (Session 1: Introduction, 0:20-25).

Ed Clowney was a well-studied theologian, obtaining degrees from Wheaton College (1939, 1966), Westminster Theological Seminary (1942), Yale Divinity School (1944), and served as the first president of Westminster Theological Seminary from 1966 to 1984. He was a prolific writer as well, authoring many books on the topic of preaching, including *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (1961) and *Preaching Christ from All of Scripture* (2003). This writer had the privilege of meeting Clowney at the beginning of his two-year stay at Christ the King Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Houston, Texas. Dr. Clowney was a very kind and gentle teacher with a disarming, personable, and gregarious style of communication, both from the pulpit and face-to-face.

The series Keller and Clowney taught together is especially enjoyable to listen to, as they have an inviting, conversational warmth in their teaching style, and the Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions are engaging, informative, and frequently jovial. Occasionally, the instructors deliver insightful quips and helpful instructions for pastors, such as Clowney's advice to study the Scriptures for personal edification and not solely for the purpose of preaching: "Don't let the pulpit drive you to the Word; let the Word drive you to the pulpit" (Session 4 Q&A, 21:05-14), or

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<sup>10</sup> Edmund Clowney and Tim Keller, *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World*, Reformed Theological Seminary, September 2008, Session 9: Applying Christ: Getting Down to Earth Part II, 1:01:15-03:02, (iTunes U).

Keller's admonition to honor the text when preaching: "Really find out what the author is trying to say" (Session 3 Q&A, 6:30-35). Because Keller learned his method from Clowney, it is helpful to hear them as they interact throughout the course in their respective roles of student and mentor; they do not always agree. There are keen insights from both of them, and the classroom venue provided a forum particularly conducive to unusual moments of candor.

The series is very helpful in the additional sense that it gets to the root of Keller's exegetical methodology. It is an excellent resource for understanding his motives, and precisely what he means by honoring authorial intent, a discipline that, when practiced, avoids imposing one's own beliefs on the text of Scripture. The course begins with a helpful emphasis on honoring authorial intent, and he repeatedly affirms it throughout the course, saying, for example, "See, we're big on authorial intent" (Session 15 Q&A, 11:55-12:20). The many interactions with the class are also very enlightening, because several of the students, apparently skeptical of his method, asked the same questions that I would have.

What we find as we study Keller's methodology is that "authorial intent" is gradually supplanted by his narrative, until we finally arrive at a point in the course where "authorial intent"—indeed the very text of Scripture itself—is replaced by speculation and fictional accounts that are consistent with his narrative, even if not with the text.

Ultimately, the result is that the sanctification of Christ's sheep is separated from truth, its effectual means, and there is simply no remaining connection between "authorial intent" and Keller's use of the Scriptures to elicit a response from his audience.

### **A. BIG STORY NARRATIVE TRUMPS AUTHORIAL INTENT**

In the series, the instructors began to back off from authorial intent almost immediately, and ended up applying it so loosely that by the end of the course, it simply had no meaning. The students in the class were apparently wary of the potential to be unfaithful to the Word if they were required to "Preach Christ" from every text, precisely because that approach might make them guilty of "spiritualizing" every passage (Session 1

Q&A, 15:50-16:00). Clowney took this question head-on and provided a very revealing example:

It all depends on what you mean by spiritualizing. If you mean getting the clue on what the whole story's about, and fitting these little stories into the big story, I don't think that's spiritualizing, I think that's expounding. That's telling us what it really is about. So I don't see "finding Christ" as spiritualizing. Say you're preaching from the book of Lamentations. How would you spiritualize that? You've got to look at the agony, you've got to hear the cry of dereliction. You have to hear ultimately the book of Lamentations as Christ's cry from the cross. When you see that, when you hear that, is that spiritualizing? ... What is the cry? The cry to God is "Why, why?" And of course, that's Christ's cry on the cross. And that takes you into the depths of the book of Lamentations (Session 1 Q&A, 16:15-17:45).

Our first cause for concern is that the entire book of Lamentations cannot be read as Christ's cry from the cross for the very simple reason that the author confesses his rebellion (Lam 1:20) and acknowledges that God "hath broken my bones" (Lam 3:40). These are historical impossibilities. Jesus did not confess His "rebellion" from the cross, and Scripture rules out any possibility of Jesus' bones being broken (John 19:36).

Immediately after this example from Lamentations, Keller affirmed Clowney's methodology: "With great confidence, I can say that is the subject of the course." (Session 1 Q&A, 17:45-50). He continued, expanding on what the Preaching Christ course is fundamentally about:

One thing that Ed [Clowney] taught me is, if you actually go find the way the New Testament writers use the Old Testament, it's pretty scary. For example, the New Testament writers, the Hebrews writer and the New Testament Gospel writers, they'll quote Psalms, they'll just take a Psalm and they'll say, "As Jesus said, as the Son said...." You go back to the Psalm, and you look at the Psalm, and you look high and low for some Messianic reference. Is this a Royal Psalm? No.

No. They can quote anything, any part, any nook or cranny of the Psalter, and say this is about Christ, or even this is Christ’s prayer, or this is about Christ... [Ed taught me], “You know, if you really look at how the New Testament writers use the Old Testament you’re going to have to come to the conclusion that there are 150 Messianic Psalms.” Now the thing that makes us nervous is, does that mean I can get anything out of anything? No... But I just want you to realize that the New Testament writers read the Old Testament in such a Christocentric way it takes your breath away. And therefore, though there’s always a danger, we have to follow them I think. Ok? So the whole rest of the course is in some ways about that, too (Session 1 Q&A:18:30-20:20).

For the same reasons mentioned above, I am not convinced, for example, that Psalm 51 is Messianic, for David confesses his sins (Ps 51:1-5) and cries, “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice” (Ps 51:8). Christ did not confess his sins, and his bones were not and could not have been broken. These examples highlight the essence of Keller’s error, for he reaffirms Clowney’s position, saying: “Unless you’re expounding every text is about Jesus, you’re changing the meaning of the Bible for the people” (Session 1: Introduction, 19:00-10). Calvin, when expounding Psalm 72, objected strenuously to this approach, complaining that we do “violence” to the text and to the testimony of the Church when we approach every verse “as if it were our purpose, sophisticatedly, to apply to Christ those things which do not directly refer to him.”<sup>11</sup> We can see why Calvin objected, and how present the danger of the hermeneutic truly is—passages that cannot possibly be about Christ are said to be clearly about Him. This is not “spiritualizing,” Clowney assures us. It is “finding Christ.” In this surreal, Orwellian twist from the outset of the course, we are admonished that if we do not see Lam 3:40 and Ps 51:8 as Christ’s cry from the cross, we are “changing the meaning” of the text.

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<sup>11</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 10: Psalms, part III, translated by John King, [1847-1850], at [sacred-texts.com](http://sacred-texts.com).

Thus, from the beginning of the course, Keller's approach reveals the underlying and grossly unhelpful hermeneutic which mandates that every "little story" must fit into a "big story" narrative predetermined by the expositor. The implications are quite dramatic. As I shall demonstrate, when the overarching narrative is brought to the text by the expositor, it ends up clouding, cloaking and obscuring it, diminishing its context and changing its meaning. By approaching the Scripture in this way, the real meaning of every passage can ostensibly be known without reading it—for the preacher already knows in advance what it means—all that remains is to fit it into his narrative. The result is that one can preach the Scriptures to the ends of the Earth, all the while withholding their message from Christ's sheep. It is actually a complete rejection of "authorial intent," even while making earnest affirmations of it, and reduces the Scriptures to a collection of words that can be shuffled, truncated, expanded and embellished to fit any preferred meaning.

## B. SOME RESTRAINT IS IN ORDER

Thankfully, one of the students who saw the danger of Clowney's and Keller's hermeneutic, pressed them on how it could be controlled. The student objected, saying:

What I'm still struggling with, and I had this course with Dr. Clowney, with the two of you, a couple years ago, and it has really been a wonderful opportunity to study and to preach a different way, but still...I'm looking at this question of controls. Because the New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament in this way, they were interpreting it to *write* the Word of God. We are *preaching* the Word of God. That's not the same (Session 1 Q&A, 26:10-55, emphasis in the original).

To this, Keller responded, "You mean they were divinely inspired, and most of us aren't. So you're still concerned about the controls thing?" and then handed it off to Clowney. Dr. Clowney then made an attempt to explain the question of control to the partial satisfaction of the student who, nonetheless, had residual concerns about where the method could lead. Keller agreed: "I do think *some restraint is in order*. Some restraint *is* in order.

