

Journal of the  
**GRACE**  
Evangelical Society

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"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"



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# **A REVIEW OF R. C. SPROUL'S GRACE UNKNOWN: THE HEART OF REFORMED THEOLOGY**

**ROBERT N. WILKIN**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, Texas

R. C. Sproul is the author of forty books, founder of Ligonier Ministries, and the daily radio teacher for the nationally broadcast “Renewing Your Mind.” He is also known as one of the easiest to follow communicators from the Reformed perspective.

Last year I had the opportunity to attend the Orlando Ligonier Conference at which Sproul spoke. There were approximately 5,000 in attendance—evidencing Sproul’s strong following.

## **I. THE AIM OF THIS BOOK**

The dust jacket of the book gives its aim:

You’ve heard of Reformed theology, but you’re not certain what it is...

Who better to teach you about Reformed theology than R. C. Sproul? He has made theology understandable and exciting to ordinary people for decades, and he knows Reformed theology inside and out.

When R. C. speaks and writes, he often refers to Reformed theology. For years people have asked him what it is. *Grace Unknown* is his first book-length answer to this question.

Sproul does a fine job of explaining Reformed theology. He covers the five points of Calvinism (TULIP) in five fairly concise and readable chapters. However, he doesn’t start the book there. Rather, he begins with five chapters dealing with what he calls “Foundations of Reformed Theology.” The titles are instructive: Centered on God, Based on God’s Word Alone, Committed to Faith Alone, Devoted to Prophet, Priest, and King, and Nicknamed Covenant Theology.

It doesn’t appear from the book that Sproul was significantly concerned with proving that Reformed theology is derived from the

Scriptures. We do not find, for example, much in the way of exegesis in the book. Rather, Sproul is preaching to the choir here. His intended audience already believes in Reformed theology and is simply looking for a coherent and reasonably comprehensive explanation. This is not to say that Sproul ignores the Scriptures. He does cite Scripture often.

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However, due to the nature of the book, he cites men (especially Calvin, Luther, and Edwards on 33, 36, and 8 pages, respectively) and the councils of men (especially the Westminster Confession of Faith, with citations on 24 pages, by my count) much more frequently than he does Scripture.

I found that he cites Scripture on 59 of the 216 pages of the body of the book.<sup>1</sup> In a secular book that would be a high percentage. However, for a theology book to limit its mention or discussion of Scripture to 27% of the pages is rather startling. That is especially so when this is compared with books like *Absolutely Free!* by Zane Hodges (94%),<sup>2</sup> or *So Great Salvation* by Charles Ryrie (54%).<sup>3</sup> The difference is marked.

## II. WHAT SPROUL SAYS ABOUT THE FREE GRACE POSITION

While he never directly mentions our position, he does cite Zane Hodges on a few pages. There he makes it clear what he thinks of his, and our, theology.

According to Sproul the idea that regeneration precedes faith is absolutely central to the Christian gospel (pp. 179-96). Therefore, at

<sup>1</sup> I do not count places in which sources he is quoting cite Scripture. If those were added in, the total would increase slightly. What I counted were places where he quoted, discussed, or even merely referred to a text of Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> I found only 12 out of 203 pages in which Hodges failed to quote, discuss, or refer to Scripture. In fact, on most pages there were many references and many exegetical points made.

<sup>3</sup> Scripture was cited on 84 of 154 pages, by my count.

one point in this discussion he mentions Hodges and his book *Absolutely Free!*.

After giving Hodges mild praise for saying that regeneration is a miraculous work of God, he asks,

The question is, however, *when* does this miracle take place? According to Hodges it occurs when the Word is received in faith. Faith precedes regeneration and is the necessary condition for it. This places Hodges squarely in the semi-Pelagian camp.<sup>4</sup>

I found this a rather extreme example of overstatement. Semi-Pelagianism is the view that eternal salvation requires both the work of God and man. People must turn from their sins and obey God in order to gain and keep salvation. A few pages later Sproul indicates as much:

Are there some who have genuine faith who do not endure to the end and are therefore not ultimately saved? The semi-Pelagian answers yes. Semi-Pelagianism teaches that a person may come to true, authentic, saving faith and fall away from that faith, losing his salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Thus Sproul appears to believe that Zane Hodges teaches that one can lose eternal salvation. How else could he say that he is “squarely in the semi-Pelagian camp”? If he believes that, he hasn’t even done a good job of skimming Hodges’s writings. If he doesn’t believe that, then he is guilty of grossly misstating the position of Zane Hodges.

And, it should be noted, Sproul is placing all who believe that faith precedes regeneration, and that includes nearly all of us in the Free Grace camp, under the semi-Pelagian banner. That is nearly a curse word in Reformed circles.

I was surprised that in his discussion of perseverance and eternal security Sproul failed to indicate our position. He said that there are three views as to what happens to professing believers who fall away from the faith. First, he says they may not have been saved in the first place (pp. 208-209). Second, he says that they may be genuinely saved and if so, they “will repent of their sin and be restored before they die” (p. 209). Third, he indicates a biblically impossible position, which he

<sup>4</sup>R.C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 194.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 198.



again calls the semi-Pelagian position, that they were genuinely saved and lost their salvation (p. 209). Does he not know that there is a fourth position? Did he not read *Absolutely Free!* well enough to realize that we teach that genuine believers may fall away and yet remain eternally secure? That he doesn't even mention this position is an incredible mistake for a serious theologian!

### III. WHAT SPROUL BELIEVES ABOUT FAITH AND ASSURANCE

#### A. FAITH DEFINED

Sproul does not mention or show any familiarity with the outstanding work, *Faith and Saving Faith*, by the late Reformed scholar Gordon Clark. That is a shame, for his discussion of faith suffers from lack of attention to the points made by Clark.

Sproul suggests that faith has three components: knowledge (*notitia*<sup>6</sup>), understanding (*assensus*), and trust that loves the object of trust (*fiducia*).<sup>7</sup> Of course, trust is a synonym for faith. As Clark has shown, to say that trust is an element of faith is to say that faith is made up of faith!

Sproul states:

The presence of both *notitia* and *assensus* is still insufficient for justification. Even the devil has these elements. Satan is aware of the data of the gospel and is more certain of their truth than we are. Yet he hates and despises the truth of Christ. He will not rely on Christ or his righteousness because he is the enemy of Christ. The elements of *notitia* and *assensus* are necessary conditions for justification (we cannot be justified without them), but they are not sufficient conditions. A third element must be present before we possess the faith that justifies.<sup>8</sup>

Before going on to see what he says about *fiducia*, notice his logic. Satan has knowledge of the gospel and he assents to its truthfulness.

<sup>6</sup> Sproul normally spells this *notitia* (pp. 71, 72 twice, 226 ). However, he also spells it *noticia* on one occasion (p. 71).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 69-72.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 72.

Yet he is not regenerate. The conclusion demanded, it seems, is that more than knowledge and assent is needed to have eternal life.

Yet think this through a bit more. Did the Lord Jesus die for Satan and demons? Of course not. Thus even if they did whatever Sproul requires to have “the faith that justifies,” they still wouldn’t be justified. Justification is impossible for non-humans.

Notice that Sproul admits that Satan is more certain of the truth of the gospel than he himself is. He writes, “Satan is aware of the data of the gospel *and is more certain of their truth than we are*” (italics added). I’m not sure what he means here. Does he mean that we are not sure that the gospel is true? That is the impression given.

Luke 8:12 makes it clear that Satan believes the gospel. He knows that any living human being that comes to faith in Christ has eternal salvation that can never be lost. Hence he is busy snatching away the Word lest people believe it and are saved.

The problem with Satan is not lack of faith, or lack of the right kind of faith, as Sproul would say. His problem is that he rebelled against God and once he did, God set his eternal destiny once and for all. There is no changing of his condition, or the condition of the angels who fell with him.

How does this view stack up against the Gospel of John? Do we find more than knowledge and assent in the case of the woman at the well and the other Samaritans who came to faith in Christ (John 4)? Where is commitment indicated in the man born blind (John 9)? Or in the Lord’s simple statement to Martha (John 11:25-27)? John’s Gospel knows nothing of some third element of saving faith. Indeed the purpose statement of the book says that whoever believes *that* Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, has everlasting life. Clearly in John nothing more than understanding and acceptance (or assent) are required for eternal life. The same is true in the entire Bible (compare, for example, Gen 15:6 and Rom 4:1-8).

Here is what Sproul says about the supposed third element:

This [third] element is *fiducia*, a personal trust and reliance on Christ, and on him alone, for one’s justification. *Fiducia* also involves the affections. By the power of the Holy Spirit the believer sees, embraces, and acquiesces in the sweetness and loveliness of Christ. Saving faith loves the object of our faith, Jesus himself. This element is so crucial to the debate over justification. If a

sinner relies on his own works or on a combination of his righteousness and that of Christ, then he is not trusting in the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

This is remarkable. It amazes me how a number of Reformed theologians have expanded the meaning of *fiducia*. No longer is it merely trust in Christ. (Of course, even that would not be an element of faith, but merely a synonym for it.) Now it is trust that “also involves the affections.” That is a vague statement. How does one know when his affections have been sufficiently *involved* so as to show he has true saving faith and not the other kind, whatever it is?

If “by the power of the Holy Spirit the believer sees, embraces, and acquiesces in the sweetness and loveliness of Christ,” then how could the believer ever sin? If “saving faith loves the object of our faith, Jesus himself,” then would not sinlessness be true of all with saving faith? Surely sin is never an expression of love for Christ. The Lord Himself said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Of course, Sproul might counter that the believer’s life is merely characteristically loving and obedient. Thus temporary incidents of sin occur. However, keep in mind that Sproul is defining here what saving faith is. According to his theology, saving faith must be continuous to be genuine. If it ever ceases, then one proves he never truly believed in the first place. Thus under this reasoning if a Christian ever failed to see, embrace, or acquiesce in the sweetness and loveliness of Christ, would he not be proving that he never believed in the first place?

#### B. REGENERATION PRECEDES FAITH

As previously noted, Sproul calls all who believe that faith is a condition of regeneration *semi-Pelagians*.

He begins his chapter on the “I” in TULIP talking about this issue. He indicates that when John H. Gerstner was a college student many years ago, he was stunned when his professor, John Orr, wrote in large letters: REGENERATION PRECEDES FAITH. Gerstner thought Orr transposed the words *regeneration* and *faith*. “Once he heard his

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 72.



professor's cogent argument, Gerstner was convinced and his life was set on an entirely different course."<sup>10</sup>

I was saddened by this story. Imagine what John Gerstner might have accomplished for the Lord and His gospel if he had been in the Free Grace camp. If he had sat under the teaching of men like Charles Ryrie, Zane Hodges, and Howard Hendricks, he might well have become a powerful Free Grace spokesman. I'm not sure from this or other stories about him whether he once was in our camp or not. However, this anecdote makes it clear that Gerstner once believed that faith is a condition of the new birth.

Sproul goes on to say something even more startling. He says,

This tends to be something of a pattern for Calvinists. As Roger Nicole declared, "We are all born Pelagians." Conversion to Christ does not instantly cure us of our Pelagian tendencies...In the church we are widely exposed to Arminianism, which has had American evangelicalism in a stranglehold since the days of Charles Finney.<sup>11</sup>

What is amazing is that this Reformed theologian believes that a person can at the moment of new birth believe in a works-salvation gospel. For that is the gospel of Pelagianism (or, Arminianism). Maybe that isn't so amazing after all. For in their view the key is perseverance. As long as someone comes to the right doctrines eventually, they were saved in the first place. In essence they, like Luther, hold to a linear view of eternal salvation.

Sproul cites the raising of Lazarus as an example of how a spiritually dead person must be born again before he can come to faith (pp. 184-87). Yet he fails to explain how a regenerate man, a believer, can be an example of how an unbeliever is regenerated. Would not Lazarus better illustrate how *believers* can become bound up and need God to deliver them from their bondage to sin? Did not the Lord say to believers, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)?

According to Reformed thought it is heresy to suggest that an unregenerate person can respond in any way to God. Yet what do they do with the account of Cornelius in Acts 10? He was an unregenerate

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 179-80.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 180.

man. Yet God was moved by his prayers and alms to send an angel to him to give him a message. Cornelius heard the message and sent for Peter who told him what he needed to do to be saved.

And what of Acts 17:27? Hebrews 11:6?

Sproul presents the case as either Arminianism or Five-Point Calvinism. He scoffs at the idea of Four-Point Dispensational Calvinists (pp. 192-96). The uninformed reader who realizes that Arminianism is not correct is left with the impression that the only other option is Reformed theology. It seems to me that Sproul should do a better job of presenting the third option so that his readers at least have enough

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information upon which to base their beliefs. As mentioned above, his caricature of Hodges and other Free Grace proponents as semi-Pelagian is a gross misrepresentation.

#### C. ASSURANCE AND FAITH

Sproul devotes eight pages (pp. 199-206) to the doctrine of assurance of salvation. That is a fair amount of space in a book of this size attempting to discuss all aspects of theology. Unfortunately, his book is as confusing on this subject as is the Westminster Confession of Faith.

After a brief quote from the Westminster Confession, his first sentence speaks volumes. How a person introduces a subject is vitally important. Here is how Sproul starts his discussion of assurance:

The [Westminster] confession acknowledges that there is such a thing as false assurance.<sup>12</sup>

That is quite telling. His primary concern is not how a believer can have assurance. Rather, his main concern is to warn believers that any assurance they may have may well not be real assurance at all. Not only that, but should we not also be concerned that he quotes from the Westminster Confession and not the Bible to establish the grounds for the discussion?

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 199.

He says that false assurance comes from two difficulties: 1) “from an incorrect view of salvation,” or 2) [from] “an incorrect assumption about one’s personal faith” (p. 199). Unfortunately, he doesn’t explain what he means by either of these statements. In light of the entire book and his other writings, he would consider the Free Grace view of salvation to be an incorrect view that leads to false assurance. And his view of “one’s personal faith” is that faith is unknowable on merely a mental basis. To know if one truly believes he must look at the works which he is doing. Those works give clues as to whether his faith is genuine or not. Since the Free Grace position adopts what he would call “an incorrect assumption about one’s personal faith,” he would conclude that any assurance we have is false.

He goes on to suggest that all elect people are saved. Thus, he says if we can figure out if we are elect or not, we can know if we are saved (p. 200).

The problem here is that he has things backwards. Assurance comes from knowing we are saved. Once we know we are saved, we know we are elect. There is no sign of election other than that you believe the gospel and hence know yourself to be regenerate. However, since Reformed theology looks for proofs of election, and since they look at one’s works to find this, they end up with no certainty.

Sproul’s next major point is chilling to me:

One thing, however, is certain. There is clearly a link between our assurance and our sanctification.<sup>13</sup>

The reason I find this chilling is because if assurance is based even in part on our progressive sanctification, then absolute certainty is impossible.

In spite of this, twice in the next few sentences Sproul says that one can be “certain of his salvation” (pp. 200-201). This leads him to a section of the Confession where it speaks of certainty and infallible assurance. After saying this, however, he goes on to say that if one obtains certainty, it can and probably will be shaken and lost:

Our faith and assurance tend to be frail and fragile. Assurance can be easily disrupted and rudely shaken. It can be intermittent. It is

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 200.



particularly vulnerable to sin...When we commit it, we ask ourselves, "How can a true Christian do such things."<sup>14</sup>

Sproul claims to believe that a person can be certain he is saved. Yet when this claim is examined carefully, it doesn't make sense.

If sin destroys assurance, as he says, then every time we are aware of sin, we wonder if we are truly saved. Since all believers sin many times each day, how could anyone ever be sure?

Let's say you got in a minor spat with your wife or kids before leaving for work. There went your assurance. Now say you got it back after prayer and confession. But then you said something wrong at work before lunch and lost it again. And so it went all day. You doubted your salvation time and again. How many days would it take like that before you concluded that it is a fantasy to speak of certainty? Such "certainty" is not certainty since all believers sin (1 John 1:9, 10).

In Reformed thought true believers persevere and false professors don't. Both believe the same things *in their heads*. The way to find out which category you fall in is by seeing if you persevere. Of course, you can't be sure you will persevere until you've died. So the best you can do is look at your works and see if they look like the types of works that the Spirit does. If they do, then it is quite possible you will persevere and prove you are saved. Of course, even false professors produce temporary good works that look like the real thing. So any assurance we have is at best tentative.

Indeed, after discussing "Assurance and Sanctification," Sproul considers "Perseverance in Salvation." Note well the first sentence here: "We have seen the close link between the assurance of salvation and perseverance in the Christian life" (p. 207). He then continues, "We must also remember, however, that they are not to be identified with or equated with each other. They are to be distinguished, but not separated. *Assurance is our subjective confidence* in both our present salvation and, by extension, our future salvation."

Actually the Westminster Confession gives both objective and subjective grounds for assurance. But Sproul is right (*assurance is our subjective confidence*). The bottom line in Reformed theology is that the subjective elements (the works we do and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit) are the real grounds of assurance. The objective promises

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 204-205.

of God only apply to me if Christ died for me, and He only died for me if I am elect and I can only know if I am elect by subjective means.

What about professing believers who fall away? Are they saved or unsaved? "The first possibility is that their profession was not genuine in the first place" (p. 208). "The second possible explanation of those who make a profession of faith, give outward evidence of conversion, and then repudiate the faith, is that they are true believers who have fallen into serious and radical apostasy, but who will repent of their sin and be restored before they die. If they persist in apostasy until death, then theirs is a full and final fall from grace, which is evidence that they were not genuine believers in the first place" (p. 209).

In other words, if a believer falls away and dies in that state, he never was saved in the first place. Since no believer can be sure he will not fall away—even Paul wasn't sure (1 Cor 9:24-27)—thus no believer can be certain he is genuinely saved until he dies.

Despite his few comments on certainty, full assurance for Sproul is not certainty. The best a believer can hope for is a high degree of confidence. However, even that is wishful thinking, since every sin produces doubt in his mind.

#### IV. WHAT SPROUL SAYS ON OTHER MATTERS

##### A. THE ATONEMENT

The title of Sproul's chapter on the atonement is "Christ's Purposeful Atonement" (p. 163). While all systems of theology agree that Christ had a purpose in dying on the cross, when Reformed theology speaks of purposeful atonement, these are code words for *limited atonement*. That is, Christ didn't die for everyone. He only died for the elect. Sproul makes this clear from the first page of this chapter and throughout the entire chapter.

Dispensationalists and all who believe in unlimited atonement are called *semi-Pelagians* at the start and end of this chapter (pp. 165, 177). Sproul feels that the unlimited atonement position is a works-salvation theology. He reasons in this

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*way. Most will not be saved. But if Christ died for all, then all will be saved unless there is some condition they must meet. If people must believe in Christ in order to be saved, then they must do something. Since faith includes commitment and thus obedience, faith itself is a work. This would make salvation a human work, rather than a gift of God.* Thus all who believe in unlimited atonement believe in works salvation according to Sproul!

Sproul is either unaware of or withholds from the reader the view of Dr. Chafer and others that the atonement made all people “savable.” The Lamb of God took away the sins of the world (John 1:29) in the sense that no one’s sins represent a barrier to him being saved. He is now free to gain eternal life by faith in Christ. Of course, the one who dies in unbelief dies in his sins (John 8:24). Taking away sins is not the same as the granting of eternal life.

That is the point of the cross. Jesus has made the whole world savable. Our sins no longer represent a barrier to us gaining eternal life. However, prior to the new birth, we are indeed spiritually dead. Only by believing in Christ can we be born again.

Unlimited atonement does not mean universalism. Since most reject the free offer of eternal life, most will die in their sins. Still, they will not be able to claim they were unable to gain life. The cross means that all are savable.

Before moving on, I thought Sproul should have discussed Calvin’s view on this point. Scholars are divided on whether Calvin himself believed in limited or unlimited atonement. Sproul fails to mention this. In fact, he doesn’t mention Calvin even once in this chapter.<sup>15</sup> Statements seeming to prove both positions can be found in Calvin’s *Institutes*. The best study I’ve seen shows that Calvin indeed held to unlimited atonement. Since Sproul is defending what are typically called *the five points of Calvinism*, it would seem essential that he point out that modern Calvinism is not necessarily in sync with Calvin on this point.

<sup>15</sup>This is especially surprising in view of the people he does mention. He cites the views of J. I. Packer, John Owen (two lengthy quotes), and the Westminster Confession.



## B. PREDESTINATION AND ELECTION (DOUBLE PREDESTINATION)

The author is remarkably candid on this highly controversial point. Even many five-point Calvinists reject what is called *double predestination*. Double predestination is the teaching that God arbitrarily elected some to eternal life (predestination #1) and chose all the rest to eternal damnation (predestination #2). According to this view, it isn't merely that God *passed over* the non-elect with the result that they experience the consequence of their own unbelief. Rather, God actually chose people to spend eternity in hell. These people, according to Sproul's form of Reformed theology, never had a chance to believe since they were constitutionally unable to believe.

Sproul puts it this way:

Some advocates of predestination argue for *single* predestination. They maintain that, though some are predestined to election, no one is predestined to damnation or reprobation. God chooses some whom he will definitely save, but leaves open the opportunity for salvation for the rest. God makes sure that some people are saved by providing special helps, but the rest of mankind still has an opportunity to be saved. They can somehow *become* elect by responding positively to the gospel.

This view is based more on sentiment than on logic or exegesis. It is manifestly obvious that if some people are elect and some are not elect, then predestination has two sides to it. It is not enough to speak of Jacob; we also consider Esau. Unless predestination is universal, either to universal election or universal reprobation, it must be double in some sense.<sup>16</sup>

How is God fair in condemning people who were predestined never to come to faith? That question doesn't bother Sproul. God is God and anything He does must be just, for He is just. That is true. However, it is *manifestly obvious*, to use Sproul's term, that punishing someone eternally for failing to do something they were incapable of doing is unfair. Surely that should drive double predestinarians back to the Scriptures to see if they don't teach something else.

<sup>16</sup>Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 157.

