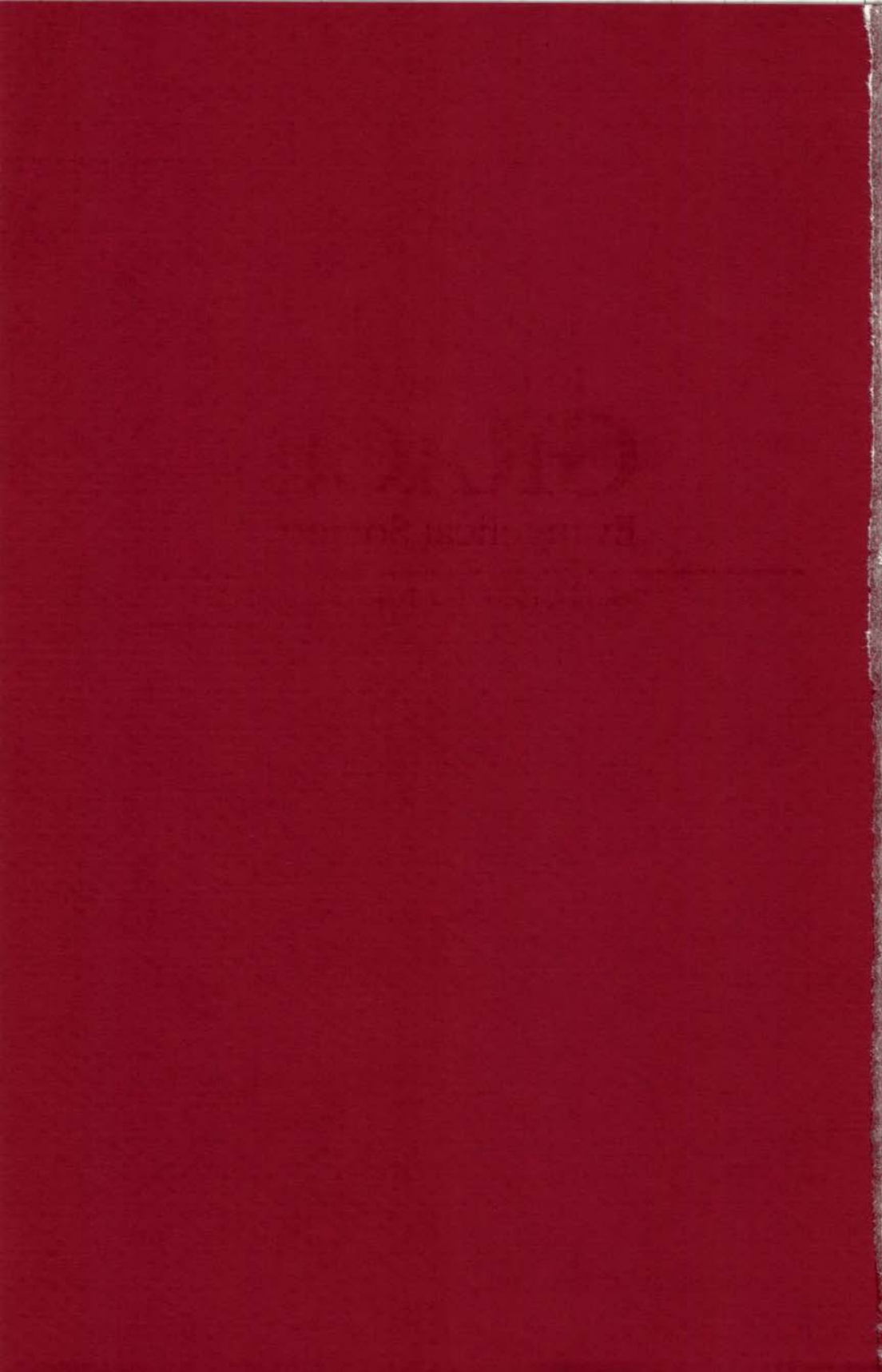


Journal of the
GRACE
Evangelical Society

"Faith Alone in Christ Alone"



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TOWARD A NARROW VIEW OF *IPSISSIMA VOX*

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

Since the late 1940s the Evangelical Theological Society (of which I have been a member since 1982) has been dedicated to two issues that are very dear to my heart—a defense of the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. For if the Bible is not dependable, then neither is its gospel message. Indeed, the veracity of all biblical teachings depends on the authority of Scripture.

At the 1999 annual ETS meeting in Boston Dr. Dan Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary presented a provocative paper entitled: “An *Apologia* for a Broad View of *Ipsissima Vox*.” He suggested that the authors of the NT did not approach the reporting of history in the same way that current historians do. In order to interpret the NT correctly, we must be aware of this different approach. Practically speaking this brings into question the NT authors’ concern about historical accuracy in terms of the speaker, the location, the date, and the precise content of what was said.

(The expression *ipsissima vox* means “the very voice.” It is contrasted with the Latin expression *ipsissima verba*, “the very words.” The latter refers to direct quotes [*verbatim* is related to *verba*]. The specific meaning of *ipsissima vox* is the subject of this article.)

In the June 1999 issue of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Dr. Grant Osborne voiced similar concerns in an article entitled, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical.” A rejoinder by Dr. Robert Thomas and a surrejoinder by Osborne followed in the next issue.

I am in agreement with Wallace and Osborne on the following points: (1) Many of the words of Jesus recorded in Scripture are indirect discourse, not direct quotes, and (2) since Jesus spoke in Hebrew and Aramaic as well as Greek, some of His recorded words are translations.

I am, however, uncomfortable with a broad view of *ipsissima vox*. What the broad view terms inerrant, an unbiased observer would call errant. Accurately paraphrasing or translating what someone said is one thing. Inaccurately reporting what someone said is an error. *Changing* what someone said and reporting it as though that is what the person said is another matter altogether.

Misidentifying who said something and when and where he said it are errors.

A broad view of *ipsissima vox* renders the interpreter an agnostic on the life and ministry of Jesus. The interpreter cannot be sure what Jesus actually said or did. The broad-view interpreter considers the NT to be historically unreliable.

Yet, ETS members who hold to a broad view of *ipsissima vox* claim they believe in inspiration and inerrancy. However, this claim can only be valid if inspiration and inerrancy are stripped of their meaning.

If scholars aren't sure what Jesus said and did, then how can laypeople be sure? The New Testament can't be relied upon to convey truth. It is presenting error under the guise of a different form of historiography.

The day has come when members like Dr. Robert Thomas who hold a narrow view of inspiration and inerrancy are openly criticized in *JETS* for failing to acknowledge that the broad view upholds a high view of inspiration and inerrancy. Of course, Thomas can't acknowledge that because he does not believe it.

I. WE SHOULD NOT READ THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF ANCIENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Wallace made the point that *one* ancient historian, Thucydides, played loose and free with his reporting.

Even if we grant that this is so, and even if we grant that *all* ancient historians presented historical inaccuracies, this in no way suggests that the divine author, the Holy Spirit, followed such an approach. While God used human authors, He superintended the entire project so that each word was God-breathed. Inspiration leaves no room for misreporting by human authors.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS WERE COMMITTED TO ABSOLUTE HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Like Moses, the four Gospel writers were committed to writing precisely what was said and done. The idea that the Gospel writers created sayings to convey their theology is antithetical to inerrancy and inspiration.

Paul said that all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). Peter said that prophecies of Scripture came about as the Holy Spirit moved holy men to write what He wished (2 Pet 1:21). If these verses are true, and they are, then there is no room for inaccuracies of any type anywhere in the Bible.

Wallace gave no evidence suggesting that the New Testament authors believed in a skewed view of historiography, other than suggesting that passages in the New Testament are not historically accurate and then concluding that they must be following Thucydides' approach. That is not proof. What we need is an admission by a New Testament author that he was writing something which didn't actually occur. That we do not have, because it did not happen. Even if a human author had thought to report an inaccuracy, the Holy Spirit would not have allowed it to be written.

III. THE BROAD APPROACH DESTROYS THE RELIABILITY OF THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT

If the Gospels are not historically accurate, then the reasonable interpreter should question the authenticity of all of the words and acts of Jesus.

Consider how a broad view would impact one's understanding of the following verses:

John 19:30. Should we not have serious doubts about whether Jesus actually said, "It is finished"? Why would the Synoptics fail to mention Jesus' last words on the cross, especially when they are so fraught with meaning?

Acts 20:35. Since this saying of Jesus is not found in any of the four Gospels, the broad view would lead us to consider this saying to be highly suspect in terms of authenticity. We would probably conclude that this was an interpretive paraphrase of something Jesus said. We might write a creative journal article giving likely examples of phrases in the Synoptics from which Paul created this saying.

All of the reported words of Jesus to Saul recorded in Acts. This should be a ripe field of study as well. After all, there is no confirmation of any of these sayings. Each saying could be examined in an effort to determine what Jesus actually said, and how Luke has altered the words.

What about the expression *the outer darkness* in Matthew? Since this expression is only found in Matthew, and since it isn't found even in parallel passages (e.g., Matt 25:30 versus Luke 19:26), shouldn't we conclude that Matthew added this expression for some reason?

John 6:21. If the words of Jesus are not necessarily historically accurate, then His actions may be historically inaccurate as well. Only in John do we learn that "immediately the boat was at the land where they were going." If this indeed occurred, and it sounds hard to believe (unless one believes in miracles), why didn't at least one of the other three Gospel writers include it? A broad view makes it likely that this is another example of inspired fiction.

Matthew 14:28-31. Only in Matthew do we learn of Peter himself walking on water. Shouldn't we question whether this actually occurred? If this incident were authentic, then wouldn't the other Gospel writers have reported it, as well as Peter himself in his preaching in Acts and in his epistles?

A broad view logically leads to a questioning of the literal raising of Lazarus from the dead. Is it not hard to explain why the Synoptic writers would not record this miracle if it actually occurred? After all, John indicates that the Jews were actually plotting to kill Lazarus because this was such a powerful sign. Surely this must be a creation of John to prepare the way for Jesus' resurrection. It is John's way of expressing his faith in Christ. In fact, we should probably wonder

whether Lazarus really existed, for none of the other Gospel writers even mention him.

There is practically no limit to the number of passages whose authenticity might be suspect. Just think of the many potential journal articles that could be written to garner attention as cutting-edge NT scholarship. The possibilities are endless. We've only barely begun in this regard. As long as we say we don't deny inerrancy, very few things would be outside of consideration.

Osborne's article clearly puts those with a narrow view on notice that *they* are being divisive, reactionary, and closed-minded. *They* are the ones who are out of step. This would seem to be a demand for freedom to come to any conclusion as to historicity as long as one affirms his belief in inspiration and inerrancy.

IV. CONCLUSION

The idea that the New Testament contains historical inaccuracies and yet is God-breathed and without error is ludicrous. No one would accept this claim if it were evaluated logically. Liberal scholars must laugh at this deception. Many conservative scholars are not laughing, but see it for what it is, a denial of the authority of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit would never allow what Farnell calls "inspired deception" (*The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship*, p. 212). God would never confuse the reader as to speaker, location, audience, wording, etc. If God were capable of getting it right, then why didn't He? It is God's integrity that is at stake.

The broad view of *ipsissima vox* contradicts the ETS doctrinal position. However, many modern theologians view doctrinal statements as living breathing documents whose meaning changes depending on the majority position. Thus in their view it no longer matters what the framers of the ETS doctrinal statement meant.

I hope that ETS takes a stand on this issue one way or another. This issue directly impinges on the *raison d'être* of ETS. The two views are clearly not the same.

In reading Osborne's article in *JETS*, Thomas's rejoinder, and Osborne's surrejoinder, it is apparent that these men recognize that

their theological positions are not only different; they are incompatible. Neither is going to find the other receptive to his view. Neither is going to welcome the other view being taught in his classroom, his church, or his school. I agree with them. These views are fundamentally incompatible.

Recently I visited with a college professor who is a graduate of a conservative Bible college and a liberal seminary. He was once a vibrant Evangelical. Now he doesn't believe in inspiration and inerrancy, the deity of Christ, life after death, etc. In discussing with him this issue of *ipsissima vox*, he stated that "Higher criticism is going to destroy evangelical seminaries." I responded, "I believe it already has."

HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE TO CHRIST, PART 2:

OUR INVITATION TO RESPOND

ZANE C. HODGES

Dallas, Texas

In my previous article I discussed getting the core of our message to men clearly in mind. Our objective is to lead them to believe in Christ to provide their eternal salvation. The gospel message about His death, burial, and resurrection is the normal context for our presentation of this core objective. But at the end of the day, anyone who trusts Christ for eternal life is born again.

In this article I will discuss the process of seeking a response of faith from those with whom we share our good news.

I. BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS

In recent years I have become aware of a way of presenting the gospel invitation that troubles me. I believe I have heard it from my earliest years, and I admit it didn't really bother me for a long time. Now it does.

I have heard people say this: "In order to be saved you must believe that Jesus died on the cross." In the context of our present discussion, I mean that this is their summary of the requirement of faith. It is not just one item, among others, to be believed. Whenever I hear that nowadays, I get extremely uncomfortable.

For one thing, is there anyone anywhere in a Christian church (unless it is radically liberal) who *doesn't* believe that Jesus died on the cross? For that matter, even some really liberal theologians would consider that a true statement, although they might balk at the doctrine of the resurrection. You see why I am uncomfortable, I hope.

Now I know that the statement I am evaluating leaves a lot of things unspoken that are still implied by the speaker. Most of the time people who say you are saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross

mean that He died for our sins. Indeed the phrase “for your sins” is often added. But even with that addition, there is still unspoken material that the person usually has in mind.

They usually mean to say, for example, that this belief in Christ’s death is all that is necessary for salvation. Thus they are normally proclaiming salvation by faith alone. Also unspoken, but usually implied, is the idea that Christ’s work on the cross is sufficient to provide for our salvation. Thus they mean to say that we are trusting in the sufficiency of His work of atonement.

Let me be honest. I don’t like this way of presenting a gospel invitation.

But before I go further, I also want to say that I believe that this kind of presentation has been used by God to the actual salvation of souls. But that doesn’t make it the best way of reaching people or making the truth plain to them.

LET US ALWAYS
POINT MEN TO
CHRIST HIMSELF
AS THE OBJECT
OF FAITH.

The very first disadvantage of this kind of invitation to faith is that it cannot be found in the Bible. Just think for a minute of John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 16:31, and so on, and not a one of these verses invites us to get saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross. Why is it that we like to verbalize our message in ways that the Bible does not do? What is wrong with biblical language?

The associated question is this: what is wrong with *our language*? The simple fact of the matter is that the statement I am criticizing is technically incorrect. People are not saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross; they are saved by believing in Jesus for eternal life, or eternal salvation.

If we say it the biblical way, we will be able to support our claim by direct biblical statements. But suppose a person I am witnessing to says, “Where does the Bible say we are saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross?” What am I going to do then? In that case I would be compelled to take him to a number of Scriptures and try to combine them to prove my point. But even then, I would not really have a statement from the Word of God that exactly verified the point I was making.

I would like to see grace people abandon this form of invitation to faith. Let us always point men to Christ Himself as the object of faith, rather than to some concept that must be theologically clarified before it can really be understood.

II. DOING THE TWO-STEP

Here is another technique that bothers me. Many good grace people employ what I would call a two-step approach to faith. First they invite people to believe the basic facts of the gospel, and then they ask them to appropriate this truth for themselves. In describing this second step, they often prefer the word *trust* to the word *believe*.

I happen to think that people who take this approach to evangelism are sometimes running scared. They do not want to be accused of making faith mere intellectual assent. Thus they try hard to make clear that just believing the facts doesn't save us. According to them appropriating those facts for ourselves—that is, trusting Christ for our own salvation—is the crucial issue.

This approach to things opens the door for the famous illustrations about the chair, or the elevator, or something similar. Here is an elevator, they would say. Do you believe it can carry you up to the top story of the building? If the answer is yes, the next question is: what do you need to do now to get to the top story? The answer is supposed to be “trust” the elevator by getting onto it.

In the distant past I used to use such illustrations myself. I confess this fact with real embarrassment. Illustrations of this type do show considerable creativity. But I am afraid that the creativity here is badly misused. What is created is another idea that is absent from the Bible.

Where in the New Testament do we find any such presentation as this? Sorry, my friends, it just isn't there. And if you read part 1 of this article, you will know one of the reasons why it is not there.

You see, as we noted previously, the facts surrounding the gospel message—such as the death and resurrection of Christ—are important facts for what they tell us about the reasons for trusting Christ. But believing these facts doesn't save anyone. People are only saved when they believe that Jesus gives them eternal life the moment they believe in Him for that.

Let's return for a moment to that deserted island in the Pacific Ocean that I invented in my previous article. My hypothetical unsaved

man has just read the words of Jesus in John 6:47, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has eternal life." All this person needs to do is to believe that statement and eternal life is his. There is no two-step process here at all.

The issues involved in eternal salvation are significantly muddled by the two-step approach I am discussing. The two-step approach seems to imply that two acts of faith are essential to one's salvation. The first of these is belief in the facts, the second is an act of personal trust. So this approach ignores the instrumental value of the facts of the gospel in bringing men to faith in Christ, and it tends to elevate them to the level of a preliminary condition which must also be followed by a second step, namely, trust.

Notice how the approaches I have objected to so far tend to blur the necessary focus on the Person of Christ as the object of faith. In the case of "believe that Jesus died on the cross" the focus is on an action He performed (admittedly an indispensable one). In the two-step scenario we approach Christ first by believing certain facts about Him. The simple truth is that Jesus can be believed for eternal salvation apart from any detailed knowledge of what He did to provide it.

In other words, the sufficiency of Christ is the true focus of the faith that brings salvation. I am contending here that until we have that concept clearly in mind, we will be vulnerable to making appeals to faith that tend to cloud the issues rather than clarify them. If anybody in the world should be able to present a crystal clear gospel message and a clear appeal to faith, it ought to be grace people like ourselves.