Because the hearer out there at a certain point, even the more untutored hearer, is going to start to say 'Wait a minute.' And it may throw doubt in their mind on everything else you said" (Session 1 Q&A, 29:10, emphasis added).

This enlightening exchange continued for several more minutes and largely remained unresolved, for the question of controls came up again. In Session 10, Clowney had preached on Luke 15, the parable of the Prodigal Son. This is significant here because, as Keller acknowledges, Clowney's approach to this parable fundamentally "changed the way I understood Christianity."<sup>12</sup> In the sermon, Clowney stated unequivocally that the parable teaches us that it was the older son's responsibility to seek the prodigal, which is why the father in the parable does not initiate a search for the son. The same student responded by appealing to the text, and complained,

What I see is forcing into this story this idea that it was the older brother's responsibility to seek the younger brother. There is nothing in Jesus' telling of the story, of the father's rebuke of the older son, there is nothing in the story itself exegetically that tells us that that was what He was doing (Session 10 Q&A: 14:05-40).

The student was quite right that "the older brother's responsibility to seek the younger brother" is not in the parable. But Clowney insisted that the overarching narrative provided the basis from which to exegete it. Said Clowney, Jesus "is doing exactly what the Pharisees were not doing, and they're criticizing Him for doing it. They're criticizing Him for seeking, and seeking is the last thing they ever have on their minds, and they're perfectly represented in the elder brother. I'm not 'bringing that in'—that's why Jesus told the story" (Session 10 Q&A: 15:15-45).<sup>13</sup>

It takes very little effort to see that the ninety-nine sheep, the nine coins, and the elder brother represent the Pharisees and scribes in the three parables of Luke 15. With the same level

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<sup>12</sup> Keller, *Prodigal God*, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Editor's note: This is controverted by Jesus in His pronouncement of woe on the Pharisees and Scribes in Matt 23:15: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."

of exertion, one can see that the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the younger brother in all three represent the sinners and tax collectors.<sup>14</sup> Then with only a modest additional effort, one can see that Jesus is represented by the shepherd, the woman, and the father, each in succession, each rejoicing that what was lost is found. It is ironic, then, that when Clowney was ostensibly teaching how to put Christ into every text, he manages first to take Him out of a text that is clearly about Him. Armed with his narrative, Clowney simply states that Jesus left Himself out of the last parable and inserted the Pharisees in His place:

Look at that older brother again. Why is he in the picture? ... What Jesus did in the third parable, He stepped out of it—He could have told it about Himself...but see He stepped out of the parable and put in a Pharisee, put in an older brother (Session 10 Q&A, 29:00).

Having removed Jesus from the parable, Clowney then instructs the hearer to put Jesus back into it in the Pharisee's place: "You take out the cardboard figure of the Pharisee, and you let Jesus step in, and you see how the parable really works" (Session 10 Q&A, 29:10-20). It was by this means that Clowney concluded that the purpose of the parable was to show that it was the responsibility of the older brother to seek the younger. This is the triumph of narrative over the Scriptures. It was with no less irony, then, that in a later session, another student armed with an overarching "exile narrative" proposed that perhaps the intent of the parable was to show that "All the blessings that were Israel's were given to the younger brother, because Israel refused to come in." Keller rejected the interpretation because he disagreed with the exile narrative, and Clowney joined in with this terse response: "I don't think that's in the parable" (Session 11 Q&A, 11:00-40). It is noteworthy that the instructors rejected one narrative because the text itself does not suggest it, but defended their own interpretation because the overarching narrative requires it, even though the text does not. This exchange was instructional indeed, because it showed that

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<sup>14</sup> Editor's note: Another option is that all of the sheep, coins, and sons represent believers, and that the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son represent believers who stray from fellowship with God. See [http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y2005/05\\_BC\\_3.html](http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y2005/05_BC_3.html).

it was the narrative, and not the text, that was actually being expounded that day. This is how “big story narrative” can end up supplanting the text, a point that Clowney finally conceded in the next section.

### C. AUTHORIAL INTENT CAN BE DISREGARDED

There followed from this point in the Q&A on the Prodigal Son the same discussion that apparently left the question previously unresolved in the mind of the student. The student begged to differ from the instructors’ “big story narrative”: “To what extent do you ask yourself the question, well ‘Did Luke think this?’ ... What are the controls?” (Session 11 Q&A, 12:54-13:22).

Here, Clowney finally and very transparently relented, and in a moment of remarkable candor, acknowledged that in order to fit the “little story” into the “big story,” sometimes the preacher has to cast “authorial intent” aside—as long as the conclusion is consistent with the rest of the Scriptures:

You’re right, you’re right in appealing to the use of Lucan theology to see what Luke is drawing us to see in this passage. And maybe this is a case where I’m saying *you can go outside of what Luke deliberately intended* in terms of the whole canonical Scripture (Session 11 Q&A, 13:25-14:00, emphasis added).

With this hermeneutic, we could say John 3:16 teaches that the stars were created on the fourth day (Gen 1:16). Invalid though the inference may be, the conclusion is consistent with “the whole canonical Scripture.” What does it matter what John 3:16 actually says if the meaning we extract is consistent with the whole of Scripture?

That this flexible hermeneutic is Keller’s as well was indicated by his rendition of the story of Jairus in Mark 5:21-43. Jairus, the synagogue leader whose daughter is on the verge of death, has approached Jesus in faith and in abject helplessness: “My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live” (Mark 5:23). Due to a slight delay, Jairus then received the news that his daughter was already dead. Jesus’ instructions to him were simple and clear: “Be not afraid, only believe” (Mark 5:36).

The natural reading of the text is plain: Jairus ought to believe, and to set his fears aside, for nothing is impossible for Jesus Who is able to raise her up again. But that is not how Keller teaches about Jairus' encounter with Christ. To Keller, Jesus' plain meaning, while true, might be taken moralistically, so he says that the preacher needs to "put Jesus into" the story—a story that is *already* about trusting in Jesus—by taking Jairus out and putting Jesus back in his place. In the process he introduces hopeless confusion to an otherwise plain text, and warns against the temptation to teach that we, too, must trust Jesus as Jairus did:

With that sermon yesterday from Mark 5...I tried to say that it's easy even there to preach that sermon, like "you just have to trust Jesus, no matter what," instead of putting Jesus into that, and looking at how this shows how He saves us, as well—that He himself had a prayer turned down, and He steps in as the true father. He really takes the father's position, by saying "Honey, time to get up." He shows Himself to be the true parent. The other parents can't do a thing. He's the true parent but it's because he lost His Father on the cross....You've got to put Jesus even into the New Testament. You've got to be careful that you're not preaching a pedagogic sermon. Ed Clowney showed me that years ago with the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Session 10 Q&A, 2:20-3:35).

By way of contrast, we note that Keller's nuanced approach was lost on Augustine and Calvin. Expounding this text, Augustine wrote simply that Jesus "did not find fault with him on the ground of his want of belief, but really encouraged him to a yet stronger faith" (Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels*, Book II:28:66). So with Calvin: "By this expression, only believe, he... exhorts him to enlarge his heart with confidence, because there is no room to fear that his faith will be more extensive than the boundless power of God" (Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke* - Volume 1, Mark 5:36). They were hardly infallible, but it is difficult to find fault with their exegesis, as it follows the text plainly.

Contrasted with these two, Keller's exegetical method is frankly alarming. The text says nothing of Jesus stepping in to show Himself as the "true father." In Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, and in very similar circumstances, Jesus elevated the faith of the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9) perchance that the Jews might imitate it: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Should we not rejoice that a leader of the Synagogue has found the same faith as the Roman Centurion? Should we not be pleased to imitate them both, whom Jesus made models of faith? Nay! Keller warns that someone might respond with "faith alone," but do so legalistically. This is driven by Keller's conviction that every verse of Scripture must be fit into his broader narrative—that the "little story" must be force-fitted into "the big story"—irrespective of what the text actually says. Of Jesus' command to Jairus to "only believe," Keller says, "Jesus' own examples and teaching have to be put into the big picture or you're preaching moralistically" (Session 4: Applying Christ, Part I, 41:40-50). As can be seen in his exposition above, this method can actually cloak the meaning of the text and shroud it in confusing allegory. Jesus was simply living out the Savior's role, healing the sick, curing the blind, cleansing the lepers and raising the dead (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22), and Jairus was invited to believe just as the Roman Centurion had. This is lost when embellishment and speculative interpolation are considered valid and necessary means of instruction.