### C. TOTAL DEPRAVITY (HUMAN INABILITY)

Chapter 6 is entitled "Humanity's Radical Corruption." We do not find here some of the harshness on this subject found in works of other Reformed theologians. For example, MacArthur illustrated what he thinks it means to be dead in trespasses and sins with the story of a woman whose baby died. The woman was crazy with grief, and even kept talking to the baby and touching it, evidently hoping she could revive him. But there was no response. Here is MacArthur's conclusion:

Spiritual death is exactly like that. Unregenerate sinners have no life by which they can respond to spiritual stimuli. No amount of love, beseeching, or spiritual truth can summon a response. People apart from God are the ungrateful dead, spiritual zombies, death-walkers, unable even to understand the gravity of their situation. They are lifeless. They may go through the motions of life, but they do not possess it. They are dead even while they live (cf. 1 Tim 5:6).<sup>17</sup>

Sproul ends up in the same place. But he does so without an insensitive illustration, and without being as in-your-face as MacArthur. He indicates that the unregenerate do in some sense have free wills (pp. 130-34). However, until God regenerates a person, he can only exercise his free will to do sin and never to seek God or respond to Him. He says, "The spiritually dead must first be made alive ('quicken') by the Holy Spirit before they have any desire for God" (p. 136).

What should we conclude about Cornelius in Acts 10? Before he was born again his prayers went up to God. He received a message from God from an angel. And he understood the message and obeyed it! Only after he had sought God was he born again. Sproul, however, does not discuss Cornelius or other examples which contradict his position (e.g., Lydia, Acts 16).

### D. PERSEVERANCE

For some reason both Arminianism and Five-Point Calvinism teach that only those who persevere in faith and good works will make it into the kingdom. Despite the seeming differences between those two

<sup>17</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 65.

theological systems, their views on perseverance show that they are indeed quite similar at their core.

As previously mentioned, in Reformed thought assurance of salvation is conditioned upon perseverance. Sproul makes this point repeatedly in Chapter 10 (see especially pp. 207-209). In fact, this chapter which is on perseverance begins with an extended section on assurance of salvation.

When I went to seminary I thought that the fifth point of Calvinism was all about eternal security. I thought it meant that all who come to faith are eternally secure regardless of whether they live for Christ or not. I quickly learned that is not the Reformed position. Sproul brings this out clearly time and again. In his first sentences in a section entitled "Perseverance and Preservation," he notes, "The perseverance of the saints could more accurately be called the preservation of the saints... The believer does not persevere through the power of his unaided will. God's preserving grace makes our perseverance both possible and actual."<sup>18</sup>

Here is his reasoning. *God promises that no regenerate person will fall away. Regeneration guarantees transformation that lasts. Thus while it is true that all believers are eternally secure, this security is never true of a person who falls away from the Lord and dies in that state. Such a person proves he was never saved in the first place. Eternal security is only true because perseverance/preservation is guaranteed.*

I found it rather remarkable that Sproul indicated that "as part of the process of our sanctification, perseverance is a synergistic work. This means it is a cooperative effort between God and us."<sup>19</sup> At first glance, this statement seems fine. Do not Free Grace people believe that perseverance is a synergistic work? Of course we do. And do we not believe that perseverance is a part of sanctification? The answer is yes, but the problem is that for Sproul and Reformed theology, justification flows into sanctification in such a way that the two cannot be separated. If a person fails to persevere, he proves he was never justified in the first place. Thus, perseverance is required to get into the kingdom. Of course, we do not believe that and so we have no problem saying that perseverance is a synergistic work. However,

<sup>18</sup> Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 210.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.



since Sproul believes perseverance *is* required to get into the kingdom, he should be totally unwilling to say that perseverance is a synergistic work. Sproul is here implying what Gerstner made explicitly clear in his book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*.<sup>20</sup>

A theology that vehemently denies any sense of synergism in justification ends up essentially contradicting itself because of its view of perseverance in sanctification.

#### E. SOLA SCRIPTURA

*JOTGES* readers would agree with what Sproul says in this section (pp. 41-57). He defends inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture. We would say a hearty "Amen" to his remarks here.

He also expresses concern that individuals should not use their

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freedom to interpret the Bible to condone a sloppy handling of the Word of God:

The right of private interpretation means that every Christian has the right to read and interpret the Bible for himself or herself. This does not give an individual the right to

misinterpret or distort the Bible. With the right of private interpretation comes the responsibility of handling the Bible carefully and accurately. Nor does this right suggest that teachers, commentaries, and so forth are unnecessary or unhelpful. God has not gifted teachers for the church in vain.<sup>21</sup>

While we certainly find fault with some of the interpretations of Sproul and other Reformed theologians, we are quite happy that they stand firmly for the authority and inerrancy of the Word of God.

<sup>20</sup> John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, 1991). See especially pp. 209-50. Note this statement, "Thus, good works may be said to be a condition for obtaining salvation in that they inevitably accompany genuine faith" (p. 210).

<sup>21</sup> Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 55.

## V. CONCLUSION

Sproul selected the title *Grace Unknown* because he feels, rightly I believe, that most Evangelicals fail to grasp the wonder of God's amazing grace.

According to Reformed theology, only those who persevere in the faith are truly saved. And no one can be sure he will persevere until he dies. Hence absolute certainty that one is eternally secure is impossible prior to death.

Thus the title has meaning on another level as well. It is not merely the author's audience that needs a better grasp of God's grace. The very theology the author is advancing leads the author himself to be unaware of the grace of God.

*Grace Unknown* is an ironic title for this book. Grace is indeed unknown to those who adopt the traditional understanding of five-point Calvinism.<sup>22</sup>

Imagine a person who believes it is impossible to be sure you are saved going out to witness to others. What does he hope to accomplish? He hopes to lead his listeners to adopt his views. Thus if his listeners accept what he is saying, then they too will be convinced that it is impossible prior to death to be sure that they are eternally secure.

That is the position of Reformed theology. They hope to convince all in Christendom that we might not really be saved. They wish to get us to focus our attention on our works. Fear of hell is a desirable motivation in this system of theology.

The gospel debate is no academic exercise conducted in a vacuum. The issues here are a matter of life and death. Only one gospel is truly good news.

I recommend this book as a helpful introduction to Reformed theology. Read it with your eyes open and you will come away with a profound sadness. Well-meaning leaders have lost that which is the heart of the good news—assurance of eternal salvation. *Grace Unknown* is indeed *The Heart of Reformed Theology*.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that there are some five-point Calvinists who are Free Grace advocates. I have met a few of them. That is why I speak here of the "traditional understanding of five-point Calvinism." Those five-pointers who are in the Free Grace camp hold to a very loose understanding of perseverance (some works, some time, but they may not be recognizable to us and the person may die in rebellion to God).

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pg 111



# **A RESPONSE TO HODGES: HOW TO LEAD A PERSON TO CHRIST, PARTS 1 AND 2**

**GREGORY P. SAPAUGH**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

I appreciate the opportunity given by Grace Evangelical Society to respond to the articles by Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 1: The Content of our Message”<sup>1</sup> and “How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation to Respond.”<sup>2</sup> While my admiration and appreciation for Mr. Hodges is of the highest order, I nevertheless feel constrained to reply to these articles, which I feel contain some issues that need to be addressed. Hopefully, this dialogue will lead to a greater understanding of the gospel, which we both hold so dear.

I agree that the message of the gospel should not be loaded up with extraneous content as the Lordship Salvation position does. The effort of Hodges to find “the core issue in bringing men and women to faith and eternal life”<sup>3</sup> is commendable and necessary. However, I disagree as to what comprises the core issue. My difference with the articles concerns the issue of progressive revelation and the centrality of the work of Christ on the cross for salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 1: The Content of our Message,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 3-12.

<sup>2</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation to Respond,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 9-18.

<sup>3</sup> Hodges, “How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 1,” 7.

## II. THE PROGRESS OF REVELATION

In the two articles, Hodges focused exclusively on the Gospel of John. While he is correct that “the Gospel of John is the only book in our New Testament canon that explicitly declares its purpose to be evangelistic,”<sup>4</sup> his total reliance on that book alone for soteriological truth creates a needless dichotomy with the rest of the New Testament. While John may not *emphasize* the death of Christ in his presentation on how to receive everlasting life,<sup>5</sup> the centrality of the cross becomes clear in the remainder of the New Testament (this will be discussed more later). Single-minded focus and reliance on one book of the Bible, while ignoring the testimony of the rest of Scripture, is not too far from using a verse out of context to support an erroneous theological position.<sup>6</sup>

It is unclear why Hodges focuses on the misunderstanding by the disciples of the coming death and resurrection of Christ (cf. John 20:9).<sup>7</sup> How are these men any different from any other Old Testament believer? One could go all the way back to Abraham who “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Abraham had eternal life at that point, and yet surely he did not really understand the future crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah. But he believed in the promise of a Deliverer, and that is what the disciples in John are doing.<sup>8</sup>

But Hodges uses the experience of the disciples to conclude that the cross is not relevant to understanding the gospel. But their experience is from a prior dispensation and it is wrong to make that incomplete

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>5</sup> Although the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection narrative take up two chapters, 18 and 19. In fact, John’s account of the passion week takes up almost half of the book, Chapters 12-20.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the Church of Christ denomination, to a great extent, uses one verse, Acts 2:38, to build their entire soteriological doctrine.

<sup>7</sup> John 20:9 says, “For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.”

<sup>8</sup> Even Abraham later received a picture of the substitutionary atonement by Christ on the cross when God provided a ram to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac (Gen 22:13-14).

experience a basis for comprehending the gospel in the Church age. I agree with the position of Ryrie regarding progressive revelation:

The basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations.

It is this last point, of course, that distinguishes dispensationalism from covenant theology, but it is not a point to which the charge of teaching two ways of salvation can be attached. It simply recognizes the obvious fact of progressive revelation. When Adam looked upon the coats of skins with which God had clothed him

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and his wife, he did not see what the believer today sees looking back on the cross of Calvary. And neither did other Old Testament saints see what we can see today (*italics in original*).<sup>9</sup>

So it seems reasonable to expect the disciples of Jesus to have an incomplete understanding of the coming crucifixion. But Hodges, by narrowly focusing on one book of the Bible, the Gospel of John, has forced truth from the Mosaic dispensation onto the Church Age. Thus, for him, the misunderstanding by the disciples becomes an indicator that the crucifixion of Christ is not essential to the gospel. But now we have the complete revelation of the mind of God—the Bible. God has not limited soteriological truth to the Gospel of John. The totality of Scripture must be considered for the full expression of the doctrine of salvation.

<sup>9</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 115.



### III. THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

The lack of consideration for progressive revelation seems to lead Hodges to disregard the centrality of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as payment for sin. He writes, "Neither explicitly nor implicitly does the Gospel of John teach that a person must understand the cross to be saved."<sup>10</sup> And, "People are not saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross."<sup>11</sup> Finally, "The simple truth is that Jesus can be believed for eternal salvation apart from any detailed knowledge of what He did to provide it."<sup>12</sup>

I think Hodges has overstated the case with regard to the lack of references to the crucifixion of Christ in the Gospel of John. For example, the death of Christ is proclaimed implicitly in John 3:14-15: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Surely, the post-crucifixion reader of these words would have understood that eternal life was obtained by believing in the Christ *who was raised up and died on the cross*.

Another implicit Johannine reference to the crucifixion in a soteriological context is in John 6:51-54:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world . . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

The reference to eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ is unquestionably a reference to the death of Jesus and would have been understood this way by the reader of John.<sup>13</sup>

Paul certainly gives emphasis to the cross. It is the core of his gospel message. To the Romans he writes, "But God demonstrates His

<sup>10</sup> Hodges, "How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 1," 7.

<sup>11</sup> Hodges, "How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 2," 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus also made a clear reference to His death in John 10:15 when He said, "I lay down My life for the sheep."

own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). In 1 Corinthians the union between the person of Christ and His work on the cross is clear: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Later in the same epistle, Paul defines the gospel:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-4).

Also instructive is the preaching of Paul as recorded by Luke in Acts 17:2-3: "Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." Like John (cf. John 20:31),<sup>14</sup> Paul proclaimed Jesus as the Christ and sought to bring people to faith in Him. But notice that Paul's presentation of Jesus as the Christ included His death and resurrection.

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PAUL'S  
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THE CHRIST  
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RESURRECTION.

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I believe the "bottom line" of the gospel message is the substitutionary sacrifice for sin by Christ on the cross.

From the very beginning, death has always been the payment for sin: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely

<sup>14</sup> The purpose of the Gospel of John, as found in 20:31, is to persuade the reader to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the result of which is everlasting life. The verse says, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."



die” (Gen 2:16-17). The suggestion of a suffering Deliverer appears as early as Gen 3:15, the *protevangelium*. There God announced judgment on the serpent, Satan: “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.”<sup>15</sup> The blood of “a lamb . . . without blemish” (Exod 12:5) in the Passover account provides a picture of “Christ, our Passover” (1 Cor 5:7). The whole Levitical sacrificial system pointed the way to the blood of “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).<sup>16</sup> I concur with Article V of the doctrinal statement of Dallas Theological Seminary:

We believe that according to the “eternal purpose” of God (Eph 3:11) salvation in the divine reckoning is always “by grace through faith,” and *rests upon the basis of the shed blood of Christ* . . . We believe that it has always been true that “without faith it is impossible to please” God (Heb. 11:6), and that the principle of faith was prevalent in the lives of all the Old Testament saints. However, we believe that it was historically impossible that they should have had as the conscious object of their faith *the incarnate, crucified Son*, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and that it is evident that they did not comprehend as we do that the sacrifices depicted the person and work of Christ (italics added).

In contrast, Hodges does not see “the shed blood of Christ” as intrinsic to the gospel message. For him, the death of Christ is merely the “*avenue through which men and women come to understand why*

<sup>15</sup> Modern scholarship has tended to dispel the notion of Messianic prophecy in Gen 3:15. But see the discussion by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Christology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1998), 14-17; and Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> Glaser and Glaser have shown that, based on Leviticus 16, two goats were offered in sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. One goat was killed as a sacrifice for sin. The other was released into the wilderness, illustrating the actual removal of sin. This second goat was called the scapegoat. Leviticus 16:5 makes it clear that the two goats together constituted one offering for sin: “two kids of a goat as a sin offering.” John the Baptist, in John 1:29, combined the idea of the slaughtered goat, the sacrifice for sin, and the scapegoat, the removal of sin. Mitch and Zhava Glaser, *The Fall Feasts of Israel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 86-90.



they can trust completely in the Savior" (*italics added*).<sup>17</sup> The crucifixion and resurrection are only "facts *surrounding* the gospel message" (*italics added*).<sup>18</sup> I believe the cross is more than just a vehicle to lead a person to the Savior. The death of Christ for sin is inherent in what it means to believe in Christ for everlasting life. I do not agree that "trust in Christ *can occur* without a knowledge of the cross (*italics in original*)."<sup>19</sup> In this dispensation, the age of the Church, an understanding of sin and the sufficient payment for sin by our Lord on the cross is fundamental to salvation.

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With regard to Hodges's deserted island scenario,<sup>20</sup> I disagree that the man in the illustration receives eternal life by believing portions of John 6:43-47 that washed ashore. This man may have no concept of sin or his need for a Savior. The name Jesus is just a word on a piece of paper with no content. For all we know, the man thinks everlasting life is a "fountain of youth." Instead, I see this man as a lost person who has received some light. I trust that God will now bring him more light in the form of a missionary or perhaps a New Testament that washes ashore.

Hodges rightly calls the actions of Jesus on the cross "indispensable."<sup>21</sup> But how can facts that are indispensable not be part

<sup>17</sup> Hodges, "How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 1," 11.

<sup>18</sup> Hodges, "How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 2," 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. While a person may trust Christ to meet a need without a knowledge of the cross, an understanding of the sufficiency of the death of Christ is essential for eternal salvation.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hodges, "How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 1," 4. In this hypothetical story, a man who has never heard of Christianity is marooned on a deserted island. Fragments of John 6:43-47 wash ashore. All that is readable is "Jesus therefore answered and said to them" (v. 43), and "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (v. 47). Hodges believes this man is eternally saved if he "becomes convinced that this person called Jesus can guarantee his eternal future."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11.

and parcel to the gospel? How can the person of Christ be separated from the work of Christ?

In the final analysis, the exclusive reliance by Hodges on the Gospel of John has led him to this very position: a division of the person of Christ from the work of Christ. The logical extension of this is that the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son of God were not even necessary. But who Christ is and what He did are inseparable. John unites the person and work of the Lord when he writes, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I in Him" (John 10:37-38). The works that Jesus did gave testimony to His person. And Paul says to the Corinthians, "But we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23). His message united the person of Jesus (He is the "Christ") with His work (He was "crucified").

Hodges is correct when he writes, "We are not saved by believing a series of theological propositions, however true and important they may be. We are saved by believing in Jesus."<sup>22</sup> I agree with his insistence that "we need to lead men to *Christ* (italics in original)!"<sup>23</sup> But the death of Christ for sin is not mere theological baggage that is added to the gospel. It is not "some concept that must be theologically clarified."<sup>24</sup> It is an essential part of the gospel and is indivisible with who He is. I believe in a *historical, crucified* Christ, not just a name on a piece of paper.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

I appreciate the effort of Hodges to refine and clarify the doctrine of salvation. I share this goal. But I take issue with his conclusions regarding the basic presentation of the gospel. When I read "How to Lead a Person to Christ, Parts 1 and 2," I conclude that Hodges does not think the cross is essential to the presentation of the gospel. According to him, the substitutionary death of Christ on behalf of a person is not a core element of the gospel.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>24</sup> Hodges, "How to Lead a Person to Christ, Part 2," 11.

In reply, I believe Hodges has ignored the progress of revelation, which has further led him to dismiss the foundational issue that death has always been the required payment for sin. By doing so he has artificially bifurcated the person and work of Christ. For sure, I believe that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone. But my faith is in the Christ who died in my place, paying the penalty for my sin.



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# MAKING SENSE OF THE MILLENNIUM: RESURRECTION IN REVELATION 20\*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will first deal with background material of Revelation as a whole. Subsequently a more detailed look at Rev 20:1-10 will conclude with observations pertaining to the type of resurrection mentioned in this hotly debated text. Throughout these arguments a position on the millennial issue becomes evident.

## II. GENRE BACKGROUND AND STRUCTURE

The Book of Revelation is complex. A perusal of commentaries and other introductory works warrants this observation. This is further borne out when one attempts to “work through” the actual exposition of the book in the many writings available. Even when a seeming scholarly consensus concerning a particular aspect of study appears to dawn on the academic horizon, dissenters from the group are still to be found.<sup>1</sup>

\* This paper was originally presented on December 16, 2000 in Nashville, TN at the Evangelical Theological Society’s annual meeting.

<sup>1</sup>One thinks immediately of the issue of which genre characterizes the Revelation. Merrill Tenney’s observation in the 1950’s still holds true for many: “In literary type the Revelation belongs to the class of apocalyptic writings, and is the only specimen of this kind in the New Testament.” *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 14. A brief but helpful survey of the debate can be found in Arthur W. Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 143-46. Besides the dissenting voices mentioned by Wainwright, others who are reluctant to see Revelation as apocalyptic include Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 23-29; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), 12-29; Steven Lloyd Waechter, *An Analysis of the Literary Structure of the Book of Revelation according to Textlinguistic Methods* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1995), 69-73.



## A. GENRE

On the specific topic of genre, one must be impressed with the sustained efforts to provide definitions and nomenclature that will suffice for all students. This issue has received intense study since the two world wars. An issue of the journal *Semeia*<sup>2</sup> back in 1986 continued the work done collectively by scholars since the early seventies. Based on these types of studies and the general consensus among students of the Apocalypse, it is sufficient to accept the book as having apocalyptic coloring.<sup>3</sup> The uniqueness of John's "Apocalyptic Work" is that it is also *Scripture*. It cannot fit into any genre wholesale. It is God's final word to man. The book must be read, not so much in conjunction with other apocalyptic works; as it must be read in light of other scriptural works.<sup>4</sup> Both *Sola Scriptura* and *Tota Scriptura* are significant for

<sup>2</sup>*Semeia* 36 (1986): 1-95, was particularly focused on the genre in relation to the Book of Revelation.

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Smith, following David Aune, claims "It has been said the peculiar idiom of apocalypses...is to thinly conceal what it purports to reveal so that the audience may themselves have the experience of decoding or deciphering the message." "The Structure of the Book of Revelation in Light of Apocalyptic Literary Conventions," *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994): 382. A few years earlier Smith noted that an appreciation of the genre of Revelation is important, but that one must see how John "...transforms and transcends the very genre in which he is writing, because that is one means of appreciating the profound revelation he received." See "Revelation 1:19: An Escalated Prophetic Convention," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (December 1990): 465. Smith claimed that the author adapted his work to contrast it with other similar works that were not divinely inspired. Craig Blaising has argued along similar lines stating, "John's rejection of pseudonymity concurs with his own testimony as a prophet to the Christian community and distinguishes his 'apocalypse' as true in contrast to many others with which his readers might be familiar." See "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrel L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 209, n. 72.

<sup>4</sup>Other Scriptures which have also been identified as apocalyptic will no doubt lend much help to the understanding of Revelation's message. An important study has been conducted by John Andrew McLean, *The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Key for Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Mellen Press, 1996). Noting ten categories developed by genre scholars, McLean claims: "These



understanding the Apocalypse of John. Scripture alone is what is definitive for belief and behavior. This necessarily includes the idea that one can understand the Book of Revelation without recourse to extra canonical works. All of Scripture is also needed, as the progress of revelation has been gradual, yet now completed. In light of the entire Bible, Revelation can be understood as the concluding chapter to a long and epic work.