But in a lot of cases we are not doing nearly as good a job as we should.

III. ASK JESUS INTO YOUR HEART

I am not going to say much about the famous invitational phrase, "Invite Jesus into your heart." I suspect that most *JOTGES* readers would not be tempted to use this phrase in leading people to Christ.

It has often been pointed out that this phrase is not biblical and this fact is reason enough to leave it alone. Of course, we could also note that a person who used it could have a Lordship message in mind. He could mean that we are to invite the Lord in to take charge of our lives.

However, we should remember also that people have gotten saved this way too. If they are being told to believe in Christ for eternal life

and are told that when Jesus comes in, He gives it to us, they are being told the truth. When I believe in Christ, He does come in and He Himself *is* eternal life (1 John 5:20). Thus as 1 John 5:12 says: "He who has the Son has life."

But even after saying that, the unbiblical character of the phrase, "Invite Jesus into your heart," is too heavy a burden to bear. Our own terminology is never better than the Bible's. Never! And if we think so, we are kidding ourselves. And probably also confusing people.

IV. COMMIT YOURSELF TO CHRIST

Even less needs to be said about the phrase, "Commit yourself to Christ," and its many variant forms. Such a phrase *could mean* entrust your eternal destiny to Him. But it could mean a lot of other things too, including surrender of the life in the Lordship Salvation sense.

What's the point of employing phrases that are not only unbiblical but liable to misrepresentation and misunderstanding?

V. WHAT ABOUT "TRUST CHRIST"?

I know that many grace people like to invite the unsaved to "trust Christ" for eternal life. I really don't have a strong objection to this phrase and occasionally use it myself when I want to offer a synonym for belief. But I never use it as my exclusive, or even pre-eminent, term for the faith that brings salvation.

However, I do resist the idea that is sometimes advanced that *trust* is a better term than the word *belief*. Of course, *trust* is often a synonym for faith in English usage. But often the English word *trust* has a diminished force that becomes equivalent to, "I just have to hope he will do it." In that kind of statement, the speaker is expressing a significant degree of uncertainty. This is not what we mean by faith.

I may even use the word *trust* of someone I don't really trust. I may say, "Jim asked me for twenty dollars to pay off a bill and I was afraid he might use the money on something else. But I said to myself, 'Maybe he does want to pay a bill.' So I gave him the twenty and decided that I would just have to trust him to do what he said. I hope he will."

Presumably all of us recognize that this use of trust is perfectly acceptable and fairly common. Of course, the word *believe* can be used that way, too. I may say, "I believe he will come," when I am not really certain that he will. Usually when we use the word this way, we signal our doubt by a tonal inflection: I *believe* he will come. But it does seem to me, at least, that the word *trust* more easily expresses some lack of certainty, as when I say, "I trust he will come." I think an element of doubt is indicated just by using the word *trust* in this kind of statement.

However, uncertainty is far from being the normal implication of the word *trust*. In *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2nd college edition) in the discussion of trust in relation to synonyms like "*faith, confidence, reliance, dependence*," the statement is made that all "these nouns reflect a feeling that a person or thing will not fail in performance. *Trust* implies depth and assurance of such feeling, which may not always be supported by proof" (p. 1300). So the note of complete confidence normally belongs to the word *trust*, just as it does also to *faith* or the verb *believe*.

The fact remains, however, that no English translation that I am aware of has opted to use *trust* as a replacement word for *believe* in any significant number of contexts. It just so happens that *believe* works better where the text is specifying the *content* of belief. For example, in 1 John 5:1, we get, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." It would sound strange in English to say, "Whoever trusts that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." The English word *believe* has the distinct advantage of working well in almost all the salvation verses. Thus the word *trust* is only helpful if we are looking for a synonym to assist the unsaved person to understand what it means to believe.

But since our English Bibles use the word *believe* consistently and constantly, I think we are better off using the word people find in their Bibles. *To trust* may be a synonym for *to believe* but there are no real grounds for preferring it when we do evangelism. If for some reason or other we are afraid of the word *believe*, we ought to re-examine our fear and get past it.

And, as I have already said, the use of *trust* to express the second part of a two-step process of believing, has no foundation in Scripture. I would certainly urge that we firmly reject any alleged distinction between *believing* and *trusting*, which is thought to favor the word

trust over the word *believe*. That would amount to a misuse of one or both of these words.

VI. INVITING PEOPLE TO BELIEVE

So now let's talk about leading a person to faith in Christ. In my discussion to this point, I have largely been clearing away brushwood. I have been trying to point out some of the mistakes that are made in inviting people to believe. Now let's consider this from the positive standpoint.

Let's suppose I have been talking to "Ralph," an unsaved young man. I have given him the gospel about the death and resurrection of Christ. I have emphasized the point that the Lord Jesus, by His death on the cross, has completely satisfied God in regard to Ralph's sins. Christ has paid for all the sins Ralph would ever commit from the day of his birth to the day of his death. Thus Jesus has purchased Ralph's way to heaven.

The one thing Ralph needs now is eternal life. People who don't have this go to hell according to Rev 20:15. Without new birth we are unable to enter the kingdom of God despite Jesus' death for our sins (John 3:3). And the alternative to eternal life is to perish (John 3:16).

However, I tell Ralph, eternal life is available on one condition alone, and that condition is faith in Jesus. I now turn to verses like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; and especially John 6:35-40. I spend time on each of these verses, but I particularly want to focus on John 6:35-40. Let me now give my presentation to Ralph in the first person. I speak as follows:

"Ralph, notice how Jesus stresses the fact that believing in Him has permanent results. In verse 35 He insists that the person who comes to Him for the bread of life will never get hungry for that bread again. And the person who believes in Him for the water of life will never get thirsty for it again.

"Let me put it to you this way, Ralph. If a person could lose the bread or water of life after coming to Christ for it, he would be hungry or thirsty again. But notice! Jesus says that can't happen.

"He says the same thing in a different way in verse 37. There He says that if a person comes to Him, He will never throw him out.

"Look also at verses 38-39. Here Jesus says that He came down from heaven to do His Father's will and that His Father's will is that

Jesus should lose none of those that the Father has given Him and that He should raise them all up on the last day.

“And then notice how He repeats this idea in verse 40. Everyone who believes in Him gets eternal life and will be raised up at the last day.

“Notice, Ralph, that our resurrection at the last day depends on Jesus doing God’s will. If I believe in Jesus for eternal life, I get it and He does the rest. He does God’s will, so He will never throw me out. He will raise me up at the last day. I will never again hunger for the bread of life. And I will never thirst for the water of life. Do you think you understand this, Ralph?”

Hopefully, Ralph says that he does. If he says he doesn’t, I will ask him, “What seems to still puzzle you, Ralph?”

At this point, experience suggests that I will often get a question like this: “Do you mean that if I believe in Jesus for eternal life, that I can go out and do anything I want and still go to heaven?”

I am always pleased to hear this question, because it signals to me that the person is getting the idea that this is a gift and that it is not withdrawn if we behave badly.

My usual way of responding to the question is that being born again is like being born into a family. After that, we are always members of that family, even if we are scoundrels. But if we have good parents, they are not going to let us run wild. They will discipline and correct us and do their best to get us on the right path. Then I point out that, after we get eternal life, God is our heavenly Father and He is the best Parent we could imagine. He will not let us run wild. He will spank us, if need be, and may even take our physical lives away. But Jesus will never cast us out of God’s family.

So far as my own experience goes, I have never had anybody not find this an adequate answer. It seems to clear things up for people, while still maintaining the truth of a passage like John 6:35-40.

So if I have successfully answered Ralph’s questions, and he tells me he understands what I have been saying to him, I can get to the bottom line. Here is one approach that I feel comfortable about:

“Okay, Ralph. You say it’s all clear to you. And maybe as we talked, you not only understood Jesus’ promise, but you also believed it. If you have believed, then you now have eternal life. Do you remember how we went over John 5:24? Well if you have heard Jesus’ word and believed it, that verse says you have eternal life and that you

will never come into judgment before God to decide your eternal destiny. You have already passed from death to life."

At this point, of course, I can ask him if he *does* believe. If he says yes, I can also ask, "Then do you know for sure that you have eternal life and will be with the Lord Jesus forever?"

If he also responds affirmatively to this, and gives me no reason to doubt his veracity, I can and should regard him as saved. If, in fact, he does believe the things we have discussed from God's Word, then on the authority of God's Word he most certainly *is* saved.

Notice please! I have not asked him to pray, or to make a decision for Christ, or to do any of the many other things people often ask the unsaved to do.

All I have done is to ask if he has understood the truth we have discussed, and I have asked if he believes it. I absolutely insist that this is all the personal worker needs to do. I am encouraging the unsaved person to believe, but I can't make him do that.

PEOPLE ARE
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If he does believe, a prayer is unnecessary. If he doesn't, a prayer will be confusing since I may direct him to say things he can't yet understand or believe, because God has not yet opened his heart.

I should know about this problem. You see, when I was a little boy, I went forward in a meeting and said a prayer before I really understood what I was doing. Actually I was saved years later. But that prayer confused me, because I spent years wondering if I got saved when I prayed it. The pastor even thought I had because he came to visit my mother and told her so. But I wasn't sure at all.

I now realize that no one is saved by praying a prayer. They are saved when they understand God's offer of eternal life through Jesus and believe it. That's when people are saved. And that's the *only* time when people are saved. All of the excess baggage that we bring into our encounter with unsaved sinners is just that, excess baggage!

In this brief make-believe encounter with Ralph, I tried to give him something to believe about Jesus Christ. I wanted him to realize that you could believe Jesus' promises about eternal life and that when you did, you were saved forever.

That's all I basically wanted. Everything I might have included in my presentation leading up to the issue of faith was designed to prepare the way for that faith. I work on the conviction that if a person understands God's provision for salvation through the cross of Christ, it will be easier for him or her to believe in Jesus for eternal life.

But the bottom line is this: I want people to know that the moment they believe in Christ for this free gift, they are saved and saved forever.

Let me add one final word. I find this a most liberating approach to evangelism. I have done my part if I have presented the message clearly. But faith in the heart is the work of God's Spirit and not a function of my technique or of my evangelistic dynamism.

The simple Word of God responded to in simple faith: that's what leading people to Christ is all about.

“BUT IF IT YIELDS THORNS AND THISTLES”:

AN EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS 5:11–6:12

J. PAUL TANNER

Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies
The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary
Amman, Jordan

Chapter six of Hebrews, particularly vv 4-6, remains a classic interpretative challenge as well as a theological battleground concerning the issues of eternal security, perseverance, and assurance of salvation. Great evangelical stalwarts have parted company at this juncture. On the one hand, we find no less a scholar than I. Howard Marshall insisting that genuine Christians are being described but concluding that they may be “lost through deliberate apostasy.”¹ On the other hand, F. F. Bruce, equally an evangelical champion of the faith, contends (in the Reformed tradition) that the subjects in view were never Christians at all. Rather, Bruce argues, the author “is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints.”²

Begging to differ with both these positions are those of the “free grace” camp who see this passage addressed to true Christians who—though not in danger of losing their salvation—are nevertheless in danger of judgment from God and eventual loss of rewards. The following exposition of Heb 5:11–6:12, written from this latter perspective, not only best accounts for the details of the passage (I believe) but underscores the urgency for all Christians to grow in spiritual maturity.

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Kept By the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* (London: Epworth, 1969), 145.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 144.

I. HEBREWS SIX IN RELATION TO THE AUTHOR'S ARGUMENT

Chapters 1–7 of Hebrews form the first major movement within the book. In these chapters, the author of Hebrews argues his case for the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant by virtue of the superior Person on which it has been founded, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1:5–2:8, he demonstrated the superiority of Jesus to the angels, and explained why it was necessary for Jesus to temporarily be “a little lower than the angels.” This was a significant point, for angels were instruments of God used in bringing the revelation of the Old Covenant (2:2). Jesus’ superiority to them implies that the revelation of the New Covenant through Him is superior to the former revelation of God given in the Old Covenant—and hence ought to be carefully heeded (1:1–2; 2:1).

In 3:1–5:10, he pointed out the superiority of Jesus to Moses and suggested that Jesus is guiding His people to a greater “rest” than did Joshua under the Old Covenant. This material likewise supports his case. Moses was the primary human agent by whom God brought the Old Covenant and by whom the earthly tabernacle was established. Though Joshua led the people of the Old Covenant to their “rest” in the land of Canaan and granted them an earthly inheritance, Jesus leads His people to a yet greater rest. This greater rest is not the mere land of Canaan, but the Messianic kingdom where faithful believers are to enjoy their eternal rest and inheritance.³ To be successful in this pilgrimage that results in an eternal *eschatological* salvation, however, New Covenant believers will need the help of a high priest (namely, Jesus).

³ The *kingdom theme* was introduced as early as chapter one, especially vv 8–9 where the Son’s kingdom is explicitly mentioned. This suggests that the Son’s appointment in 1:2 as “heir of all things” (an allusion to the Messianic promise of Ps 2:8 for God’s king designate) will find its fulfillment in this new world order. This, then, is “the world to come” that our author mentions in 2:5, and which he refers to directly in 12:28 as “a kingdom which cannot be shaken.”

The matter of Messiah being both king and priest was no doubt a more difficult matter to comprehend for those steeped in Old Covenant thought. In 5:5-6, however, the author demonstrated that the Old Covenant revelation anticipated that the Messiah would not only be a king but also a high priest (so Psalm 110). Hence, there is a legitimate basis for Jesus to be regarded as a high priest.

Beginning in 5:11, then, he initiates a third case for the superiority of the New Covenant by arguing for the superiority of Christ's priestly ministry to that of the Levitical priestly ministry. The author senses, however, that this will be a much more difficult task, given the spiritual condition of his readers. They will need to be able to comprehend deeper spiritual truth, if they are to bear with him. They will need to be able to understand the Melchizedekian priesthood and its relationship to the Old Covenant priesthood based on Aaron and the tribe of Levi. The following diagram clarifies the author's flow of thought in chapters 1-7:

FIRST MAJOR MOVEMENT OF THE BOOK (Heb 1:1-7:28)

MAJOR THESIS: The New Covenant is superior to the Old, because of the superior Person upon which it is based.

Heb 1:1-2:18

The Son is superior to the angels who mediated the Old Covenant revelation

Heb 3:1-5:10

The Son is superior to Moses through whom the Old Covenant came, and has a superior task to Joshua in leading us to God's "rest"

Heb 5:11-7:28

The Son (as High Priest) has a superior ministry to those of the Levitical priestly ministry

Though the main force of this argument regarding the comparison of priesthoods will be given in 7:1-28, the preceding material in 5:11-6:20 is meant to help prepare them for this presentation. The author must first address their immaturity and declining spiritual state, which he views as quite a serious matter. Not only will their immaturity hinder them from comprehending the truth he wants to present; but continued

persistence in their condition could result in their “falling away” (6:6). That situation would not only invite God’s judgment upon them (6:7-8), but would result in their forfeiture of the promises to be inherited.

II. THE STATEMENT OF THEIR SPIRITUAL PROBLEM (5:11-14)

This section presumes that there is a correlation between spiritual maturity and one’s ability to understand spiritual truth. As one progresses toward spiritual adulthood, he should grow in his ability to comprehend spiritual truth. Yet, in the spiritual realm, one’s ability to comprehend does not necessarily increase with the passing of time. How one has responded to truth along the way determines one’s present capability to understand and whether or not he ever gets past the spiritual ABC’s.

The proper response, of course, is one of faith and obedience... applying the Word to one’s life and thus becoming a “doer” of the Word... becoming more Christlike in character and being drawn into a deeper experience of worshiping God. Before God gives us more spiritual light, we must first respond to the light He has already given us! This is one of the fundamental principles of the Christian life.

A. THE READERS ARE “DULL OF HEARING” (5:11)

The problem with the readers of Hebrews, however, is that they had not responded properly to the spiritual light they had received. Consequently, they had failed to grow and develop—and thus remained in spiritual infancy. This makes explaining Christ’s priestly ministry difficult, for they are “dull” (*nōthroi*) of hearing. The word *nōthros* basically means *slow* or *sluggish*.⁴ They are *sluggish hearers*, meaning that they do not hear well when it comes to comprehending spiritual truth. Lane remarks,

⁴ We do have three occurrences of *nōthros* in the LXX (Pr 22:29; Sir 4:29; 11:12). The idea of “sluggish” is seen, for example, in Sir 4:29 (=Ecclesiasticus) where it is contrasted with the idea of “hasty:” “Be not hasty in thy tongue, and in thy deeds slack (*nōthros*) and remiss.”

Deafness or dullness in receptivity is a dangerous condition for those who have been called to radical obedience. The importance of responsible listening has been stressed repeatedly in the sermon (2:1,...; 3:7b-8a, 15; 4:1-2, 7b).⁵

The adjective *nōthros* is important to our evaluation of this whole unit, since it occurs only one other time in the New Testament and that is in Heb 6:12. What we have, then, is an *inclusio* with *nōthros* marking the beginning and ending points of the subunit.

5:11 "you are *dull/sluggish* of hearing"

6:12 "that you might not be *sluggish* (*nōthroi*), but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises"

Within this *inclusio*, the author will confront them about their immaturity, exhort them to mature, warn them about failure to do so, and finally encourage them that he has high hopes for them—even that they might "inherit the promises."

B. THE READERS CANNOT PARTAKE OF "SOLID FOOD" (5:12)

The problem was not that the readers had not had time to mature and progress to a point of greater spiritual understanding. In fact, had they made appropriate progress, they even could have (and should have!) been teachers by this time. With the comment "you have need again," the word *again* (*palin*) was a reminder that someone had already indeed taught them the basics of Christianity, the "elementary principles of the oracles of God." The word for *principles* (NASB) or *truths* (NIV) is the word *stoicheion* which means *fundamental principles* or what we might call the ABC's. The term was used of the letters of the alphabet as they might be learned by a school child. The author likens these *basic truths* of the faith to "milk" in contrast to "solid food."