Thankfully, one student in the class objected, saying that we cannot forget that it is God's work, not the preacher's, to open the heart of the hearer—that the preacher can preach the truth, but if God has not opened the heart, the hearer will not understand. There is simply no need to embellish. The student implored Keller to just keep to the text and trust the work of God: "Tell the story about grace. It's not even a story of moralism" (Session 4 Q&A, 12:00-40). At this point, Keller backed down momentarily, saying, "You're right, you're absolutely right. In fact there is no doubt that you can say absolutely everything right, and if the Holy Spirit is not working on their heart, they're going to hear it [moralistically]" (Session 4 Q&A, 12:40-55). But within two minutes, he returned to his theme: "it doesn't mean that you don't work like crazy to be understood and dismantle the grid" through which the listener may be hearing the message

(Session 4 Q&A, 14:25-45). But as we shall see, “working like crazy to dismantle the grid,” requires embellishment of the text and occasionally even omitting it.

#### **D. THE TEXT CAN BE EMBELLISHED WITH SPECULATION**

This tendency to recast the text to fit the narrative is part and parcel of the hermeneutic taught in the course. So comfortable was Clowney with the preeminence of the story over the text itself, that he actually recommended that on some occasions, when preaching a familiar text, it is better just to tell the story based on the text rather than to read it. This, he said, will make it “more vivid” than reading the text word-for-word. So remarkable is the exchange between Dr. Clowney and the student that we reproduce it here as it unfolded in the class:

**Narrator:** “In this brief Q&A portion of Session 7, Dr. Ed Clowney kicks off the discussion with his thoughts on reading the Scripture *verbatim*, vs. telling a story of the Scriptures, and which is more effective.”

**Student:** “Dr. Clowney, I want to ask you, for example, let’s say you were preaching part of the Old Testament yearly. Would you be open to just telling the story, instead of actually reading it word-for-word? Have you ever done that?”

**Clowney:** “Oh yeah.”

**Student:** “And I’m talking about [unintelligible]. Topical sermon.”

**Clowney:** “Yeah.”

**Student:** “Tell it.”

**Clowney:** “Oh sure. It’s always one option I always consider.”

**Student:** “And *not* reading it word-for-word.”

**Clowney:** “It depends on the length of the story, see. And it depends, too, really on the whole

structure of worship and all that. If you read the Bible right before you preach, that can be part of your sermon, in a sense. And I've often found that it helps to, well, when I was preaching on the Joseph story, 'From Pit to Palace,' I actually read [Exodus] chapter 37. I read that. So you can put a piece of the story before the people, and tell the rest of it. Length means a lot there. Sometimes the story is very familiar, and it does not need much to be read. It just needs to be understood better. But you can still retell it, retell it in a way that is more vivid" (Session 7 Q&A, 0:00-1:50, emphasis in original).

This is a remarkable acknowledgement that his method can use, but does not require, the actual text of Scripture, because storytelling would make it "more vivid." By way of example, we note that Clowney made the familiar Parable of the Prodigal Son "more vivid" through this method. He attached considerable exegetical significance to the physical layout of the father's estate—noting the symmetrical beauty of the parable by the fact that the father went down the same path twice, once to greet the prodigal, and a second time to implore the elder brother. His story also emphasized the fact of the elder brother's advance knowledge of the cause of festivities even before he "asked what these things meant" in Luke 15:26 (Session 10: Expounding Christ Part V, The Parable of the Prodigal Son, 22:20-55). The attentive reader will note, however, that these are not facts at all, for the Parable says nothing of them. But apparently, the text must never get in the way of a good story, and if fiction and speculation can make the parable "more vivid" to the hearer, what harm can come of it? The harm, of course, is that by this means the sheep are denied the present power of the Word of God as their nourishment. The elect are to be called "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor 1:21), and what is both preached and believed is the Word of God (Rom 10:17). Stories about the elder brother's advance knowledge of the cause of the festivities, or which path the father took to greet each son, do not make the parable "more vivid"—just less true.

In his day, B. B. Warfield saw this same abuse of the Parable, noting that men who add these details in order to embellish

the words of Christ are actually rejecting Christ's ministry of preaching:

Determined to get the Gospel out of the parable, they diligently go to work first to put it in.... *The fact is that this commentator is rewriting the parable. He is not expounding the parable we have, but composing another parable, a different parable with different lessons.* Our Lord, with His exquisitely nice adjustment of every detail of this parable to His purpose, we may be sure, has omitted nothing needed for the most poignant conveyance of the meaning He intended it to convey. That the expositor feels it necessary to insert all this merely proves that he is bent on making the parable teach something foreign to it as it stands.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, Clowney was "bent on making the parable teach something" that the original does not contain. To his discordant mixture of truth, falsehood, and speculation, Clowney then added this questionable advice on how to "make it real" for the hearers by planting in their consciousness possible endings to the "story" that are not included in the Scriptures:

The way you could best cheat is say, "What do you suppose happened then? Well we don't know, but perhaps, et cetera." You're not saying it's the text, but you're saying it really happened, that's all. You can't go on and on about that kind of stuff, and you certainly can't build any doctrine on it. But just to suggest things. The only reason for suggesting is to make it real. It really did happen. We're talking about history. It's not fable or something (Session 7 Q&A, 2:25-3:05).

In the next session, Keller acknowledged that he is comfortable using the same approach. One student had objected to the use of embellishment because the Scriptures should be sufficient as delivered to the saints. Keller, acknowledging the student's reservations, nonetheless explained that fictional but plausible

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<sup>15</sup> B.B. Warfield, "The Prodigal Son," in *The Savior of the World: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), 11f, emphasis added.

details can be added to the Scriptural narrative in order to enhance the message:

I'm concerned about the sufficiency of Scripture, my brother over here, you were saying, but there's that one place where Hollywood dealt with Abraham and Isaac. At the end of the movie, *The Bible*, where you have George C. Scott playing Abraham, and he's about to sacrifice his son. And they stick pretty close to the Biblical text, but at one point when Isaac realizes what he is doing—he's all tied up and his father is getting out the knife—and Isaac looks up at Abraham and says, "Is there nothing He cannot ask of thee?" And Abraham just whispers, "Nothing." *And yeah, that's not in the text, but it's hard for me not to repeat that when I'm telling the story, because I think that was the point* (Session 8: Applying Christ Part III, Getting Down to Earth Part I, 28:15-29:00, emphasis added).

I take this brief opportunity to suggest that one way to "make it real" so it can "be understood better," is to read and preach the text the way it is in the Bible, instead of trying to make it "more vivid" by substituting the preacher's "storytelling" and plausible, but fictional conversations and outcomes for the actual content of Scripture. The clear and present danger is that the "more real" and "more vivid" version of the story may be consistent with the preacher's narrative, but not consistent with the text. But the text as delivered was apparently not enough for Clowney and is not enough for Keller—a fact that becomes even more clear when, as we shall see in the next session, he determines that the Word of God gets in the way of a good narrative and therefore occasionally needs to be omitted for the sake of the sheep.

### **E. THE TEXT GETS IN THE WAY**

We see that Keller's apple did not fall far from Clowney's tree when he continued his lecture on "Applying Christ." "Preaching Christ from every text," he explained, means that portions of the text that are inconsistent with that narrative need to be skipped over:

The book of Esther ends that they [the Jews] get the legal right to turn on all the people who were trying to kill them and just slaughter them and take their money. That's another problem with preaching from...Esther....So if you're really going to preach...Esther, you know what I'd do, in New York, I'd just never bring that out. I mean, people don't come to church with their Bibles. They study the passage I print out in the text. So I'm just not going to bring that up (Session 9: Applying Christ Part IV: Getting Down to Earth Part II, 1:01:15-03:02).

After this lecture, Dave, a student in the class, requested clarification. Keller repeated his advice, explaining that sermons on the book of Esther do not really fit into his methodology, and therefore must be kept to a minimum:

If I was going to preach Esther, I would probably take no more than three and probably two weeks. At least with my congregation it would be a real mistake [to go longer than that]. *And I'm not even sure the book breaks down very well....* [To do this] you would just read something. It couldn't be too long, Dave. But you still have to tell the whole story through the text. Choose a text in which you can tell the first half of the story and preach the sovereignty side of it. The second week, find a text that tells how the story resolves....You're really going to tell the whole second part of the story through the text, rather than expound the text verse by verse and open the text up and the structure (Session 9 Q&A, 1:40-2:25, emphasis added).