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features will help provide the parameters for defining the literature of apocalyptic...These categories will provide a common groundwork for the comparison of the apocalypses of Daniel and Revelation" (p. 17). The definitions that McLean garners are as follows: "An apocalypse is a genre that is shaped by its incorporation of apocalyptic features. This definition specifies a work as apocalyptic by the qualitative impact of apocalyptic features upon composition, rather than the quantitative presence of a certain number of features. A few features could impact a composition so thoroughly that it would be classified as an apocalypse. Apocalyptic eschatology is a deterministic view of the future that anticipates the intervention of a sovereign and autonomous God to judge the wicked, deliver the righteous, and inaugurate the kingdom. Apocalyptic eschatology may be found in apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic works. The world universally, rather than Israel individually, is the focus of apocalyptic eschatology. Israel may be included in the last day events, but it is not a prerequisite feature. Apocalypticism is a socio-religious movement by a group of oppressed and alienated people who envision an idyllic state in the celestial realm and anticipate deliverance with the intervention of God. Apocalyptic literature does not need to arise out of apocalypticism, nor does all literature that arises out of apocalypticism have to be apocalyptic" (p. 31). McLean's study obviously draws heavily from Daniel, but he also utilizes the Synoptic Gospels for fuller understanding of the outline structure of Revelation. He summarizes, "The apocalypse clearly evidences the influence of the synoptic eschatological discourses on its content and structure. The first five seals patently parallel the 'birth pangs' of the Synoptics. These judgments follow the sequential order of all three Synoptic Gospels. Furthermore, the sixth seal has been shown to correlate with the eschatological passages in Luke to evidence the establishment of the midpoint of Daniel's seventieth week. The cumulative testimony of thematic and linguistic affinities strongly suggests that John has also adapted synoptic motifs into the development of the latter chapters of his Apocalypse. John has amplified the synoptic eschatological discourses by means of apocalyptic imagery and incorporated new material to present his view of end time events" (p. 224).

## B. AUTHORSHIP

As with the question of genre, the identification of authorship as well as the background to the book has evaded scholarly consensus. The meaning of the book should be discernible without access to its author and background setting. It is, arguably so, more certain having securely established those features. Is John the apostle *that* John or some other John? Was the book written in the 60's or in the 90's of the first century? These questions once answered may shed some light in aiding interpretation not only of the broad intent of the author (the proverbial forest), but also will help in clarifying the specific meaning of particular texts (the trees).<sup>5</sup> Although detailed work on this issue is beyond the scope of this article, it is an added help for exegesis so must be briefly treated.

Robert Thomas has gathered some convincing evidence for a late date and for the apostle John being the author.<sup>6</sup> Some have contended for an almost unanimous agreement by the early church regarding the

<sup>5</sup>For example, if it is securely established that the book was written during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), this will necessarily rule out the interpretive approaches that see the book as a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Also of particular interest for our study, if the book is not a comfort for the persecuted believers as is so often thought, but rather an exhortation to faithfulness in the face of heresy, then other dimensions emerge as to the nature of the consummation, including the purpose of John's millennium of chapter 20. The future will not be seen as release from oppression, but as reward for righteousness and steadfastness to Christ. This question is beyond the scope of the present paper, yet brief mention of it will suffice in this note. The "overcomers" described in chapters 2 and 3 may not in fact represent all Christians but only those who endure the trials and finally persevere in faithfulness. By keeping His works till the end, the overcomer is not guaranteed just salvation, but is allowed much more by way of reward. Ruling in the earthly kingdom then, is not true of all by virtue of justification, but an experience awaiting those who evidenced spiritual progress and persevered in sanctification. The martyrs specifically described in the 20th chapter clearly fit in this category.

<sup>6</sup>See his commentary *Revelation 1-7*, pp. 2-29. Also note the observation by George Ladd: "This apostolic authorship was widely accepted by the ancient fathers." *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 7. Merrill Tenney has also asserted, "The late date has the advantage of being confirmed by definite historical evidence"



date and authorship. This is not entirely accurate. Thomas has drawn our attention to dissenters from belief in Johannine authorship such as Dionysius of Alexandria. Based extensively on internal evidence, Dionysius argued dissimilarities between the Revelation and John's writings in which there was no dispute. Following Ned Stonehouse and G. B. Caird, Thomas has claimed: "In spite of this apparently pious regard for the Apocalypse and endeavor to be objective in his criticisms, it is admitted on all sides that Dionysius's entire criticism is motivated by dogmatic considerations and his arguments are one-sided and overstated."<sup>7</sup> What was this dogmatic concern? It was his dislike for the literal understanding of the Revelation that naturally led to a literal millennial kingdom on the earth. If Dionysius could eliminate apostolic *authorship* for Revelation, then he succeeded in eliminating apostolic *authority* for Revelation's millennial kingdom!

Being prophetic in character, the book's author is described, lending weight to his revelations. Unlike the Gospel of John (which indirectly identifies the apostle John as the author), the function of the prophetic work necessitates clear identification of its author for sake of authority.<sup>8</sup> It is plain to the reader of the book that the author makes sure there is no doubt as to his identity. In Rev 1:4 and 9 the author identifies himself both in the prologue and in the first vision. Also in 22:6-21, the epilogue to the book, the author again identifies himself in v 8. Here we are reminded of Guthrie's famous quip as to whether the early Church was so enamored with brilliant men named John that a mere reference to the name would enable one to discern who is who.<sup>9</sup> The implication is

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*Interpreting Revelation*, 19. For the early date view, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

<sup>7</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 10. Thomas notes that "...apostolic authorship was a major, if not the major, factor in the recognition of the Apocalypse as canonical."

<sup>9</sup>Steven Waechter said, "Discrediting Johannine authorship, however, leaves the question posed by Donald Guthrie unanswered: 'Was the Asiatic church overrun with brilliant Christians by the name of John, who would only need to announce their name for the Christians to know which was meant?'" Although the question of authorship is not foundational to a textlinguistic study, one's position on this matter will determine if micro- and macro-structural findings from the book of Revelation can be compared to and



that the early Church had but one John of this stature able to produce this work, and he was none other than John the apostle.

### C. LIFE SETTING

With regards to the life setting, it is safe to say that, despite a few objectors, the time of the writing is in Domitian's reign. The persecution could well have reached Asia Minor. John's exile for his commitment to Christ was one form of that persecution.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on the historical record concerning the imperial cult of the first century, Robert Wall states, "In our view the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2–3), together with the vision of Babylon's destruction (Revelation 17–18), reflect the *Sitz im Leben* (life setting) of the Asian church during the Domitian period (AD 81–96)."<sup>11</sup> With these issues

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contrasted with the Gospel and the three Epistles of John. The present writer holds to the traditional view that the Book of Revelation was composed by the same author who wrote the Gospel and the three Epistles of John, namely, John the disciple of Jesus," *An Analysis of the Literary Structure*, 66, 67.

<sup>10</sup>Persecution is not to be the only factor for the writing of the book. Waechter posits another reason: "The threat of persecution as the most pressing problem behind John's writing is suspect...a more urgent matter was doctrinal integrity and loyalty to Christ under threat of heretical teaching concerning the sovereign rule of God. Accordingly, John's intent was not to comfort those wounded by persecutions but to challenge those wooed by heretics. Perhaps the reference to virgins in 14:4 refers to doctrinal purity in the same way that adultery in the Old Testament prophets indicated falling away from the one true God," *An Analysis of the Literary Structure*, 68, 69.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Wall, *Revelation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 5. See also Robert Mounce, who adds, "when one turns to the Revelation itself, it is evident that the background is one of conflict between the demands of a totalitarian secular power and allegiance to the Christian faith...it was not until the reign of Domitian that failure to honor the emperor as a god became a political offence and punishable....While the picture of universal enforcement of the imperial cult given in Revelation 13 is a forecast rather than a descriptive account of the condition under Domitian, all the elements were present in the final decade of the first century from which a reasonable projection could be made. Within the book itself is an indication that the storm of persecution is about to break. The author has been banished to the island of Patmos 'on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (1:9). Even if this exile resulted from the action taken by a local authority, it is not unreasonable to assume that behind the decision was a general policy emanating from Rome,"

squarely behind us, it is imperative to focus on the actual structure of the book's contents.

#### D. STRUCTURE

It is probable with regard to structure that more diverse opinions exist than with any other matter pertaining to the Apocalypse.<sup>12</sup> Here the words of Waechter are particularly significant: "Text structure is ultimately related to authorial intent."<sup>13</sup> This is especially important for Evangelicals with a high view of Scripture. We must discern from the text of God's Word what *God* is saying to us through the human author. Despite Waechter's concern that the text of 1:19 has been used more so to provide legitimization of a pre-conceived dogmatic approach to the book, this writer believes that 1:19 does in fact serve as a structural indicator.<sup>14</sup> Although sharing a commitment to all of Scripture as inspired and therefore inerrant, we must make the observation that it is the risen Lord Jesus Christ who is speaking at this point. Ultimately we must see that it is God who gave the outline to John.

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*The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 32-33.

<sup>12</sup>For a survey and critique of some current views on the structure of Revelation see John Andrew McLean, *The Seventieth Week of Daniel*, 235-75. Included within this evaluation are the various approaches common in the secondary literature. See also Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 330-65.

<sup>13</sup>Steven Lloyd Waechter, *An Analysis of the Literary Structure*, 173. With regards to his methodological approach of Discourse Analysis, Waechter asserted: "Applying textlinguistics to a written document starts from the presupposition of literary unity," (p. 65). Also important are the comments by Christopher Smith in discussing the presentation of the texts denoting the sixth and seventh trumpets (9:21 and 11:15-19), "...the literary order here is legitimate in terms of John's larger purposes. We should not blame a careless redactor, as some commentators do...." "The Structure of the Book of Revelation in Light of Apocalyptic Literary Conventions," *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994): 389.

<sup>14</sup>Here I follow in part Thomas's outline with some brief modification. See *Revelation 1-7*, pp. 43-46.



### III. OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK'S CONTENTS

Revelation has a clear prologue, 1:1-8. There is also an epilogue to the work in 22:6-21. The seven churches in chapters 2-3 are a unit. In chapters 4-5 the heavenly scene is also a unit. It is with the beginning of chapter 6 that a pattern begins to unfold with seals, trumpets, and bowls that make up the bulk of the next major section.<sup>15</sup> In 19:1 there is a declarative praise indicating something magnificent is about to occur. This is fulfilled in 19:11ff., which describes the coming of Christ in power with judgment on His enemies. In the next chapter we have the millennial rule of Christ with His saints. Finally in chapters 21-22:5, we see the consummation of all redemption as God has made all things new.

From the text itself, it is plausible to see the threefold outline given by Christ to John as a key to the text of the book from 1:9-22:5.<sup>16</sup> These divisions would be as follows:

|      |   |
|------|---|
| I.   | <i>Ha eides</i> (The things which you have seen) 1:9-20.<br>The vision of a risen Christ.   |
| II.  | <i>Ha eisi</i> (The things which are) 2:1-3:22.<br>The condition of the church.   |
| III. | <i>Ha mellei genesthai</i> (The things which will take place after these things) 6:1-22:5.<br>The trials, the Kingdom, and the Glory. <sup>17</sup> |

<sup>15</sup>For a good discussion of the relationship between the seals, trumpets, and bowls, see Robert Thomas, "Excursus 3" in *Revelation 8-22*, pp. 525-43.

<sup>16</sup>George Ladd commented on 1:19, "John's commission was now repeated; he was told: **Write what you see**, i.e., the vision of the glorified Christ, **what is**, i.e., the state of the seven churches of Asia in chapters 2-3, and **what is to take place hereafter**, i.e., the consummation of God's redemptive purpose and the coming of the Kingdom of God. This begins with the breaking of the seven seals in chapter 6 and continues to the end of the book." *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 34.

<sup>17</sup>See McLean's outline, which is similar to the above construct. *Seventieth Week*, 230-31.



This type of outline considers the literary development of the book and is therefore the most trustworthy. Other approaches which take their cues from the text have also seen a literary progression.<sup>18</sup> The significance of this outline is important in that it strongly suggests that the recapitulation idea (so prevalent in amillennial exegesis) is probably incorrect.<sup>19</sup> We now turn to the matter of Revelation 20. Where does it fit in the outworking of God's plan and how do we interpret the text itself?

<sup>18</sup>See Waechter's phrase by phrase outline. Waechter suggests that although his textlinguistic approach rules out literary recapitulation it does not necessarily deny *historical* recapitulation. He claims, "The textlinguistic analysis...supports literary progression instead of reiteration. This method has no bearing, however, on chronological progression of events in actual fulfillment. Most of the narrative sequence of the Book of Revelation is straightforward," *An Analysis of the Literary Structure*, 184-85. If one sees the progression of the prophecy in a narrative framework, then a chronological and sequential reading would demand a chronological fulfillment, otherwise why is it cast in the form that it is? Unlike Waechter's hesitancy to see this book as history foretold but merely a literary work, this writer prefers to see in this writing an actual prediction of what will transpire at the time of the end. George Ladd stated well, "The prophecy of Revelation goes far beyond any known historical situation in the first century." Later on he claimed, "It is the nature of apocalyptic writings to be concerned primarily with the consummation of God's redemptive purpose and the eschatological end of the age....It is the nature of apocalyptic symbolism...to refer to events in history leading up to...this eschatological consummation...the book claims to be a prophecy....The nature of prophecy is to let light shine from the future to the present." *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 9, 14. Hence, what *will* happen in the future affects what *should* happen in the present.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas's disclaimer should be heeded. However, he states, "The progressive sequence of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls does not, however, rule out some measure of recapitulation in sections of intercalation. In particular, the interlude in 11:1-13 regarding the two witnesses, the one in Revelation 12-14 between the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15) and the description of the seven bowls (chapters 15-16), and the one in Revelation 17-18 between the announcement of the seventh bowl (16:17) and the personal intervention of the Warrior-King (19:11-16)—these three intercalations are partially recapitulatory. But recapitulation is limited to the intercalatory portions of the book, with the main structure of the book revolving about the progressive sequence of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls." *Revelation 8-22* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 540-41.

## IV. REVELATION 20:1-10

## A. INTRODUCTION

Approaching chapter 20 in light of the outline found in 1:19<sup>20</sup> we assume that it follows chronologically the preceding passage which describes the second coming of Christ in 19:11-21. Consequently the millennial rule is to be established at the arrival of Jesus at the conclusion of the period of the great tribulation. Not only are the preceding extended narrative chapters 6–19 a part of “The Things Which Shall Take Place After These Things,” but chapter 20 is also, thus precluding it as a part of “The Things Which Are.”<sup>21</sup>

## B. CONTEXT

This scenario of 20:4-6, when seen in its place in the immediate context of 19:11–20:15, reads as an end-time phenomenon, as part of and following the events associated with the second coming of Christ to the earth. It seems artificial and a case of special pleading to place this “living and reigning with Christ” anywhere other than right after

<sup>20</sup>See footnote 17.

<sup>21</sup>Amillennialists such as William Hendriksen and Anthony Hoekema approach chapter 20 somewhat differently. Their outline to the Book of Revelation, which they see as a series of recapitulations of the same period, with progression as a mark of intensification as the chapters unfold, does not recognize chapter 20 as following chronologically after chapter 19. Instead they believe chapter 20 takes the reader back to the first coming of Christ. Hendriksen claims, “Our division is as follows:

1. Christ in the midst of the Seven Golden Lampstands, 1-3.
2. The Book with Seven Seals, 4-7.
3. The Seven Trumpets of Judgment, 8-11.
4. The Woman and the Man-Child persecuted by the Dragon and his Helpers (the beast and the Harlot), 12-14.
5. The Seven Bowls of Wrath, 15, 16.
6. The Fall of the Great Harlot and of the beasts, 17-19.
7. The Judgment upon the Dragon (Satan) followed by the New Heaven and Earth, New Jerusalem, 20-22.”

Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1947), 30. See also Hoekema “Amillennialism” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed., Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 156-58.



His arrival to shepherd (*poimanei*) the nations (cf. 19:15). This hearkens back to the promise made to the Church at Thyatira. In 2:26-27, Jesus promised the overcomers that they were to rule and shepherd (*poimanei*) the nations only if they held fast to what they already had *till His Coming* (2:25).<sup>22</sup>

### C. ISSUES

A key structural indicator begins 20:1. The phrase *kai ēidon*, although not clearly proving chronological succession, is most naturally consistent with it.<sup>23</sup> The text 20:1-10 contains the angel coming down and imprisoning Satan (vv 1-3); saints resurrected and reigning with Christ (vv 4-6); and the release of Satan and a final rebellion leading to Satan's consignment to the lake of fire (vv 7-10). Within these verses, particularly 2-7, one encounters the phrase *chilia etē* six times. The key questions that must be addressed are: (1) What is the nature and purpose of the binding of Satan? (2) What is the meaning and significance of the word *ezēsan* in vv. 4 and 5? (3) Is the phrase *hē anastasis hē prōtē* a metaphorical/paradoxical expression or a plain reference to bodily resurrection? To these questions we now proceed.

### D. BINDING OF SATAN

A standard amillennial explanation concerning the binding of Satan is to associate this with the *first* advent of Christ.<sup>24</sup> The approach draws heavily from Augustine, who saw the work of Christ of binding the strong man in His first coming (Mark 3:27) as the same as the binding

<sup>22</sup>Another text from the broader context of the Book of Revelation is 5:10, where the declaration is made concerning those whom Jesus saved with His blood, that they shall rule on the *earth*. Revelation 20:4-6 is but the intertextual fulfillment of the preceding expectation.

<sup>23</sup>See 4:1; 6:1; and especially 19:11; and 21:1.

<sup>24</sup>See Sydney Page, "Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (March, 1980): 32-35; Hoekema, *The Meaning of The Millennium*, 161-64. Also the essay by Robert Strimple, "Amillennialism" in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell Bock. Postmillennialist Kenneth Gentry, "Postmillennialism" also in *Three Views on the Millennium*, offers a similar argument. Also, J. Marcellus Kik, *Revelation Twenty* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 27-32, presents a postmillennial view along the same lines.



of Satan in Revelation 20.<sup>25</sup> In attempts to defend this approach, it is also claimed that what in fact is in view is not total cessation of activity but a curbing of deceptive influence. This means that Satan is bound but really is still free to roam, yet to a lesser degree than before the first advent of Christ.

Sydney Page tied this idea with the expansion of the church's mission to the Gentile world. Prior to the binding of Satan the Word of God was restricted, now it is unbound as Satan is bound. Although this view seems theologically sound, and to some degree reflects partial truth concerning the importance of the coming of Christ in the first century, the problem remains that exegetically it is very weak indeed.

The text reads:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold on the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while (Rev 20:1-3 NKJV).

This passage notes certain features that are decisive for a position that sees complete inactivity of Satan throughout the thousand years. First, the authority of the angel connotes his ability to enforce confinement to the abyss. Second, an actual binding of Satan is expressed before he is cast into the abyss. Third, a closing of the abyss is followed by a seal placed on him.<sup>26</sup> The compounding of elements in

<sup>25</sup>Hans Bietenhard, "The Millennial Hope in the Early Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953): 18, 29, explains how Gaius was the first to propound this theory. Augustine was the most influential in spreading its acceptance.

<sup>26</sup>In the Greek the seal is placed *epano autou* which is to be understood as above him rather than on him. The abyss is the holding place of demons from which they arise at the appointed time to engage in their activities. Prior to emerging from the abyss, they are unable to move on the earth. See Rev 9:1-2; 11:7. Hence at the end of the thousand years Satan will be released in order to once again return to his activities on the earth. This sealing strongly affirms a complete inactivity of Satan during the millennial reign. Amillennialists have tried to tie Revelation 20 with Revelation 12 because of the similarity in

this brief description necessitates a view which has Satan absent from the earth and totally inactive in relation to its inhabitants.

## V. THE KEY PASSAGE: REVELATION 20:4-6

We must now look at the following passage to answer our remaining questions.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev 20:4-6).

John sees in his vision thrones and certain ones sitting on these thrones. Judgment has been given over to them. Next is a description of some or all of these as having been axed (literally beheaded, *pepelekismenōn*) because of their refusal to receive the mark of the beast which would have revealed their worship of the beast. These then "live" and "reign" with Christ for the duration of the Millennium.

### A. IDENTITY OF THOSE LIVING AND REIGNING

Before addressing directly the meaning of "lived," we must discern where the scene is set and who these people are.<sup>27</sup> The latter is addressed

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the terminology "thrown down." As Blaising has noted, "In 20:1-3, the language of key and pit is repeated echoing the situation of chapter 9. But the notion of confinement is emphasized even more by the language of 'chain,' 'bound' (*edesen*), 'locked' (*ekleisen*), implying the use of 'key,' (*kleis*), and 'sealed...over him' (*esphragisen epano autou*). The contrast between Satan's activity in chapter 12f. and the inactivity in chapter 20 could not be more greatly stressed." Craig Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell Bock, 218.

<sup>27</sup>George Ladd asks and answers this question rather well. "How many groups does John see?" He ponders, then adds, "Many interpreters recognize only one group and limit this 'first resurrection' to the martyrs, maintaining



first. It is quite possible that two classes of people are being described. Those seated (*ekathisan*) are "...the army of Christ that accompany Him, at His return."<sup>28</sup> The others in the passage, would refer to a particular group. "This detailed description" as Walvoord says, "...fits only one class of saints, namely, the tribulation saints who in refusing to worship the beast are martyred."<sup>29</sup> But by the time they are all reigning with Christ as stated of both groups in the latter part of v. 4, something has transpired. This is the occurrence of a resurrection (*ezēsan*) as a precondition for their ruling (*ebasileusan*) with Christ.

#### B. HEAVEN OR EARTH?

If it is safe to assume that this scenario is describing the earth, it will, of necessity rule out certain interpretations. The evidence of seeing this description on the earth can be summarized as follows: First, Jesus has just returned in His glorious second advent (19:11f). This was predicted long ago, that to the earth He would return, just as from the earth He ascended on high (cf. Acts 1:11). Second, the angel has just descended from heaven (Rev 20:1), to eliminate Satan from the earth. Third, Rev 5:10 spoke of the future reign on the earth, of which Rev 20:4-6 is a fulfillment. Fourth, when Satan is loosed again at the end of the thousand years, he amasses an army *from* the earth to attack Jesus and His saints *on* the earth (Rev 20:7-10). Finally, a setting needs to be found which will account for all the dimensions of the promises throughout the OT concerning the advent and rule of Messiah.<sup>30</sup>

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that God has some special blessing for those who have died because of their faithful witness to Jesus. However, the RSV correctly reflects the Greek idiom, which could be literally translated: 'And I saw thrones, and [people] sat upon them, and judgment was given to them; and [I saw] the souls of those who had been beheaded....' The language suggests two different groups: one group to whom judgment was given, and a smaller group who are the martyrs of the great tribulation." *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 263.