Just as a baby has to drink milk until it develops to a point of being able to digest solid foods, so it is in the spiritual realm as well. Not all

⁵ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991), 1:136.

truth is at the same level, and not all truth is digestible by all Christians. Only those who have worked their way through the “milk stage” are ready for deeper spiritual truth. Yet, the author is not going to correct their problem by trying to relay the foundational truths. Rather, he will issue a serious warning to them, and then seek to exhort and motivate them to obey.

C. SPIRITUAL MATURITY INVOLVES THE CAPACITY TO DISCRIMINATE, BUT ONE MUST BE TRAINED FOR THIS (5:13-14)

There is nothing wrong with *being* an *infant* (*nēpios*), but there is plenty wrong with *remaining* an infant. One should make progress beyond *spiritual infancy*. If one never feeds on anything other than the “milk” (the first basics), he will be *inexperienced* (*apeiros*) in the “word of righteousness.”⁶ The expression *word of righteousness* (*lougou dikaiousunēs*) has been variously interpreted.⁷ The NIV’s “teaching about righteousness” reflects their classification as an *objective genitive*,

⁶ The word *apeiros* is a *hapax* in the NT (only used once), although it is used four times in the LXX (Num 14:23; Wis 13:18; Zech 11:15; Jer 2:6). It is used in Num 14:23, for example, to speak of an “inexperienced youth” and in Zech 11:15 to speak of an “unskilled shepherd.” The word basically means to be inexperienced in something, and thus lacking the appropriate skill for such an endeavor. In Jer 2:6, it speaks of the wilderness as an “untried land,” i.e., no one had passed through it before.

⁷ Lane (1:138) interprets the phrase in a more restricted way as meaning the “paramount lesson in holiness” and connects it with endurance that has martyrdom in sight. He states,

“It may be preferable, therefore, to take account of a technical use of the formulation in the early second century that clearly links the phrase with martyrdom. In calling for unceasing perseverance in Christian hope, Polycarp appeals to Christ Jesus and says, ‘He endured everything. Therefore, let us become imitators of his patient endurance and glorify him whenever we suffer for the sake of his name. I, therefore, exhort you to obey the word of righteousness (*peitharchein tō logō tēs dikaiousunēs*) and practice patient endurance to the limit—an endurance of which you have had an object lesson not only in those blessed persons Ignatius, Zosimus, and Rufus, but also in members of your own community as well as in Paul himself and the other apostles’ (*Phil.* 8, 1B9.1). J. A. Kleist comments on the expression *tō logō tēs*

though Ellingworth prefers a *genitive of quality*, meaning "righteous Word."⁸ Consideration could also be given to a *genitive of purpose*, in which the phrase could be translated "the Word for righteousness." In this case, the author would have in mind the intended outcome that growing in the Word should provide. Such an understanding would have a natural connection with chapter twelve, where "training" that comes by way of God's discipline enables believers to share in God's holiness and righteousness [note especially Heb 12:11 in which *dikaïosunē* is used again with *gumnazō*].

THE SOLID
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Whether an objective genitive is preferred or genitive of purpose, the author's point is that "spiritual infants" are untrained and inexperienced in this facet of the Christian life. Such righteousness does not come easily, but only as one moves beyond spiritual infancy (the "milk" stage) and begins to walk by faith and endures through the God-given *training sessions* designed to produce righteousness and holiness in one's life. Retreating in the Christian life will certainly not help one attain these goals.

The solid food of God's Word, however, is for those who are mature. In the case of the mature, their *senses* (*aisthētēria*) have been

dikaïosunēs: 'Polycarp now shows that the great and paramount lesson in holiness which a Christian has received is to hold himself in readiness for martyrdom' (ACW 1:193, n. 65)."

Although Lane's interpretation would fit in with the larger concerns of the epistle, it is too dependent on a 2nd century use and not clearly attested in the immediate context.

⁸ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 307. In support of the NIV, note the use of *logos* in Heb 6:1 which follows: "The elementary *logos* (teaching) about the Messiah."

trained for distinguishing between good and evil.⁹ One who would desire the “solid food” of God’s Word must realize that he cannot gain it apart from the process of maturing...a process that will require difficult training. The idea of stressful “training” is suggested by the word *gumnazō* (from which we get our English word gymnasium), meaning to exercise or train. But this maturing process is worth the price one pays, for in this way he comes to distinguish good and evil. This thought sets the stage for the author’s exhortation in 6:1 in which he urges them to move on to maturity.

III. THE CALL TO MATURITY (6:1-3)

A. THE READERS MUST CHOOSE THE GOAL OF MATURING (6:1a)

Having confronted the readers of their woeful state of immaturity—that they are *sluggish hearers* who lack the capability to comprehend “solid food”—the author calls upon them to press on to maturity. The word *Therefore* (*Dio*) initiating v 1 underscores the connection to the preceding paragraph and suggests that pressing on to maturity is the only logical inference to make. Lane notes,

In this context spiritual maturity implies receptivity and responsiveness to the received tradition (5:14), an earnest concern for the full realization of hope (6:11), unwavering faith and steadfast endurance (6:12).¹⁰

The very fact that the author exhorts them to “press on” clarifies that there is still hope and opportunity for them. But this is the decisive moment in which they must choose which way they are going to go [note that he is not suggesting a continued diet of “milk” for them]. Any appeals they may have received to leave the faith and abandon their confession of Jesus as Messiah (note 3:6, 14; 4:14) must be rejected in preference to the goal of maturing.

⁹ “Senses” means the inner part of man where moral reasoning takes place (4 Macc 2:22; cf. Jer 4:19).

¹⁰ Lane, 1:140.

B. THE REMEDY IS NOT TO BE FOUND IN LAYING AGAIN THE FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS (6:1b-2)

The author is not suggesting that the foundational truths they had learned about Messiah must now be discarded, as though they were unimportant. Rather, he is suggesting that these should not be re-laid. His readers must put their efforts into moving beyond these basic teachings that they already know.

There is debate as to whether the teachings mentioned in these verses pertain to Jewish or Christian matters of faith. Lane points out that the latter option has been questioned

on the ground that in none of the six items mentioned in 6:1-2 is there any reference to anything specifically Christian (e.g., Adams, *NTS* 13 [1966-67] 379-84; Weeks, *WTJ* 39 [1976] 74-76). Each of the articles, however, is related to the high priestly Christology developed in the subsequent chapters, which makes explicit the christological structure of the foundation.¹¹

The correct interpretation is probably not an either/or matter (i.e., that the teachings were either totally Jewish or totally Christian). Given the Jewish background of the readers, their faith in the Lord Jesus and participation in the New Covenant called for a radical reassessment of their previous understanding of spiritual matters. In other words, their Jewish worldview needed to be recast and given new understanding in light of the New Covenant Jesus Christ inaugurated.

The mention of "dead works" in v 1 does not pertain to human works of the flesh in general, but more specifically to the external regulations of the Levitical cultus. This is confirmed by the use of the phrase "dead works" in Heb 9:14, in which the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice is said to do so much more than Levitical sacrifices ever could. The "dead works," then, represent the efforts connected with the earthly sanctuary system to secure cleansing and acceptance before God. Now that the Messiah had come and made a perfect sacrifice (one that did not merely provide *external cleansing* but even made possible the cleansing of the conscience), those Jewish believers who turned to Christ repented of (changed their mind about) the Levitical

¹¹ Ibid.

approach to God and adjusted their theology to place their faith completely in the Lord Jesus as the sure and final atonement for their sins.

Other teachings had to be adjusted in light of Messiah's coming as well. The four items remaining in v 2 are all grammatically related to the word *instruction* which in turn is related to *foundation* in v 1:

Not laying again a foundation

- (1) of repentance from dead works and faith toward God
- (2) of instruction about:

ritual washings
laying on of hands
resurrection of the dead
eternal judgment

The word *washings* (*baptismōn*) probably does not refer to Christian baptism but to Levitical washings connected with the cultus (note the use of *baptisma* in the plural in Heb 9:10). The "laying on" of hands was commonly practiced under the Old Covenant. This was associated with sacrifices (e.g., Lev 4:15 [by elders]; 8:14 [by priests]; and 16:21 [by the high priest on the Day of Atonement]). Also, hands were laid on the Levites when consecrating them to ministry (Num 8:10). Lane states,

The discrimination between useless washings on the one hand and purification by the blood of Christ on the other (9:9-10, 19; 10:22), or between priests appointed by the imposition of hands according to the law, which in its weakness could not achieve the perfection of the people of God, and the high priest appointed by the oath of God and the power of an indestructible life (5:1-6; 7:5, 15-28) demonstrates the relationship between the foundational teaching and the advanced instruction provided in 7:1-10:18.¹²

Whatever understanding they previously had about resurrection and eternal judgment now had to be corrected in light of Messiah's coming. There was certainly a resurrection: since He had been resurrected, so they would be also. Furthermore, the Father had entrusted

¹² Lane, 1:140.

all judgment into His hands (John 5:22). For believers, they must be prepared for giving an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10), while unbelievers will face condemnation to hell at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11).

Yet these foundational matters had already been dealt with in days past. There was no need to cover this ground again, but rather to "press on."

C. THERE IS A DANGER THAT THE READERS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO PRESS ON (6:3)

With the mention of the eschatological issue of "eternal judgment," the author suddenly stops his enumeration of what he considers "elementary teaching." The thought of judgment is a sober reminder of the potential danger his readers face. If their present situation is not corrected, they may be in store for a negative judgment experience. Furthermore, God Himself may not permit them to "press on to maturity." The phrase *if God permits* in 6:3 raises a note of alarm. While there is still the possibility of "pressing on," they must be made aware that they are dangerously close to complete spiritual disaster. Hence, in 6:4-6 the author will now confront them with the situation whereby God might *cut off* the opportunity, thus leaving them to face the severe judgment of God.

IV. THE DANGER OF "FALLING AWAY" (6:4-8)

The compounding problem of their immaturity and "dullness of hearing" (5:11) could be alleviated if the readers were to "press on to maturity" (6:1). Though they desperately need to go on to maturity, the author sets forth the reality that *in some cases* that may not be possible. Hence, in 6:4-6 he describes a situation in which true regenerate Christians may commit an offense so serious that God may not permit them to move on to maturity. This offense is described in 6:6 as "falling away." There is nothing in the passage that explicitly states they will lose their salvation for this, anymore than the sin of the wilderness generation meant loss of salvation for them, and certainly the author still has this Old Covenant failure in mind that he had brought to their attention in chapter three. Continuing the analogy, however, they may face temporal judgment and loss of their inheritance (as was true for the wilderness generation according to Psalm 95).

As serious as such a sin may be, the author is not actually charging his readers as guilty of this, i.e., he is not saying that any of them had gone to this extent yet. Three observations confirm this: (1) he offers the possibility of “pressing on” in 6:1; (2) he makes a subtle shift from the first person in 6:1-3 to a less direct way by use of the third person in 6:4-6, and (3) he reaffirms his confidence in them in 6:9. Nevertheless, he recognizes that they are on a perilous path, and they need to quickly gain their senses and realize the seriousness of what is at stake. If they do not shake out of their spiritual lethargy, they may very well end up as one of those described in Heb 6:4-8.

A. THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE OFFENDERS (6:4-5)

Verses 4-6 must be seen as one complete unit of thought. In the Greek text, the emphatic word *impossible* (*Adunton*), is placed up front in v 4, while the complement *to restore again to repentance* does not come until v 6. In between, we have a series of five participles describing those who cannot be renewed to repentance. The first four are positive statements of their Christian experience, while the last (“have fallen away”) in v 6 is negative.

Significantly, all five participles are governed by the one definite article *tous* in v 4 which serves to unite them. As a result, these are not two different situations, but a single situation in which the one who “falls away” is the very one who had been enlightened, etc.

Lane is undoubtedly correct when he states, “Together, the clauses describe vividly the reality of the experience of personal salvation enjoyed by the Christians addressed.”¹³ This is true for at least three basic reasons: (1) the author had expressed statements of concern about his readers in earlier portions of the epistle (e.g., Heb 3:12) while yet referring to them as “brethren;” (2) what he has to say about them in 6:4-6 cannot be divorced from what he has said about them at the beginning of this literary unit in 5:11-14, namely, that they are spiritual babes who have not matured; and (3) the terminology in 6:4-5 is most naturally descriptive of Christian experience, not of unbelievers.

To claim that they have merely professed to believe (in response to pre-salvation enlightenment) while yet remaining unregenerate is to force one’s theology on the text rather than allowing the text to speak

¹³ Lane, 1:141.

for itself. Randall Gleason is right on target when he points out that this passage must be understood in light of its Old Testament background.¹⁴ In particular, the author is still making allusions to the event that occurred at Kadesh-barnea:

Most important to this study is the writer's use in chapters 3-4 of the Exodus generation at Kadesh-barnea (Ps 95:7b-11) as a type of the Christian community to which he was writing. In each case the Old Testament record of God's dealings in earlier redemptive history is used to bring understanding to the present situation of his readers.¹⁵

Gleason substantiates this claim by pointing out numerous instances to the author's use of the pilgrimage motif following chapter six.¹⁶ The fateful decision of the wilderness generation at Kadesh-barnea is the Old Testament counterpart to a decision by those under the New Covenant who would rebel and "fall away" from God.

The author's first statement about his readers in this verse is that they had been "enlightened" (*phōtisthentas*). The author uses this term one other time in Heb 10:32 where he says, "after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings." The context deals with their sufferings for the faith, a situation which would surely point to their regenerate state, for it is hardly imaginable that they (especially being first century Jews) would suffer persecution had they not truly come to know the Savior.

Secondly, he points out that they had "tasted" (*geusamenous*) the heavenly gift. Some have tried to argue that they had only "tasted" but had not fully partaken of, and hence were only *professing Christians*. The Greek verb *geuomai*, however, does not restrict itself to such a

¹⁴ Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (Jan-Mar 1998). According to Gleason, the Old Testament is cited at least 38 times in Hebrews, and Longenecker has identified at least 55 additional allusions to the OT (Richard Longenecker, "Hebrews and the Old Testament," in *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975], 166-70).

¹⁵ Gleason, 66.

¹⁶ See especially pp. 72-75 in Gleason.

limited meaning. Furthermore, the author has already used the same verb in Heb 2:9 in reference to Christ having “tasted death for everyone.” We would have quite a theological dilemma on our hands if Christ merely tasted death for us but did not fully undergo it. The Scripture is quite clear, however, that He fully experienced death for our sins.

As Ellingworth has noted, the author is using the word to mean “eat,” not merely taste, and hence figuratively to “experience (to the full).”¹⁷ Possibly, by the phrase *tasted the heavenly gift*, the author has in mind that they had partaken of God’s free gift of eternal life in Christ (cf. John 4:10; Rom 6:23). As the wilderness generation ate of the heavenly provision of manna, so these New Covenant believers had eaten the greater heavenly manna—the “bread of life” (John 6:33).

Thirdly, he states that his readers had been made “partakers of” or “partners with” the Holy Spirit. The word *partakers/participants* is the Greek word *metochous*, a word that was used earlier in 3:1 of the “holy brethren” who were participants in a heavenly calling and in 3:14 of those who had become partners with Christ by holding fast their confidence.¹⁸ In Heb 6:4, the readers are “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” because they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. The Holy Spirit was God’s “pledge” (or earnest payment) until the day of redemption when they would receive their resurrected bodies (Eph 1:13-14; Rom 8:23).

Fourthly, he says in 6:5 that they had “tasted (*geusamenous*) the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come.” The word *tasted* is the same Greek word as used in v 4, hence a true experiencing of. The Christian message had come to them accompanied by miraculous confirmations which they fully experienced (recall 2:3-4).

¹⁷ Ellingworth, 320.

¹⁸ The translation “shared in the Holy Spirit” given by the NIV (as though to suggest that the guilty ones had only participated in some of the Spirit’s ministry rather than having received the Holy Spirit Himself) is too weak in light of the use of the term in Heb 3:1 and would better be rendered “partakers of the Holy Spirit.”

B. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A RENEWED REPENTANCE (6:6)

The final participle of the series indicates that it is possible that one who had truly been enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift (i.e., a truly regenerate person) can "fall away" (*parapesontas*—from the verb *parapiptō*). Our understanding of this crucial term is handicapped by the fact that this is the only time this word is used in the New Testament. Nevertheless, we are not completely empty-handed, for the verb is used eight times in the LXX.¹⁹ It is used to translate several different Hebrew words (most often *mā'al*). Frequently, *parapiptō* has the meaning of "transgressing" against the LORD, though not in the sense of apostasy. In Ezek 20:27, for instance, the LXX reads "your fathers provoked me in their trespasses in which they transgressed (*parepeson*) against Me." In the preceding context, the main issues to their "transgressing" were the profaning of the Sabbath and turning to idolatry. From Moulton and Milligan, we find a few other examples from after the first century AD, including the following phrase: "if the terms of it (i.e., a contract) should be broken or it in any other way be rendered invalid."²⁰

A better clue of the author's intention, however, may be found in his use of the cognate form *piptō* (*fall*) earlier in the book. In Heb 4:11, he had warned the readers, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone *fall* (*pesē*—aorist subjunctive of *piptō*) through following the same example of disobedience" (cf. 3:17). In our author's thinking, one could "fall" rather than being diligent to enter God's rest. There is also a strong connection to his warning of "falling away from the living God" in Heb 3:12. In the case of Heb 3:12, the verb is *aphistēmi* rather than *parapiptō*, but the two verbs are still related. As mentioned above, most of the instances of *parapiptō* in the LXX translate the Hebrew verb *mā'al*, but the same Hebrew word is rendered by *aphistēmi* in another verse (namely, 2 Chron 26:18). Though the expression "falling away" in Heb 3:12 is not *lexically* related to our

¹⁹ For *parapiptō* in the LXX, see Est 6:10; Ezek 14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27; 22:4; Wisdom of Solomon 6:9; 12:2.