Keller believes, apparently, that there are extra-Scriptural truths that New Yorkers need to hear, and Scriptural truths that they were not meant, and do not need, to hear. The determining factor in deciding which truths to preach (those in the Bible vs. those outside the Bible) is clearly his narrative and not the text. If his sheep need to hear truths that the Scripture does not contain, he finds a way to work them in. If his sheep do not need to hear truths that the Scriptures do contain, he finds a

way to work them out. Thus it is the narrative, not the Scripture that prevails—a methodology that caused no small concern to his students, as we see them continuing to push back against Keller's methodology.

## F. THE TEXT IS CONFUSING AND MISLEADING

There was a growing and understandable concern among the students that they were being trained to starve the sheep of the Word of God. One student in the class expressed concern about the suggestion that Esther should be condensed into just two sermons, and perhaps even just one, and even then attended by only a fraction of the actual text. The student very justifiably asked, "Are we really giving our people the whole counsel of God?" (Session 9 Q&A, 15:25-15:30). If anyone still believes that Keller actually holds to any coherent definition of "authorial intent," his answer here should settle the matter. Keller does not believe that the original author intended Esther to be expounded over a ten-week period. To "expound the text verse-by-verse and open the text up" over more than two weeks introduces the danger of "misleading" the flock:

If you're into authorial intent, you have to ask yourself, "Did the author of the book of Esther expect somebody to be taking ten weeks going through it verse-by-verse?" I doubt it. It depends on where your people are....Some books are pretty tough to break out without maybe even misleading people (Session 9 Q&A, 15:45-17:00).

Of course, when the Scripture *does* fit into Keller's narrative, he has no objections to verse-by-verse expositions. In fact, one year he spent "seven or eight weeks going through Matthew 26, 27, and 28 verse-by-verse" (Session 9 Q&A, 24:10-20). I am delighted that he did so, and pleased that the Passion of Christ is worthy of Keller's time—albeit in plain violation of his own view of "authorial intent," since Matthew, to borrow Keller's phraseology, probably never expected "somebody to be taking eight weeks going through it verse-by-verse." But when the Scripture does not fit into Keller's "big story" narrative, he is comfortable simply leaving it out either "to honor authorial intent," or to protect his uneducated and untrained congregation from passages of Scripture that might confuse them:

They don't have Bibles. Besides that, also non-Christians may not have Bibles. So we print it out [in the church bulletin]. And that works very, very well by the way. It also is a great way of keeping away from certain texts that you don't want them to see. That's true. I mean, I don't want them to be confused by some texts that I just don't have time in a sermon to get to. So I just stop right there and they don't keep [reading and ask,] "Wait a minute, what about this?" They don't ask me (Session 13 Q&A, 9:10-33).

Clearly it is the narrative, and not the Word, which determines what Keller preaches. Notable, we think, is Keller's statement earlier in the course that his interpretations are never questioned by his flock because to them, "the whole Bible is opaque. They open it, nothing makes sense. 'It's all Greek to me,' they say. Therefore anything I say at all that clarifies it, I get very little flak on interpretation. The fact that I'm getting anything coherent out of the text at all just shocks them" (Session 4 Q&A, 5:00-30). We cannot imagine a more pitiable condition for his congregation than this, that they should be so ill-equipped and so vulnerable to Keller's devices. They are not Bereans (Acts 17:11) and are not trained to be. There is an easy solution to this problem, of course, but it would require that the sheep be better instructed in the Word—something Keller thinks might be dangerous and misleading. Indeed it might be dangerous, but certainly not to them.

#### **IV. THE WORSHIP IS THE SANCTIFICATION**

If a pastor believed that sanctification of the sheep is by the truth (and the truth is the Word, John 17:17), we might find it inexcusable for such a one to be so invested in shielding them from it. But in Keller's case, there is a rather simple explanation: Keller believes that sanctification is by faith through worship. His only obligation, then, is to get his sheep to adore Christ that they may be sanctified. If sanctification were by truth (and it is), the preacher's obligation would be to impart

truth to the congregation, and truth is expressed in propositions— what Keller derides as “information.” But providing truth to the congregation is not his primary objective. The objective is to get the sheep to experience Christ through the text, irrespective of its meaning, as we have seen:

The aim of every sermon is for them to experience Christ through the text, so the hearers have a sense of God on their hearts...You haven't fulfilled the text's purpose unless you bring people into the presence of God through Christ. And the alternative is giving information (Session 1: Introduction, 5:00-28).

I humbly suggest that if the preacher leads people into the presence of God through speculation, fiction, embellishment, falsehood, and omission, then they have not been led into the presence of God, “for the Father seeketh” those who worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), not through speculative exegetical showmanship. Sanctification may occur when the sheep learn that the Medo-Persian empire extended as far as the Greek Isles (Esth 10:1-2), as well as when they learn that “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matt 27:51). Both statements are equally true without the preacher having to force Jesus into either one. But this is not how Keller sees sanctification. Through worship, he can “get sanctification done on the spot,” and “what we're after” is getting sanctification done:

I believe you can actually get sanctification done on the spot...Because if the person is worshiping Christ in a deeper way right there, that's what you have to do...Worship actually consumes the flesh...As I am actually worshiping Christ, I am both humbled and built up...As the sermon goes on, if I'm worshiping as I'm preaching, and the people are worshiping as I'm preaching, they're getting sanctification done on the spot. In other words, they will not actually be as angry when they leave. If they have been worshiping, they will find that things that irritated them before will not irritate them because those things are not as necessary as they were before. The worship is the sanctification. You're getting

sanctification done on the spot in the sermon... In the sermon you are making Christ glorious to their hearts at that moment. Jesus becomes the central thing at that moment during the sermon. They are actually being sanctified on the spot. The roots of the flesh are being withered in the light of the worship of Jesus. And that's what we're after (Session 9 Q&A, 6:45-8:30, 12:50-13:10, emphasis in original).

The way to get to sanctification, then, is to get the people to worship, and the way to get them to worship is to tell them that every text is about Christ. He states,

It's only as you show how the text reveals Christ that you're really giving people the "Oh, that's what it means." ...It's when you show people that this text is really about Christ that you really move from lecture into worship (Session 1: Introduction, 11:25-45).

God's children will be more effectively sanctified by a lecture on the tax Ahasuerus imposed on "the isles of the sea" (Esth 10:1) than they will be sanctified by worship based on the "facts" that Jesus cried "he hath broken my bones" from the cross and that Isaac asked a rather penetrating question of Abraham when he was about to go under the knife. Simply put, the former is in the Scripture and the latter are not, and sanctification is to be by the Scriptures, not by the embellishment, substitution, omission, and replacement thereof. As we have thus far demonstrated, showing people "that this (and every) text is really about Christ" is how Keller thinks sanctification gets done on the spot, and whether the text really is about Christ appears to be beside the point. When sanctification is separated from truth (as it clearly is in Keller's mind), then the logical end of his approach, as we shall see, is that sanctification can be accomplished through a lie...as long as the lie results in worship, through which sanctification can take place.

## V. SANCTIFICATION BY INCORRECT THEOLOGY

Keller's methodology in the *Preaching Christ* series has led him to some interesting, if detrimental, practical applications. In one session, Keller related a rather touching, personal reflection based on a very moving event from *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. At this point in the story, a Hobbit joins Aewen's side in battle because, the Hobbit feels, a being so fair, so beautiful, should not die alone. Keller even agreed that his personal inferences here were incorrect from a theological standpoint. Nonetheless, he said, God had used that false theology in order to provide an incentive in his life toward good works—that is, to sanctify him:

Now I want you to know that that has been a very important way that God has worked in my life. When I see Jesus Christ dying on the cross, I feel like if He was willing to do that for me, if He was willing to stand up before these incredible giants of darkness, that for no other reason, then I just need to die with Him. I need to stand there with Him. If He's going to do that for me, then I need to stand alongside of Him, even if I go under. I know that's not theologically right. That's not theologically correct. But there's something that said to me that if He was going to go to hell for me, and if all I could do is stand next to Him and go to hell with Him, I should (Session 8, Q&A, 3:55-4:50).

To his credit, Keller insisted that his hearers not use his inferences from Aewen's courage as a sermon illustration, and he is quite right that this is bad theology. Jesus did not come to Earth to find a band of likeminded brethren to perish with Him. Instead, Jesus said that He "must... be rejected" (Luke 17:25), and "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Mark 14:27). But there is a verse with some truth that Keller may wish to take on board: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet 2:21-22).