<sup>28</sup>Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, p. 414.

<sup>29</sup>John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 296.

<sup>30</sup>Most of the chapters of the book, *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*. eds., Donald Campbell and Jeffrey Townsend, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), deal with OT texts such as Isaiah 2; Jeremiah 31; Psalm 89; Ezekiel 36; and Daniel 2.



### C. MERELY "LIVED," OR MORE LIKELY, "CAME TO LIFE"?

No doubt the setting is one on earth, and one that follows chronologically Christ's return to it. The word "lived" then, must connote an existence to which one has returned. As an ingressive aorist,<sup>31</sup> *ezēsan* is best translated "came to life." A reinstatement to embodied existence is what is being described. What is obviously precluded, is seeing this reference to "coming to life" as an experience of saints in heaven prior to the return of Christ as amillennialists often suggest. On the contrary, as Blaising has stated,

John interprets his own words in 5b-6. This coming to life is the "first resurrection." "The second death has no power over them" recalls the promise of 2:11, that they would receive "the crown of life" from Jesus, who himself had come to life....John clarifies that he has resurrection from physical death in view, followed by a reign of the resurrected with Christ on the earth, and he repeats the point that this reign will last a thousand years.<sup>32</sup>

### D. THE FIRST RESURRECTION: PARADOXICAL OR PLAIN MEANING?

Meredith Kline wrote an article about twenty-five years ago that has drawn both praise and criticism alike.<sup>33</sup> He begins with how the word "first" is used both contextually in the Revelation and in other significant NT texts aiding his evaluation. His main contention is that

<sup>31</sup>Thomas has said, "The verb *ezēsan* (they lived) is an ingressive aorist, conveying the force of 'they came to life' or 'they lived again.' This is the meaning of the same form in 2:8 and 20:5 (cf. Rom 14:9). This second life is comparable to the second death that is the destiny of the unfaithful (cf. 2:11; 20:6, 14)" *Revelation* 8–22, p. 416.

<sup>32</sup>Craig Blaising, "Premillennialism," 222.

<sup>33</sup>Meredith Kline, "The First Resurrection," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (Spring, 1975): 366–75. Recent acclaim has come from Bruce Waltke, who referred to this article as containing, "magnificent exegesis." "A Response" in *Dispensationalism Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. Craig Blaising & Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 356. Blaising, who co-edited the above volume shares a different approach. In his essay "Premillennialism," he exclaims, "It seems incredible that Meredith Kline could devote two articles attempting to defend a traditional amillennial view of 'the first resurrection' by means of an argument on the word 'first' completely ignoring the operative term 'resurrection,' (p. 224, n. 96.)

the word is not used in an ordinal sequential way, but rather is employed as a contrasting term. In Revelation 21, Kline states,

"Second" as well as "new" serves as the antithesis of "first." Whatever accounts for the preference for "first" over "old" in describing the present world, the use of "first" naturally led to the use of "second" alongside of "new" for the future world, particularly for the future reality of eternal death for which the term "new" with its positive redemptive overtones would be inappropriate.<sup>34</sup>

Specifically in Revelation 20, Kline establishes a paradoxical reading of the passage.<sup>35</sup> He therefore denies that the term *anastasis* retains its normal usage in this passage. Clearly the burden of proof falls on Kline to establish this highly unusual meaning of a word that, in every instance in the NT, refers to physical resurrection of the body.<sup>36</sup>

Blaising's comments here are apropos:

John's meaning is established by his use of the word "resurrection" (*anastasis*) to clarify "came to life" (*ezēsan*). The word *anastasis*

<sup>34</sup>Meredith Kline, "The First Resurrection," 367.

<sup>35</sup>This paragraph represents the essence of his article. Kline explains, "The proper decipherment of the 'first resurrection' in the interlocking schema of first-(second) resurrection and (first)-second death is now obvious enough. Just as the resurrection of the unjust is paradoxically identified as 'the second death' so the death of the Christian is paradoxically identified as 'the first resurrection.' John sees the Christian dead (v. 4). The real meaning of their passage from earthly life is to be found in the state to which it leads them. And John sees the Christian dead, living, and reigning with Christ (vv. 4, 6); unveiled before the seer is the royal-priestly life on the heavenly side of the Christian's earthly death. Hence the use of the paradoxical metaphor of 'the first resurrection' (v. 5f.) for the death of the faithful believer. What for others is the first death is for the Christian a veritable resurrection!" "The First Resurrection," 371.

<sup>36</sup>It is well known that from over 40 references, the possible exception to a literal bodily resurrection of the term *anastasis*, is found in Luke 2:34. J. Dwight Pentecost, commenting on this passage, had this to say however: "Simeon declared that Israel's destiny was tied into this person. Jesus was 'destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel (Luke 2:34).' Those who received Him would rise with Him but those who rejected Him would fall under His curse." *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids:



is never used in the Bible for the continuing existence of the physically dead. Other than an instance in which it has no reference to death (Luke 2:34, although an oblique reference to resurrection cannot be ruled out), it *always* refers to the *elimination of the condition of physical death through bodily resurrection*.<sup>37</sup>

Kline's thesis, although winning some advocates<sup>38</sup> has some problems. The most important are the contextual issues. Kline's approach fails to take into account what the Revelation has been leading up to all along: A vindication of the risen Christ on the earth.

From the beginning of the book Jesus is expected to return (cf. 1:7). In Rev 11:15, the great pre-announcement of what transpires in the millennium, requires an earthly rule: "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."

Also, Kline's view concerning the concept of "first" being part of the present order of things which is destined to pass away, will reach an insurmountable problem of explaining how our Lord Himself is the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:20, 23). He is also described in the NT as the *firstborn* from the dead (Col 1:18, Rev 1:5); He is the *firstborn* over all creation (Col 1:15); He is the *firstborn* among many brethren (Rom 8:29); He is the *firstborn* of Mary (Matt 1:25); and He is the *first* and the last (Rev 1:17). Clearly Jesus Christ does not belong to the order of things that is passing away. On the contrary the coming world derives its form and function, as well as retains its splendor throughout all aeons because Jesus the Savior *first* loved us with an everlasting love.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, there is no reason to think that an intermediate kingdom prior to the eternal state is incompatible with the resurrected state of believers. According to Kline, the heavenly reigning with Christ would still be "on this side of consummation. It is only the intermediate, not the

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Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 65. It may not be inappropriate then to claim that *bodily rising* is *always* the meaning of the word *anastasis*.

<sup>37</sup>Blaising, "Premillennialism," 223-24.

<sup>38</sup>Don Garlington in "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 in Its Salvation-Historical Setting," *Baptist Review of Theology* 4 (Spring, 1994): 4-37, follows Kline quite closely in this study.

<sup>39</sup>See 1 John 4:19; Jer 31:3.



final state.”<sup>40</sup> If the saints in heaven are not yet in the consummated state, then there is an imperfection in heaven. If an imperfect (non-resurrected) person can exist in heaven (perfect environment), then why can there not be an imperfect environment (millennial earth) where perfected (resurrected) people can exist? Unless Kline believes the non-resurrected state to be ideal, there is room for the millennial (intermediate) earthly kingdom using a variation of Kline’s own ideas.

#### E. RESURRECTION OR RESURRECTIONS?

Kline has therefore failed to convince this writer of his view of “the first resurrection.” There is clearly in the text of the passage more evidence for an alternate approach to Kline’s than has been provided thus far. In 20:5, we are told that the rest of the dead *ouk ezēsan* (did not come to life again) until the thousand years were over. Here John makes a recognizable distinction. Those resurrected at the beginning of the millennium were not all the dead. Other dead ones are to be resurrected after the thousand years are complete. These, no doubt, will include the wicked dead and possibly those who die during the millennium.<sup>41</sup>

The resurrection of the wicked should cause us no alarm. It is of the nature of humanity to “live” eternally. The resurrection of Christ according to 1 Corinthians 15 is the Firstfruits. The guarantee of all rising is found in the historical resurrection of Jesus. Paul’s discussion of this is in 1 Corinthians 15. In vv. 20-28 the idea of orders of resurrection is found. Each will rise in his own *tagmati* (order).<sup>42</sup> Revelation 20 merely shows us the outworking of the earlier expectation that Paul had.

The first resurrection then is not to be understood as the first actual occurrence of a resurrection resulting in a perfect re-embodied state. This has transpired in history but once. It is Christ’s resurrection that is first numerically and therefore no other resurrection can be first in that sense. What then is the meaning of the term “first”? Its significance

<sup>40</sup>Kline, “The First Resurrection,” 371.

<sup>41</sup>Roy Aldrich, “Divisions of the First Resurrection,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (April, 1971): 117-19.

<sup>42</sup>This military term is ideal, as it conveys a sense of orders of resurrection. See D. Edmond Hiebert, “Evidence From 1 Corinthians 15,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, 225-34.

is to be sought in what it results in. Those blessed to be a part of the first resurrection may actually rise at different times, as is the case of Jesus and those who rise at the time of His return. But the consequence of not being susceptible to harm from the second death is what defines the order of the first resurrection.<sup>43</sup> Since there are very few who would disclaim that the second use of the term *ezēsan* in 20:5 does not refer to bodily rising, then a strong suggestion that this is also the case in 20:4 can be made. Both times John speaks of bodily rising.

What separates these two words is the reign on earth for a thousand years. The saints who partake in the first resurrection are further described as being priests and ruling with Christ. "The saints constitute a kingdom" Ladd explains, "not because they are the people over whom Christ reigns, but because they share His reign."<sup>44</sup> This reign then, can be expected only during the earthly rule that Christ establishes at His second advent. No other view, no matter how plausible, fits the context as well as does the basic premillennial understanding of this chapter.

## VI. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

One other line of evidence is worth mentioning here. As one reads the final dramatic account of Jesus' second coming and examines closely the judgment inflicted, some interesting observations can be discerned. John seems to make careful distinctions between the type of judgment administered to rebellious humanity on the one hand, and to the beast and false prophet on the other. In Rev 19:20-21 the first one dealt with is the beast, and with him, the false prophet. These two are

<sup>43</sup>Walvoord perhaps said it best in claiming, "The term 'first resurrection' is not an event but an order of resurrection including all the righteous who are raised from the dead before the millennial kingdom begins," *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 299. It would be wise to add to this definition that it is not necessary to encompass only those who rise before the millennium. The key to the concept of the "first" resurrection is that those who partake in it, no matter when, will in fact be raised to blessedness and will not be hurt by the second death. Conceivably, some will be raised at the end of the millennium who will also partake of the first resurrection, the only difference is that accordingly they will not reign with Christ for the thousand years but will partake of the blessed Kingdom which will last forever on the new earth.

<sup>44</sup>Ladd, *A Commentary*, 264.



explicitly mentioned as the ones thrown into the lake of fire. The rest are killed in a manner leaving their bodies as food for the birds, suggesting they are *not* thrown into the lake of fire. Theirs is clearly physical and temporal, not eternal, punishment.

In Rev 20:7-10 a similar distinction is made in the battle after the millennium. This time Satan, who was merely imprisoned after the casting into hell of the beast and false prophet, is permitted to rise from the abyss. He amasses the army, named as Gog and Magog, to fight against the saints. In v 9 we see fire coming down from heaven killing the people gathered for battle. This appears to be physical death in a similar fate describing those who perished in chapter 19. Satan, however, is at this time cast into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet had been consigned a thousand years earlier.

What is significant to note is that *only* Satan is so judged. The eternal banishment of the rebellious people awaits their physical resurrection that does not occur until 20:12ff. It is after the evaluation, made by God based on the data in the open books, that the wicked are also finally cast into the lake of fire. Here, as the text indicates, all the dead were made to stand before the Great White Throne. Presumably those who died physically in the battle described in chapter 19 are at this time also present with those who died in the battle in chapter 20. It seems that at this gathering the whole of humanity will be present. Only those who have their names written in the book of life will escape the second death. Those written in the book of life will be spared the condemnation of the lake of fire because they have been saved by faith. The data in the other open books will become the basis for the degrees of condemnation which the lost will experience.

Although Revelation doesn't explicitly state this, it is inferred from the fact that the judgment of God is made on the basis of people's works. In Matt 10:15; 11:22 and Luke 11:13, Jesus specifically describes degrees of condemnation of those who are lost. This appears to be the counterpart to the Bible's explanation of degrees of reward for the saved.

Then those not found in the book of life will join the devil and his hosts in the eternal fires of hell. The chronological distinction of judgment presented in these two chapters also indicates an interval of time. This too lends support for an intermediate earthly kingdom that lasts a thousand years, as Rev 20:4-6 informs us.



## VII. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study, we expressed the notion that the Book of Revelation is complex. This is particularly true when one engages the secondary literature. Surprisingly enough, when one stays in the text of the Apocalypse itself, a chronological progression seems to become self evident, especially between chapters 6 and 22. In reading this complete text in one sitting, one gets the feeling that only a preconceived commitment to non-millennial doctrine is really at fault for missing it in the text itself. The millennial reign of Christ with His saints is an end time phenomenon, actualized after the Lord returns to the earth in the post-tribulational advent.

Premillennialism is the outcome of the plain reading of the text. Of course, Premillennialism must not become a litmus test for fellowship among Evangelicals. What must be overcome is eschatological agnosticism, especially when it arises from neglect of the Revelation of John. Is the Apocalypse complex? Yes, certainly. But is it incomprehensible? No, not at all. After all, "Revelation" means *disclosing* not *disguising*! The "thousand year" reign of Christ with His saints is clearly and repeatedly *revealed* in the Revelation.

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# **CONFESSION OF SINS IN THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Dennis the Menace is kneeling at his bedside, hands folded, his eyes looking toward heaven. With an imploring look on his face, he prays, "I'm here to turn myself in!" Dennis senses that for things to be right between himself and God, he must turn himself in. He must confess his sins.

Dennis's prayer seems so simple, so innocent, so straightforward, that I feel a little guilty saying, "Let's analyze and question what Dennis is saying in that prayer." But having confessed my feelings of guilt, let's proceed anyway: Is Dennis confessing his sins thinking he must do this to go to heaven? If he already has believed in Jesus and received forgiveness, why does he still think he needs to confess his sins for forgiveness? Is he sorry for his sins? Is he sorry enough to be forgiven? Has he repented? If he's only confessing some of his sins, how does God feel about the ones he doesn't confess?

While I wouldn't want to overwhelm or discourage Dennis with questions like these, I think that answers to these and other questions are extremely important to his spiritual life and ours, too. This article will raise and attempt to answer ten questions about confession of sins.

## **II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CONFESS SINS?**

The first question is "What does it mean to confess sins?" The term "confess" found in 1 John 1:9 means "to say the same thing, to agree, to admit, to acknowledge." When I confess my sins to God, I simply admit to Him the sins that He already knows I have committed. To confess sins also involves a request for God's forgiveness as evidenced by the words of Jesus when He taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4). To confess sins, therefore, involves an admission of sins and a request for God's forgiveness.



### III. WHO NEEDS TO CONFESS SINS?

That leads to a second question, "Who needs to confess sins?" Some suggest that confession of sins is something that unsaved people must do to be saved, citing 1 John 1:9 as proof, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But there are some obvious problems with this view. First of all, John says, "If *we* confess our sins." In the previous verses, John makes it crystal clear that the term "we" refers to himself, the other apostles, and his readers whom he assumes already have eternal life as evidenced in 1 John 2:12-14. A suggestion that "we" in 1 John 1:9 refers to neither the readers nor the writer is self-refuting. Who needs to confess sins? "We do!" John says, referring to himself, the other apostles, and his believing readers. Secondly, John's Gospel was specifically written to tell us how to receive eternal life and never is confession of sins mentioned as a condition. Thirdly, Jesus taught believers to confess sins when He gave the model prayer, telling the disciples to pray, "Forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4).

### IV. WHY DO WE NEED TO CONFESS SINS?

But that leads to a third question, "Why do we need to confess sins?" 1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We need to confess sins in order to be forgiven of sins. "But," someone might ask, "haven't we already been forgiven of our sins? Didn't that happen when we received eternal life? Doesn't Eph 1:7 make that clear: 'In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace'? And what about Col 3:13: '...Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do'? Aren't we insulting God to ask Him for something He's already given us?"

These questions were perfectly and beautifully answered by Jesus on the night before His crucifixion as He met with His disciples in the Upper Room and attempted to wash their feet. Jesus carefully and clearly explained His actions with these words, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you" (John 13:10). If you and I lived in the days of Jesus

and the disciples, we could better relate to His illustration. On a given day, we would get up in the morning and take a bath. And at that moment, we are completely clean. We then leave our house and walk in open sandals down dusty unpaved streets to visit our friend. When we arrive, our feet are filthy. With dirty feet, we should not want to, or be allowed to, enjoy fellowship in our friend's house. So what do we need to do? Take a bath? No. Just as Jesus said, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean..."

But what did Jesus mean by this statement? Certainly he isn't talking about literal daily hygiene because He goes on to say, "...and you are clean, but not all of you. For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean'" (John 13:10-11). Obviously Jesus is not referring to Judas's personal hygiene in contrast to that of the eleven, but rather He is contrasting Judas's spiritual condition with theirs. The eleven had believed in Jesus for eternal life and received the bath of positional forgiveness of their sins; Judas had not. But the eleven still needed to let Jesus wash their feet. If the bath represents forgiveness of sins, then so does the washing of feet. The bath represents positional forgiveness of sins; the washing of feet represents daily, experiential forgiveness of sins. To paraphrase Jesus' words, "He who has received the bath of positional forgiveness of sins needs only to receive the foot washing of experiential forgiveness of sins."

Jesus startled Peter that night when He said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8). What did Jesus mean by that statement? Again, He obviously isn't talking about literal footwashing as a requirement to gain eternal life. To have a "part" with Jesus means to have fellowship with Jesus. Just as a visitor needed to wash his feet before having fellowship in someone's home, so we must be cleansed of daily sin in order to experience fellowship with God. To paraphrase Jesus' words in v 8, *If you do not allow me to cleanse your daily sins, you will have no fellowship with Me.*

In the Upper Room that night, Jesus didn't explain to the disciples what they must do to have their feet washed and receive daily, experiential forgiveness of sins. But that was by design. He knew that they wouldn't understand until a later time as He said, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7). Jesus' prediction was fulfilled, as the disciples later understood what He had taught them that night and they are now zealous to share this truth with us. As John says in 1 John 1:3, "That which we have



seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,” and he explains in v 9 that confession of sins is what we must do to have fellowship with God.

The term *fellowship* means sharing. John writes so that we may share the same spiritual experiences with the Father and the Son that the apostles experienced. John stresses the importance of confession of sins and fellowship in 1 John 1:4, “These things we write to you that your joy may be full.” The Majority Text leads us to translate, “These things we write to you that *our* joy may be full.” “Our joy,” John says; the joy of the apostles, is made full when they know that believers are confessing their sins to receive forgiveness and experience fellowship with the Father and the Son. Their joy is made full because they know that fellowship with God is what it’s all about. There is nothing in our lives that is more important than “turning ourselves in” to experience forgiveness and fellowship with God.

Our need for confession, forgiveness, and fellowship is based on a message about God that we need to understand. As John says in 1 John 1:5, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” God is perfect, free from any imperfection or impurity. How can we as sinful, impure people have fellowship with a sinless God? We must be completely cleansed of our sins; not only cleansed by our once for all bath, but also by the continual washing of our feet. Why do we need to confess our sins? To allow Jesus to wash our feet of daily sins so we can have fellowship with God in whom there is no darkness at all.

## V. HOW DOES GOD RESPOND TO CONFESSION OF SINS?

Now a fourth question. “How does God respond to confession of sins?” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). If we wonder whether or not God will forgive us, we need to remember that He is faithful; He must remain true to His promise. As John says, “He is faithful to forgive us our sins.” God is also “just” to forgive us. God does not compromise His justice when He forgives us because it is the shed blood of Christ that cleanses us. As John says in 1 John 1:7, “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” John does



not say “has cleansed us” (past tense) but “cleanses us” (present tense). This terminology reflects what Jesus said, “He who is bathed [past tense] needs [present tense] only to wash his feet.” The cleansing agent for our bath was the blood of Christ, the same blood that washes our feet of daily sin. You and I have never experienced one moment of fellowship with God apart from present cleansing by the blood of Christ. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What allows me to have fellowship with God? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. As another songwriter says, “The blood that Jesus shed for me, way back on Calvary, the blood that gives me strength from day to day, it will never lose its power.” How does God respond to confession of sins? He forgives us and cleanses us by the shed blood of Christ.

## VI. WHAT SINS NEED TO BE CONFESSED?

Now a fifth question, “What sins need to be confessed?” 1 John 1:9 answers this question, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In this verse, John distinguishes between two categories of sins. First, he says that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. The term *our* is in italics in the NKJV rightly signifying that it is not in the original text. We could translate “forgive us the sins” meaning the sins that we confess. Obviously the only sins that we can confess are the ones of which we are aware. John refers to a second category of sins when he says, “and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.” This is a reference to the sins of which we are unaware. When we confess the sins of which we are aware, He cleanses us of all unrighteousness including the sins of which we are unaware.

Suppose I notice spots on the front of my suit and take it to the cleaners. When I pick it up days later the cleaner says, “Mr. Bryant, did you know there were spots all over the back of your suit as well?” “No,” I reply, “I didn’t notice.” “It doesn’t matter, Mr. Bryant. We cleaned the whole suit.” In a similar way God holds us accountable to turn ourselves in and confess the sins His light reveals to us. When we do, He not only forgives the sins we confess but He cleanses us from all unrighteousness, even the sins of which we are not aware, and, in turn, we are able to have fellowship with our sinless Father.