²⁰ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri I*, 9534 (AD 129), ed. B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, 1898; quoted in James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1930), 488-89.

verb *parapiptō*, *conceptually* it is. Lane concurs that it is “equivalent to the expression *apostēnai apo Theou zōntos*...in 3:12.”²¹

We can thus conclude that “falling away” in Heb 6:6 is to transgress against the Lord in a way that parallels what happened at Kadesh-barnea when the Hebrews rebelled against the Lord with a heart of unbelief, the end result of becoming hardened in heart against the Lord. More specifically, this would mean (in the context of what the author has stated thus far in the epistle) to not hold fast one’s confession of faith in Christ...the very thing he had exhorted them to do in Heb 4:14 (cf. 3:6). This is a major concern of the author, for he reasserts this in Heb 10:23.

Of course, any drastic falling away from the faith was unlikely to happen without some prior development. They must be equally concerned about the root cause. Already, there was a passive drifting away from the word of Christ (2:1), they were *sluggish hearers* who had not moved on to maturity (5:11-14), and some were already avoiding Christian fellowship (10:25). Such a situation, if not soon corrected, would only bring on more hardening of heart until (like the Hebrews that fell in the wilderness) it would be too late. That is to say, God’s judgment would fall...it would not be averted.

The author is telling them that there is a point beyond which it is impossible to restore them to a state of repentance. This would presume that their hearts would be gravely hardened. At this point (and only God knows when one has reached such a point), the guilty one does not recover to a repentant state, for this would be tantamount to recrucifying the Savior and a severe public humiliation of Him. Instead, the guilty one remains hardened against God and must face God’s judgment. However, we must be careful what we conclude as to the form this judgment will take (and when it will take place).

C. AN ILLUSTRATION OF TWO MAIN ALTERNATIVES (6:7-8)

1. Orientation. The author realizes that his audience could gravitate in one of two directions: they could either move on to maturity (6:1), or they could continue on the slippery slope that could ultimately lead them to “falling away” (6:6). Though in reality different ones among them were at different points of this spectrum, the author is primarily

²¹ Lane, 1:142.

concerned with the direction they are headed. One leads to God’s blessing, while the other may result in disaster. To help them see his concern, the author uses an illustration from agriculture involving the response of the ground to care that it receives.

To understand the illustration, we should carefully note two important observations: (1) it is not “two grounds” being described but two possible outcomes of the same ground, and (2) regardless of the outcome, the ground has received the rain and what it needs for growth. Regarding the first point, we should notice that the NIV has obscured this matter:

⁷**Land that drinks** in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸**But land that produces** thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

In the Greek text, the word *ground* (*gē*) occurs only once (namely, in v 7...not twice as the NIV implies). So the point is that the *same ground* can have two possible outcomes, and by analogy there can be two possible outcomes for any individual’s life.

The falling of the rain upon the ground probably speaks of God’s divine care and provision for the ground, i.e., God gives what is needed for growth. In this illustration, the ground should never be devoid of vegetation, because it is watered and sustained. This is what God does for the life of each believer. He waters and cares for him so that there will be fruitfulness. If fruitfulness does not result, it is not because God has not given His care and done His part.

2. Possible Interpretative Options. The illustration of vv 7-8 could be interpreted in one of three ways:

- 1) A contrast between a true believer and an unbeliever
- 2) A contrast between a faithful enduring Christian and an “apostate Christian” who loses his salvation
- 3) A contrast between a faithful believer who is fruitful and an unfaithful believer [but not involving loss of salvation]

The decision about which interpretation to choose should not be based upon one’s preconceived theology *as primary resort*, but first

and foremost upon the exegetical details of 6:7-8 and the general context.

In regard to context, nothing explicitly has been said about loss of salvation, and the details of 6:4-6 do not seem directed at unbelievers (not withstanding the fact that several commentators have opted for this suggestion). Context is more in favor of option three above, especially since mature and immature believers have been in view since 5:11.

3. *Exegetical Details of Heb 6:7-8.* Most of the concern is with v 8, so attention will primarily be given to this.

a. An allusion to Gen 3:17-18. The author of Hebrews is not simply making an illustration, but seems to word his illustration in such a way as to allude to Gen 3:17-18.

Hebrews 6:8 – *ekpherousa de akanthas kai tribolous adokimos kai kataras engus*

NASB	LXX
Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.	<i>epikataratos hē gē en tois ergois sou en lupais phagē autēn pasas tas hēmerastēs zōēs sou</i>
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you,	<i>akanthas kai tribolous anatelei soi</i>

Not only do we have the exact words for *thorns and thistles* (*akanthas kai tribolous*), but the noun *curse* (*kataras*) in Heb 6:8 has similarity to the adjective *Cursed* (*epikataratos*) in the LXX of Gen 3:17.²²

²² Note that Gal 3:10 closely links the adjective *epikataratos* with the noun *katara*.

In the context of Gen 3:17-18, the first man Adam received God’s *curse* for disobedience. This is reflected in the words “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground.” Hence, the allusion to Gen 3:17-18 (despite the fact that the order in Hebrews is inverted) brings to our mind the *temporal judgment* that fell on the first man’s disobedience.²³

b. Blessing-Curse motif. Given the Jewish nature of the audience, the words *blessing* and *curse* would no doubt have particular significance to them in light of their Old Testament orientation. These words were juxtaposed in Deuteronomy 28–30, in which *blessing* was promised for obedience and *curse* (i.e., discipline) was promised for disobedience. Notice the use of the same word *katara* in Deut 28:15, 45; 29:26; 30:1, 19. The word *curse* should not be taken as a technical term in Heb 6:8 for those who are unregenerate. From an Old Testament perspective, this designated God’s discipline on His own children who were disobedient.

c. “If it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless...” The Greek adjective for *worthless* (*adokimos*) is certainly not a technical term for unbelievers. According to the standard Greek lexicon, the word means “not standing the test” and [then] “unqualified, worthless.”²⁴ The particular nuance of the word, of course, depends on the context in which it is being used. In the LXX, *dokimazō* and its cognate terms were often used in relation to testing or examining metals (especially by fire) to determine the acceptability of their quality (e.g., Prov 8:10; 17:3; 25:4; Isa 1:22). If they did not meet the standard, they were considered unfit and hence disapproved. The apostle Paul could use the term in relation to himself, as he does in 1 Cor 9:27, “lest...I myself

²³ There may also be similarity to the *song of the vineyard* in Isaiah 5. In that passage, *akantha* is used 3 times (5:2, 4, 6). God’s discipline came upon it, because it did not produce good grapes.

²⁴ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. Revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 18.

should be disqualified.” In this case, his eternal salvation was not the concern. Possibly he thought about disqualification or disapproval.²⁵

David K. Lowery suggests that Paul was concerned that he might be disapproved by God and thus face the disciplinary action of God that could even cut short his life.

On the other hand, the preceding context (with its analogy of competition in the athletic games) might suggest that Paul was fearful of jeopardizing his eternal reward. Fee agrees that the athletic metaphor is still in view. He writes, “This has been the point of the metaphors from the beginning, that the Corinthians exercise self-control lest they fail to obtain the eschatological prize.”²⁶

The antonym to our term for *worthless* is *dokimos*, a word that emphasizes a *favorable evaluation*. In 2 Cor 10:18, for instance, it is used to indicate the approval of that Christian (but not every Christian!) who is commended by the Lord. Some Christians are “approved” and some are not (cf. 1 Cor 11:19). The Lord’s approval may stem from the way one handles the Word of God (2 Tim 2:15) or by the way one successfully endures divine trials in his life (Jas 1:12). Thus, the evaluation of the unfruitful ground of Heb 6:8 as being *adokimos* probably implies no more than the fact that the offender is considered unfit and has not gained God’s approval. He may be in store for God’s discipline and eventual loss of reward, but there is nothing from a study of *adokimos* or *dokimos* in the New Testament to establish that he loses his salvation.

d. “Whose end (is) for burning” (*ēs to telos eis kausin*). The “end” or outcome (*telos*) of the ground that yields thorns and thistles is burning. Is the author trying to suggest (by analogy) that the individuals that “fall away” (6:6) are destined for hell? If so, then those who are in danger are either (1) Christians who lose their salvation, or (2) professing Christians who in actuality were never regenerate.

²⁵ David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985). Note that chapter 11 immediately launches into a discussion about God’s discipline upon Israelites of old.

²⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 440.

The Greek noun for *burning* (*kausin*) is used only once in the New Testament [cf. The mention of fire as a judgment in Heb 10:27], but it occurs seven times in the LXX. In Isa 4:4, it is used of God's judgment and purging of the land (including Jerusalem) for the Millennium "by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning." In Dan 7:11, it is used of the destruction of the Antichrist who is "given to the burning fire." The latter is certainly *hell* (compare Rev 19:20), though the word itself does not have to mean this.

Basically, *fire* is often used in Scripture to speak of God's judgment or sometimes of purifying something or someone. Though *fire* can be used to speak of the ultimate judgment of the unregenerate in hell, *fire* is also used to speak of God's judgment in connection with regenerate Christians. The latter is clearly the case in 1 Cor 3:12-15 where Paul is concerned about the "works" of believers in regard to God's church:

¹²Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test **the quality of each man's work.**

¹⁴If any man's **work** which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's **work** is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

In the case of this passage, fire is used for revealing the *quality* of the believer's works. The purpose is for assessing whether or not these are *rewardable good works*, but the person's eternal destiny is not the issue.

Hence, the motifs of *fire* and *burning* can speak of judgment in regard to the unregenerate (i.e., hades/hell) as well as evaluation of the regenerate (i.e., examination of one's works for the purpose of giving rewards). In the case of the latter, works that are unsuitable for reward are burned up.

So we must ask if in the case of Heb 6:8, the author is using *fire* to speak of the ultimate destiny of individuals in hell for their rejection of Christ, or if he is concerned about their *works* (i.e., a worthless life without rewardable good works). Two things in the following context argue for the latter: (1) he mentions their *work* in Heb 6:10, and (2) rewards are in view in Heb 6:12 when he speaks of those who *inherit the promises* because of their faith and patience.

Based on these two contextual observations as well as the other matters mentioned in points a–c above, the danger of *fire* does not seem to be related to hell. This probably looks at the discipline and judgment that can come upon an unfaithful Christian's life who has not brought forth fruit (as he should) but rather a life of worthless works (thorns and thistles). Such a person stands in jeopardy of receiving the Lord's discipline in this life ("near curse") and will certainly see his works burned up when examined at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10 ff.; cf. 2 Cor 5:9-10). In contrast, the believer that is moving onward to "maturity" and walking in obedience to the Lord can expect to receive God's "blessing."

V. ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE FOR THE READERS (6:9-12)

Despite the rebuke for being "dull of hearing" as spiritual babes and despite the ominous warning given in 6:4-6, the author has better hopes for his readers. It may be possible for these wayward believers to "fall away," but the author apparently does not think they have gone to that extreme yet. So, his warning of the fatal consequences is balanced by an encouraging note and exhortation to faithfulness in vv 9-12.

A. AN AFFIRMATION OF HIS CONFIDENCE IN THE READERS (6:9)

In the previous illustration, the unsuitable vegetation was burned off the unfruitful ground. That should not be seen as the normative outcome of the Christian life, and the author is concerned of "better things" for them, i.e., things that "accompany salvation." Most likely, *salvation* (*sōtēria*) is being used in the same eschatological sense that it previously had in the book (cf. 1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9) and in which it will be used in regard to the Second Coming in 9:28. Earlier in the epistle, the author anticipated Christ becoming heir of all things (1:2) and of those who would "inherit salvation" (1:14). In chapter two, the author connects this concept of *inheriting salvation* with the regaining of God's plan for man exercising dominion. This is the time when man shall be crowned with glory and honor...in resurrected state ruling jointly with Christ. This is the glorious destiny of believers who are faithful to

Christ in this life (cf. Rev 2:26-27). These are the “better things” that the author has in mind for his readers. Faithfulness does bring a rich reward, both now and in the eschatological future.

B. THE REASON FOR HIS CONFIDENCE IN THEM (6:10)

The conjunction *For* (*Gar*) in v 10 signals the reason (illative use of *gar*) for his confidence in his readers. Apparently, the author had firsthand knowledge of this group of believers, and he knew that they had been faithful to the Lord in days past. Notice that his commendation is not in regard to their personal justification, but in regard to their faithfulness *as Christians*. Their faithfulness is evidenced by their *work* (*ergou*) and their love. Later in the book (10:32ff.), he commends their past faithfulness again. Since they had begun their Christian pilgrimage well, they must not turn from the pathway of faithfulness.

C. THE EXHORTATION TO REMAIN FAITHFUL (6:11-12)

They are to be diligent to have the “full assurance of hope” until the end. The word *diligence* translates the Greek *spoudē*, the cognate to the verb *spoudazō* in Heb 4:11 (“Let us be diligent to enter that rest”). The word means “diligence, earnestness, or eagerness.” They are to be diligent and eagerly making every effort to maintain a “full assurance of hope” until the end. The author has in mind the same concern as in 3:6—“if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end” (cf. 3:14; 10:23). He is concerned that *each one of them* (*hekaston humōn*) maintain their confession of Jesus as Messiah and be diligent to remain faithful to Him.

Not only must they be careful to hold fast their confession, but the author does not even want them to be *sluggish* (*nōthroi*). This is the same word he used to describe them in 5:11 when he charged them as being “dull of hearing” (*nōthroi tais akoais*). Unfortunately, the NIV obscures the connection by its translation “we do not want you to become lazy.”²⁷ Indeed, they are *sluggish* at the present moment, but they must not remain so.

²⁷ The verb *ginomai* can mean either “be” or “become.” Note that the NASB chose the translation “be,” which is better in light of the use of *nōthros* in 5:11. The NIV’s “become lazy” suggests they had not already entered into this state.

Alternatively, they can be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” *Inheriting the promises* is not automatic for any Christian, for this is based on the exercise of faith and patience. The idea of “inheriting” is found four times in Hebrews, namely 1:4; 1:14; 6:12; and 12:17. In the context of Hebrews, the *inheritance* in view is the “eschatological salvation” and full participation in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, entering God’s rest and ruling jointly with Christ. Disobedience and unbelief may jeopardize these future promises (cf. Heb 3:12, 19; 4:1, 3, 11), but faith and patience help to bring them about.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the preceding study, we have observed that the inclusion involving the word *nōthros* in 5:11 and 6:12 marks the true parameters of the immediate context. This is important, since it identifies the readers addressed in 5:11-14 as being the same as those in 6:4-8. In both cases they are true Christians, and this is confirmed by the descriptive participles in 6:4-5. Their need is to press on to maturity, but a “falling away”—i.e., a rebellion against God akin to what happened at Kadesh-barnea (as suggested by the lexical connections between *parapiptō* in 6:6 and *aphistēmi* in 3:12)—could eliminate that possibility for them. This would not mean a loss of eternal life, however, and we do well to observe that such an outcome is never clearly specified. In Heb 6:7-8, the author’s deliberate allusion to Gen 3:17-18 underscores that divine discipline would be in store for such rebels. Yet he quickly turns in 6:9 to encourage them that such negative warnings need not be their fate at all. Through faith and endurance, they can “inherit the promises” (which in the context of Hebrews amounts to rewards that await them in the Messianic kingdom).

Hebrews 5:11–6:12 is a good reminder to each of us that we should be pressing on to spiritual maturity, but this is not an automatic or guaranteed outcome for any Christian. One attains to maturity as he responds in faith and obedience to God’s Word, surrenders his life to the Savior, and endures in the pathway of discipleship. The price, of course, is high (death to self), but the reward is great...and the reward is for all eternity!

THE SALVATION OF BELIEVING ISRAELITES PRIOR TO THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

SIDNEY D. DYER

Associate Professor of Greek and New Testament
Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Greenville, South Carolina

Editor's note: The views of the author are not in all cases those of JOTGES. However there is much excellent and original material in this article. Dr. Dyer gives us much to think about.

I. INTRODUCTION

The title of Walter Kaiser's book *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* shows that there is a tendency to neglect the first three fourths of the Bible.¹ Kaiser's book appeared back in 1987. The propensity to give greater attention to the last fourth of the Bible is still with us today. A contributing factor is undoubtedly a misunderstanding concerning the salvation of believing Israelites prior to Christ coming in the flesh. Demonstrating the unity of salvation before and after the incarnation facilitates a better appreciation for and usefulness of the Old Testament.

There has always been only one way of salvation. Both covenant theologians and dispensationalists agree on this point. Both explain that throughout the history of mankind salvation has been by grace through faith. There is, of course, disagreement on specific points.² In this article I will argue that believers before the incarnation of Christ heard the same gospel, looked to the same Savior, were members of the same Church, and enjoyed the same blessings of salvation that believers do today.

¹Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987.

²See for example, Fred H. Klooster, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Continuity" and Allen P. Ross, "The Biblical Method of Salvation:

II. THEY HEARD THE SAME GOSPEL

The gospel existed before Jesus' birth. Revelation 14:6 contains the expression "the everlasting gospel." Some argue that the absence of the article in the Greek means that John is not referring to *the* gospel, but to *a* gospel. Paul, however, refers to the gospel without the article in Romans 1:1. Some have also argued that the content of the everlasting gospel is given in 14:7 where men are commanded to fear, give glory to, and worship God because the hour of His judgment has come. It would seem better, however, as Ladd does, to understand that the angel

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had the everlasting gospel of which the content of v 7 is a part.³ Two other texts support the idea that the gospel in Rev 14:6 is eternal in the fullest sense of the term. Revelation 13:8 presents Christ as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Revelation 17:8 speaks of those whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. This text, of course, implies that names were recorded in the Book of Life prior to creation. If the eternal gospel of Rev 14:6 is understood in its fullest

sense, then the Book of Revelation teaches that the gospel, the death of Christ, and the people of God are eternal concepts. Thus, the Provider, the people, and the proclamation of salvation existed in the mind of God before the foundation of the world.