We are indeed called to follow in His steps, “laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings”—something that the Spirit accomplishes through the God-given desire for “the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet 2:1-2). That is how the Spirit “gets sanctification done.”

Yet just as Keller claims that God uses error in his life for his personal sanctification, he also attempts to “get sanctification done” through the use of error in his sermons. He explicitly acknowledges this later in the course. For example, while Keller disagrees with some of C. S. Lewis’ apologetics, he uses those arguments anyway because “it works on certain people”:

Lewis in his sort of wonderful Arminian way, argues for hell as the price of freedom. He says hell is the greatest monument to human freedom there is. That if you really want to screw up your life royally and eternally, you have the power to do it. Some people actually like that. There are some people that are that radically committed to human freedom that I can use that, even though I kind of don’t believe it. Because he’s not Reformed, there are things Lewis says that theologically I don’t like, and yet I know it works on certain people, so I use it (Session 13: Adoring Christ Part I, Getting inside their World Part II, 12:15-13:00, emphasis in original).

This quote from his “Adoring Christ” lecture is quite revealing, because it exposes the fleshly pragmatism of Keller’s ministry, a pragmatism that leads him ultimately to conclude that sanctification is accomplished through worship apart from truth. In other words, Christ’s sheep can be sanctified by adoration whether they are led to adore Him by the truth or not. Truth apparently must bend to “narrative” when one takes on the monumental task of “getting sanctification done,” especially if falsehood can get them to adore Christ more willingly.

## VI. CONCLUSION: IS GOD'S WORD THE MESSAGE OR IS IT THE MEDIUM?

In the end, the answer to our questions about Keller's framework is that his definition of, or need to adhere to, "authorial intent" ebbs and flows like the tide and bends to his personal narrative. All of Scripture is like clay in the potter's hands—he shapes it to meet whatever objective he has at the time. Authorial intent allegedly militates against verse-by-verse exposition when it does not suit him, but verse-by-verse exposition is required when it does. Authorial intent ostensibly requires that some passages be skipped, but allows for fictional speculation to be interpolated when the Scripture has not sufficiently made its point. Clearly, authorial intent and Scripture itself are subordinate to Keller's narrative.

The danger to the sheep is palpable. Whereas the preacher's duty is to use his gifts and his personality as a platform for the delivery of the contents of Scripture, Keller instead uses the Scripture as a platform to deliver the contents of his own imagination. Where the Scriptures do not conform to it, they are either modified to suit the message, or omitted lest they get in the way of it. The Word is not the message—it is just the medium through which Keller delivers his. This results in confusion ("Jesus is the true parent because He lost His Father on the cross"), speculation ("because I think that was the point"), and outright falsehood ("Jesus was rejected by obedient Bible-believers"). If the Scripture, in Keller's mind, is confusing and misleading to the sheep, it is only because he himself has made it so. His own practices therefore lead us to be wary of his works, as he himself warned: "It may throw doubt in their mind on everything else you said." Indeed, it does.

We are grateful for the testimony of some of Keller's students who repeatedly objected to his methods. But not all did. Unfortunately for those students, and their sheep, Keller's exegetical methodology is being spread to every corner of the world. Nevertheless, his *Preaching Christ* series does provide a valuable opportunity to instruct the sheep to be wary of such devices—devices which are ever present in his works. When Paul left the flock at Ephesus, he commended them "to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts

20:32). Christ, the head of the Church, has always entrusted the unity and purity of the Church to the Spirit and His undefiled, unembellished Word. We believe that is, and always will be, enough, lest the church succumb to the constant temptation to derive its unity from one man's personality.

In closing, Calvin had some very stern warnings for those who were doing exactly what Keller is doing, and what Clowney did:

...the world always has and always will prefer speculations which seem ingenious, to solid doctrine...For many centuries no man was thought clever who lacked the cunning and daring to transfigure with subtlety the sacred Word of God. This was undoubtedly a trick of Satan to impair the authority of Scripture and remove any true advantage out of the reading of it...Scripture, they say, is fertile and thus bears multiple meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is the most rich and inexhaustible fount of all wisdom. But I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which anyone may fasten to it as his pleasure. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one, and let us embrace and hold it resolutely. Let us not merely neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions which lead us away from the literal sense (*Commentary on Galatians*, s.v., Galatians 4:22).

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain.* By Matt Chandler. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013. 224 pp. Hardback, \$11.99.

This book by Matt Chandler, the pastor of The Village Church in Dallas, TX, is a devotional commentary on the book of Philippians. However, it does not provide an exposition of the book. It can more properly be called a devotional reflection on certain themes found in the book.

The main point Chandler wants to emphasize is maturity in Christ. We can look at Philippians and see what this maturity looks like and it will encourage us to pursue it (p. 11). To gain it, we must focus on Christ and strive to be like Him.

The book is easy to read. Chandler gives many illustrations from his own life and his church. Another thing he does that makes the book interesting to read is he uses the example of Lydia, the slave-girl, and the jailer from Philippians to ask how they would have looked at the things Paul says in Philippians.

Chandler mostly deals with issues of assurance and perseverance implicitly. He says that Lydia, the jailer, and the slave-girl in Philippians almost certainly struggled with sin after salvation and were not perfect. However, Phil 1:6 was probably a source of comfort for them (pp. 40-41). God was at work in them.

The statement by Paul that we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling is also connected with the idea that God is at work in the believer (2:12-13). God empowers us to obey but forgives us when we don't (pp. 77-78).

Readers of the *JOTGES* will probably agree with Chandler that maturity in Christ is a matter of looking to Jesus. It is not accomplished by doing a list of dos and don'ts, which only results in judging others (pp. 90-91). It is by beholding Christ that we are transformed more and more into His image (2 Cor 3:18; p. 106).

According to Chandler, the gospel is more than simply how one is saved from the lake of fire. It includes sanctification (p. 133). The power to walk in obedience is found in the grace of the

gospel. This sanctification, which is part of the gospel, involves discipleship (p. 134).

Chandler is also to be commended for recognizing that godliness does not happen automatically (p. 127). However, throughout the book it seems to this reviewer that he contradicts himself on this issue. He says that the faith that saves always has works and he quotes Jas 2:26 (p. 128).

Evidently, Chandler does not see the subject of rewards for believers in Philippians or the rest of the NT. The reward for the believer is simply going to heaven. This should motivate us to aggressively pursue Christ (p. 144). Chandler feels that Paul suffers for Christ in order to share in the resurrection (p. 98).

Chandler evidently does not believe we can have absolute assurance of our salvation. He says that mature believers are serious about pursuing God because we want to be raised with Christ. It is somewhat confusing to this reviewer, but in the same discussion, it appears that he believes in a general judgment when the believer will find out if he or she is really saved (p. 219).

He asks the readers if they are serious about the fact that one day we will all give an account to God. On that day we “want” to be raised with Christ (p. 220). It appears Chandler is saying we will not know until that day, but if we are serious about the implications of the Gospel, we can have greater hope and assurance.

Chandler is an effective and engaging writer. He encourages his readers to passionately follow Christ. However, he does not have an understanding of assurance or rewards in the NT. As a result, he misunderstands what living in Christ means, as well as what Paul says in some of the passages in Philippians.

Kenneth Yates  
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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
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***Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology.*** By Ronald E. Diprose. Waynesboro, GA: Authentic, 2004. 265 pp. Paper, \$18.00.

In the Preface, Diprose says that in Christendom, “During the early centuries, Israel was thought to be a renegade nation that should be treated with contempt. However, after the Shoah [the desolation, that is, the Holocaust] and the birth of the modern State of Israel in 1948, a new view developed according to which Israel’s status as a visible, elect nation exonerated its members from the need to exercise faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved” (pp. xiii-xiv). Diprose rejects both of those views.

According to the author “the logic of replacement theology required that much of the OT be allegorized. Only in this way could the church be made the subject of passages in which the nation of Israel is addressed” (pp. 169-70).

Diprose says that the result of replacement theology on ecclesiology is that “instead of being called elders, local church leaders began to be called priests in order to comply with the new concept of Christian ministry as sacrificial” (p. 170). He continues, “At the same time...the crucial importance of faith in Christ for personal salvation [was] neglected” (p. 170).