Samson is a classic illustration of these truths. Samson did a lot of things that he didn't know were wrong because after all, he lived in the days of the judges. "The word of the Lord was rare in those days" (1 Sam 3:1). "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 21:25). He married a Philistine girl probably not knowing it was prohibited in the Law. He had a weakness for ungodly women and may not have even known it was wrong. I say that because in spite of his sins and immaturity, the Spirit of God worked through him mightily, indicating that he was in fellowship with God. In fact, Samson is one of the heroes of faith recorded in Hebrews 11. Samson is a classic example of an immature believer who walks in fellowship with God. He has all kinds of sin in his life, but he isn't aware of these things as sin.

Samson is just like you and me. Each of us has more sin in our lives than we can even begin to imagine; sins that would keep us from ever having fellowship with God. But we can still have fellowship with Him based on only one condition: that we confess known sins. And when we do, He cleanses us of all the many sins of which we are unaware. Samson helps us to see that God can put up with a lot when our hearts are open to Him. We all underestimate the degree to which He forgives and overlooks things in us and the degree to which He still chooses to use us if we will simply confess known sins.

## VII. WHEN SHOULD SINS BE CONFESSED?

Now a sixth question, "When should sins be confessed?" Jesus answered this question in what is popularly called "The Lord's Prayer." As Jesus introduced the Lord's Prayer, He made it clear that He was giving a model for private prayer, not public prayer, as He said, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place..." (Matt 6:6). When He said, "In this manner, therefore, pray" (Matt 6:9) rather than, "Pray this prayer," He made it clear that He was giving us an outline to follow rather than a prayer to recite. When He said, "Give us this day our daily bread," He made it clear that we should use this model as our everyday way to pray. And when He said, "Forgive us our debts," He made it clear that we should confess our sins at least daily as we spend time alone with God in prayer.



However, that only partially answers the question, "When should sins be confessed?" The Psalmist wrote, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps 66:18). This verse implies that we should confess known sin as soon as we are aware of it in addition to confessing sins in our special daily time of prayer.

### VIII. WHAT MUST PRECEDE CONFESSION OF SINS?

This leads to a seventh question, "What must precede confession of sins?" John answers this question in 1 John 1:7, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." John says we must walk in the light to have fellowship with God. He doesn't say we must walk "according to the light" which would require us to be sinlessly perfect as only God is. To walk in the light means to be open to God in prayer and open to His Word. We must be honest with God about everything He shows us, which means we must confess to Him the sin that He reveals.

When you go to the airport you are required to walk in their light. If you want to go to the gates, you must allow your carry-ons to pass under the x-ray machine and you must walk through a metal detector. If you refuse to open yourself up to this light, you forfeit the privilege of going to the gates. In the same way, to have fellowship with God we must open ourselves up to Him and be willing to confess any sins that His light may expose. If we refuse, we forfeit the privilege of having fellowship with Him.

The truth that walking in the light must precede confession of sins is also seen in the Lord's Prayer. The order of the Lord's Prayer had puzzled me for many years. I wondered why, "Forgive us our sins" came so late in this outline of prayer. But it now seems to me that Jesus gave us this order so that as we focus on "Our Father who art in Heaven" in His sinless glory, we might at times become aware of certain sins even as we are praying. This is similar to what Isaiah experienced when he saw the glory of the Lord, became aware of his sins, and said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:5). As we pray "Thy kingdom come" and focus on the future kingdom, we may become aware of misplaced priorities that need to be confessed. As we pray "Give us



this day our daily bread” and elaborate on the needs we ask Him to meet, we may become aware of selfish desires and motives that need to be confessed.

Therefore, as we pray following the outline of the Lord’s Prayer, an elaboration of “Forgive us our sins” should be similar to what the Psalmist prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps 139:23-24). What must precede confession of sins? An open, honest heart that walks in God’s light and is willing to confess whatever sins that light reveals. Following the order of the Lord’s Prayer helps us to have that kind of heart.

## IX. WHAT MUST ACCOMPANY CONFESSION OF SINS?

The order of the Lord’s Prayer leads us to ask an eighth question, “What must accompany confession of sins?” Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:12). This is the only part of the model prayer, which Jesus explained, as He said, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt 6:14-15). Jesus is teaching us that forgiveness of others must accompany confession of sins. If we don’t forgive others, our Father will not forgive us. There is a difference between the condition upon which God forgives us and the condition upon which we are to forgive others. We must confess our sins to Him but never are we told that others must confess their sins to us. We are to forgive others regardless of their words and actions toward us. Since the Lord’s Prayer is our model for daily prayer, we know that Jesus wants us to open our hearts to our heavenly Father each day concerning whether there is someone we may need to forgive. Jesus taught this same truth in the Upper Room when He said, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). His forgiveness of us (washing our feet) must be accompanied by our forgiveness of others (washing one another’s feet).

The Lord’s Prayer not only reveals that confession of sins must be accompanied by forgiveness of others, but also by a desire to not continue sinning, as evidenced by these words, “And lead us not into

temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13). A request for forgiveness is followed by a request for God to protect us from temptation as well as a request to be delivered from evil.

What must accompany confession of sins? Forgiveness of others as well as a sincere desire to not continue to sin.

## X. WHAT MAY OR MAY NOT ACCOMPANY CONFESSION OF SINS?

Having considered what must accompany confession of sins, let's now consider a ninth question, "What may or may not accompany confession of sins?" Two further questions explain what I have in mind here, "Must sorrow accompany confession of sins?" and "Must repentance accompany confession of sins?" It seems to me that the biblical answer to both questions is "No."

To suggest that sorrow must accompany confessions of sins is to suggest something devoid of any scriptural support. Certainly, sorrow may accompany confession, but the Scriptures don't demand it. Besides, how would one measure the amount of sorrow needed to qualify for God's forgiveness? To suggest that sorrow must accompany confession of sins will only lead one to wonder if one is sorry enough, robbing that person of the assurance of forgiveness and fellowship with God.

To suggest that repentance must accompany confession of sin is to fail to see John's usage of the concept in his writings. He never uses the term *repentance* in 1 John but he does use it in Revelation of those who are in a persistent pattern of sin which needs to be changed (Rev 2:5, 16, 21, 23; 3:3, 19). Confession of sins, however, seems to apply to an audience in 1 John that has nothing of which to repent, people who simply discover sin as they walk in the light. This is consistent with the Lord's Prayer in which believers who draw near to God in daily prayer need no repentance, but do need to ask for forgiveness as God reveals their sins. While true repentance would certainly include confession of sins, daily confession of sins would not necessarily include repentance.

## XI. WHAT SHOULD FOLLOW CONFESSION OF SINS?

Now a final question, "What may or may not follow confession of sins?" John tells us that fellowship with God is not identical to knowing God. Fellowship with God is based on confession of sins while knowing God is based on keeping His commandments. After John encourages the readers toward fellowship with God in 1:1-2:2, he goes on to encourage the readers toward knowing God in 2:3-11. Knowing God is the goal toward which fellowship should lead, but it is not identical to it.

Jesus made this distinction in the Upper Room. After washing the disciples' feet, picturing forgiveness and fellowship with Him, He later says to Phillip, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Phillip?" (John 14:9). Obviously Jesus is not saying that Phillip is not saved. He had already said, "All of you are clean," including Phillip. But He is saying that Phillip and the other disciples did not know Jesus as well as they could and would. To know Him better and better takes time and obedience to His commands. It follows fellowship, which is received by the washing of feet. As is His desire for us, Jesus wanted the disciples to experience fellowship as a foundation upon which they would come to know Him in a growing personal relationship. Even though it is not automatic, knowing Him should follow confession of sins.

## XII. CONCLUSION

Dennis the Menace is a great example to us all. May we all continually turn ourselves in, confessing known sin to our Father in heaven that we may enjoy fellowship with Him.



**GRACE IN THE ARTS:**  
**THE BRONTE SISTERS:**  
**A MINISTERIAL HOME WITHOUT**  
**MUCH *BLESSED* ASSURANCE**

**JAMES A. TOWNSEND**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Bronte [*BRAHN-tay*] wrote of her sister Emily in her obituary, "I have never seen her parallel in anything."<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact the very same eulogium could be applied to all three Bronte sisters—Charlotte, Emily, and Anne. Never in the history of literature have three sisters so distinguished themselves as such world-class authors. Some literature professors would probably class Emily's *Wuthering Heights* among the top ten novels in English literature. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* is not to be rated far behind that novel.

Another unparalleled fact is that none of the trio of world-renowned sisters lived to be forty years old. Charlotte (1816-1855) lived to be 39, Emily (1818-1848) 30, and Anne (1820-1849) only 29, yet among the three of them seven of their novels were published—with two of them proving to be blockbusters. The great literary critic Matthew Arnold penned a poem entitled "Haworth Churchyard," referring to where this remarkable family of authors was buried.

Charlotte Bronte met other celebrated contemporary English writers such as William Thackeray, Thomas Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold, as well as being friends with two well-known female authors—atheist Harriet Martineau and Unitarian writer Elizabeth Gaskell (who would become Charlotte's first biographer). She was also a contemporary of female authors George Eliot, George Sand, and Jane Austen. (Austen's novels Charlotte did not particularly admire.) Intriguingly, if we include the three Bronte sisters along with the last three named novelists, five of the six female authors felt compelled—in that male-dominated society—to assume masculine pen names in order to get their excellent

<sup>1</sup>Rebecca Fraser, *The Brontes* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1988), 317.

works published. (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte took the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, preserving the same initials of their first and last names, in order to secure publication.)

Whether we can classify the falsehood of Ellen Nussey (Charlotte's longest-lasting friend and pen pal) with the lies of the Egyptian midwives (in Exod 1:19) or not, we are indebted to Ellen for her falsity. In the last year of Charlotte's life, Ellen promised Charlotte's husband to burn Charlotte's old letters. However, Ellen relented this promise and later shared 300 of Charlotte's 500 letters to her with Charlotte's first biographer. The twenty-four year correspondence between these two friends has provided the bulk of documentary data about the Brontes for their biographical legacy, which constitutes the bulk of four volumes of their correspondence.<sup>2</sup>

Charlotte indicated that every morning her ministerial father carried a loaded pistol with him, and other reports circulated that he fired off a brace of pistols out of his window each day. Whether or not the latter tale is true, assuredly from this ministerial home certain shots were fired that were heard around the world—namely the unprecedented, yet secretive, blast of creative power released from that parsonage by means of some very *novel* novels. (The descriptive word “secretive” is employed here because their own brother—living at home before he died—never even knew that his sisters had rocked the literary world with their sensational books.

## II. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

From 1738 (the year of his purported conversion or Aldersgate experience) until the year of his death (1791) John Wesley left a trail of impact upon England and world history that has rarely ever been equaled anywhere. Wesley first arrived in 1748 at Haworth, the village of the yet future Brontes. Wesley would participate there in services of the Church of Englander William Grimshaw. In fact, “John Wesley preached at Haworth in 1757, 1761, 1766, 1772, 1786, and 1790; and [his fellow (Calvinistic-oriented) evangelist] George Whitefield [pronounced WHIT-field]...preached [at Haworth] many times.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 477, 482, 489.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas J. Wise and J. A. Symington, eds., *The Brontes: Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932), I, 52.



Although William Grimshaw was not a Methodist, this Haworth minister of the Church of England was friendly to the Methodists. Grimshaw had been an excessive drinker and better on horse racing. This graduate of Christ's College at Cambridge "became a typical [Anglican] curate...until a long spiritual struggle culminated in a conversion experience in 1742."<sup>4</sup> He was converted through reading the Bible and John Owens on the subject of justification. Therefore, he became an Evangelical and evangelistic Anglican. In his twenty-one years at Haworth he transformed the countryside. John Newton, who penned our hymn "Amazing Grace" and wrote Grimshaw's biography, reported, "The last time I was with him was as we were standing together on a hill near Haworth."<sup>5</sup> Grimshaw had held the position that seventy years later the Bronte sisters' father (Patrick) would hold as an Anglican clergyman.

One of Patrick Bronte's mentors had been Charles Simeon, an eminent Evangelical Church of Englander, whose life history would later be edited by one of the most damaging of Christians (physically and spiritually) to the Bronte children (William Carus Wilson). Patrick Bronte had attended St. John's College at Cambridge for ministerial training. The well-known pioneer missionary Henry Martyn (Simeon's curate) wrote to the evangelical social reformer William Wilberforce in order to gain financial aid for young Patrick Bronte while he was at college. Patrick Bronte himself authored two religious novels and was known as an evangelical Anglican clergyman. He once wrote a poem in which he borrowed Wesley's hymn-phrase "a crucified God," presumably implying that Bronte believed in the full deity and humanity of Christ. Also he wrote to a Miss Burder (April 21, 1823), "An interest in Jesus Christ is the best interest we can have, both here and hereafter."<sup>6</sup> To *The Pastoral Visitor* (1815) he contributed two articles entitled "On Conversion." All of the preceding information thus far shows how the Bronte sisters were raised in the heartland of English Evangelicalism.

<sup>4</sup>John C. Pollack in J. D. Douglas, ed. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 438.

<sup>5</sup>Elsie Harrison, *Haworth Parsonage: A Study of Wesley and the Brontes* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), 9.

<sup>6</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, I, 62.



Patrick Brontë's wife Maria died after nine years of marriage and the birthing of six children. She had been a Methodist prior to their marriage. Before their marriage she had written her husband-to-be of their prayers "ascend[ing] to a throne of grace, and through a Redeemer's merits [they will] procure for us peace and happiness here and a life of eternal felicity hereafter."<sup>7</sup> In a later letter she urged her future husband to be "successful in [his] evangelistic efforts for the salvation of souls."<sup>8</sup> Actually, Mrs. Brontë's preceding statements are among the clearest salvational statements found in the entirety of the Brontë family's written legacy. After their mother died, their aunt (Miss Branwell)—a Methodist—entered their home and contributed to the children's spiritual heritage. One Brontë biographer, Winifred Gerin, wrongly treated Aunt Branwell as a Calvinist rather than an Arminian.<sup>9</sup> Still today in the Haworth parsonage can be seen the girls' samplers with Bible verses stitched on them.

Two other Brontë sisters died early (Charlotte believed) as a result of poor nourishment and treatment in the girls' school run by a Calvinist named William Carus Wilson. The school is depicted in *Jane Eyre*, and Charlotte's depiction of it generated a lot of heated controversy among alumni because of her accusations.

As young adults in 1846 the three sisters combined to have a book of their poetry published. It sold a grand total of two copies. Then all three wrote novels, and two of them were immediately successful. The two (out of their seven publications) which attained lasting recognition were Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* (pronounced *ERR*) and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*.

Ironically, it was their brother, Branwell, who (as the only son) was expected to achieve fame for literature. Unitarian minister James Martineau had praised his poetry. However, Branwell proved to be an irresponsible, dissolute alcoholic and opium addict. He was dead at age 31 without ever having known that his three sisters had published books that would achieve world fame. During his terminal period Branwell sketched "funerary sculptures of himself consumed by the

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>9</sup>Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 52.

flames of hell.”<sup>10</sup> Though Branwell allowed his father to pray for him in his last period and though Charlotte later believed him to be at peace in heaven, there is no solid evidence to indicate that this minister’s son was a true Christian.

Charlotte watched Branwell, Emily, and Anne all die within nine months of each other. Each of the three women were distinctive in temperament. Emily and Anne, who were closest to each other, were polar opposites. Emily’s willfulness protruded itself in the never-to-be-forgotten personalities of the brutish Heathcliff and the irrepressible Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*. By contrast with Emily, Anne was the reserved, submissive, pliant, gentle youngest sister. She reminds one of the Beth-character in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*. Charlotte struggled with her unattractive appearance and painful silence—despite her intellectual brilliance. The general impression given was that Emily was the least Christian in doctrine, and Anne seemed the most Christian in life-orientation.

In (what turned out to be) the last year of her life, Charlotte married her father’s curate (which was in American terms like being an assistant pastor), Arthur Nicholls. At first she was shocked at the unsuspectedness of his marriage proposal and declined it, but Nicholls’s longsuffering persistence paid off, and their year of marriage seems to have been happy. One of the people Charlotte discussed her engagement with was Catherine Winkworth, whose name appears in many hymnal indexes as the translator of numerous German hymns into English. She published over 300 German hymn translations (including that of the hymn “Now Thank We All Our God”).

### III. ANALYSIS OF THEIR NOVELS

Whereas Charlotte Bronte (thanks to Ellen Nussey’s falsehood mentioned earlier) left a legacy of perhaps 500 letters, the same Ellen declared, “So very little is known of Emily Bronte.”<sup>11</sup> Emily seemed to be like a boiling cauldron with the lid clamped down on top. Finally her smoldering mini-volcano erupted in her novel *Wuthering Heights* (which is the least patently autobiographical of the seven novels that the three sisters bequeathed to the world).

<sup>10</sup>Fraser, *The Brontes*, 253.

<sup>11</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, II, 273.



Literary critic Edward Wagenknecht indicated that "her novel stands alone in world literature," noting that "Lord David Cecil [who also wrote on the Christian poet William Cowper] regards *Wuthering Heights* as the greatest of all Victorian novels."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Barry Qualls concluded, "There is nothing like *Wuthering Heights* in...19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction."<sup>13</sup> Norman Sherry deduced, "Certainly it is the most finished of

all the Bronte novels in its more complete artistic vision and in its superior fictional technique."<sup>14</sup>

Analysts Gilbert and Gubar made the assessment, "That *Wuthering Heights* is about heaven and hell...has long been seen by critics...partly because Nelly Dean raises the questions: What is heaven? Where is hell? Perhaps more urgently than any other speech in an English novel."<sup>15</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti commented in 1854 that *Wuthering Heights* "is a fiend of a book, an incredible monster...The action is laid in

Hell."<sup>16</sup> Its lead male character (Heathcliff) is called an "imp of Satan" (ch. 5), "a devil" (ch. 13), "most diabolical" (ch. 19), and "a ghoul or a vampire" (ch. 34). Its one indisputable area of overlap with Christianity is that "the story of *Wuthering Heights* is built around a central fall."<sup>17</sup> However, unlike Christianity, the novel offers no clear-cut, substantive doctrine of redemption.

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<sup>12</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the English Novel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1943), 304, 314.

<sup>13</sup>Barry V. Qualls in *The Columbia History of the British Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 353.

<sup>14</sup>Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Bronte* (New York: Arco, 1969), 114.

<sup>15</sup>Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 253.

<sup>16</sup>Qualls, *Columbia History*, 373.

<sup>17</sup>Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 253.



Emily Bronte seems to have been the least Christianly oriented of the three sisters. Although a negligible amount of data about her has survived outside of her one world-class novel, several surviving tidbits of information indicate her penchant away from Christian orthodoxy. Once their friend Mary Taylor mentioned that at Haworth someone asked her "what religion I was of," trying to pin down her perspective. She replied that the answer to that question was between God and her. At that comment Emily Bronte exclaimed, "That's right." Mary Taylor later commented, "This was all I ever heard Emily say on religious subjects."<sup>18</sup>

Biographer Rebecca Fraser wrote that Anne Bronte "distrusted Emily's wild, wilful pantheism."<sup>19</sup> Fraser then added that Emily's poetic lines "left a Christian God out of the equation and [her sister] Anne...rejected Emily's vision."<sup>20</sup>

Emily penned the following two poetic lines:

"I'll walk where my own nature would be leading:  
It vexes me to choose another guide."<sup>21</sup>

Taken at face value, the lines are a declaration of independence from God. This view is confirmed in her poem "The Old Stoic" when Emily stated:

"And if I pray, the only prayer  
That moves my lips for me  
Is, 'Leave the heart that now I bear,  
And give me liberty!'"<sup>22</sup>

Thus, one evangelical minister's daughter evidently died entrenched in her own willfulness.

Anne Bronte wrote two books—*Agnes Grey* (1845) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Although the English writer George Moore "champion[ed] Anne as the greatest of the [three] Brontes," it remains

<sup>18</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, II, 275-76.

<sup>19</sup>Fraser, *Brontes*, 294.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, II, 275.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

for most appraisers "doubtful whether either [of Anne's novels] would be read now if Anne were not the sister of Charlotte and Emily."<sup>23</sup>

George Moore eccentrically called *Agnes Grey* "the most perfect prose narrative in English literature."<sup>24</sup> In *Agnes Grey* Anne transmuted her own autobiographical experience in serving as an English governess into novel form. Agnes Grey served as a governess for two high-class ungovernable children. Agnes also fell in love with a young Anglican curate, Mr. Weston, and married him. In real life Anne had a crush upon the curate Mr. Weightman who died suddenly.

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* transmutes her brother Branwell's real-life experience into fiction, but like Anne's own thwarted love affair, Branwell's hopes were torpedoed in real life. Branwell had a romance going (some said an actual affair) with his employer's wife, and when his employer died, he threatened to disinherit his widow if she married Branwell. In the novel Gilbert Markham fell in love with a woman (Helen Graham) who appeared to be a widow, but turned out to be separated from her dissolute husband and who sought to redeem him (as no doubt Anne tried to do with her dissipated brother) before he died. Whereas Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is concerned with a single man who can't marry a woman because she's officially married (secretly) to an immoral man, Charlotte's main novel *Jane Eyre* is concerned with a woman who can't marry a man because he's officially married (secretly) to an insane woman.

Maria Fawley wrote: "Anne Bronte was more influenced by her [Methodist] aunt's religious beliefs than were any of her siblings."<sup>25</sup> Charlotte wrote to Margaret Wooler (March 24, 1849) concerning Anne, "at heart she is—I believe—a true Christian. She looks beyond this life, and regards her Home and Rest as elsewhere than on Earth."<sup>26</sup> Charlotte said (on June 4, 1849) that Anne died "trusting in God."<sup>27</sup>

Despite the preceding statements, the documentary evidence concerning Anne's Christianity and concomitant assurance is not without

<sup>23</sup>Cornelius Weygandt, *A Century of the English Novel* (Freeport, NY: Books for Library Press, 1968), 109-110.

<sup>24</sup>Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade*, 315.

<sup>25</sup>Maria Fawley, *Anne Bronte* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 24.

<sup>26</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, II, 317.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

surprising contrary data. When Anne was ill in 1837, she "requested a visit with the Moravian minister James de la Trobe and discussed what he called 'the main truths of the Bible respecting our salvation.'" <sup>28</sup> It is interesting that when Anne wished to discuss issues related to salvation, she did not turn to her evangelical minister father for assistance.