After Adam and Eve fell, God placed them under a curse that left them and their descendants in a state of sin and misery. He also proclaimed the eternal gospel to them. In Gen 3:15 God says to the

A Case for Discontinuity" in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Fienberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 131-78.

³George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 193.

serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." This verse presents the essence of the gospel. It is a gospel proclamation of the coming Provider of salvation. The gospel was expanded further in the Abrahamic Covenant where the people of God's redemptive plan are restricted to the posterity of one man (Gen 17:1-8). In this covenant God makes several promises to Abraham. He promises Abraham a seed in Gen 22:18, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." Paul in Gal 3:16 explains that the seed in Gen 22:18 ultimately points to Christ, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." In Gen 17:8, God promises Abraham a land, which ultimately points to the new earth. For example, Rom 4:13 reads, "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." In Gen 17:7, God also promises Abraham a special relationship between Himself and Abraham's seed. This ultimately points to the inclusion of the Gentiles who are the spiritual seed of Abraham. In Gal 3:29, Paul explains to Gentile believers that "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Finally, God promises Abraham that his seed would exercise dominion over their enemies in Gen 22:17 where the LORD said to Abraham, "and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies." This promise ultimately points to the triumph of Christ's kingdom, "for He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor 15:25). The rest of Scripture is an unfolding of the Abrahamic Covenant, which is an unfolding of the gospel.

The gospel demonstrates an organic development in the Bible. Geerhardus Vos correctly describes the organic development of revelation in his *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*.⁴ When an acorn is planted in the soil, it contains an oak tree. The acorn sprouts, pushes through the soil, sends out branches and leaves, and continues to grow into a mighty tree. Throughout the growth process the oak is the same oak. In the same way, the gospel as it unfolds in the Scripture remains the same gospel. The author of the book of Hebrews explains in 4:2 that "the gospel was preached to us as well as to them." The

⁴Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948, 7-8.

“them” in this verse refers to the generation of Israelites who departed from Egypt with Moses. They heard the gospel. Believers today, of course, enjoy that same gospel with greater clarity, fullness, and glory (2 Cor 3:10-11).

It must be remembered, however, that the organic development of revelation refers to inscripturated revelation. Believers who lived before the incarnation undoubtedly possessed revelation that was transmitted orally. There is evidence in the New Testament that believers before the incarnation had a more comprehensive knowledge of the gospel than is indicated in the Old Testament. Take for example Jude’s statement about Enoch in vv 14 and 15 of his epistle. Here Jude quotes Enoch saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” Since Enoch knew about the second coming of Christ and prophesied concerning it, is it not logical to conclude that Enoch also knew about His first coming? Even though believers were not called Christians until they were given that name in Antioch, is it really an anachronism to say that the name appropriately belongs to Enoch? Consider also the statement made by the author of Hebrews in 11:26 where he states that Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” This statement shows that Moses possessed a fuller knowledge of the gospel than is indicated in the Pentateuch. Even though we do not know the exact content of the oral Bible used by the Israelites, we know that it was more comprehensive than is indicated in the Old Testament Scriptures.

III. THEY LOOKED TO THE SAME SAVIOR

In John 8:56, Jesus says to the Pharisees, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad.” Jesus was telling them that He was a contemporary of Abraham. They understood that this was what He was saying, so they ask Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham?”

His answer informs them that not only did He see Abraham, He existed before the patriarch. He says in v 55, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." But when did Abraham see Christ? Consider first, that in John 1:18 the apostle explains that "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." The One called God in this verse is God the Father. The First Person of the Trinity has remained unseen by men throughout history. Only the Second Person has been visible to men. Thus, the verses in Genesis that tell of the LORD's appearing to Abraham refer to the appearance of the Son of God (15:1; 17:1; 18:1). For example, in Gen 18:1, Moses specifically says that "the LORD appeared to him." Also, in Gen 15:1, Moses tells us that the LORD appeared to the patriarch in a vision. Thus, when Gen 15:6 declares that Abraham believed God and He counted it to him for righteousness, the object of Abraham's faith was undoubtedly the Son of God, the preincarnate Christ. Is it not appropriate therefore to say that Abraham was a Christian?

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The prophet Isaiah is another example of one who had faith in Christ before the incarnation. In Isa 6:1-8, the prophet saw a glorious vision of Jehovah and received his commission. According to the Apostle John, Isaiah actually saw the glory of Christ (John 12:37-41).

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology*, describes the Son of God as the "manifested Jehovah, who led his people under the Old Testament economy."⁵ This is a significant description of the Christ before His incarnation. If Christ truly is the manifested Jehovah of the Old Testament, it means that Christ is not merely seen in the Old Testament types, shadows, and prophecies, but also in the awesome

⁵Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977, I, 485.

acts of Jehovah. There are occurrences of the name Jehovah that must refer to God the Father. In Ps 110:1, for example, Jehovah speaks to the Messiah. Thus, Jehovah in this verse must refer to God the Father. Also, in Isa 61:1, it is said that Jehovah will anoint the Messiah. In Zech 2:10-11, one Jehovah is presented as sending another Jehovah. See also Ps 16:5-10 and Isa 48:13-16. These exceptions show that the name Jehovah does not exclusively refer to God the Son. But the Bible does demonstrate that the name Jehovah primarily refers to the Second Person of the Trinity and that it always refers to the Second Person when He is manifested to His people.

Peter declares in Acts 2:16-21 and 33 that Jesus, in fulfillment of Joel 2:27-28, poured out the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and Joel 2:27 declares that Jehovah said He would pour out His Spirit. John (John 1:3) and Paul (Col 1:16), declare Christ to be the Creator, and Moses (Exod 31:17), Isaiah (Isa 40:28), and Jonah (Jonah 1:9), declare Jehovah to be the Creator. John (John 12:39-40) declares that Isaiah saw Christ's glory and Isaiah (Isa 6:1-5) says that he saw Jehovah. John's statement that no one has seen God the Father (1:18, cf. 6:46) shows that the One who appeared as Jehovah to men in the Old Testament must have been the Second Person of the Trinity. Jehovah appeared to Abraham (Gen 18:1-2, 10, 13), Isaac (Gen 26:1-5), Jacob (Gen 28:10-15), Moses (Exod 3:2, 4, 16, 18-23), and other Old Testament saints. This Jehovah was Christ.

These examples are sufficient to show that believers before the birth of Christ were saved by believing in Him. It is commonly said that Old Testament saints were saved by looking forward to the cross and we today are saved by looking back to the cross. This is in part true. The emphasis in Scripture, however, is not that salvation is by faith in what would or did happen, but by faith in Christ. The saints who lived before Christ's incarnation are appropriately called Christians because they were saved by faith in Him, who was the manifested Jehovah of the Old Testament.

IV. THEY ARE MEMBERS OF THE SAME CHURCH

In Heb 3:1-3 the author teaches that Christ built the house of which Moses was a part:

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house.

The word "house" in the Old Testament means "family" and the building of a house refers to the founding of the family as is seen in Ruth 4:11. Thus, it was Christ, not Moses, who established the people of God under the Old Covenant. In v 6 the author says that we belong to the same house if we remain firm in our faith.

Paul describes the people of God as an olive tree in Rom 11:16-24. The unbelieving Jews are represented as domestic branches of the tree that were broken off because of unbelief. Gentile believers are represented as wild olive branches that have been grafted into the olive tree. Christ has only one olive tree, only one Church.

In Eph 2:12, Paul describes Gentile believers before their conversion as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." In v 13 he declares that they have now been brought near. In v 14 he refers to the middle wall around the temple and says that Christ has broken it down. Paul is using figurative language to teach the union of Gentile and Jewish believers. But notice that the middle wall was not broken down to let the Jews out, but to let the believing Gentiles in. The Apostle's point is that Gentile believers have been joined to Israel and her covenants. This shows once again that Christ has only one people, one believing remnant of Israel, one Church.⁶

⁶Editor's Note: While most *JOTGES* readers will not agree with this point, all would admit that there are common elements between Christians and believing Jews and Gentiles who died before the birth of the Church. All are

Paul refers to the Church as the Israel of God in Gal 6:16. Some argue that he only refers to Jewish believers within the Church. Paul, however, writes in Gal 3:28 that in Christ "There is neither Jew nor Greek." Therefore, it is inconceivable that Paul would have made a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers at the end of a book in which he had stressed the unity of believers in Christ.

V. THEY ENJOYED THE SAME BLESSINGS OF SALVATION

There are those who minimize and outrightly deny the regeneration of Old Testament saints. For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote:

With respect to regeneration, the Old Testament saints were evidently renewed; but as there is no definite doctrinal teaching relative to the extent and character of that renewal, no positive declaration can be made...If the first law of interpretation is to be observed—that which restricts every doctrinal truth to the exact body of Scripture which pertains to it—it cannot be determined that this spiritual renewal known to the Old Testament, whatever its character may have been, resulted in the impartation of the divine nature, in an actual sonship, a joint heirship with Christ, or a placing in the household and family of God.⁷

In this statement Chafer stops just short of actually denying that Old Testament saints were regenerated. Richard C. Trench was one who did deny the regeneration of Old Testament saints. According to him

Christian new birth was not till after Christ's birth, as men were not new-born, till Christ was born (John 1:12). As their regeneration did not go before, but only followed his generation;

part of God's coming kingdom. All believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The points the author is making in this article are not undercut by seeing a distinction between Israel and the Church.

⁷*Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), VI, 73.

so the word could not be used in this its highest, most mysterious sense, till that great mystery of the birth of the Son of God into our world had actually found place.⁸

An appropriate place to affirm that the Old Testament saints were indeed regenerated is in John 3 where Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about the need for being born again. When Nicodemus expresses ignorance concerning this doctrine, Jesus responds in v 10 by saying, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" Our Lord's rebuke shows that Nicodemus should have known what He meant by being born again. The implication is that the Old Testament Scriptures are sufficient for understanding this doctrine. Regeneration is the infusion of spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament does not mention regeneration explicitly, but it does refer to the reviving work of God within the believer. The initial reviving experienced by the Old Testament believers is regeneration. A significant text in the Pentateuch is Deut 30:6. In this text, Moses declares that the LORD would circumcise the heart of His people in order that they might love Him. Thus the text presents the need for the LORD's inward act of cleansing a man's heart in order for him to love God. There are numerous prayers in the Psalms for revival (Ps 85:6; 119:25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). The necessary implication is that revival in the soul of a believer assumes that an initial revival must have taken place. Another expression in the Old Testament used for regeneration is the law of God in or on the heart. In Jer 31:33, the LORD promised that He would put His laws in the minds of His people and write it on their hearts. In Isa 51:7, the LORD describes the faithful in Isaiah's day as those "in whose heart is My law."

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⁸*Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1880), 60.

The Old Testament does not explicitly teach that believers before Christ were regenerated. Their regeneration, however, is a necessary inference. It is an inference Nicodemus should have made, and Jesus rebuked him for not making it.

The Scriptures clearly teach that the Old Testament saints were justified. Paul argues in the book of Romans that men are justified by faith rather than works and he uses two examples from the Old Testament to prove his point: Abraham and David. In Rom 4:3, Paul quotes Gen 15:6 where it states that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Then in v 6 he quotes David from Ps 32:1-2 where he "describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works." Revelation 13:8 refers to Christ as the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. The death of Christ has always been the basis for the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, and the hope of heaven. Thus believing Israelites who lived prior to the incarnation enjoyed justification by faith even as believers do today.

It should be pointed out that the animal sacrifices offered under the Mosaic Covenant did not serve as a temporary basis for justification as some teach. O. Palmer Robertson, in his excellent book *The Christ of the Covenants*, states that "the constant renewal of sacrifices for sins under the old covenant gave clear indication of the fact that sin actually was not removed, but only was passed over."⁹ This statement contradicts Ps 103:12, which reads, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." The animal sacrifices were not like credit cards that were used to make temporary payment for sin until the actual payment was made. Abraham was justified without a sacrifice 430 years before the sacrificial system was instituted under Moses (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:17). When the author of Hebrews writes that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins," (10:4) he is referring to the forensic taking away of sins. He is not teaching that the animal sacrifices accomplished nothing. Otherwise he would be contradicting those statements in Leviticus, such as 4:20, which show that through the sacrifices atonement was made and forgiveness was granted. The animal sacrifices actually represent the same type of forgiveness expressed in 1 John

⁹Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980, 283.

1:9. This verse teaches that the condition for forgiveness is confession of sins. Leviticus 5:5 and 16:21 connect the confession of sin with the animal sacrifices.

The Bible teaches two types of forgiveness. One may be called judicial and the other paternal. Consider the table of comparison below. Judicial forgiveness expresses the relationship of the believer to God as Judge. Paternal forgiveness demonstrates the relationship of the believer to God as Father. Romans 3:24 and 1 John 1:7-9 show that both types are based on the sacrifice of Christ. The judicial type of forgiveness is not repeated, but the paternal is.

A COMPARISON OF THE TWO TYPES OF FORGIVENESS

Judicial Forgiveness	Paternal Forgiveness
Given by God as our Judge (Heb 12:23)	Given by God as our Father (Luke 11:2, 4)
Based on the sacrifice of Jesus (Rom 3:24)	Based on the sacrifice of Jesus (1 John 1:7-9)
Not repeated (Ps 103:12)	Repeated (1John 1:9-10)
Appropriated by faith (Gen 15:6; Rom 5:1)	Appropriated by confession (1 John 1:9)
Not achieved by animal sacrifices (Heb 10:4)	Achieved by animal sacrifices (Lev 5:5, 10; 16:21)
Brings us into fellowship with God (Rom 5:1-2)	Restores us to fellowship with God (1 John 1:3-9)
Keeps us from being separated from God in hell (Rev 20:11-15)	Keeps us from being separated from God on earth (Ps 66:18)
Related to justification (being declared righteous)	Related to sanctification (being made righteous)

Failure to recognize the existence of judicial and paternal forgiveness can result in serious error. If a person recognizes paternal forgiveness but fails to recognize judicial forgiveness, he may believe that if he dies with unconfessed sin he will go to hell. If a person recognizes judicial forgiveness but fails to recognize paternal forgiveness, he may believe that it does not matter how he lives because his sins have been judicially forgiven.

It is essential for believers to recognize both types of forgiveness to fully experience the benefits of the Christian life. A believer is not repeatedly granted forensic forgiveness, but he is repeatedly granted paternal forgiveness. Old Testament believers enjoyed both types of forgiveness, even as New Testament believers do.

Old Testament believers also enjoyed the blessing of sanctification. In the New Testament God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are presented as the sanctifiers of believers (John 17:17; Rom 15:16; Eph 5:26). There are several references in the Old Testament which speak of God as the sanctifier of His people. For example, in Lev 20:8 we read, "I am the LORD who sanctifies you." See also Exod 31:13, Lev 21:8, and Ezek 20:12. Thus sanctification is still another example of believers before and after the incarnation enjoying one of the same benefits of salvation.

The ultimate and final aspect of sanctification is glorification. When a believer dies his soul is transformed so that he is perfect in holiness. His body remains in the grave until Christ's return when it will be transformed into perfected humanity. Believers before the birth of Christ anticipated the glorification of both soul and body. In Ps 73:24 David addresses the LORD saying, "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." Daniel described the glory of the resurrection in his book. He wrote:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever (Dan 12:2-3).

Thus believers living before the incarnation enjoyed regeneration, justification (which is judicial forgiveness), paternal forgiveness, and sanctification, and they anticipated glorification even as those living after the incarnation did and do.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Bible teaches only one way of salvation. It is by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Believers before the birth of Christ heard the same gospel, looked to the same Savior, were members of the same Church, and enjoyed the same blessings of salvation as we who believe today. The more we recognize the unity of the salvation of Old Testament saints with our own, the more we will recognize the unity of the Scriptures and the usefulness of the Old Testament. Martin Luther said long ago, "It is the intention of all the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament to direct and drive us to the Old Testament, which they call the Holy Scriptures proper."¹⁰ Even though we acknowledge this, may we not treat the Bible as though it is a book in which three fourths of it is merely the introduction.

¹⁰*Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John N. Lenker (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), I, 31.

GRACE IN THE ARTS:

F. W. BOREHAM: ESSAYIST EXTRAORDINAIRE

JAMES TOWNSEND

Elgin, Illinois

I. INTRODUCTION

The name of Boreham only rhymes with the word *boredom*. At that point the similarity ceases. The popular preacher Warren Wiersbe said: "It amazes me that my favorite biographical handbook, *Who Was Who in Church History*, mentions Caesar Borgia...but contains not one line about Frank W. Boreham."¹ In 1975 Ruth Graham aspired to read "one of F. W. Boreham's books" that year, observing, "I have read all but two of his [forty-eight] books and read them for pure pleasure."² Alas, "there arose up a new [generation who]...knew not" F. W. Boreham, to borrow the wording of Exodus 1:8. In a preceding generation the moderator of the Church of Scotland could introduce Boreham as "the man whose name is on all our lips, whose books are on all our shelves and whose illustrations are in all our sermons."³ When the young Billy Graham went to Australia to hold a crusade, he personally visited F. W. Boreham in what was to become the year of his death (1959).

This is the first article to appear under this section of this journal on the art form used by an essayist. An essay has its own characteristic contouring and fundamental features, so there is no reason that an essayist should not appear in this journal section, just as previously articles have appeared on novelists and on an opera singer.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Walking With the Giants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 153.

² *Eternity* (January, 1975).

³ Wiersbe, *Walking With the Giants*, 153.

Actually the precise genre of F. W. Boreham's artistic medium is something of a hybrid. In a single verse the author of Hebrews called his written masterpiece a "word of exhortation" (which is the same expression in Greek as a sermon in Acts 13:15) and a "letter" (Heb 13:22). Therefore, I coined the term *homiletter* for describing the textual nature of the book of Hebrews. Similarly, what F. W. Boreham wrote was ordinarily not a sermon (especially for those drilled in the presentation of expository sermons from Scripture) and he might not even have labeled it a pure essay. However, his writings partook of the nature of a hybrid (like the book of Hebrews) in being sermonic essays, replete with insights for biblical preaching.

II. PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY

One afternoon when F. W. Boreham was still a baby, his nurse carried him along the trail of an English countryside when a gypsy caravan appeared. An old bent-over gypsy woman limped along. She hobbled over to where the baby was, and she said to the nurse, "Tell his mother to put a pen in his hand and he'll never want for a living!"⁴ The prophecy was eventually to be abundantly fulfilled, for the baby was destined as an adult to write more than forty volumes.

Boreham wrote, "Salvoes of artillery and peals of bells echoed across Europe on the morning of my birth" on March 3, 1871, because it marked the termination of the Franco-Prussian War.⁵ As a boy he once stood within a few feet of D. L. Moody as the evangelist preached to thousands outdoors in England, although it wasn't until Boreham was seventeen years old that he came to faith in Christ.

When he secured work as a young man in London, he frequently heard C. H. Spurgeon, Joseph Parker, and F. B. Meyer, whose Saturday afternoon Bible class became a regular treat for him. Boreham was once informed that he had been "the last student" C. H. Spurgeon had accepted into Spurgeon's College before the renowned preacher died.⁶

⁴F. W. Boreham, *My Pilgrimage: An Autobiography* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1950), 29.

⁵Ibid., 9.

⁶Ibid., 89.

Boreham fell in love shortly before he was commissioned upon his graduation by Charles Spurgeon's brother, Thomas, to become a rural pastor in New Zealand. During that first pastorate Boreham sent back to England (a trip of 13,000 miles) to retrieve his sweetheart in marriage. Boreham's thirty-four years in the pastorate were divided between Mosgiel (New Zealand), Hobart (Tasmania), and Armadale (a suburb of Melbourne, Australia). Boreham received an honorary doctorate from McMaster University in Canada, and he wrote over 2,500 editorials in 46 years.⁷

III. HOMILETICAL PEDAGOGY

Through his voluminous writing Boreham was a teacher of preachers. I would concur with the assessment of the eloquent preacher John Henry Jowett who penned: "I would advise you to read all the books of F. W. Boreham."⁸ What was it that constituted the chemical compounding of F. W. Boreham's mastery? It was the immensity of his subject combined with the imaginativeness of his style. A professor of homiletics could practically teach Homiletics 101 by using F. W. Boreham's written materials as a paradigm.

Boreham was immensely conscious of immensities. In a telling use of language he spoke of Christ's cross as "the climax of immensities, the center of infinities, the conflux of eternities."⁹ He communicated an infinite God with His unsurpassable love who sent an unxeroxable Savior with an unfathomable salvation. Through a mosaic of subjects Boreham conveyed the Subject of subjects.

Boreham once announced, "The world is full of sacramental things."¹⁰ It was precisely this panoramic perspective that made him a theological transmutationist. This is why he could say, "And now, let's overhaul the universe, talking [about] planets, politics, potatoes, or on

⁷ T. Howard Crago, *The Story of F. W. Boreham* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1961), 150.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁹ F. W. Boreham, *The Ivory Spires* (London: The Epworth Press, 1934), 157.

¹⁰ F. W. Boreham, *The Blue Flame* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), 247.

anything that comes to mind!"¹¹ This is why he has book titles such as *Boulevards of Paradise* or *A Casket of Cameos* or *The Luggage of Life* or *Wisps of Wildfire*. This is why he has chapter headings such as "Mad Dogs and Mosquitoes" or "A Philosophy of Pickles." Anything and everything was grist for his mental mill—and somehow it always (like a homing pigeon) headed instinctively higher toward those eternal immensities.

Poet John Dryden spoke of "the faculty of imagination...which, like a nimble spaniel...ranges through the field of memory."¹² Boreham's only filing card system was his memory (not recommended to us other mere mortals), and he filed away a welter of illustrative material from the thousands of books he read—with a fond penchant for biographies.

Boreham was imaginative in his descriptiveness. He spoke of "sleep, Death's own twin sister," embroidering passages such as John 11:11-13 or 1 Thess 4:13-15.¹³ A phrase such as "incarnate thunderstorm" will now invade any sermon when I preach about the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17).¹⁴

He described a seaside scene viewed at sunset by writing, "Every wave was a heaving billow of molten gold."¹⁵

Sometimes it is merely one of Boreham's flashing insights that stretches the reader's own imagination. For instance, in comparing the John the Baptist of the Old Testament (2 Kings 1:8) with the John the Baptist of the New Testament (Mark 1:6), Boreham noted that "they were alike in this—the birds fed the one [1 Kings 18:6] and the bees fed the other [Matthew 3:4]. For Elijah, God kept an *aviary*. For John,

¹¹ F. W. Boreham, *The Three Half-Moons* (London: The Epworth Press, 1929), 7.

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 105.

¹³ F. W. Boreham, *The Golden Milestone* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1914), 197.

¹⁴ F. W. Boreham, *Mushrooms on the Moor* (London: The Epworth Press, 1915), 90.

¹⁵ F. W. Boreham, *The Fiery Crags* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1928), 7.

he kept an *apiary*.”¹⁶ On another occasion Boreham remarked picturesquely: “[That Bible] text had done for my imprisoned mind what Noah did for the imprisoned dove.”¹⁷

Furthermore, Boreham’s books are irradiated with quotable quotes. In speaking about Calvary’s cross he gets (literally) colorful by writing: “Love ever marches to its triumphs by way of pitch-black Gethsemanes and blood-red Golgathas. The footmarks on the track along which Love has gone always show the print of the nails. The love-letters of the kingdom of heaven are all of them written in red.”¹⁸ Or, how’s the following quip to get you thinking? “A fool may easily mistake a mosquito in the telescope for a monster on the moon.”¹⁹ With all the succinctness and paradoxicality of a writer like G. K. Chesterton, Boreham observed: “The best of men are only men at best.”²⁰

Biblical preachers are always in need of forceful illustrations, and Boreham’s books are a storehouse of sparkling ones. Take the following one. A man was dying and he confronted the doctor with his terminal condition. Grasping at the doctor’s coat, he said (though apparently a believer), “I’m afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side.” At that moment the sound of scratching was heard on the other side of the door. It prompted the doctor to say as a Christian, “That dog has never been in this room before. He didn’t know what lay beyond that door because he’d never experienced it firsthand before. However, the dog was convinced of one thing: his master was on the other side of the door. Therefore, it could know with complete fearlessness that all would be okay on the other side of the door.”²¹ Such an illustration is modifiable to fit the needs of a doctrine of assurance when teaching demands it, such as in reference to John 14:2b-3.

¹⁶ F. W. Boreham, *A Witch’s Brewing* (London: The Epworth Press, 1932), 148.

¹⁷ F. W. Boreham, *Faces in the Fire* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1919), 238.

¹⁸ F. W. Boreham, *The Passing of John Broadbanks* (London: The Epworth Press, 1936), 36-37.

¹⁹ F. W. Boreham, *The Silver Shadow* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1918), 164.

²⁰ Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 37.

²¹ F. W. Boreham, *Shadows on the Wall* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1922), 115-16.

Here's another example which would work well with a broader passage, such as the hundreds of people's names found in 1 Chronicles 1-9 or the numerous names ensconced in Romans 16. A census-taker was working among New York tenements crowded with children. He inquired of one woman, "How many children do you have?" She started in, "There's Mary and Ella and Delia and Susie and Tommy..." And the "and's" kept on coming until the census-taker interrupted, "Just give me the number." To this remark the woman became incensed: "We ain't got to numbering 'em yet. We ain't run out of names!"²² Ah, yes. Aren't there a lot of names in some sections of Scripture? But each one is precious to his or her Creator.

While Boreham's book chapters are not normally expository sermons, they do provide extensive filing fodder for the Bible expositor and are a treasure house of homiletic helps. He produced over 100 biographical chapters (revolving around Bible texts) encompassed in five volumes.

IV. GENERAL THEOLOGY

In this section we will survey Boreham's random comments which relate to salient subjects in systematic theology. However, first a word about his general theological position and perspective before tackling specific subject-areas. Boreham could be described doctrinally as generally orthodox yet irenic in approach.

F. W. Boreham (borrowing from John Watson) declared: "There are certain matters...on which the preacher can be absolutely positive—the facts of revelation, of the deity of the Son of God, of sin, of redemption, and of the power of the Holy Ghost."²³ The only real particularity in that credo relates to the deity of Christ. Boreham tends to speak summarily of "the more sublime and more profound phases of my spiritual pilgrimage—sin, repentance, faith, forgiveness."²⁴

F. W. Boreham claimed that with reference to "adopting a theological phraseology" he considered himself "very much of an

²² Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 165-66.

²³ F. W. Boreham, *The Luggage of Life* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1918), 235.

²⁴ F. W. Boreham, *In Pastures Green* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1954), 32.

amateur.”²⁵ He once borrowed Dean Inge’s metaphor that “the philosopher and the theologian” are the examples of “spectacle makers.”²⁶ They are seeking to provide us with clear apertures for seeing God’s reality.

In his autobiography Boreham told about having a serious falling-out with another pastor. He regretted taking him to task over a social question in a newspaper controversy, which harmfully damaged the relationship of the two friends. They were eventually reconciled, yet out of that acrimonious contest Boreham crystallized his own determinative peace-pursuing perspective on many doctrinal debates.²⁷ Even though Boreham patched up the personal quarrel, it gave him a more irenic viewpoint where others might like to pin him down on various doctrinal stances.

With the preceding personal experience in mind, Boreham stated: “as a rule, a minister’s best work is not done by criticism, by attack, by negative methods.”²⁸ As a result Irving Benson would say, “With Fundamentalist, with High Church and Evangelical, with Roman Catholic and Protestant, [Boreham] had no discernible quarrel.”²⁹ Benson also characterized Boreham’s style: “He did not attack people, always maintaining that the best way of proving that a stick is crooked is to lay a straight one beside it.”³⁰

A. THE BIBLE

F. W. Boreham doesn’t use terms in print such as “inerrant,” “infallible,” “verbal plenary inspiration,” etc. He lived before such theological terminology proliferated and branded one’s place on the theological spectrum, as well as the fact that he tended to steer away from doctrinal controversy.

Boreham did quote favorably American poet James Russell Lowell who said: “I have observed that many who deny the inspiration of Scripture hasten to redress the balance by giving a reverent credit to

²⁵ Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 228.

²⁶ F. W. Boreham, *When Swans Fly High* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1931), 264.

²⁷ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 168-71.

²⁸ Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 259.

²⁹ F. W. Boreham, *The Last Milestone* (London: The Epworth Press, 1961), 8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

the revelations of inspired tables and campstools.”³¹ (The poet Lowell may be referring to people like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who were wrapped up in spiritualism and seances.) In another place Boreham wrote that “the Bible is essentially a revelation.”³²

In his forty-eight book legacy there is little hermeneutically that the average Protestant Evangelical could fault—with perhaps the exception that Boreham employs a much heavier dose of imagination than most prosaic commentators would. Consequently the few glaring misinterpretations mentioned here are to be understood as a rarity rather than as the rule.

On one occasion Boreham quoted Luke 21:5-6. From these words about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, he drew the strange deduction: “the Founder of the Church Himself looks forward to the day when there shall be no Church!”³³ Such a comment merits a slack-jawed comeback, such as “How did you get that out of that?” By “no Church” does he mean the whole Jewish religious system as it then operated? His explanation would seem to require considerably more explanation—or better explanation.

There is one other place in the whole gamut of his writings where Boreham might be taken to task for interpretive issues—when he announced: “The essence of Christianity is charity.”³⁴ Other than these few instances, F. W. Boreham’s treatment of Scripture would not raise many eyebrows in his handling of texts.

B. GOD

Throughout F. W. Boreham’s writings a traditional orthodox treatment of the Christian doctrine of God is manifest. “There is one God and one Mediator...Only one God! Only one Mediator!” Boreham declared, launching from 1 Tim 2:5.³⁵ Elsewhere he pondered: “If I am out of my depth in contemplating the triune character of my own personality, is it any wonder that I am baffled and bewildered by the

³¹ Boreham, *The Silver Shadow*, 233.

³² Boreham, *When the Swans Fly High*, 258.

³³ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁴ F. W. Boreham, *I Forgot to Say* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1939), 263.

³⁵ F. W. Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn* (London: The Epworth Press, 1933), 116.

thought of the Triune Personality of Almighty God?"³⁶ Although he wrote of "a certain reverent reticence in regard to the thought of the Trinity," he traced numerous mirrorings of threeness elsewhere throughout our universe, reflecting the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.³⁷ In another book he would write: "A conversion is the evidence of the mighty ministry of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost in the theater of the human soul. A conversion represents the enactment of the first chapter of Genesis all over again."³⁸

Pimentioned throughout his books are allusions to various attributes of God. If God "is God," then He is "absolutely infinite."³⁹ Furthermore, he reasons that "since He has fashioned me with a reverence for all good things, He must Himself be Absolute Perfection."⁴⁰ Elsewhere he speaks of such divine attributes as love, sovereignty, immaculate justice, supreme authority, wisdom, illimitable power, etc.⁴¹ While Boreham speaks of his youth in London under the influence of "an evangelical clergyman,"⁴² in other places he will speak about the non-necessity of fully understanding all doctrine.

C. CHRIST

Wherever F. W. Boreham spoke in print about the person of Christ, he spoke within the parameters of evangelical theology. He has no hesitation about declaring that "Jesus is God; He is the pronouncement of the unpronounceable Word!"⁴³ After he quotes John 1:14 in another book, he writes: "God is Jesus, and Jesus is God! 'The Word was made flesh.'"⁴⁴ (Of course, though Jesus is entirely divine, He is not all of the Godhead that there is, so to say, "God is Jesus" could be misleading.)

³⁶ F. W. Boreham, *Dreams at Sunset* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954), 117.

³⁷ F. W. Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing* (London, The Epworth Press, 1945), 14.

³⁸ Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 41.

³⁹ Boreham, *When the Swans Fly High*, 246.

⁴⁰ Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 270.

⁴¹ Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 208-209.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴³ Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 41.

⁴⁴ Boreham, *Faces in the Fire*, 270.

Elsewhere Boreham refers to “the transcendent Savior! He is obviously divine; does not one clearly perceive from the very outset the object of his coming...to redeem this prodigal planet?”⁴⁵ Boreham was committed to “the eternal deity of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Boreham implicitly treats Christ as Creator when he speaks of “the Son of God, and the hands that were nailed to the tree were creators of both nails and tree.”⁴⁷ In another spot he clarifies with illustrations: “The Son is as really of the same essence with the Father as the heaven is with the light; and He is as full and complete a representation of the Father as the impression is of the seal.”⁴⁸

Along with Christ’s perfect deity, Boreham subscribed to Christ’s full humanity. In his very first book he penned: “Christ is the Son of God and Son of Man.”⁴⁹ On the next page he coupled “His humanity [and] His deity.”⁵⁰ In another book Boreham averred: “The two greatest events in the history of this planet are the Incarnation and the Crucifixion.”⁵¹ In one conjunction (similar to Acts 20:28) Boreham exclaims wonderingly: “that Deity should die!”⁵² Referring to the atoning work of Christ in another place, Boreham quotes his mother’s “favorite hymn:”

“He saw how wicked man had been;
He knew that God must punish sin;
So, out of pity, Jesus said
He’d bear the punishment instead.”⁵³

⁴⁵ F. W. Boreham, *Ships of Pearl* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1935), 261.

⁴⁶ F. W. Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1926), 167.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁸ F. W. Boreham, *Arrows of Desire* (London: The Epworth Press, 1951), 117.

⁴⁹ F. W. Boreham, *The Whisper of God* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1902), 76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵¹ F. W. Boreham, *Rubble and Roseleaves* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1923), 234.

⁵² Boreham, *The Ivory Spires*, 38.

⁵³ Boreham, *A Witch’s Brewing*, 107.

D. EVOLUTION

There are other issues to which F. W. Boreham alludes where his precise theological stance is harder to pin down. It is this issue (evolution) in Boreham to which many evangelical Christians will take exception.

One of the characters interspersed throughout Boreham's books is a fellow minister named John Broadbanks. New Zealanders of that area knew of no such actual person or location specified in reference to a John Broadbanks.⁵⁴ As a result, it is presumed that "John Broadbanks" was a kind of alter ego for Boreham himself. In the books the neighboring John Broadbanks appears as Boreham's best friend for nearly twenty years, and one of Boreham's book titles is even *The Passing of John Broadbanks* (1936).

Even the name "Broadbanks" is suggestive of the capacious breadth to which Boreham stretched. Once Boreham wrote of this Broadbanks: "He could never be sure as to the part played by evolutionary processes in the creation of the world."⁵⁵ As we will see, the preceding statement apparently could be echoed in Boreham's writings. In one place Boreham raises the tantalizing questions: "Were the worlds created or evolved? Were the 'days' of Genesis literal days or vast geologic ages?...It is no good shelving the question, *What must I do to be saved?* In order to investigate the latest theory of evolution."⁵⁶

Oddly enough, in a sermon on John 3:16, Boreham asserted: "The greatest controversy of the nineteenth century—almost the only controversy that has any vital interest for our time—is the controversy between Darwin and Drummond."⁵⁷ Henry Drummond wrote a counter-reply to Darwin in *Ascent of Man*. "With most of Darwin's conclusions he cordially agreed."⁵⁸ Yet Drummond saw the struggle in nature not as a cruel process, but as driven by the intelligent motive of love. In other words, Boreham here depicts a conflict between atheistic evolution and theistic evolution, but he seems to offer no proposal for a stricter creationist viewpoint.

⁵⁴ Crago, *The Story of F. W. Boreham*, 175.

⁵⁵ Boreham, *The Ivory Spires*, 145.

⁵⁶ F. W. Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet's Hair* (London: The Epworth Press, 1926), 236.