In the appendix, he points out the Jewish-Christian dialogue has not led to a Biblical position on soteriology. A colloquium held in Rome in November 1986 concluded that the Jews were eternally saved apart from faith in Jesus (Yeshua), though Gentiles needed to believe in Him. Diprose comments, “What should concern us as Christian theologians is that Christian partners in dialogue tend to negate the belief that Jews need to believe in Yeshua in order to be saved” (p. 186). “While this solution might appear attractive at first glance, it involves a selective use of the NT and hence is not an option for those who take seriously the canonical status of the NT writings in which faith in Yeshua is essential for salvation” (p. 187).

It is heartening to see how often the author refers to the need of faith in Christ in order to be saved. He does not speak of commitment, obedience, or following Christ in order to be born again. (He does mention “the call to repentance” on p. 187, but it is not clear how he understands repentance and whether he considers it a condition for everlasting life.)

Realized eschatology is also a direct outgrowth of replacement theology according to Diprose (p. 168). He suggests that both should be rejected.

When I did a bit more digging on the internet, I found that realized eschatology has links with preterism and even to prosperity theology. Much of what is going on in the emerging church is related to realized eschatology and thus, I imagine, there may be some, if not many, in the emerging church that hold to replacement theology.

I very strongly recommend this book. It is an outstanding work.

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***An Introduction to the New Covenant.*** By Gary Gilley, David Gunn, Don Trest, Christopher Cone, Charlie Clough, and George Gunn. General editor Christopher Cone. Hurst, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2013. 375 pp. Paper, \$27.00.

This is a book *by* Dispensationalists who espouse a particular view of the New Covenant *for* Dispensationalists of every stripe. The authors present a broad case for the view that the Church is not related to the New Covenant. To this end they are not afraid to criticize Dispensationalist giants of the past such as Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, C. I. Scofield, and J. Dwight Pentecost for what they perceive as their inconsistency. I believe their criticism is warranted. *An Introduction to the New Covenant* is as important a work for committed Dispensationalists as Charles Ryrie's *Dispensationalism* is for general audiences.

*An Introduction to the New Covenant* contains eleven chapters: three by Cone, three by G. Gunn, two by Clough, and one each by Gilley, D. Gunn, and Trest. Cone, who serves as the general editor, also contributed the preface. Two chapters originally appeared in the *Journal of Dispensational Theology* in 2009. Each of them was initially addressed to the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics at Baptist Bible Seminary in

2009. One additional chapter was previously addressed to this council in 2011. Each chapter is extensively footnoted. However, there is no bibliography or index. In spite of the book having six authors and one overarching theme, there is no redundant overlap.

The first two chapters are introductory. In “Laying the Groundwork for Understanding the New Covenant,” Gilley introduces four views of the New Covenant followed by a brief mention of some New Covenant passages in the Bible. This is followed by nine detailed answers to questions and inconsistencies with the common dispensational view that the Church participates in some way in the New Covenant. This is supplemented by four objections to arguments in support of this viewpoint. Gilley concludes: “The New Covenant is specifically for the Kingdom Age, not the Church Age. The church today has nothing directly to do with the New Covenant; she operates under the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).”

The second introductory chapter, “An Overview of New Covenant Passages, Ostensible and Actual,” is by D. Gunn. Beginning with the primary New Covenant passage in Jer 31:31-34, it truly does offer “a bird’s-eye view of all the major texts that are most frequently taken to refer to the New Covenant.” Throughout, Gunn issues “a preliminary judgment on which ones can and cannot be legitimately regarded as referencing the New Covenant.” The chapter concludes with a valuable chart summarizing his conclusions.

Chapters three and four, both by Cone, address specific issues. In “Hermeneutic Ramifications of Applying the New Covenant to the Church,” he presents three views of the New Covenant held by Dispensationalists (multiple covenants, single covenant with multiple participants, single covenant with Israel only) and criticizes the “theological hermeneutic” adopted by the first two that is inconsistent with a literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Only the single covenant with Israel view is able to “uniquely maintain” the “*complete* distinction of Israel and the church, and the complete, literal, and *only* literal fulfillment of the provision of God’s New Covenant with Israel.”

In “The Holy Spirit, the Church, and the New Covenant,” Cone challenges a point of methodological similarity between classical Dispensationalism, covenant theology, progressive

Dispensationalism, and new covenant theology regarding the relationship between the New Covenant and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. After chronologically examining some OT texts “that are cited as significant to the positions of the various traditions,” he concludes that “each of the theological systems considered above have, in varying degrees, and to the detriment of the text, separated the regenerative blessing of Israel from her land blessing, in order to show some present application or fulfillment in the present church age.”

Chapters five through eight are the exegetical meat of the book because they address the NT passages on the New Covenant. G. Gunn tackles “The Lord’s Supper and the New Covenant,” which includes the texts in the Synoptic Gospels and Paul’s reference to them in 1 Corinthians. He also handles the New Covenant references in Rom 11:17 and 2 Cor 3:6. His key points are: “Paul has omitted a reference to the direct application of the covenant to believers of the Church Age” in 1 Corinthians; that the “root” in Romans 11 represents “the position of privilege and administrative responsibility into which God places his mediatorial representatives on the earth,”; and that “Paul’s point” in 2 Corinthians “had to do with the *character* of his ministry, rather than with the *content* of his ministry.”

Cone addresses the New Covenant passages in Hebrews. His observations from Hebrews 8 actually relate to the entire book. Hebrews “neither expands the recipients nor distinguishes between physical and spiritual blessings. Rather, it maintains all the original specific recipient language, and gives no alteration to the covenant whatsoever.” In Hebrews, “There is no new teaching about the NC; it is cited as a contrast to the old, in order to reinforce earlier assertions that Jesus Christ is superior in every way.” Although Cone briefly mentions the testament/covenant distinction of the KJV in Hebrews, I would like to have seen Gunn do likewise.

The last three chapters are tangential and unfortunately add little to the book.

Although the *content* of *An Introduction to the New Testament* is most excellent, the *composition* of the book is not uniform and suffers from many formatting issues that are quite distracting. There are headers on blank pages and the first pages of new chapters. Blank pages are numbered. There are extra spaces

between some words, errant hyphens and footnote numbers, missing space after block quotes, wrong paragraph indentions, and inconsistent use of periods with abbreviations and fonts for apostrophes and quotation marks. Footnotes are left justified with unnecessary spaces between them. The attempt to avoid continuing a footnote to the next page means that there are large blocks of blank space above the footnotes on many pages. Different Greek fonts are used, sometimes on the same page. Some Greek words are accented, some are not. Some Greek words are transliterated, some are not. Some transliterations are faulty. There are also some typos, redundant footnotes, and an incorrect reference in the footnotes. All of these issues could and should be fixed in a second printing of the book.

Even with these issues, a well-read, highlighted, and marked-up copy of *An Introduction to the New Covenant* belongs on the shelf of every Dispensationalist.

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***The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples.*** By Michael Horton. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011. 321 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

Before I read *The Gospel Commission*, I had only read a couple of books by Michael Horton. Overall, I was pleased with the direction of the book and was surprised to find out that he was not overtly “Lordship” in what he wrote. I was anticipating it to be more vocal in Lordship Salvation theology. Back in 1992, Horton wrote a book entitled, *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*, in which he chided MacArthur for his over emphasis of good works as a proof (or condition) of saving faith.

The main purpose of the book is to show how “mission creep” is prevalent in the church today. Mission creep is a term that is often used in military operations, but has been applied to many different fields. Mission creep is the expansion of a mission beyond its original goals, often after initial successes, but often

it ends in failure of the mission. I found that Horton makes a good case for this in the church today, by showing how American religion has thrived under the conditions of modernity and how we've adopted certain worldviews, such as pragmatism and consumerism. Initially the church has seemed to make it work, until recently.

I think he is right when looking at many of the movements within the church today. One has to wonder how much of this is Biblical. As he rightly says, we can't even say it's working anymore as the church is in decline and as "self-described evangelicals fall away from regular church attendance" (p. 15). Again, I think Horton rightly points out that the church has lost its focus or seems to be "distracted from their primary calling" which is making disciples and "the light is dimming and the salt is losing its savor" (p. 15). When you look at the big picture, I think those from the Free Grace perspective would agree with Horton on the fact that the church has lost its way and its focus of sharing the gospel and making disciples.

There were times in the book when Horton made statements that would be in line with Free Grace theology. On page 106 he says: "Actually, it is we who are arrogant when we presume to present our own righteousness—or encourage others to present theirs—before God rather than being justified through faith in Christ alone." Even though Horton says it's faith in Christ alone, what is his definition of faith? On page 112 he gives one, but it doesn't clarify anything: "Faith is more than knowing and assenting to facts, but it is not less." What that "more" is he never explains. It seems we have reached a cul-de-sac with Horton at this point as it relates to a definition of faith.