Charlotte testified concerning Anne, "I have said that she was religious [which in those days in England meant being a 'Christian'], and it was by leaning on those Christian doctrines in which she firmly believed that she found support through...her last hour [with]...calm triumph."<sup>29</sup> However, in retrospect one year (1849) after her "gentle, retiring" sister's death, Charlotte wrote,

In looking over my sister Anne's papers, I find mournful evidence that religious feeling had been to her much like what it was to [William] Cowper [pronounced *KOO-puhr*]...in a milder form...she waited at the foot of a secret Sinai...To me [that] seem[s] sad, as if her whole innocent life had passed under the martyrdom of an unconfessed physical pain.<sup>30</sup>

In one of Anne's poetically composed hymns (called "The Doubter's Prayer," September 10, 1843) she wrote that "every fiend of Hell methinks/Enjoys the anguish of my heart."<sup>31</sup> (These lines expressing her difficulty with Christian assurance were penned six years after her discussion with the Moravian minister about salvation.)

Another of Anne's poems expresses her lack of assurance:

"Could I but hear my Savior say,  
 'I know thy patience and thy love;  
 How thou hast held the narrow way,  
 For my sake labored night and day,  
 And watched, and striven with them that strove,  
 And still hast borne, and didst not faint,'  
 Oh, this would be reward indeed!"<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Frawley, *Anne Bronte*, 31.

<sup>29</sup>Haworth, *Hamilton Parsonage*, 41.

<sup>30</sup>Frawley, *Anne Bronte*, 20.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.



This poem obviously expresses a works-based (lack of) assurance. At odds with the above statements is Bronte biographer Elizabeth Gaskell's (Unitarian) record that Charlotte told her before death that Anne had said, "soon all will be well through the merits of our Redeemer."<sup>33</sup> One would hope that Anne did understand assurance in Christ on her deathbed, yet despite growing up in an evangelical home, Anne was obviously more than once troubled by questions about eternal life and assurance (as the title to this article intimates).

Of the three authorial sisters Charlotte was the oldest, lived the longest, and authored the most novels—four of them. *Jane Eyre* was Charlotte's unCinderella story in that the unbeautiful Jane receives two offers of marriage. It also has some parallels with the Old Testament account of Joseph in that (1) she returns to forgive the relative who mistreated her earlier in life, and (2) she rises to become first in her class.<sup>34</sup> Like Joseph, Jane also must confront a moral dilemma of a sexual nature, and she refuses to yield to it. For that refusal she must suffer for a number of years until finally a reversal takes place.

The then-contemporary reviews of *Jane Eyre* were highly diverse. One "thoroughgoing Evangelical, the...tract-loving Reverend Morgan, had written about *Jane Eyre* '...in the highest strains of eulogy!'"<sup>35</sup> In contrast, however, there ensued a great deal of backlash within conservative Christianity. Eleanor Rigby (in *The Quarterly Review* for 1848-1849) insisted that *Jane Eyre* was "the personification of an unregenerate...spirit who has a mere heathen mind."<sup>36</sup>

One evangelical writer of that time, Mrs. Guyton (known by the pen name of Emma Jane Worboise), felt the need to counteract the deleterious influence she saw in *Jane Eyre* by writing her own purified, more Christianized version of such a story. She borrowed (or stole!) practically the whole framework of *Jane Eyre* and called her more evangelical novel *Thornycraft Hall* (named after Thornwood Hall in *Jane Eyre*). Mrs. Guyton had attended the same evangelical girls' school that Charlotte Bronte had, and she felt compelled to defend its

<sup>33</sup>Fraser, *Brontes*, 325.

<sup>34</sup>Margaret Howard Blom, *Charlotte Bronte* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 134.

<sup>35</sup>Fraser, *Brontes*, 356.

<sup>36</sup>Blom, *Charlotte Bronte*, 102.

headmaster (William Carus Wilson) as her "second father."<sup>37</sup> In *Thornycroft Hall* Julia tells her cousin Ellen that her fiancée is not "the sort that insists on being 'born again.'"<sup>38</sup> In the same book the author warned of "the suicidal folly, the utter madness of putting off to the last the awfully great question of one's eternal salvation!"<sup>39</sup> Elisabeth Jay noted, "Once [Worboise's characters'] conversion has taken place, Mrs. Worboise makes their new status crystal clear by allowing them to explain in some detail the way in which they had formerly relied on upbringing or works for the assurance of their faith."<sup>40</sup> Of course, *Jane Eyre* has outsurvived Emma Worboise's *Thornycroft Hall*.

Charlotte Bronte tried to place her second (and most feminist) novel, *Shirley*, in a setting of social ferment (concerned with factory workers who are being replaced by machinery). The book title *Shirley* even sounds like the name Charlotte. Charlotte transmuted her heroic sister Emily into the character of Shirley Keeldar, as well as putting Ellen Nussey and her sister Anne's milder temperament into the character of Caroline Helstone. C.

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SHIRLEY [BY  
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MOVEMENT.

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S. Lewis wrote to his long-time friend, "I have just finished *Shirley*, which I think better than either *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*."<sup>41</sup> Margaret Blom claimed, "*Shirley* is the first major novel of the feminist movement."<sup>42</sup>

Charlotte wrote two books about her two years (1842-1844) spent overseas at school in Brussels—*Villette* and *The Professor* (which was actually written as her first book but not published until after Charlotte's death). Edward Wagenknecht believed *Villette* to be Charlotte's

<sup>37</sup>Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 244-46.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 255.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 258.

<sup>41</sup>Walter Hooper, ed., *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1979), 70.

<sup>42</sup>Blom, *Charlotte Bronte*, 160.

“masterpiece” and “a far more dazzling book than *Jane Eyre*,”<sup>43</sup> though this conclusion is very debatable. Although Charlotte emphatically and repeatedly denied it, it is obvious to analysts that she had a romantic crush on her Brussels tutor, Monsieur Heger, a married man. (Of course, it is this very notion that supplies *Jane Eyre* with its potent appeal.)

Margaret Blom summarized:

*Villette* is Charlotte’s brilliant attempt to confront eternal spiritual questions. Lucy [Snow]’s problem is that of Job—how is [one] to respond to what seems to be unjustified, inexplicable, and endless suffering...A statement of Miss Marchmont [in *Villette*] provides the philosophical framework for the entire novel: a life of pain teaches the essential truth that “we should acknowledge God merciful, but not always comprehensible.”<sup>44</sup>

From the preceding quotation it is apparent that Charlotte Brontë grappled with theological themes. But was this product of an evangelical minister’s home really a Christian? When the first biography (by the Unitarian Elizabeth Gaskell) on Charlotte appeared, Gaskell’s purpose was “to show [Charlotte] as a very noble, true Christian woman firstly.”<sup>45</sup> Literary critic Edward Wagenknecht claimed for the Brontës: “they are in possession of the greatest single discovery of the Romantic Movement, its affirmation of the essential meaning of Christianity, its unshaken conviction of the infinite value and significance of each individual soul.”<sup>46</sup> If Wagenknecht means that “the essential meaning of Christianity” is “the infinite value...of each...soul,” then orthodox Christians might well wish to debate that conclusion. Irrespective of that issue, however, is that we have leading literary people labeling Charlotte Brontë as a Christian. In the next section we will survey the doctrinal data available to us on Charlotte Brontë and her two sisters.

<sup>43</sup>Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade*, 310.

<sup>44</sup>Blom, *Charlotte Brontë*, 136-37.

<sup>45</sup>Fraser, *Brontës*, 385.

<sup>46</sup>Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade*, 316.



## IV. THEOLOGICAL SURVEY

## A. THE BIBLE AND CREEDS

In *Villette* Charlotte has her lead character (Lucy Snow) tell Monsieur Paul Emanuel (undoubtedly as Charlotte herself had told his own real-life Roman Catholic counterpart, Monsieur Heger) "that my own last appeal, the guide to which I looked, and the teacher which I owned, must always be the Bible itself, rather than any sect."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in a letter of December 6, 1836 (in which Charlotte is lacking in personal assurance) Charlotte declared, "I know the greatness of Jehovah. I acknowledge the truth, the perfection of his word. I adore the purity of the Christian faith."<sup>48</sup> While the sisters don't resort to such terms as "infallible Word," etc., there is no reason to assume that Charlotte and Anne held anything other than an orthodox perspective on the truthfulness of Scripture.

Furthermore, Charlotte's life-long best friend, Ellen Nussey, stated in *Scribner's Monthly* (1871) that Charlotte's "acquaintance with Holy Writ surpassed [all] others [at their girls' school]...She was very familiar with all the sublimest passages, especially those in Isaiah, in which she took great delight."<sup>49</sup> To Ellen Nussey, Charlotte had written (on May 10, 1836), "I know the treasures of the Bible. I love and adore them."

Charlotte Bronte was well-informed with reference to various creeds and theological perspectives. She wrote to W. S. Williams (October 18, 1848), "...man, as he now is, can no more do without creeds and forms in religion than he can do without laws and rulers."<sup>50</sup> (Apparently Williams was more liberal, for she groups him with Ralph Waldo Emerson the transcendentalist.) Charlotte wrote about the famed Matthew Arnold (whose father had been an orthodox Christian) in a letter to James Taylor (January 15, 1851), "I was given to understand that his theological opinions were very vague and unsettled, and indeed he betrayed as much in the course of conversation."<sup>51</sup> Charlotte's

<sup>47</sup>Charlotte Bronte, *Villette* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1909), II, 216.

<sup>48</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, I, 148.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 199-200.

theological astuteness is revealed by her Unitarian biographer Elizabeth Gaskell who remarked, "I have heard her condemn Socinianism, Calvinism, and many other 'isms' inconsistent with Church of Englandism."<sup>52</sup> (How many pastors could identify what "Socinianism" is?)

## B. GOD

There seems to have been nothing untraditional about Charlotte Brontë's understanding of God. *Jane Eyre* affirms that "God is everywhere...[and we can know of] His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence."<sup>53</sup> In answer to the question "What is God?" the girl Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre* answers, "My Maker and yours...I rely implicitly upon His power and confide wholly in His goodness."<sup>54</sup> The child also tells Jane, "God is my father; God is my friend, I love him; I believe he loves me."<sup>55</sup> With a mixture of both Latinate and rudimentary terms (in the two preceding quotations) Charlotte Brontë described some of the principal attributes of God. She also subscribed to the standard doctrine of the Trinity—in contrast to her initial biographer who was Unitarian. Though she drops few hints about Christ's deity, a doctrine of the Trinity includes that corollary.

One pervasive theme in Charlotte Brontë's works was the subject of God's providence. Interestingly, when C. S. Lewis was an eighteen-year-old atheist, he wrote, "When God can get hold of a really first-rate character like Charlotte Brontë to torture, he's just in his element: cruelty after cruelty without any escape."<sup>56</sup> She believed her fate of suffering was "part of [God's] great plan."<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere she wrote, "Providence so regulated my destiny."<sup>58</sup> To Miss Wooler, Charlotte penned, "The destiny which Providence in His goodness and wisdom seems to offer me will not...be...regarded as brilliant."<sup>59</sup> To her editor George Smith she observed, "the doubtful future must be left with

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>53</sup>Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: Random House, 1993), 486.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Walter Hooper, *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 175.

<sup>57</sup>Fraser, *Brontës*, 417.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 438.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 456.

Providence."<sup>60</sup> When his daughter died (before age forty) Rev. Brontë (her father) placed the disappointment within "the inscrutable providence of God."<sup>61</sup> Although Charlotte was not a Calvinist, she clung to the overriding providence of God.

#### C. SIN

Margaret Blom observed that "Charlotte's assumptions about the nature of the human condition expressed in her depiction of [the imaginary world of] Angria [in her youthful writings] remain essentially the same in her adult novels and are in conformity with the Christian view that man is a fallen being in a fallen world."<sup>62</sup> In a letter of January 30, 1850, Charlotte spoke of "traces of the 'old Adam.'"<sup>63</sup> Emily Brontë's bleak view of human nature in *Wuthering Heights* is certainly far more in accord with a Christian world-view than with the pantheism ascribed to her by Rebecca Fraser.

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#### D. CONVERSION

On the question of entering eternal life one could wish for clearer and more comprehensive communication from the Brontë sisters, especially in the form of personal testimony. Their father published a journal article entitled "On Conversion" (which is difficult to obtain). Rev. Brontë's friend William Morgan also wrote about conversion. Morgan stressed three points: (1) a variety of experiences may lead up to conversion; (2) great fear "is not a sure sign and proof of repentance and faith;" and (3) "the question...as to the means by which any soul is converted is not of [as much] importance as [is] the evidence of it."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 459.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 485.

<sup>62</sup>Blom, *Charlotte Brontë*, 58.

<sup>63</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontës: Correspondence*, III, 204.

<sup>64</sup>Jay, *The Religion of the Heart*, 60.



In *Villette* a Miss Marchmont tells Lucy Snow that her deceased husband had said, "I am dying in Paradise," and she concludes that her husband "was with God." Next, Miss Marchmont speaks of "preparing...for reunion" with her husband, and she wavers if "small is [her] chance of salvation." Then Miss Marchmont asks Lucy what she thinks: "Be my chaplain and tell me [about salvation]," but Lucy is dumbstruck and offers no answer. But in the morning Miss Marchmont was found dead.<sup>65</sup> Sadly, Lucy (Charlotte's character) had had nothing clear to say about the subject of salvation.

In the same novel Lucy weighs the externals and rituals of Roman Catholicism. She "thought of sin and sorrow,...of mortal depravity ...[and] the future arose in view, then...[she] only longed to cry: 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!'" Immediately she concluded, "When I had so spoken, so declared my faith, and...widely severed myself from" Monsieur Emanuel, he noted that they had that same one-line prayer (from Luke 18:13) in common.<sup>66</sup>

*Jane Eyre* includes a number of passages relevant to the question of salvation. Early in the book the child Helen Burns (about to die and probably representative of Charlotte's older sister who did die at a young age) says that "there is no merit in [her] goodness."<sup>67</sup> Later before death Helen tells Jane "I am very happy...I believe; I have faith: I am going to God."<sup>68</sup> In her statements, however, there is no explicit reference to Christ as the object of her faith.

Mrs. Reed had treated Jane Eyre miserably when she was a child. Years later Jane was called back to a dying Mrs. Reed who still hates her. Yet the adult Jane says to Mrs. Reed, "You have my full and free forgiveness; ask now for God's [forgiveness] and be at peace."<sup>69</sup> Once again there is no mention of Christ or (this time) of personal faith in Him.

In her discussion with the Rev. St. John [pronounced *sin jin*] Rivers, Jane Eyre exchanges comments germane to salvation. Rivers seems to merge his plan for being a missionary with "my foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven...[exchanging] the hope of heaven for

<sup>65</sup>Bronte, *Villette*, 47.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>67</sup>Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, 80.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 358.

the fear of hell.”<sup>70</sup> Odd statement for a Calvinist minister! Later he says to Jane, “I am simply, in my original state, stripped of that blood-bleached robe with which Christianity covers human deformity.”<sup>71</sup> In another moment Rivers declares, “I believe; and I believe the Gospel.”<sup>72</sup> (One only wishes he would be clearer about what the “Gospel” is.)

At the climax of *Jane Eyre* (when Jane is reunited with the now-blind Mr. Rochester), Rochester says he’s “an irreligious dog” and confesses: “I did wrong.” However, now that he has “pass[ed] through the valley of the shadow of death” and experienced God’s “chastisements,” his pride is abated. He admits, “I began to experience remorse, repentance, the wish for reconcilment to my Maker. I began to pray...brief prayers...but very sincere.” Then he adds, “I supplicated God that...I might...be...admitted to that world to come.”<sup>73</sup> This is presumably Rochester’s (or Charlotte Brontë’s account) of a conversion experience. Once again the absence of any mention of faith in Christ for eternal life raises questions for a student of the New Testament.

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One more excerpt from Charlotte’s novels seems worth quoting in relation to the subject of salvation because it seems quite Arminianly-tinted. In *Villette* the reader is exhorted: “Sufferer...march onward...our cross [is] our banner. For our staff we have [God’s] promise...; for present hope His providence, ‘who gives the shield of salvation...;’ for final home His bosom...; for crowning prize a glory...eternal. Let us so run that we may obtain....”<sup>74</sup> Is she speaking here to a Christian who needs prodding toward faithfulness, or is she indicating that only if people strive will they in the end be saved? Once more, the reader is left in significant ambiguity about how to receive eternal life.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 561.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 563.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 672-73.

<sup>74</sup>Brontë, *Villette*, 240.

## E. ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Although Charlotte Bronte may have been murky about answering the question: "What must I do to be saved?" she was unequivocal in her stance concerning Roman Catholicism. Her personal experience with Catholicism came from direct involvement over two years in a Catholic girls' school in Brussels.

Charlotte stated (in a July 1842 letter), "...I consider Methodism, Dissenterism, Quakerism, and the extremes of high and low Churchism foolish but Roman Catholicism beats them all."<sup>75</sup> (Yet she immediately offered this disclaimer: "At the same time...there are some Catholics who are as good as any Christians can be to whom the Bible is a sealed book and much better than scores of Protestants."<sup>76</sup> To Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte wrote, "I doubt not there are [very good people] among the Romanists, but the system is not one which should have such sympathy as yours."<sup>77</sup> Atheist Harriet Martineau accused Charlotte in *Villette* of "attacking Popery 'with virulence.'"<sup>78</sup>

In *Villette* the Protestant Lucy Snow has numerous discussions with the Catholic Paul Emanuel. She speaks of the essence of Romanism involving "each mind...being reared in slavery...."<sup>79</sup> In a mood of mental turmoil Lucy (the Protestant) decides to enter the nearby Catholic Church and make confession (as Charlotte herself did). She feels mentally relieved from her confession. The priest tells her, "our [Catholic] faith alone could...help you...."<sup>80</sup> He urges her to return, but she admits to herself that she'd "as soon have thought of walking into a Babylonish furnace" in regard to this "papish superstition."<sup>81</sup> Later the two meet and the priest says he "coveted" for her "the only true faith" to remove her from "heresy."<sup>82</sup> Lucy will give no allegiance to "saint-worship."

Later Lucy picks up "a theological work" that "preached Romanism; it persuaded to conversion. The Protestant was [summoned]

<sup>75</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, 267.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 268.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>79</sup>Bronte, *Villette*, 158.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 183.



to turn Papist, not so much in fear of the heretic's hell, as on account of the comfort...Holy Church offered...."<sup>83</sup> Paul Emanuel had left Lucy this literature. As a follow-up she says to him, "I am not unChristian, I am not dangerous;...I would not trouble your faith; you believe in God and Christ and the Bible, and so do I."<sup>84</sup> The disturbing part of this conversation is that although she is convinced of his theological wrongness, she offers no positive alternative to him by way of evangelism. Rather, she "would not trouble [his] faith."

#### F. CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM

Rev. Patrick Bronte (the Bronte sisters' father), wrote to Rev. J. C. Franks (January 10, 1839) concerning a replacement curate in his parish church, "I could not feel comfortable with a co-adjutor who would deem it his duty to preach the appalling doctrines of personal Election and Reprobation...and the enforcement of final perseverance as an essential article of belief."<sup>85</sup> His daughter (Charlotte) likewise opposed such a version of Calvinism. A Bible-quoting servant named Joseph (in *Wuthering Heights*) "is linked with hypocrisy" by Emily Bronte.<sup>86</sup>

#### G. ASSURANCE

As is indicated in the title of this article, these three famed female authors who were raised in an evangelical (Arminian) Anglican minister's home each had bouts with lack of spiritual assurance. The subject was not without precedent in their mindsets, for their clergy father wrote to Miss Burder (on July 18, 1823), "...I trust you possess in your soul a sweet peace and serenity answering from communion with the Holy Spirit, and a well-grounded hope of eternal felicity."<sup>87</sup>

To Mrs. Franks (on July 6, 1835) Charlotte wrote, "Amidst all the...trials of this mortal life, we have still the glorious conviction on our minds that we may have our hope immovably anchored in heaven...and I trust this blessed consideration will be a never-failing source of comfort to you..., especially at that last hour when you will step out of time into eternity."<sup>88</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 214.

<sup>85</sup>Wise and Symington, *Brontes: Correspondence*, 169.

<sup>86</sup>Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Bronte*, 133.

<sup>87</sup>Wise and Symington, eds., *Brontes: Correspondence*, 63.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 131.

Despite the preceding paragraph, a letter dated one year later (1836) to her best friend paints a different story. Charlotte wrote,

I have stirrings of conscience...I may be in utter midnight, but I implore a Merciful Redeemer that if this be the real dawn of the Gospel, it may still brighten to perfect day....Do not think I am good....I am in that state of horrid, gloomy uncertainty....I would...be old, gray-haired...if I could only thereby ensure the prospect of reconciliation to God and Redemption through His Son's merits.<sup>89</sup>

Charlotte's statement sounds as if she has serious doubts if she is a real Christian. In yet another letter to Ellen Nussey in the same miserable year for her (1836, when Charlotte was functioning unsuitably as a governess) she penned,

I keep trying to do right...but I still every instant find myself going astray....I abhor myself, I despise myself. If the doctrine of Calvin be true, I am already an outcast....When I begin to study on the subject, I almost grow blasphemous, atheistical in my sentiments....<sup>90</sup>

In still a similar vein Charlotte wrote to Ellen Nussey (December 6, 1836) that she was uncertain that:

I have ever felt true contrition..., longing for holiness which I shall never, never attain—smitten at times to the heart that \_\_\_\_\_'s Calvinistic doctrines are true—darkened in short by the very shadows of spiritual death! If Christian perfections be necessary to salvation, I shall never be saved....<sup>91</sup>

There is a good deal that is obscure and confusing in the last two paragraphs just quoted. Had she imbibed the notions of William Cowper the Calvinist, who irrationally believed himself to be not part of the elect (“an outcast”) and so to be doomed? Her Calvinistic school master (William Carus Wilson) wrote tracts scaring children, intimating that if

<sup>89</sup>Wise and Symington, eds., *Brontes: Correspondence*, I, 140.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 147.

they were caught in a sin when they died, they would go to hell. (But is this notion inherent in any standard strain of Calvinism?) Actually Arminian Wesleyanism promoted the idea that one had to have "Christian perfections" if one would be "saved" (basing this view on such texts as Heb 12:14b and 1 John 3:6 and 9). Whatever the reasons were, Charlotte Bronte suffered a good deal from a lack of clear-cut Christian assurance.