⁵⁷ Boreham, *The Passing of John Broadbanks*, 35.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

In one context he seems to rule out creationism by writing: "Life is a slow process of evolution. We begin as monkeys; we develop as machines."⁵⁹ The alternation of the two metaphors (monkeys and machines) shows that he is speaking somewhat figuratively, yet the figure he uses has a different framework than the basic biblical one. By contrast, in a different setting Boreham could write: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth—and me! Especially me."⁶⁰ We might presume Boreham adopted a purely creationist stance if that were the only statement we had to go on.

On numerous occasions Boreham referred favorably to Charles Darwin. He refers to "my later teachers—Darwin and [Richard] Jeffries..."⁶¹ In another volume he spoke of "a true scientist, like Darwin" exhibiting "truthfulness."⁶² In *A Late Lark Singing* Boreham quoted the famed eight-line poem that concludes:

"Some call it Evolution
And others call it God."⁶³

In a fashion that no atheistic scientist could swallow, Boreham asserted that "the separate hemispheres [for instance, of geology and religion] are the perfect counterparts, and natural complements of each other."⁶⁴ His conclusion is "that the discrepancy [between science and Scripture]—if indeed, there be one—is not between the things themselves, but between the faulty interpretations of these things."⁶⁵ Most Christians could probably buy his conclusion even if they do not accept his premise.

Once Boreham spoke of reading a journal controversy over Evolution, in which he observed: "I was amazed at the assurance with which many tabulated and detailed the things that happened millions

⁵⁹ F. W. Boreham, *Wisps of Wildfire* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1924), 141.

⁶⁰ Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 183.

⁶¹ F. W. Boreham, *The Crystal Pointers* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1925), 164.

⁶² Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 85.

⁶³ Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing*, 137.

⁶⁴ Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 50.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

of years ago—Personally, I have to confess that I simply do not know.”⁶⁶ Admittedly Boreham was just talking about past English history when he wrote the following: “The pageant is so impressive that we feel instinctively that the magnificent procession is being marshaled, that the evolution is an ordered and prearranged scheme, that there is an intelligence, a will, a heart behind it all. We discover God.”⁶⁷ True, here he is discussing recent historical “evolution,” but one feels (by comparing numerous other contexts in his books) that he could equally use such terminology concerning scientific beginnings.

Apparently F. W. Boreham came closest to espousing a form of theistic evolution, as C. S. Lewis did, yet he is not reticent to say: “Man is very like his Maker...in Whose image he was made.”⁶⁸ We have devoted more space to this issue because it is one of the rare places where F. W. Boreham seems to have differed significantly from many evangelical Christians.

V. SPECIFIC SOTERIOLOGY

The *raison d'être* for this journal is to declare and defend the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Therefore, the bulk of this article will be devoted to an appraisal of F. W. Boreham's stance on soteriology in his nearly fifty books.

A. CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

“What if there were no Mediator, no Redeemer, no Savior?” Boreham asked.⁶⁹ In the hymn footnoted by note 53 Boreham implied that he believed that “God must punish sin” and Christ bore “the punishment [that we deserved] instead.” In one of his biographical essays Boreham referred to Andrew Bonar's observing that “Christ pleases the Father to the full, and...this is the ground of my acceptance.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Boreham, *When the Swans Fly High*, 17.

⁶⁷ Boreham, *The Three Half-Moons*, 189-90.

⁶⁸ F. W. Boreham, *The Nest of Spears* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1927), 33.

⁶⁹ Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 116.

⁷⁰ F. W. Boreham, *A Handful of Stars* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1922), 234.

While all that Boreham positively affirms in his scattered comments about the atonement would be deemed acceptable to the average Evangelical, he does declare more reticently: "I have no theory of the Atonement. I have neither the desire nor the ability to argue about it."⁷¹ Elsewhere he urges us to "tell a little child the story of the Cross; tell him of its unutterable love and anguish; tell him that Jesus died for him!"⁷² However, if you "relate to an adult the same awful facts,...he will ask for a theory of the Atonement!"⁷³

B. CONVERSION'S NECESSITY

F. W. Boreham acknowledged: "The human heart cries out for a personal Redeemer, and Nature cannot satisfy it."⁷⁴ Boreham wrote that a human must "kneel in contrition to the Lamb of God. For, with all his fervor for the *Ethical*, he is a sinful man, he needs a Savior."⁷⁵ He reiterated: "I am simply saying that there is nothing in the civilization of our cities that can save us apart from the gospel, and there is nothing in the beauty of the bush that can save us apart from the gospel. Jesus is the only hope."⁷⁶

C. REDEMPTION'S TRANSACTION

What happens at the point of the new birth? Boreham inquired: "How can I live the new life except by way of the new birth? How can I acquire...graces...except by becoming a new creation in Christ Jesus?"⁷⁷ Boreham also announced: "What is it to be saved? What must one do to be saved? The soul is saved when it is reunited with God. As soon as Christ enters the heart, bringing...divine grace, the new day has dawned."⁷⁸ Elsewhere he wrote that a Christian is one "who has received through Christ the pardon of sins and the gift of eternal life."⁷⁹

⁷¹ Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 96.

⁷² Boreham, *The Crystal Pointers*, 200.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 126.

⁷⁵ Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 29.

⁷⁶ Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 129-30.

⁷⁷ F. W. Boreham, *The Heavenly Octave* (London: The Epworth Press, 1935), 51-52.

⁷⁸ Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing*, 171.

⁷⁹ Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 209.

Twice in another book he indicates that this phenomenon means to be "born again."⁸⁰ In a picturesque multiple metaphor Boreham wrote of someone: "Jesus the Sun of Righteousness arose, and burst in meridian splendor on her benighted soul."⁸¹ As a result of this transactional theology, "the preacher unfolds...the wonders of the everlasting gospel. He speaks of the Father's love; he points to the Cross of Christ; he offers pardon and...peace."⁸²

Boreham can speak enthusiastically of "our gospel of free grace."⁸³ Elsewhere he exults: "Give me the gospel of the grace of God!"⁸⁴

D. FAITH'S ROLE

Boreham quotes approvingly Ruskin's claim that "the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has ever suffered has been the effort of man to earn rather than to receive...salvation."⁸⁵ In his very first published book Boreham tells of asking an 80-year-old man, "Will you not trust the Savior?"⁸⁶ Boreham relates from George MacDonald's book *Malcolm* how a schoolmaster meets with a dying marquis. The schoolmaster first tells him to keep the commandments, but the marquis says there's no time for that. To this the schoolmaster announces: "There is one commandment which includes all the rest!" And he quotes Acts 16:31.⁸⁷

In biographical fashion Boreham related the conversion story of John Fletcher who came into possession of John Wesley's *Journal*. In it Fletcher learned that "salvation lies, not in feeling, but in faith." Therefore, (Boreham quotes Romans 5:1): "Being justified *by faith* we have peace with God!"⁸⁸ In another work Boreham affirms that faith is

⁸⁰ F. W. Boreham, *The Prodigal* (London: The Epworth Press, 1941), 19.

⁸¹ F. W. Boreham, *A Casket of Cameos* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1924), 220.

⁸² Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 136.

⁸³ Boreham, *A Witch's Brewing*, 38.

⁸⁴ Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 28.

⁸⁵ Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches*, 30.

⁸⁶ Boreham, *The Whisper of God*, 98.

⁸⁷ F. W. Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1920), 11.

⁸⁸ Boreham, *A Witch's Brewing*, 140.

“the indispensable condition of salvation.”⁸⁹ He adds: “it depend[s] on my believing in Him.”⁹⁰ Boreham called 1 John 5:12 “the greatest of all ultimatums,” concluding that “everything depended upon my faith in the Savior.”⁹¹

Boreham quoted David Brainerd’s experience: “I was irritated because faith alone was the condition of salvation.”⁹² He also quoted a pastor’s wife passing on her deceased husband’s evangelistic message: “Now is the day of salvation! What a day of days this day will be if it is recorded in heaven...that, this day, your redeemed soul entered by simple faith into the kingdom of God!”⁹³

E. ROMAN CATHOLICISM

As we recall Boreham’s irenic perspective, we ask what position did he adopt toward Roman Catholicism? In handling Hudson Taylor’s biography, Boreham quotes James Proctor’s hymn (which Taylor had quoted):

“Cast your deadly doing down,
Down at Jesus’ feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete.”⁹⁴

Taylor also said: “The whole work [of salvation] was finished and the whole debit paid,” so “there is nothing for me to do but to fall down on my knees and accept the Savior” (in Taylor’s chapter entitled “The Finished Work of Christ”).⁹⁵ Since Boreham indicated that he held the normative Protestant position on the role of good works in relation to salvation, we are somewhat cued in as to what to expect in his treatment of Catholicism.

Although Boreham tended to be irenic, he was not without barbed critique at times on the Roman Catholic position. He quoted Macauley’s *History of England* which spoke of “a Church which pretends to

⁸⁹ Boreham, *The Passing of John Broadbanks*, 39.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 89.

⁹² Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet’s Hair*, 79.

⁹³ Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 183.

⁹⁴ Boreham, *A Handful of Stars*, 108.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

infallibility” and of those who end up “worship[ing] a wafer!”⁹⁶ Ironically, however, Boreham quotes John Henry Newman (Anglican-become-Catholic cardinal) who wrote: “I have never disguised... that... we do not look toward Rome as believing that its communion is infallible.”⁹⁷ This seems to be a smokescreen, for admittedly not all of Catholicism claims infallibility, but there is a doctrine of papal infallibility that has never been revoked by official Catholicism.

In another place Boreham tells the story of a Cuban warrior named Hatuey who was to be burned at the stake by his Spanish conquerors. These Catholics tell Hatuey that “only by kissing the crucifix could his soul find admission into heaven.” Hatuey asks if the souls of these white men threatening him will go to heaven. The priest replies, “Most assuredly.” Therefore, the pagan Hatuey returns: “I will not be a Christian; for I would not go to a place where I shall find men so cruel!”⁹⁸ While all religious people ought to deplore cruelty, church history is pocked with incidents of horror on the part of both Protestants and Catholics (for which apologies are in order). Therefore, one attached to the Bible feels that the real core issue to be critiqued hasn’t been dealt with by Boreham. We would come closer to a centered critique by asking: will being a white Roman Catholic, or exercising devotion toward the crucifix, gain one’s soul’s admission to heaven?

There is one story Boreham relates about Roman Catholicism that bears more directly on the core issue of concern. Boreham records James Harrington’s journal entry in 1865 (who says):

I have been much tempted of late to turn Roman Catholic, and nearly did so, but my faith has been shaken by reading Cardinal Manning’s Funeral Sermon for Cardinal Wiseman. He said that Cardinal Wiseman’s last words were: ‘Let me have all that the Church can do for me!’ I seemed to see at once that if the highest [Roman Catholic] ecclesiastic stood thus in need of external rites on his death-bed, the system must be rotten, and I gave up all idea of departing from our Protestant faith.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Boreham, *The Silver Shadow*, 97.

⁹⁷ Boreham, *Faces in the Fire*, 105.

⁹⁸ Boreham, *Wisps of Wildfire*, 121.

⁹⁹ Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, 175.

While the preceding paragraph offers some stern words of critique, Boreham's bent is more often to build bridges where they can be built. He refers to St. Patrick's conversion when (Patrick wrote): "the Lord opened my hard and unbelieving heart to a remembrance of my transgressions and led me to turn with my whole soul to my Redeemer."¹⁰⁰ As Boreham talked to a lapsed Catholic, he "told him of my debt to Francis of Assisi, to Santa Teresa, to Francis Xavier, to Bernard of Clairvaux."¹⁰¹ Then he quoted from a Frederick Faber hymn: "the pardon of sin is the crown of [God's] glory."¹⁰² Boreham narrates talking with Dennis, "a sincere and devout Catholic."¹⁰³

In another setting Boreham told of Lucy (a Catholic) whose mother had just died. "Where was she? Would they ever meet again? [Lucy wondered]. And, above all, was her mother happy? The sacraments of her church comforted her, but they gave her no solid satisfaction on this point."¹⁰⁴ Lucy went off to St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, Australia, and prayed to St. Teresa to give her a red rose to confirm her mother's heavenly blessedness. That afternoon Lucy's Protestant friend mailed her a red rose, so naturally she was joyous. Boreham concluded: "Was it purely a coincidence? Who shall say?"¹⁰⁵ From a biblical standpoint one feels sad that anyone's hope of assurance of heaven should rest upon a sentimental coincidence rather than upon the solid ground of biblical truth.

On the other hand, believing that one is doctrinally correct need not make one unloving. Boreham told of a Protestant who was bemoaning the fact that her son was marrying a lovely girl who was a barmaid and a Catholic. The Protestants were cutting her off and refusing to attend their wedding, yet the charming girl magnanimously treated the Protestant parents (ironically) *with grace!*¹⁰⁶ When Protestants are so worried about correctness that they are discourteous to other religious

¹⁰⁰ F. W. Boreham, *A Temple of Topaz* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1928), 192.

¹⁰¹ Boreham, *The Nest of Spears*, 153.

¹⁰² Ibid., 143.

¹⁰³ Boreham, *A Witch's Brewing*, 43.

¹⁰⁴ Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 102.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁶ Boreham, *A Witch's Brewing*, 127-33.

people, they only confirm in such people the notion that the non-Protestants are right (for, after all, "if those Protestants are right, wouldn't you know it by the way they act?"). Rightness never need be accompanied by rudeness. On this point Boreham had much to teach a lot of Protestants.

F. REPENTANCE'S RELATIONSHIP

How many conditions are there to salvation? Like many Protestant preachers, F. W. Boreham didn't always speak with an absolutely ironclad consistency on this question. Under point D in this section we saw that he often did refer to salvation by grace alone through faith alone. However, like many Bible students, at other times he seemed to include repentance as a condition.

Boreham climaxed one chapter with two ten-letter terms: redemption and repentance. To explain repentance, he quoted a John Newton hymn about having a guilty conscience over "my sins." This brings about "tearful contrition," so that an awareness of Christ's crucifixion "leads me to throw myself upon my knees in tearful contrition and to yield myself to him for ever."¹⁰⁷ In speaking about the rich man in hell in Luke 16, Boreham noted: "Repentance suddenly became the supreme desideratum."¹⁰⁸

Boreham narrated a story by Michael Fairless about a poor dying man. A neighboring church minister visited and "spoke to him at some length of the need for repentance and the joys of heaven."¹⁰⁹ In a biographical sermon on Thomas Chalmers, Boreham says Chalmers "urged his people with tears to repent, to believe and to enter life everlasting."¹¹⁰ Yet in *The Prodigal* a young minister asks Beatrice Haly, "Do you think that a deathbed repentance atones for a whole life of evil?" To this question Beatrice wisely answers "No, but Calvary does!"¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 134-35.

¹⁰⁸ F. W. Boreham, *Cliffs of Opal* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), 139.

¹⁰⁹ Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 214.

¹¹⁰ Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, 10.

¹¹¹ Boreham, *The Prodigal*, 20.

G. SECURED ASSURANCE

In regard to the question of assurance of salvation F. W. Boreham states unreservedly: "There is...such a thing as the assurance of salvation. A man may reach complete certainty as to his own interest in the Cross of Christ. He may be absolutely sure that his sins are all forgiven."¹¹² In a biographical chapter, Boreham indicated that Charles Kingsley's marriage precipitated a spiritual crisis that brought him out of doubt "and the tyranny of sin into the exuberant assurance and enjoyment of salvation."¹¹³

Boreham also explored reasons for lack of assurance. He referred to Thomas Chalmer's discovery that with a "system of 'Do this and live,' no peace can be attained."¹¹⁴ Consequently, Boreham commented upon the Roman Catholic John Henry Newman: "he derives no satisfaction from his lofty faith; he never enters into its enjoyment."¹¹⁵ Similarly, the Anglican Dr. Samuel Johnson said, "I am terribly afraid of death. I think I may be one of those who shall be damned."¹¹⁶

Through the mouth of another person, Boreham offered one prescription to a perennial problem. "Frank Bullen said that he believed; yet his belief brought him no assurance."¹¹⁷ Mr. Falconer spoke correctively: "you are waiting for the witness of *your feelings* to the truth of Him who is the Truth...Your feelings...are subject to a thousand changes a day. You must *believe Him* in spite of your feelings and act accordingly."¹¹⁸

It is clear that F. W. Boreham espoused a doctrine of eternal security. Boreham once met a man on a train who'd been converted previously through his personal witness, and now the man was handing out tracts titled *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*.¹¹⁹

Boreham used a familiar tale of a great American prairie fire where the oncoming fire couldn't cover any more ground because the earlier counterfire had taken care of the problem. "Judgment has already fallen

¹¹² Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing*, 188.

¹¹³ Boreham, *A Temple of Topaz*, 167.

¹¹⁴ Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, 12-13.

¹¹⁵ Boreham, *The Silver Shadow*, 97.

¹¹⁶ Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches*, 196.

¹¹⁷ Boreham, *A Casket of Cameos*, 16.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Boreham, *Rubble and Roseleaves*, 131.

[at the Cross], and can never come again. He who takes his stand at the Cross is safe for evermore. He can never come into condemnation. He is at perfect peace within God's safety zone!"¹²⁰

Dr. John Brown of Haddington, Boreham relates, visited aged Janet on her deathbed. She was confident in Christ. Brown quizzed her: "But, Janet, what...if...God should let you drop into hell?" "If He does," Janet replied, "He'll lose [more] than I'll do."¹²¹ In other words, God would lose His honor, for He has promised security to His own people.

VI. SUMMATION

In this article we have not even surveyed Boreham's random comments related to such theological topics as the Holy Spirit, angels, demons, the church, last things, etc. Boreham tended to be traditionally orthodox overall and unsystematic in his treatment of such issues. We have concentrated on theological topics more germane to the subject of salvation. While Boreham showed a propensity for embracing theistic evolution, on subjects related to soteriology he tended to swim with the evangelical mainstream. He does quote another Christian as saying that "faith alone [is] the condition of salvation."¹²²

While F. W. Boreham offers no thoroughgoing compendium of theology, he offers a treasure house of truth for preachers and teachers. In the bakery of theological libraries his nearly 50 books are the theological chocolate eclairs of richness. The vastness and versatility of his omnivorous reading made him a rare resource for the homiletically hungry. His creativity is virtually without equal. One of the saddest matters is that you'd have to turn to a bookstore that specializes in rare or used books in order to secure any of his works today. Yet they will repay the scavenger hunt. What a legacy F. W. Boreham left!