Horton seems to show his "true colors" when he says, "Some believers have been taught that Jesus can be one's Savior without being one's Lord. However, this is a serious error" (p. 134). He goes on to say in the same paragraph, "If we are not followers of Christ, we are not his disciples. That is to say, we are not merely 'carnal Christians'—second-class believers who are saved but will lose their rewards. Rather, we are not Christians." Horton equates discipleship with attaining eternal life and thus shows his slant toward Lordship theology.

I found some other weak points to the book. Chapter 2, "Exodus and Conquest: the Gospel and the Kingdom," is a very

cumbersome read as Horton tries to make application from the OT story of the Exodus and apply it to the Great Commission. I don't think this would surprise us when one sees Horton arguing that "Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom is identical to Paul's proclamation of the gospel of justification" (p. 75). I also found his views on infant baptism and children of the elect to be troublesome. He seems to believe in infant baptism and children who are born into a Christian family should be as he says "included in the covenant of grace." Occasionally, Horton would cite Scripture, but he never expounded on it.

I recommend this book as it relates to the problem of mission creep in the church today. However, this recommendation comes with a word of caution for believers who are not well grounded, because the Lordship theology is somewhat disguised at times.

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***The Wonder of Heaven: A Biblical Tour of Our Eternal Home.*** By Ron Rhodes. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009. 266 pp. Paper, \$13.99.

As part of a recent book which had a chapter on heaven, I read a number of books on heaven. This is one of those books.

The author's basic premise is that at the current time *heaven* is the home of believers who have died and it will be the eternal home of believers after the Millennium. However, in his view, those two heavens are not the same. The current heaven he understands as referring to the third heaven, which Paul saw while still alive (2 Cor 12:2). But the future heaven will include the entire new universe except for the lake of fire (pp. 92-93). Thus for him, heaven in eternity will include the new earth, the new planets and stars, and the third heaven ("there will be a much wider meaning for the third heaven").

I found this a bit confusing. In much of the book Rhodes says that heaven is the third heaven, the place where God's glory is especially manifested (see, for example, pp. 37, 51-52, 55, 157). This is the way most people use the term. Only in a few places

(pp. 92-93, 115, 132, 135) did I find the future heaven defined as the entire new universe, including the third heaven.

Why the term *heaven* changed in meaning is not made clear, other than Rhodes seems to think that the reference to a new heaven and a new earth shows this, even though he rightly argues that the new heaven is not the third heaven, but the new stars and planets (p. 135). Rhodes seems to hold that believers will spend eternity exclusively on the new earth and not at all in the third heaven, even though he mentions that the new heaven will include the third heaven and the new earth and the new universe.

Revelation 21–22 receives more attention in this work than in most books on heaven (though I would prefer even more attention). Several verses from Revelation 21 are mentioned in passing on pages 108 and 135. Chapter 7 is devoted to discussing Revelation 21–22 (see esp. pp. 118-27).

*JOTGES* readers will be pleased that most of the time the author indicates that the sole condition of everlasting life and a guaranteed eternity with the Lord is faith in Christ, that is, being a believer (pp. 25, 57, 58, 89, 103, 141, 159, 220, 221, 222, 223). Only once did I find an errant comment: “Jesus...promised eternal life to those who followed Him” (p. 68).

His discussion of the Judgment Seat of Christ is right in line with Free Grace teaching as well (pp. 154-55, 173-90).

Some *JOTGES* readers will be somewhat uncomfortable with the evangelistic appeal of Rhodes. While he calls for faith in Christ, apart from works or commitment, he indicates that faith is a decision (pp. 218, 220, 221) and he leads the reader in a sinner’s prayer, though he does say, “Keep in mind that it is not the prayer that saves you” (p. 223).

I was surprised and unconvinced by Rhodes’s suggestion that OT saints did not go to the saved part of Sheol, but directly to the third heaven (pp. 51-52). He sees the place where Abraham is in Luke 16:19-31 as a figure of speech for the third heaven (p. 52), not an actual place in which unbelievers and believers coexisted (though separated by a great chasm) before the ascension of Jesus. In my opinion, Luke 16:19-31 is an actual historical event and it shows that OT saints were in Sheol prior to the ascension of Jesus.

I found his explanation of Eph 4:8 (“When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive”) to be possible but far from obvious. Rhodes suggests Eph 4:8 “is a reference to His conquering the forces of evil” (p. 52). If so, in what sense was He leading Satan and his followers when He ascended? They were not with Him. He was not leading them.

Many commentators suggest just the opposite—that the captives He led when He ascended were OT saints who had been redeemed and regenerated and they were going with Him to the third heaven as He ascended. They had once been captives, but they were no longer. They were now part of His entourage.

Even more puzzling is the suggestion by Rhodes that paradise is the third heaven. Thus when Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with Him that day in paradise (Luke 23:43), Rhodes says that Jesus and the thief went to the third heaven (p. 37). Yet Jesus Himself said that He would spend three days “in the heart of the earth” before rising from the dead (Matt 12:40). The heart of the earth is not the third heaven. The heart of the earth is the center of the earth, which is where many think Sheol is.

Ephesians 4:9 also says that before He ascended to heaven, “He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth.” That too shows that He went to the lower part of the earth (i.e., Sheol) when He died, not directly to the third heaven.

Overall, I find this to be a very helpful book on the place in which believers will live forever. I recommend it.

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***By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation.*** 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013. 141 pp. Paper, \$9.99.

Gaffin is the Professor Emeritus of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. Not surprisingly, he comes from a Calvinistic and Reformed perspective

(p. 4). Mark Jones, the author of the new book *Antinomianism*, writes the forward. Also, not surprisingly, he comments that without good works eternal life is not possible (p. xi).

There are aspects of the book that the readers of the *JOTGES* will appreciate. Gaffin has a high view of the inspiration of the Scripture (p. 9). He also says that one's systematic theology must be based upon the exegesis of Scripture and Biblical theology (p. 17). In addition, he sees justification in Paul as forensic. The believer in Jesus Christ is declared righteous by God (p. 55). This results in the eternal security of the believer (p. 76).

Free Grace readers will also welcome Gaffin's discussion on the broadness of the concept of salvation. It not only involves justification, but also the believer's corporate identity, sanctification, and eschatological realities. Even though most in the Free Grace camp believe the word "salvation" in the NT is even broader than Gaffin does, this provides interesting reading.

In the book, Gaffin primarily critiques the New Perspective on Paul (NP). The NP diminishes the individual aspect of justification (p. 4). There is a difference between the *ordo salutis* ("order of salvation") and the *historia salutis* ("history of salvation"). The former deals with how salvation is applied to the believer while the latter describes the completion of salvation. While the NP emphasizes corporate redemption, Gaffin says Paul is certainly also concerned with individual salvation by faith in Christ. The *ordo salutis* is grounded in the *historia salutis*. Both are important (pp. 21-29, 45).

Even though he does not specifically mention Free Grace Theology, Gaffin implicitly critiques it. He comments that grace is opposed to self-salvation, which he identifies as "semi-Pelagian," a term sometimes associated with Free Grace Theology.

Gaffin adopts the familiar theme that true believers will persevere in good works. That is how he takes Phil 1:6 (p. 77). This leads to a long discussion about the indicative versus imperative in Paul. The imperatives in Paul, which are addressed to believers, are based upon the Law, which Gaffin says is the Ten Commandments. Without these commandments, without the imperatives, we have antinomianism (pp. 81-82).

Gaffin acknowledges that the believer, who has experienced salvation by faith (the indicative), may only fulfill the commands (imperatives) imperfectly. However, the believer must

still work out his salvation with fear and trembling, as Paul says in Phil 2:12-13 (pp. 82-83).

In addition, Gaffin says these works will be necessary at the final judgment. Believers will experience such a judgment, where works will be necessary for final justification. Paul refers to this judgment in 2 Cor 5:10 (p. 107). Gaffin does not discuss the possibility that this refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ, where rewards will be given for faithfulness. Gaffin's view is the same as Thomas Schreiner's, that at this judgment the believer's works will result in a future declaration of the present justification the believer already has (p. 112).

In line with these views, the reader will not be surprised that Gaffin takes the common interpretation of James 2. The faith that saves is never alone. It has good works and perseveres to the end (p. 118).