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Many literary critics hold that Charlotte based her character Caroline Helstone partly on her sister Anne. In *Shirley* the author narrates,

Caroline was a Christian [but] it seemed to her that [her prayers] were unheard...She believed, sometimes, that God had turned His face from her. At moments she was a Calvinist, and sinking into the gulf of religious despair, she saw darkening over her the doom of reprobation.<sup>92</sup>

Shortly after the preceding description, the writer's prescription for Christian assurance seems to be: "Let whoever grieves still cling fast to love and faith in God; God will never...finally desert him. 'Whom He loveth, He chasteneth.' These words are true and should not be forgotten."<sup>93</sup>

In *Agnes Grey* Anne Bronte in her own way raised the issue of assurance about possessing eternal life. A poor cottager named Nancy finds herself troubled about her spiritual condition. She says, "I want to have my sins blotted out, and to feel that they are remembered no more against me." The visiting high church Anglican clergyman tells Nancy to go to church, to bring her prayer-book, to stand and kneel at

<sup>92</sup>Charlotte Bronte, *The Complete Works of Charlotte and Emily Bronte* (New York: Avenel Books, 1981), 619.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 619-20.



the appointed times, to take the Lord's supper often, to practice the sermons "an' it 'ud be all right." She asks the minister if (because she derives no sure comfort that way) he thinks she's "a reprobate."

After this tragic attempt on the part of the high Anglican minister to provide the discouraged woman with assurance, the curate Mr. Weston visits Nancy. Weston explains to Nancy that the other clergyman didn't mean that his recommendations were "the whole of a Christian's duty." He likens her sins to a "large sack" on her back before "a narrow doorway." To Nancy he asks, "I dare say, [you] have no sins that you would not gladly throw aside if you know how?" She concurs. At that point the more tolerant curate tells her about the "great commandment" of Matt 22:37-40. She balks at her ability to love God and certainly to love her neighbor. Weston assures her that "if God so loveth us, that He gave His only begotten son to die for us, we ought also to love one another." He urges her to do "all the good [she] can through life," to "dwell in love, that He may dwell in us." Later as Weston read the Bible to Nancy, "it seemed like...a new light broke in on [her] soul."<sup>94</sup> Certainly this is no clear-cut case study of *how* to inform a person about how to enter and enjoy eternal life. There is no mention of saving faith and negligible mention of Christ as the source of eternal life. No wonder Anne Bronte sought out a Moravian minister so as to discuss "the main truths of the Bible respecting...salvation."<sup>95</sup> Yet *Agnes Grey* was written eight years after that spiritual interview with the Moravian minister, and Anne still seemed very unclear about explaining salvation and assurance.

Charlotte claimed that Anne was "leaning on those Christian doctrines in which she firmly believed" as she neared death.<sup>96</sup> Yet a year after Anne's death (1849) as Charlotte reviewed Anne's papers, she discovered "mournful evidence that religious feeling had been to [Anne] much like what it was to [the despairing poet William] Cowper."<sup>97</sup> Anne had written assurance-lacking poems entitled "The Doubter's Prayer" and "To Cowper." While Charlotte and Anne were much closer to evangelical Christianity than Emily Bronte was, both of

<sup>94</sup> Anne Bronte, *Agnes Grey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 90-94.

<sup>95</sup> Frawley, *Anne Bronte*, 31.

<sup>96</sup> Harrison, *Haworth Parsonage*, 41.

<sup>97</sup> Frawley, *Anne Bronte*, 20.

them gave murky presentations of the essential Christian message in their publications, and both experienced a roller coaster ride of emotions with reference to personal assurance.

#### H. THE CHURCH

We have already observed that Charlotte gravitated away from either low or high church Anglicanism and disdained Quakerism, Methodism, and especially Catholicism. Her Anglican father was said to be on good terms with the Baptist and Wesleyan churches in the village of Haworth. She wrote of the high Anglican viewpoint with irony as follows: "The present successor of the apostles, disciples of Dr. Pusey and tools of the propaganda...[commend] undergoing regeneration by nursery-baptism in wash-hand basins."<sup>98</sup> She called her husband-to-be a "Puseyite" (a formalist).

In *Villette* Charlotte spoke of attending the Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopalian Churches while in Brussels. She wondered at the "unimportant character of the differences between these three sects, at the unity and identity of their vital doctrines. I saw nothing to hinder them from being one day fused into one grand Holy Alliance, and I respected them all."<sup>99</sup> In *Shirley* she referred to "the Dissenting and Methodists schools, the Baptists, Independents, and Wesleyans," distinguishing between Methodists and Wesleyans.<sup>100</sup> Charlotte thought the Methodists whom she knew to be too fanatical. She referred to the "mad Methodist magazines" of her childhood. In *Shirley* she spoke of "the Methodist chapel...in the thick of a revival."<sup>101</sup> They engaged in roof-shaking singing "such as a very Quaker might feel himself moved by the spirit to dance to."<sup>102</sup> In such Wesleyan groups one might witness "shouts, yells, ejaculations, frantic cries, agonized groans."<sup>103</sup> While Charlotte thought the high church Anglicans overly ceremonial, she was obviously not at home with such emotional overwroughtness among dissenters.

<sup>98</sup>Bronte, *The Complete Works*, 445.

<sup>99</sup>Bronte, *Villette*, II, 215.

<sup>100</sup>Bronte, *Complete Works*, 596.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 517.



## I. THE FUTURE

When Charlotte Brontë's friend, the "avowed atheist" Harriet Martineau co-authored a book espousing naturalism, it included Martineau's "disbelief in the existence of God or a future life."<sup>104</sup> In *The Professor* Charlotte wrote that "Religion...says that in another world, another life, he shall meet his kindred again. She speaks of that place unsullied by sin..., unembittered by suffering...Eternity, Immortality,...the heavenly hills all light and peace—of a spirit resting there in bliss."<sup>105</sup> The doubting child Jane Eyre acknowledged that her friend Helen Burns would be "taken to the region of spirits, if such region there were."<sup>106</sup> When Helen is asked by Jane if "there is such a place as heaven," she replies, "I am sure there is a future state."<sup>107</sup> On the last page of *Agnes Grey* Anne Brontë referred to "the glorious heaven beyond, where [we] may meet again, and sin and sorrow are unknown."<sup>108</sup>

As a governess working with ungovernable children, Anne also spoke about hell. To a boy who roasted birds alive or fed them to a cat, she (through the voice of her character Agnes) spoke to the cruel child of "where wicked people go when they die, and if you don't leave off torturing innocent birds,...you will have to go there, and suffer just what you have made them suffer."<sup>109</sup> Emily's *Wuthering Heights* (with its brutishness) certainly has references to heaven, hell, Satan, etc.

In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* a deathbed conversation occurs between Helen Graham and her dissolute husband. Her husband groans, "If there be really life beyond the tomb, and judgment after death, how can I face it?" He hopes there is "nothing after" this life. When she speaks to him of possible "joy and glory after" this life, he asks, "Are we not to be judged according to the deeds done in the body? Where's the use of a probationary existence, if a man may spend [life] as he pleases, just contrary to God's decrees, and then go to heaven with the best...by merely saying, 'I repent'?"

<sup>104</sup>Fraser, *Brontës*, 392.

<sup>105</sup>Brontë, *Complete Works*, 1132.

<sup>106</sup>Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 114-15.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>108</sup>Brontë, *Agnes Grey*, 198.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 18.



To this his wife urges, "But if you *sincerely* repent-." When he says that he wishes she could go with him to "plead for" him, she replies, "it cost the blood of an incarnate God, perfect and sinless in himself, to redeem us from the bondage of the evil one; let *Him* plead for you." In the aftermath Helen Graham reported that her husband "still [could not] trust, or...comprehend."<sup>110</sup> By presenting Christ's redemptive death for sinners, Anne has perhaps come closest anywhere in the Bronte corpus of publications to explaining the foundation of the gospel. However, there is still no explicit mention of trusting in Christ in order to receive eternal life.

In Charlotte's most Catholic-oriented novel, *Villette*, she noted concerning "purgatory:"

that a Catholic who had lost dear friends by death could enjoy the unspeakable solace of praying them out of purgatory. The writer [of the article] did not touch on the firmer peace of those whose belief dispenses with purgatory altogether, but I...preferred the latter doctrine as the most consolatory.<sup>111</sup>

Despite what has just been culled from the sisters' writings about heaven and hell, there also exists in their novels and communications the unquestionable view that they endorsed universalism. Charlotte Bronte wrote to Margaret Wooler (February 14, 1850):

I am sorry the Clergy do not like the doctrine of Universal Salvation; I think it is a great pity for their sakes, but surely they are not so unreasonable as to expect me to deny or suppress what I believe the truth!<sup>112</sup>

Undoubtedly Emily, who seems to have been the least orthodox of the three sisters, would have concurred with Charlotte in this viewpoint.

In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte's Helen Burns tends to point in the direction of Universalism. Helen speaks to Jane of "the time" of "putting off our corruptible bodies, when...sin will fall from us...and only the spark of

<sup>110</sup>Anne Bronte, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 445-46.

<sup>111</sup>Bronte, *Villette*, II, 208.

<sup>112</sup>Wise and Sumington, eds., *Brontes: Correspondence*, I, 75.

the spirit will remain...pure as when it left the Creator—perhaps again to be communicated to some being higher than man—perhaps to pass...from the pale human soul to brighten to the seraph!” Helen goes on to say that this life-principle will certainly “never...be suffered to degenerate from man to fiend.” Her clincher is: “I hold another creed, which no one ever taught me and which I seldom mention...for it extends hope to all.”<sup>113</sup> Although Helen’s statement raises many questions as to meaning, this must be what Charlotte was alluding to in her letter about Universalism to Margaret Wooler of 1850.

Of the three sisters, Anne seemed to be the most overt about the doctrine of universalism. Edward Wagenknecht said she “disbelieve[d] in eternal damnation, and said so frankly.”<sup>114</sup> Maria Frawley spoke of Anne’s “reaction against the Calvinistic notion of a ‘spiritual elect’ and corollary desire to believe in universal salvation.”<sup>115</sup> These were highly radical views in those times, for Anne’s challenge of the standard view of divine judgment in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, “proclaiming her faith in salvation for all [came] at least ten years before Dean Farrar [Anglican Dean of Canterbury] defended so heretical a notion.”<sup>116</sup> (In his 1877 book *Eternal Hope* Farrar “questioned the doctrine of eternal punishment, provok[ing] great controversy.”<sup>117</sup>

Unlike Harriet Martineau who abandoned religion and Elizabeth Gaskell, who eventually sloughed off her Unitarianism (to her ministerial brother James Martineau’s chagrin), Charlotte clung to her conviction about immortality. She observed concerning Harriet Martineau’s co-authored book that “it denies us our hope of immortality and quietly blots from man’s future heaven and the life to come.”<sup>118</sup> When Emily and Anne died within the same period, Charlotte wrote to a Mr. Williams (1848), “Had I never believed in a future life before, my sisters’ fate would assure me of it. There must be a Heaven or we

<sup>113</sup>Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, 82.

<sup>114</sup>Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade*, 315.

<sup>115</sup>Frawley, *Anne Bronte*, 11.

<sup>116</sup>Winifred Gerin, *Charlotte Bronte* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 357.

<sup>117</sup>F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 494.

<sup>118</sup>Gerin, *Charlotte Bronte*, 459.

must despair—for life seems bitter, brief—blank.”<sup>119</sup> (Of course, this approaches the subject of the afterlife from an experiential rather than a revelational viewpoint.)

## V. CONCLUSION

While (of the three sisters) Emily Bronte leaned the most toward heterodoxy, of her we know the least personally. Her *Wuthering Heights* is the least autobiographical of all seven of the Bronte sisters' novels. Rebecca Fraser called Emily a pantheist, and in Emily's one recorded comment on religion she preferred to retain privacy about her specific views.

Charlotte and Anne's religious views tended toward traditional Christian viewpoint overall, derived from their upbringing in an evangelical Anglican Arminian parsonage. Their books and letters reveal nothing eccentric in their comments about God's attributes and triune nature. Despite being friends with her Unitarian biographer (Elizabeth Gaskell), Charlotte maintained her own trinitarian position. Nor does she affirm anything other than a traditionalist view of Scripture.

Their father's reference to a "crucified God" and Anne's allusion to "the blood of an incarnate God" imply belief in the theanthropic person of Christ. Their mother's reference to "a Redeemer's merits," and Anne's indication of the need of a "sinless" Christ "to redeem us from the bondage of the evil one" carry overtones of an orthodox view of Christ's cross-work. Charlotte mentioned being reconciled to God and having "Redemption through [God's] Son's merits."

Wherever the sisters comment about sin, evil, the devil, etc., they operate within the parameters of Christian orthodoxy. *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are certainly novels which lend themselves to pre-evangelistic discussion because they are anything but relativistic about the subject of right and wrong.

The one subject where the sisters deviate most obviously from standard evangelical theology is that all three evinced a leaning toward universalism. In arriving at this position they seem to have preceded the soon-coming liberalism of the clergy on this point. Anne Bronte,

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 384.



considered the meekest of the three sisters, seems to have been the most vociferous on the subject.

For those who are committed to the New Testament's evangel, the most disturbing concern will invariably be that the sisters do not seem to be clear about how to receive eternal life. When Anne was wrestling experientially with such issues, she called for a Moravian minister (rather than her own Methodist aunt or Anglican father) to discuss "salvation." Nevertheless, we have no transcript or summation of that conversation, so we don't know what transpired in her soul. However, the conversation certainly gave her no certainty for she continued to wrestle for years afterward with personal assurance. In Anne's fictionalized deathbed conversation in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* the dying non-Christian is urged to "sincerely repent" as the only condition explicitly mentioned for possessing eternal life.

Charlotte's few books also contain passages where the occasion is ripe for telling an individual how to experience eternal life. *Jane Eyre* offers at least three such occasions. Perhaps the clearest is when the child Helen Burns tells Jane, "I believe; I have faith: I am going to God." However, in John 14:1b Jesus was imperative: "you believe in God, *believe also in Me*" (NKJV). *In what* does Helen "have faith?" The dying Mrs. Reed is told: "ask...for God's [forgiveness] and be at peace." But does this urging really fulfill the condition of Acts 16:31? Mr. Rochester speaks of wishing to be reconciled to God and praying sincere prayers to "be admitted to that world to come." At this point wouldn't an informed Christian want to inform Rochester that by believing in Jesus Christ, anyone may receive eternal life?

In *Villette* two more evangelistic opportunities present themselves. Miss Marchmont asks Lucy Snow to be her chaplain and inform her about salvation. Lucy is dumbstruck, and Miss Marchmont is dead the next morning. The Protestant Lucy later tells the Roman Catholic tutor Paul Emmanuel that he too "believe[s] in God and Christ and the Bible," so she won't "trouble his [Catholic] faith." What an opportunity she had to explain the essential difference—that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-9).

When one is unclear about salvation, logically one is going to be unsure about assurance. The Bronte biographers make it clear that Anne and Charlotte both suffered at times from a lack of Christian assurance. There was a breed of Calvinism in the Brontes' childhood that evidently

contributed heavily to this lack of assurance. Their Calvinistic schoolmaster William Carus Wilson wrote a document entitled *The Children's Friend* (1826) in which an eleven-year-old girl dies. The conversation runs as follows:

"Sarah, are you happy?"

"Yes, very happy, Sir."

"And what makes you happy?"

"Because Jesus Christ died to save me and he will take me to heaven."

"And he will save all men?"

"No, Sir, only those that trust in him...."

[If the conversation stopped there, an Evangelical might say, "Amen."]

However, Wilson went on to tell about the girl's virtues, industriousness, neatness, prayers, etc. Then she is asked if she wants to die. To this the girl answers: "Not yet," because "I should wish to have time to repent, and be a better child." Wilson's comment after the girl died was "I bless God that he has taken from us the child of whose salvation we have the best hope from this school!"<sup>120</sup> (Note the wishful phrase "the best hope.") There is no real spiritual security in this version of Calvinism. And the biographer reports, "Of Maria Bronte's [the three girls' older sister in Wilson's school] salvation Mr. Wilson had no such clear conviction."<sup>121</sup> Even Wilson later acknowledged the Helen Burns of *Jane Eyre* was in real life Maria Bronte.

In the *Methodist Magazine* (April 1810)—either a Calvinistic Methodist or one quoting a Calvinistic view—the writer states,

Some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation.... Since salvation is impossible except to the elect none, before they are confident of their salvation, have any certain ground for believing that their salvation be even so much as possible....

Ironically, by this means only the assured (who "are confident of their salvation") could be assured ("have any certain ground...")! No

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 14.

wonder Wilson—with his heavy doses of hell-and-fear preaching—kept children from understanding clearly that they could presently have an assurance of eternal life that wasn't grounded in their good behavior. These views Charlotte called “ghastly Calvinistic doctrines,” and Anne was left “in permanent doubt of her salvation.”

How much better to be able to sing confidently:

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine....”



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## BOOK REVIEWS

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***Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace: Recovering the Doctrines That Shook the World.*** By James Montgomery Boice. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001. 224 pp. (Cloth), \$17.99.

During the first message presented at Ligonier's Conference in Orlando last June, Dr. R. C. Sproul indicated that Dr. James Boice, a scheduled speaker at the conference, was *dying in faith* that very night.

Dr. Boice died that very night, June 15<sup>th</sup>. When this book, published posthumously, arrived at my office, I was understandably interested to see what he had to say about grace.

In one sense this book is merely a restatement of Reformed Lordship Salvation. However, in another sense it is quite a candid restatement. In reading this book one can get a clear idea of the type of mixed thinking that speaks of justification by faith alone and yet which warns believers that they must produce abundant and persevering good works in order to make it to heaven.

Let's start with some positive observations.

Chapter 1 is entitled, "The New Pragmatism," and is a fine chapter in which the author points out how the evangelical church today is following the example set by the liberal church 30 years ago, adopting the world's agenda and methods.

Boice's discussion of the dangers of television in chapter 2 (pp. 51-54) is superb. He clearly demonstrates how TV robs us of our ability to think.

Chapter 8 is on "Reforming Our Worship." It too is outstanding. The author shows how modern worship has become light on meaningful content about God. The singing is often designed to merely make us feel better, with the choruses saying very little to or about God.

I also found much to like in chapters 3 and 4 on "Scripture Alone" and "Christ Alone." Boice defends the primacy of Scripture and the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross.

The problems occur primarily in chapters 5 and 6 on "Faith Alone" and "Grace Alone." Here Lordship Salvation is fervently proclaimed.

It has been said that you can't tell a book by its cover. But you can tell a lot about a book by what it doesn't cover. A simple survey of the index reveals that *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace* fails to even mention key texts like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27; 20:30-31. That is amazing. How one could write a book on the grace of God and not mention all or at least *most* of those verses is inexplicable.

Admittedly Eph 2:8-9 is discussed three separate times in the book (pp. 121, 137, 159). Sadly, the verse is never clearly explained. Twice the author uses the text to prove the Reformed notion that faith is the gift of God (pp. 137, 159). On the third occasion he merely indicates that we don't understand what the grace spoken of in this passage truly means.

Also not covered are the following passages on the Judgment Seat of Christ: Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; 1 John 2:28; 4:17-19. Indeed, I could find no reference at all to the Bema (Judgment Seat) of Christ. Since the author does discuss the judgment of believers according to their works (see pp. 116-21), this is hard to explain as well.

The two most fascinating parts of the book to me occur in chapters 5 and 6 where Boice discusses the judgment of believers and saving faith.

First, Boice proposes the three-fold nature of saving faith: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia* (pp. 137-41). His discussion of the first two points is helpful. *Notitia* is knowledge or understanding. He correctly points out that one can understand the good news and yet not be convinced it is true. He defines *assensus* rightly as assent, or a conviction of the truth of the gospel.

Surprisingly he quotes Calvin as saying, "We do not obtain salvation either because we are prepared to *embrace as true* whatever the church has prescribed, or because we turn over to it the task of inquiring and knowing. But we do so *when we know that God is our merciful Father*, because of the reconciliation effected through Christ" (p. 139, italics added). Calvin is here articulating his teaching that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. Calvin is not saying, as Boice suggests, that *embracing as true* the gospel is merely one element of saving faith. Calvin is saying that *is* saving faith.

He defines the third element, *fiducia*, as "trust and commitment." "The third element of faith, which Spurgeon calls *trust* and Lloyd-Jones calls *commitment*, is a real yielding of oneself to Christ which



goes beyond knowledge, however full or accurate that knowledge may be, and even beyond agreeing with or being personally moved by the gospel" (p. 140, *italics his*). Notice that for him faith includes commitment/yieldedness.

Second, concerning the judgment of believers, he indicates that believers will be judged according to their works to determine whether or not they gain entrance into the kingdom. He fails to explain the meaning of "shall not come into judgment" in John 5:24, as he does not mention that verse. He speaks of *one* final judgment (p. 117), not separate judgments for believers (the Judgment Seat of Christ) and unbelievers (the Great White Throne Judgment).

Concerning this final judgment according to works he says, "This is a surprising point for Protestants especially. We have been taught that salvation is by grace through faith apart from works, and here [Matthew 25] the judgment is on the basis of what people have done or have not done...This seems wrong to Protestants because we have been taught that the judgment will be on the basis of whether or not we have believed on Jesus as Savior" (p. 118).

He then says, "The faith through which we are saved is not a dead faith. Saving faith must be active" (p. 118). After quoting Jas 2:14-17 he adds, "Does this mean we are saved by works after all? Were the Reformers wrong? No, but it is a statement of the necessity of works following faith—if we are truly regenerate. It means that there is an unbreakable link between what we think and what we do" (p. 119).