¹²⁰ Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet's Hair*, 229.

¹²¹ Boreham, *The Three Half-Moons*, 31.

¹²² Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet's Hair*, 79.

BOOK REVIEWS

The God Who Won't Let Go. By Dean Merrill. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998. 158 pp. (Paper), \$11.00.

Merrill has written a compelling Christian-living book that unveils divine grace in the face of guilt, tragedy, and failure. This work accomplishes its solitary aim: to overwhelm the reader with the unconditional forgiveness of God. However, this is not a book that pertains to salvation, but service. As Merrill states, "The good news to adults who have made a major mistake in their lives is this: *It's okay to run to your Father*" (p. 15, italics original). In this short, easy-to-read book, Merrill chronicles several biblical personalities who struggled and overcame sin. He then follows up his biblical case studies with several "profiles" that demonstrate how God believes in second chances.

The book contains four parts. Part One is called "The Return of Confidence" (pp. 13-42). The first biblical illustration in this section is John Mark (pp. 21-24) and the second is Jonathan (pp. 24-26). This section focuses on the God of the second chance who gives hope to His children.

The second part is called "The Need for Confrontation" (pp. 47-82). In this section, the biblical illustrations include Jonah, Jacob, and Moses. In his consideration of confrontation, Merrill observes that "God is wise enough to know that pain is the greatest motivator to change....People change faster when they hurt than under almost any other condition" (p. 49).

The third part is called "The Fruits of Confession" (pp. 47-82). In this section, David is the biblical illustration. The focus is to help those who have fallen deal with their memories (pp. 75-82) and exhibit fruits of confession (pp. 87-95). Merrill writes, "Fallen Christians are sometimes not sure about this [does God forgive totally?]. Can God really forgive as completely now as when we first came to Him for salvation? Doesn't He keep some sort of blacklist?" (p. 91). Merrill responds with grace sharing the following passages: Jer 31:34; Ps 103:12; and Eph 1:7-8.

The final part is called "Moving On" (pp. 111-53). In this section, Abraham serves as the biblical illustration. The book closes by emphasizing God's supernatural ability to make "new things" (pp. 113-18) out of the old mess of our sin. The result is that those who have fallen are capable of becoming "conquerors" (pp. 121-28).

Merrill is an excellent writer. He is the author or co-author of numerous books (e.g., he co-wrote *Fresh Wind*, *Fresh Fire* and *Fresh Faith* with Jim Cymbala). He has also served as an editor for four major Christian periodicals. However, it must be stated that while this book is compelling, it is biblically uninformative. The eight profiles that Merrill includes take up approximately half of his book. Although they are intriguing, this reviewer was interested in more biblical and practical content. Fortunately, Merrill provides a "For Your Reflection" section that closes each chapter providing plenty of Scriptures for the interested reader to look up.

Merrill capably demonstrates that God can and will forgive. He also illustrates that God can and will restore a life to usefulness once again. *JOTGES* readers will find this book profitable. It is also likely that many will find it challenging. This writer believes that it is critical to be grace-oriented as it pertains to salvation, but it is also important to be grace-oriented as it relates to sanctification and service.

Pastor Keith R. Krell
Emmanuel Baptist Church
Olympia, WA

Uncommon Graces. By John Vawter. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998. 191 pp. (Paper), \$11.00.

This popular Christian-living book by John Vawter may be one of the most important books that *JOTGES* members read this year. Although Vawter does not discuss how one may have eternal life, he does focus on how a believer who has experienced God's grace should live. In an age when we who adhere to the freeness of the gospel are a misunderstood minority, it is critical to know how we should respond

to those who malign and misrepresent us. In *Uncommon Graces*, Vawter chronicles how we can respond in a Christ-like manner to a hostile world.

In Part One Vawter introduces the seven uncommon graces of gentleness, attentiveness, loyalty, candor, mercy, kindness, and repentance (pp. 17-134).

In Part Two the author unveils his game plan on how to nurture the above uncommon graces (pp. 137-85).

The seven uncommon graces are treated equally well throughout the book. Each chapter focuses on the primary characteristics and benefits of each grace. Vawter tackles practical issues like how to respond to an "in your face" society in a gentle manner (pp. 17-34); how to be humble, give up the need to win, and be willing to admit fault (pp. 37-56); and how to demonstrate loyalty (pp. 57-70), honesty, (pp. 71-87), mercy (pp. 89-104), and kindness (pp. 105-119) in all one's relationships.

The final chapter on repentance (pp. 121-34) is also quite helpful. In this chapter Vawter helps the reader deal with relational conflict. The author touches on helpful issues such as how to listen to criticism and what to do if someone refuses to reconcile.

The following quotes will best express the flavor of this book. In chapter 1 on gentleness, Vawter writes, "If we want to demonstrate the uncommon grace of Jesus to a world that worships power, we must set aside our combativeness to embrace gentleness" (p. 19).

In chapter 2 Vawter writes on attentiveness, "Admitting our limited understanding, especially in relation to spiritual truth, is a mark of humility" (p. 46).

On loyalty, Vawter writes in chapter 3, "Sometimes the finest hour is not how heroic we are in defending our cause but how honorable we are in surrendering it" (p. 68).

In chapter 4, which deals with candor, Vawter writes, "When others are candid, they give us an opportunity to grow in our personal lives and develop character" (p. 74).

In chapter 5 Vawter writes of mercy, "It is important not to confuse mercy with sympathy. It is not a feeling but an action. It moves. It motivates. It makes a difference in people's lives" (p. 92).

JOTGES readers will appreciate Vawter's candor when, speaking about kindness, he writes in chapter 6, "The crisis of Christians in our society is not so much in the way we think about Christianity but in the

way we live it out" (p. 117). This is the crux of Vawter's book. He believes that it is critical that Christians live well and be agents of grace who distill the light of the gospel in a dark world.

In the three remaining chapters, Vawter discusses the "one another" commands (pp. 137-54), accountability (pp. 155-69), and living life according to the Golden Rule (pp. 171-82).

The strength of this book is that it is an easy and captivating read, replete with story after story that will keep the reader riveted. Since he has served as a pastor, seminary president, doctoral professor, parachurch minister, husband, and father, Vawter has countless experiences to share.

A weakness of the book is a tendency to rely on *experiential* rather than *scriptural* support.

We who have the message of God's free gift of grace ought to be on the frontlines in fulfilling this kingdom agenda. Along the way, it is worth heeding Vawter's exhortations to be people who exude the uncommon graces of the Christ-like life.

Pastor Keith R. Krell

Emmanuel Baptist Church
Olympia, WA

One to One: How to Share Your Faith with a Friend. By Michael Green. Nashville: Moorings, 1995. 118 pp. (Cloth), \$9.99.

Author Michael Green clearly has a heart for personal evangelism. He urges that we take the initiative in sharing our faith with our friends. He relates the story of a man whose golf buddy lay dying in the hospital. When he started to witness, his friend put him off saying that if it had been that important surely he would have said something during their many rounds of golf together.

Green suggests the ABCD approach: There is something to *Admit*, to *Believe*, to *Consider*, and to *Do*. While it might be possible to affirm faith as the sole condition of eternal life with such an approach, Green does not.

For example, the something to *Consider* is the high cost of discipleship! Green states: "I often summarize this aspect of becoming a Christian by posing three questions. Are you willing to let Christ clean up the wrong things in your life, many of which will have become old friends by now? Are you willing to put Jesus in the number one slot? And are you willing to be known as a Christian and join the Christian community?" (p. 69).

He then concludes, "That is about as far as he will be able to see, for the present. But you owe it to him to put this matter of the cost of discipleship fairly and squarely before him" (p. 69). (See also p. 111 where he speaks of the need in evangelism to stress the cost of discipleship.)

On another occasion he says one needs to repent, believe, and be baptized (pp. 58-59), with baptism signifying both what Christ has done for us and what we are committing to do for Him.

This book should be avoided by new or untaught believers. I can only recommend it for those who are looking for illustrations of unclear evangelistic methods.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

The Bema: A Story about the Judgment Seat of Christ. By Tim Stevenson. Gainesville, TX: Fair Haven Publications, 2000. 260 pp. (Cloth), \$18.99.

The cover of this book is a beautiful painting of one believer in the midst of a multitude appearing before the Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory. There is much I like about this book besides its cover. It presents a much-neglected truth: that the Lord Jesus will judge believers for how they lived.

Dan Mathewson, the leading figure in this novel, becomes a man of prayer after dreaming about the Judgment Seat of Christ. He faces hard choices at work the very day after the dream. And he repeatedly prays, asking God to show him what to do and say. Dan's conclusion that pleasing the Lord matters more than earthly success built on dishonesty and sham ultimately leads him to give up a lucrative job.

This book is well written and enjoyable to read. The narrative flows well, especially after Dan wakes up from his dream. (The dream covers pages 29-200). Throughout the narrative Stevenson powerfully promotes the need for humility in light of our coming judgment.

There is also a touching call to see people from a different perspective. Janitors might be leading rulers in the coming kingdom. CEOs might not rule at all.

Though Stevenson does not clearly present what we must do to be saved in this book, he does make it clear that salvation is a gift and that works cannot save us.

That said, I did, however, have some reservations.

The author expresses uncertainty about the fate of those "whose only exposure to Christianity was of a degraded, twisted, or hypocritical type. More than ever before, I know God's love, mercy, and justice, and I am sure whatever God does will be consistent and in harmony with those attributes. Still I remain in the dark on this issue" (p. 118). He seems to be suggesting that people can get into the kingdom without believing in Christ. If that is what he means, that is a major departure from the biblical position (compare Acts 4:12 and 16:30-31). In addition, it makes missions and evangelism of questionable value since we may make people accountable to believe in Christ who otherwise could have been saved in some other way.

Stevenson also introduces some confusion about how Old Testament people were saved when, after realizing that only New Testament believers are present at the bema in his dream, he asks a leading angel, "What...of all the millions *who were surely faithful* in Old Testament times?" (p. 119, italics added). Yet a few sentences later the angel says, "*Believing Israelites* who lived before our Lord's death and resurrection will be raised to live again to join in the kingdom" (p. 119, italics added). This is better, and hopefully the author's true position.

There is an anti-intellectual feel throughout the narrative. Many of the most highly rewarded saints seem to have little knowledge of the

Word of God. Yet the Scriptures link spiritual growth to feeding on and heeding the Word (1 Cor 2:14–3:3; Heb 5:12–14).

In spite of these reservations, I like this book. I came away with a desire to be more caring, generous, and sensitive. It is profitable reading for well-grounded Christians. However, I would not recommend this book for new or untaught believers.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Safe in the Arms of Jesus: God's Provision for the Death of Those Who Cannot Believe. By Robert P. Lightner. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000. 96 pp. (Paper), \$6.99.

The cover shows the picture of a small baby wrapping his entire hand around an adult's finger with the child's arm being enveloped in the palm and fingers of the adult. It is a beautiful picture that envisions safety and strength.

The title of this book is also beautiful and descriptive. Lightner taught Systematic Theology for over 30 years at Dallas Theological Seminary. He now has Professor Emeritus status.

The tone of the book is quite comforting. Lightner is writing specifically to the young couple who has lost a small child. Again and again he refers to their pain and their loss. He writes like the loving grandfather that he is.

His premise is that God applies the death of Christ to all who die without ever having been able to believe.

Here are the arguments he puts forward to prove this:

- Since Jesus showed so much love and concern for children in His earthly ministry, "we have reason to believe that He loves them and grants them eternal life when they die" (pp. 22-23).

- “Because the price [of redemption] has been paid in full, the debt is canceled until it is rejected. Therefore, God can receive into His presence all those who did not receive His Son by faith because they *could not* do so” (pp. 24-25, italics his).
- “If those who cannot believe are not beneficiaries of God’s salvation, Christ died for them in vain” (p. 26).
- Those condemned to eternal condemnation will all appear at the Great White Throne Judgment. Their works will be judged there. Yet, Lightner points out, those incapable of believing “have no works, having done neither good nor evil” (p. 39). “Because those who died before they could believe have no works, we may be sure they will not appear before the Great White Throne.”
- He asks the question, “Will all of these [those who die before being able to believe] miss heaven because they did not respond to God’s offer of grace when, in fact, they *could not* respond?” (pp. 45-46, italics his). His answer is this: “I do not believe that for a moment. It seems to me that to believe such a thing impugns the very character of God” (p. 46). He then concludes, “Would it not be mockery for God to call upon His creatures and hold them responsible for doing what they could not do?” (p. 46).

We might quibble a bit with the first four points. For example, God loves all people (John 3:16), yet all are not saved.

The second point is suspect as well. If “the debt is canceled until it is rejected,” that means that the moment a child reaches the age at which he can believe, the cancellation of the debt is withdrawn and the child is condemned. This makes the atonement something that can be temporarily applied, unapplied, and then applied again. (In a personal note, Dr. Lightner indicated, however, that “in the case of infants...the benefit is applied by God only at the time of death.”)

The third point is only valid if the death of Christ provides eternal life for all, regardless of whether or not they believe.

The fourth point is true of those who die before birth. But clearly a 5-year old, for example, has done works, both good and bad.

His strongest point is the last. Surely condemnation of those incapable of believing leaves God open to the charge of being unjust.

There is a biblical principle that God only holds people accountable for things they are capable of doing (e.g., Ezek 18:2-3ff.).

One problem that this book fails to address is the death of children who could believe, yet do not. For example, what of a seven-year-old who dies? Many seven-year-olds are capable of understanding the difference between fantasy and reality. They are thus capable of believing in Christ for eternal life. Yet they are but children.

Lightner is not trying to address that question. Thus we should take the subtitle as defining the scope of his discussion. People in children's work tell me that children are not able to believe in Christ for eternal life until they are between 5 and 10, the age varying from child to child. If that is correct, then this book concerns those who die below that age range, as well as those so severely mentally handicapped as to be unable to believe at any age.

Some might draw the conclusion from his remarks that those who have never heard the Christian gospel will be saved. Lightner shows, however, that this is not so (pp. 59-61). He does a good job of showing that all receive revelation from God and that if a person fails to respond to the light he has, he is accountable for that. God will send the gospel to all who respond to the light God gives them.

JOTGES readers will like the last chapter, "Heaven and You" where Lightner presents the grace gospel. Over and over again he says, "Come as you are." He closes with the famous song, *Just As I Am*.

I recommend this book. It is very comforting. Those who believe that only elect babies who die will be with the Lord will likely be unimpressed with the arguments here. However, most everyone else will be.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy. By Mark Hitchcock. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999. 243 pp. (Paper), \$11.99.

JOTGES readers might question the relevancy of reviewing a prophecy book in a journal that typically confines itself to issues related to eternal salvation. Yet, why not review a book on prophecy? After all, biblical salvation includes the past, the present, and *the future*. God has revealed the glorious future of His saints as well as the doom of sinners. Mark Hitchcock does a beautiful job of covering these and more in this brief book.

Hitchcock writes with a crisp style utilizing a variety of images to express his ideas. The book's structure is built around lists, which actually makes the content more memorable.

This book is ambitious, beginning with its title: *The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy*. Estimates vary but about 27% of the Bible was prophetic when it was penned. The majority of these prophecies are yet unfulfilled (these are the subject of this book). That is a lot to squeeze into just over 200 pages. Yet the author has succeeded. All this to say it is a thorough work undergirded with much scholarship and research.

Hitchcock has done a masterful job of simplifying complex ideas and terms without sacrificing content. A novice on prophetic issues could pick up this volume and, by the end, understand terms like *Premillennial*, *Amillennial*, and *Postmillennial*, as well as *Pretribulational*, *Midtribulational*, and *Posttribulational*. (The author is Premillennial and Pretribulational.) The same novice could grasp the chronological flow of prophecy and gain insights into many other details.

In spite of its simplicity in communication, this book is not limited to the biblical novice. All students of prophecy gain as they read widely, and this paperback packs more than one would expect. Even a life-long student of eschatology can glean new insights, as well as new ways to teach prophecy. Seminary professors should acquire this book for its ability to communicate the complex in simple terms.

It would be disappointing to read a book on prophecy and not come away with anything related to our wonderful salvation in Jesus Christ. Hitchcock has not let his readers down.

First, the author holds to eternal security. For example, when elucidating the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and the cultural insights

that explain the phases of this event, he states, "The divine bridegroom will never violate his betrothal, and the Father will never take back his dowry" (p. 62).

Second, he gives ample space to the doctrine of rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ, which he nicknames "the crowning day." After listing seven future judgments, he goes into detail about the judgment of believers. Various areas of our lives to be evaluated are listed with support from generous portions of Scripture. Hitchcock reviews the five "crowns" to be given as rewards and states, "This present age is training time for reigning time" (p. 52).

Third, the author presents the gospel twice (pp. 138-39 and 226-27) with unusual and refreshing clarity. He emphasizes that salvation is a gift and that a person's works cannot save. The book concludes with a section on "How can I be sure I'll go to Heaven?" In answering this question, he makes it clear that God sent His Son to die as a substitute for sinful people, and that salvation is a gift and cannot be earned by our works. He ends the book with this—"When you trust Christ, you will immediately have a place reserved for you in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). You can be sure from this time on that you will go to heaven either at the Rapture or when the Lord calls you home" (p. 227). What better way to conclude a book on prophecy than with an appeal to the reader to trust Christ? This broadens its usefulness as an evangelistic tract to unbelievers who are interested in future things.

Finally he speaks of preparing for test day with an appeal to take action now. His exhortations for believers to live in light of the fact that our lives will come under final review are right on target.

Get this volume for your personal library!

Mark Piland
Armageddon & Beyond
Multimedia Presentations
Arlington, TX

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