For the reader looking for a discussion on some of the issues surrounding the New Perspective on Paul, I recommend this book. However, when it comes to the issues of assurance of salvation, sanctification, and eternal rewards, the reader will find the usual Reformed views, as Gaffin admits from the start.

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***Religion on Trial.*** By Craig A. Parton. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008. 97 pp. Paper, \$14.00.

Craig Parton's *Religion on Trial* is an introductory defense of Christianity in the tradition of legal apologetics. The back cover description claims that Parton "argues that religions uniformly fail the simplest tests of admissibility for their respective claims." I expected that Parton would be examining a variety of religious claims and would refute them according to established legal principles. Unfortunately, that is not what Parton does.

Instead of treating religious claims seriously, he dismisses Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age, Shintoism, Taosim, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, and Islam in little more than 3 1/2 pages (pp. 37-40). Parton makes the blanket

statement that none of these faiths make “truly verifiable historical claims that can be seriously investigated” (p. 37). Parton ends his “refutation” by saying “we can only investigate religious claims which actually allow for factual testing. We have seen that virtually all of the world’s religions do not allow for such investigation because their claims are not factual in nature. It is pointless to spend time investigating the truth claims say of Buddhism or the New Age movement when they make no such falsifiable claims” (p. 40).

I don’t think it’s pointless at all. Anyone familiar with other religious traditions will know that they all make historical and contemporary miracle claims. For example, the Indian guru Sathya Sai Baba (d. 2011), was said to have performed many of the same miracles as Jesus, including raising the dead. Mormons make claims about civilizations living in the Americas. Likewise, Muslim apologists regularly claim that the Qur’an contains scientific knowledge that could not have been known in the 7th century, proving its divine origin. All of these claims are falsifiable.

Alarmingly, Parton even rejects the Torah on the grounds that the manuscript evidence is so late that it “offers no primary or eye-witness historical attestation for the miraculous and allegedly revelatory events found in the Old Testament” (p. 37). Apparently, he sees no room for establishing the credibility of the Biblical manuscripts through archeology, linguistics, and comparisons with other Near Eastern ancient documents.

In sum, despite Parton’s blanket dismissal, every religious tradition claims their mystics, gurus, and prophets have performed miracles. Of course, these may all be lies, but many of them are falsifiable and deserve a more serious treatment than what Parton is willing to give. Parton’s book is supposed to be a rational, impartial, evidence-based approach to religious claims, a standard he fails to live up to in his evaluation of other religious traditions.

The book ends with the standard legal apologetic for the historicity of the resurrection. Beginners may find it a helpful summary of an argument better developed by F. F. Bruce and John Warwick Montgomery. The rest of Parton’s book is taken up with resolving some Bible difficulties, alleged contradictions,

the problem of evil, and so on. None of these are particularly helpful or in-depth.

This book may serve as a introduction to the legal arguments for the resurrection, but there are better resources available.

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***Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy.*** By R. Albert Mohler Jr., Peter Enns, Michael Bird, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and John R. Franke. Edited by J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. 328 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

Of the five authors, three have their doctorates from liberal schools (Enns, Harvard; Franke, Oxford; Vanhoozer, Cambridge). In addition, of the two editors, one has his doctorate from a liberal school (Merrick, Aberdeen). Thus it would not be surprising if many of the views expressed in this book do not uphold a high view of inerrancy.

Unlike other books which deal with three, four, or five views, this one does not actually lay out five separate views, as the editors explain on pages 24-25. The editors had all five participants write essays. Then the editors broke the essays into three different areas: inerrancy today as compared with inerrancy in the past (Mohler and Enns); the impact of inerrancy on international ministry; and “how inerrancy has been received and perceived within contemporary evangelicalism” (p. 24).

Before even reading the essays, I found myself disappointed. I wanted to see five distinct views. It appears that there may only be two views in this book: the conservative view (Mohler); and various liberal views that eviscerate inerrancy. While I do not agree with Mohler on the condition of everlasting life or the extent of the atonement, I am in strong agreement with him in this book.

Another disappointing aspect of this book is that all the authors were told to write essays in which they laid out their view and discuss three particular passages that seems to present

problems for inerrancy: Judges 6 and the destruction of Jericho; Acts 9:7 and 22:9; and Deut 20:16-17 and Matt 5:43-48.

In the first place, I do not think those are difficult texts regarding inerrancy. Many more difficult problems could have been chosen.

In the second place, I would rather have each contributor develop his view with whatever texts he wished to raise. Having all five make comments on the same three texts seems to needlessly hamstring each contributor.

Mohler's essay is worth the price of the book. It is very well done. Unlike much theological writing today, especially in books comparing different views on a subject, his article is easy to understand. He gives excellent quotations showing how far liberals go in their rejection and actual rewriting of the Bible.

Not surprisingly, the four responses by the other authors to Mohler are all quite negative. They can't understand why he is so dogmatic, why he does not acknowledge that other views on inerrancy are equally valid, and why he leans so heavily on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI). I strongly recommend reading these four responses as well as Mohler's essay.

(I agree with the criticism of Mohler made by several of the respondents that the view of inerrancy before 1978 and CSBI was not identical with CSBI. However, I think Mohler's point is that until the last few centuries there was widespread agreement on a view of inerrancy that was at least similar to that of CSBI. In any case, we all would probably be wise to make our arguments based on Scripture, not on Scripture plus tradition.)

If one merely read the first 81 pages of this book, he would have a good overview of the issues and a strong case for inerrancy. However, this is but the first 25% of the book.

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***The Bible Made Impossible.*** By Christian Smith. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012. 240 pp. Paper, \$11.99.

The subtitle of this book tells the tale: *Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*. What is *Biblicism*? It takes the author a page and a half (pp. 4-5) to state ten characteristics. I will try to paraphrase.

Biblicism is the belief that the Bible and the Bible alone is God's Word. In addition, the Bible can be understood by normal everyday people who do not know Greek or Hebrew or have advanced theological degrees, that we need not rely on creeds, confessions, and traditions to understand the Bible, that the Bible never contradicts itself, and that the Bible tells us what God wants us to believe and do.

Smith, a sociologist who teaches at Notre Dame, disagrees with all those points. He believes that normal people cannot understand the Bible and that it is dangerous to give them the impression they can. Indeed, even scholars need creeds, confessions, and traditions to guide them. The Bible is not really a book telling us what to believe and do. Instead, it is a book that is all about Jesus Christ.

There are positives in this book. Here are some I found: 1) Christ is indeed the center of Scripture (pp. 97-116, though that doesn't deny that the Bible tells us what to believe and how to live in light of Him); 2) It is a mistake for people to take verses out of context and personalize them and misuse them "to help legitimate and maintain the commitments and assumptions that they already hold before coming to the biblical text" (p. 75ff.); 3) It is dangerous for people to interpret the Bible totally on their own, without ever checking to see what others say (while I believe we are all independently responsible for what we believe and that we should first study the text before we study commentaries, I have found that consulting the writings of others can raise observations I missed or interpretive options I never considered).

The weaknesses of *The Bible Made Impossible* include: 1) The Bible has errors in it (pp. 12-16). Smith says, "I do not wish to engage the fruitless inerrancy debate" (p. 184); 2) Language and meaning does not permit any book, the Bible included, to infallibly communicate to people in a way that can be understood (p. 173); 3) The Biblical authors contradict one another (p.

173); 4) The many Protestant denominations and groups prove that the Bible cannot possibly be understood the way Biblicists claim (p. 173); 5) The Roman Catholic Church is the best means of discerning the meaning of Scripture (pp. 190-92; Smith converted to Catholicism shortly after writing this book); 6) The fact that there are multiple understandings of various theological topics and various passages (pluralism) shows that Biblicism is incorrect; and 7) A Biblicist approach to Scripture “is unable to deliver one coherent, much less comprehensive, social ethic to guide a compelling ‘biblical’ response to contemporary social problems” (p. 86).

It is hard not to come away from this book discouraged. The author seems bent on destroying a high view of Scripture and on convincing the reader that the Bible is impossible to interpret for oneself.

This is definitely not a book for new believers, or even for mature believers who are not extremely well taught concerning hermeneutics and inerrancy. However, it is a book that pastors and theologians ought to read since it is a very popular view among some academics. For example, famed blogger Dr. Scot McKnight, a Professor at Northern Seminary, endorses this book in glowing terms.

For a helpful online article, “Why I Am a Biblicist,” by Dr. Malcolm Yarnell, see [SBCtoday.com](http://SBCtoday.com) (July 28, 2011).

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