Boice makes a compelling case that Satan and demons believe the gospel (pp. 140-41). He says, "He [Satan] also believes the gospel in the sense that he knows that it is true; in this sense he has assensus. But Satan resists Christ. He is opposed to all he represents. He despises Christ. Therefore, Satan does not have faith in Jesus in a saving sense" (p. 141).

The problem with his argument is that there is no salvation for Satan or demons. Christ didn't die for them. Thus even though they believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God in the biblical sense (John 20:31; compare 11:25-27), they are not saved. We need not change the nature of saving faith in order to keep Satan from getting into the kingdom!



I recommend this book for the well-grounded believer. It shows clearly, as Dr. Earl Radmacher charged in 1989, that Reformed theology sometimes very closely approximates the theology of Rome.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX

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***What God Wishes Christians Knew About Christianity.*** By Bill Gillham. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998. 382 pp. (Paper), \$8.79.

The author of the popular *Lifetime Guarantee* has written another Christian living book designed to get believers to think. In the course of eighteen chapters, Gillham shares eighteen principles that he believes God wishes Christians recognized and applied. Gillham writes with a passion and persuasion likely to woo his readers.

In the first chapter, Gillham suggests that Christ is a “triple threat” Savior. He means that through Christ’s death, we are forgiven of all our sins, have undergone a change in our identity from sinner to saint, and have received new life—Christ as life, to replace our former life (p. 13). In the next five chapters, Gillham sets forth several valuable truths. (1) The cycle of sin that many believers are trapped in is not God’s intention for Christians (pp. 31-38). (2) The victorious Christian life can only be achieved through an abiding relationship with Christ (pp. 39-50). (3) At the moment of salvation, Christians are given the life of Christ, not merely positionally but actually (pp. 51-66). (4) As Christians appropriate the desires of the new nature, the conditions of discipleship will be carried out (pp. 67-91). (5) The sin nature is extinct; Christians now battle the flesh (pp. 93-117). These six chapters are accurate and insightful.

Gillham writes many other fine chapters as well. He delves into the biblical model of sanctification (pp. 181-202) and counseling (pp. 285-303), the role of faith (pp. 221-35) and suffering in the Christian

life (pp. 237-57), and the importance of recognizing and appropriating our identity in Christ (pp. 305-75).

*JOTGES* readers will be especially interested in chapter 14: "God wishes Christians knew that we are being trained on earth to reign in heaven" (pp. 259-84). Gillham discusses topics like "Admission versus Maturation," and "Acceptance versus Approval." Although he only takes a cursory look at a few passages (e.g. 1 Cor 3:11-15; 2 Pet 1:5-10; Rev 19:7-8), it is nonetheless interesting to read his perspective on the Bema. He seems to take the "teeth" out of the Bema by writing that every Christian shall reign (p. 266); however, much of what he writes is fairly accurate.

Unfortunately, not all of Gillham's interpretations and principles are to be esteemed. In chapters 7-8 (pp. 119-180), he insists that in several passages in the gospels (e.g. Matt 5:7-9, 20, 22, 25-26, 30, 48; 6:14-15; Luke 11:13) Jesus was speaking to those under the law who were unsaved. He even suggests that the disciples were not regenerated until Pentecost (p. 148). Gillham also believes that when the gospels and epistles seem to conflict, the epistles should win out (pp. 159-79). For example, in chapter 11, he suggests Jesus presented the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:22-35) to unregenerate listeners "with the motive of whetting their appetite for the Savior" (p. 209). This allows him to interpret 1 John 1:9 in an evangelistic sense, rather than in a fellowship sense. However, he does acknowledge that confession has its place for Christians (Jas 5:16, see p. 214).

This book is grounded in a liberating grace-oriented theology. Gillham is clear on the gospel and assurance. He writes, "...admission to heaven is based solely upon faith in the finished work of Christ" (p. 262). He is also a clever, humorous, and entertaining writer. This easy to read book is definitely worthwhile if one is looking for insight into the believer's new nature or pertinent illustrations and case studies on how to live the Christian life. However, the above concerns should be noted as one works his way through the book.

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***Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII.*** By John Cornwell. New York: Penguin Books, 1999. 426 pp. (Paper), \$15.00.

Anyone interested in the papacy must read this fascinating book. It is an eye opener regarding the inner workings of the Vatican.

Cornwell, an award-winning journalist and a Roman Catholic, was given access to secret Vatican and Jesuit archives. His stated goal in writing this book was to exonerate the memory of Pope Pius XII, "I was convinced that if his full story were told, Pius XII's pontificate would be vindicated" (p. xi).

Pius XII, Eugenio Pacelli, ruled Catholicism with an iron hand, and was one of the most powerful, if not *the* most powerful pope in modern times.

Pacelli was papal nuncio in Germany from 1917 to 1929. After he left Germany to become Cardinal Secretary of State, he continued to negotiate with the Germans on a Concordat. In 1933, after years of haggling, he signed an historic agreement with Hitler that eliminated the Catholic political party in Germany clearing the way for Hitler to become the country's undisputed leader.

Pacelli became pope in 1939, just before World War II began. Cornwell shows that Pacelli knew of Hitler's *Final Solution* in 1940, that he was repeatedly urged to make a statement denouncing the slaughter of Jews, and that he held fast in his resolve not to make such a statement.

What if Pius XII had denounced the killing of the Jews by the Nazis? Would it have made a difference? Cornwell relates accounts where relatively minor demonstrations by Catholics in Germany played a role in a cessation of the euthanasia that had begun. Therefore, massive Catholic opposition to the final solution surely would have saved millions, for the Nazis could not have begun or maintained the war without the support of nearly 40 million Catholics in Germany.

Being half-Serbian, I found the chapter entitled "Friend of Croatia" to be fascinating. Cornwell wrote, "The tally almost defies belief. By the most reliable reckoning, 487,000 Orthodox Serbs and 27,000 Gypsies were massacred between 1941 and 1945 in the Independent State of Croatia. In addition, approximately 30,000 out of a population of 45,000 Jews were killed: 20,000 to 25,000 in Ustashe death camps and another 7,000 deported to the gas chambers" (p. 253). While these



numbers pale in comparison to the six million Jews and eleven million total people exterminated by the Nazis, they are still staggering.

Not a few Catholic priests carried guns and killed many Serbs. Cornwell writes, "Priests, invariably Franciscans, took a leading part in the massacres. Many went around routinely armed and performed their murderous acts with zeal. A Father Bozidar Bralow, known for the machine gun that was his constant companion, was accused of performing a dance around the bodies of 180 massacred Serbs at Alipasin-Most. Individual Franciscans killed, set fire to homes, sacked villages, and laid waste the Bosnian countryside at the head of Ustashe bands. In September of 1941, an Italian reporter wrote of a Franciscan he had witnessed south of Banja Luka urging on a band of Ustashe with his crucifix" (p. 254).

Pacelli was aware of the forced conversions (most Serbians are Eastern Orthodox; most Croats Roman Catholics) and the mass murders ostensibly in the name of Catholic expansion. Yet he did nothing to stop them. In fact, he had a number of warm audiences with people whom he knew to be involved in the massacres (see p. 260).

The old adage that "absolute power corrupts absolutely" surely seems to fit here. These words from the back cover are quite telling in that regard, "Cornwell tells the full, tragic story of how narcissism, long-standing personal antipathy for the Jews, and political and spiritual ambition combined to make Pius the most dangerous churchman in history."

The final sentence of the book is quite gripping. "Having come to the end of my own journey through the life and times of Pacelli, I am convinced that the cumulative verdict of history shows him to be not a saintly exemplar for future generations, but a deeply flawed human being from whom Catholics, and our relations with other religions, can best profit by expressing our sincere regret" (p. 384).

My only reservation with the book is that Cornwell endorses pluralism. He implies that there is no absolute truth. When he speaks of progressives and traditionalists in the Catholic church, it is clear he favors the former position.

I give this book my highest recommendation. It is an outstanding book historically, psychologically (as a character study), theologically, and sociologically.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
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***The Strait Gate and the Narrow Way: Bible Studies on the Doctrine of Salvation and Repentance.*** By Eddie R. Galyean. No publishing information available. 128 pp. Paper.

While helping a friend organize his bookshelf, I came across this book. Intrigued by the title—as repentance-based salvation always gets my attention—I began skimming through the chapters. I was extremely surprised to find that I agreed with most of what had been written.

Galyean, a Southern Baptist preacher, opposes the teaching of Lordship Salvation. He has a good understanding of the freeness of eternal salvation, and relates that truth in a way that is easy enough for a child to understand. But he writes with an intensity and passion that would keep any theologian interested in what he has to say.

*The Strait Gate and the Narrow Way*, for the most part, is consistent with the teachings of Free Grace. For example, Galyean states, “A gift is something that is given with no stipulations or requirements. A gift is free. The Bible says Heaven is a free gift” (pp. 60-61). He remains consistent with this teaching, even while explaining tough texts, such as Jas 2:14-26. His understanding of this text is that James is explaining how to have fellowship with God, and that works serve to justify saved people before men. Of this passage, he writes, “A person’s works have absolutely nothing to do with his getting to heaven. Although it is important to be justified in God’s sight, it is also important to be justified in man’s sight. The only way to be justified in man’s sight is by works” (p. 46). On Phil 2:12 he writes, “Becoming a Christian and becoming a good Christian do not happen at the same time, but it takes time and

practice to become a good Christian. Being a good Christian takes work. For this reason, God said, ‘Work out your salvation...’” (p. 116).

While remaining consistent along most points, Galyean sounds a bit less clear when he speaks about what he calls the “plan of salvation.” While he repeatedly states that the sole condition for eternal life is simple belief, he fails to clearly explain what it means to believe in Jesus for that eternal life. For instance, there are several times that he equates belief with phrases such as “asking Jesus into your heart,” “deciding to trust Him,” and “asking Jesus to save you” (pp. 61-62, 111-12).

*The Strait Gate and the Narrow Way* is overall, very informative, enjoyable, and biblically sound. I would recommend this book.

**Jason Scott Hyde**

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***The Other Side of Calvinism.*** Revised Edition. By Laurence M. Vance. Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1991, 1999. 788 pp. (Cloth), \$27.95.

This book has ten major sections. The first half deals generally with Calvinism (Introduction, Origin of Calvinism, John Calvin, James Arminius, The Five Points). The second half deals point by point with the five points of Calvinism (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the Saints).

There are also seven appendixes dealing with various Calvinist (and Arminian) confessions including The Canons of Dort, The Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Second London Confession of Faith.

The book has a Scripture Index as well. By consulting it you can quickly discover the Calvinist position on many passages. Unfortunately for *JOTGES* readers, many of the key passages in the gospel debate



are not referenced in the index. For example: Heb 6:4-8; Jas 2:14-26; John 8:30-32; 12:42-43; Gal 5:21.

I found the chapter on perseverance to be very helpful. There Vance argues that “the New Testament is abundantly clear in its declaration that Christians may not persevere” (p. 574). “The fact that Christians may not persevere does not mean that they should not strive to do so. There are numerous exhortations in the Bible for believers to persevere...” (p. 575).

Within the section on perseverance is a nice discussion (i.e., refutation) of Lordship Salvation (pp. 577-86).

Vance does a good job of showing that the Reformed view of assurance of salvation is really no different than the Arminian position (pp. 595-96). Both look to works and perseverance to determine entrance into the kingdom.

While the book appears to be addressed for a fairly advanced audience, it is well written and easy to follow.

The main reservation I have with this book is its length, which is a bit intimidating. However, if it is used as a resource, the concern vanishes. In addition, it may be read one section at a time, since each stands alone.

I recommend this book as a super resource on the issue of Calvinism.

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## PERIODICAL REVIEWS

**“The Word *Kosmos* ‘World’ in John 17,” David J. Clark, *The Bible Translator* (October 1999): 401-406.**

Clark is a UBS translation consultant based in Woking, England. He argues convincingly here that the word *kosmos* has four distinct meanings in John 17: 1) the universe as a whole; 2) the earth itself; 3) the world system that is opposed to God; and 4) people who live on the earth.

Using John 17 he illustrates each of these uses.

John 17:5 and 17:24 use *kosmos* to refer to the entire universe. “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you *before the world was* (17:5, italics added). “For you loved Me *before the foundation of the world*” (17:24, italics added). In both cases the Lord is thinking of more than the third planet from the sun. He is thinking of the entire universe.

The second usage, the earth itself, is the intended sense of *kosmos* in John 17:11 and 17:13. “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You, Holy Father” (17:11). “But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (17:13). In both cases it is clear that the Lord is thinking specifically of this planet, and not of the entire created universe.

The world system opposed to God is captured in the term *kosmos* in John 17:14 and 17:16. “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (17:14). “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (17:16). Neither the universe or planet earth is in view in these cases. Rather, the world system dominated by Satan is what is in view.

The fourth nuance, the people who live on the earth, is clearly seen in John 17:21 and 17:23. “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (17:21). “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that You

have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (17:23). It is evident that it is the people of the world who are in view in these uses.

Clark illustrates these four uses outside of John 17 as well. Of greatest interest to *JOTGES* readers is his explanation of *kosmos* in John 3:16. After citing the verse he says, "This is a figure of speech called a metonymy, in which an associated term is used instead of the direct term. In this context it is John's way of saying that God loved the people of the world. There is no hint of criticism of the people here, and this is an undisputed example of the fourth meaning. Other examples of this meaning are found in John 1:29; 4:42; 12:47" (p. 403).

I highly recommend this brief but informative article.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

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**"The Nature of Faith,"** David Anderson, *Chafer Theological Journal* vol. 5 no. 4 (December 1999): 2-26.

The power of the spoken word is proverbial. In theology, the power of the word *faith* is pivotal. The debate concerning soteriology and Lordship Salvation is one that has as its centerpiece the definition of faith. Dr David Anderson has written an excellent article that combines a review of much of the literature on this thematic term, both historical and theological, as well as a brief exposition of the relevant texts found in the New Testament.

The article begins with a brief discussion concerning the meaning of *pistis*/faith from the vantage point of the reformers both Calvinistic and Lutheran in persuasion. This is followed by an evaluation of the English Puritan form of reformed theology, evidenced in the Westminster Confession, which following Theodore Beza, perverted not only the biblical meaning of the concept of faith but also convoluted Calvin's meaning. There is an excellent selection of citations from



supporting material of many who have dealt with this issue from an historical perspective, such as R.T. Kendall and Charles Bell. (The addition of Michel Eaton, author of *No Condemnation* would be of great benefit as an additional source.) Quotes from B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge, two men often overlooked by those who trumpet Puritan Theology, provide keen insight concerning the concept of faith.

The next section deals with the lexical meaning of faith. An excellent selection of the most up to date sources as well as a brief survey of the NT use of the term is offered. Anderson is most helpful as he clarifies faith as it involves both the idea of assent and its volitional aspects. The historical charge against the grace position pejoratively stated is that faith is "nothing more than mental assent." This was built upon the threefold definition of faith as *knowledge*, *assent*, and *trust* articulated by L. Berkhof and carried on today by John MacArthur, James Boice, and J. I. Packer. This charge is answered both from the text of Scripture and by interacting with the recent literature. There is little space devoted to the problematic text of Jas 2:14-16. It is relegated to the work of Zane Hodges and his masterful commentary on James. However, much of the article is invested toward a discussion of the Gospel of John. Much of this discussion is a restatement of the many fine books and articles from those who have written for GES. Nevertheless, the material is worth reviewing.

The majority of attention is given to John 2:21-23 to explain that genuine faith has transpired based on the textual construction "Believed in His name" as well as the theology of the Gospel of John. (The work is similar to Zane Hodges's article "Untrustworthy Believers—John 2:23-25," *BibSac* vol. 135, April/June 1978, and the unpublished thesis by Bob Bryant, "Secret Believers in the Gospel of John," DTS.)

A brief section is given over to a discussion of the subtheme of intimacy in the Gospel of John viewing the distinction between John 1-12 and the concept and content of John 13-17, the Upper Room Discourse. A brief discussion concerning John 8:32 and the similar motif in 1 John would have been of help to support the theme, however, an article can only contain so much. And so can a review of an article. As such, Dr. Anderson has provided an excellent challenge to Puritan theology's boilerplate arguments concerning the definition of faith, both textually and theologically. I encourage this work to be read and

added to your file concerning and contributing to the support for the biblical meaning of faith.

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**“Translation and Interpretation of *ean me* in Galatians 2:16,”**

William O. Walker, Jr., *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Fall 1997): 515-20.

The NKJV translates Gal 2:16a as follows: “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ...” The adversative *but* translates two Greek words, *ean me*.

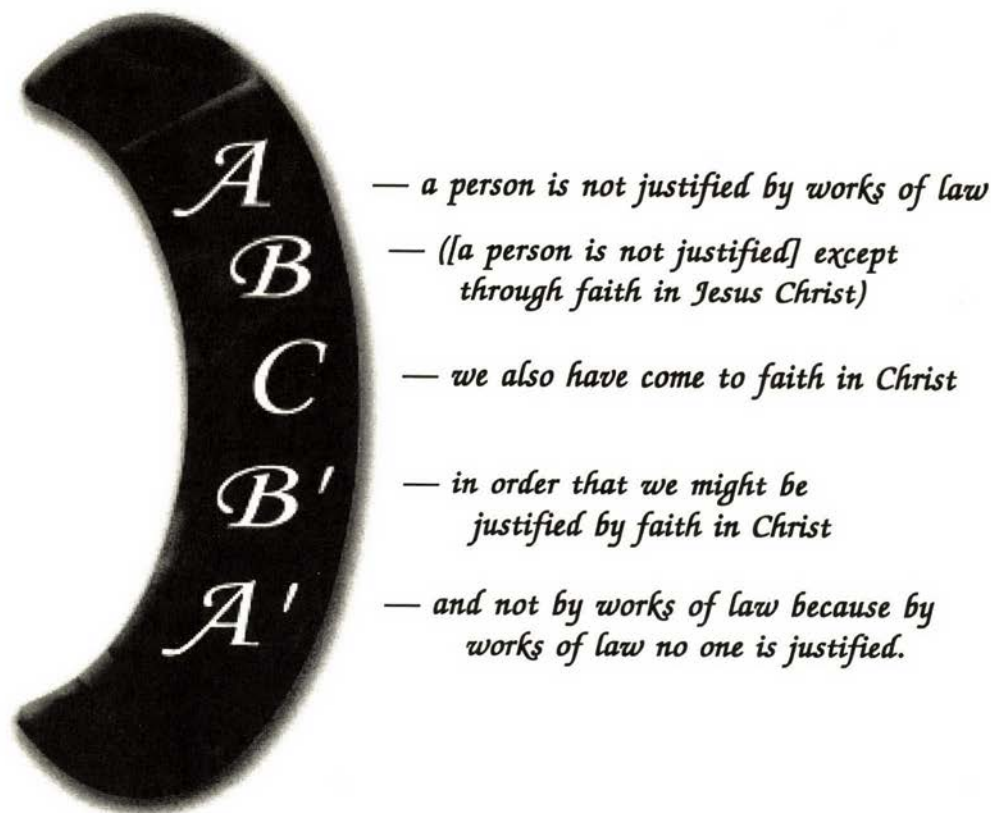
Walker suggests that while this common translation correctly conveys the sense of the verse, it is more accurate to translate the words *ean me* as *except* and to supply material which he feels is clearly implied by Paul.

The author is reacting to a suggestion by James D. G. Dunn that here Paul is not rejecting justification by the law. Rather, he was rejecting justification by the law apart from faith in Christ. Thus Dunn would have us read the verse like this: “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law except (or unless) he believes in Jesus Christ.” In this view a person could be justified by the law if he also put his faith in Christ.

Walker rejects this view, but likes Dunn’s translation choice for *ean me*. Walker would paraphrase 16a in this way: “a person is not justified by works of law; [a person is not justified] except by faith in Jesus Christ...” In other words, he sees the phrase, “a person is not justified,” doing double duty. It is modified by two clauses, “by works of the law,” and “except by faith in Jesus Christ.”

Having done a cursory study of the other uses of *ean me*, I did not find any other uses where *but* is the correct translation. In many *unless* or *except* is clearly the sense. So Walker’s suggestion may have merit.

Clearly he is correct that Paul is not suggesting that the Judaizers are right! Here is the chiasmic structure suggested by Walker:



However, it seems probable that there is an adversative sense here (in B above), and if we studied other uses of *ean me*, I imagine we would find some where it carries this sense. Even if we didn't, it only takes one usage to establish a lexical possibility for an expression. Here the text cries out for an adversative.

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**“Who’s Cursed—and Why? (Galatians 3:10-14),”** Norman H. Young, *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Winter 1997): 79-92.

*JOTGES* readers will find this article extremely provocative. Young suggests that it is possible to keep the law perfectly! In his view, as long as one repented, he was perfectly fulfilling the law: “A person does not incur the law’s curse for inevitable infringements, since these are covered by repentance, but for the purposeful abandonment of any of the law’s demands” (p. 84). Thus he speaks of “the dubious assumption that it is impossible to keep the law perfectly” (p. 87).

Further, Young says that “there is no hint in Deuteronomy, in Paul, or in Judaism that the law required an impossible perfection. To suggest that any human shortcoming immediately attracted the law’s curse is really an unlikely proposal once the historical realities are considered” (p. 83). When he speaks of “an impossible perfection,” the author is not contradicting what he says later (cited above). Rather, he is speaking of the supposed impossibility of keeping the law perfectly. In his view, it is possible, hence there is nothing that suggests the law required a perfection which couldn’t be obtained.

The author is attempting to refute the idea that Paul is asserting the impossibility of justification by works of the law. He thinks that Paul is responding to an implied charge of the Judaizers. The charge? That Paul was placing Gentile converts under a curse because he was setting aside some of the stipulations of the law, such as circumcision.

Amazingly, in Young’s view Paul is not refuting this charge, but accepting it. Here is how he paraphrases the passage:

v 10 Whoever makes the Sinai Covenantal Law their way of life comes under a curse (if they deliberately abandon any of its precepts); for Scripture itself pronounces a curse on anyone who claims to be under the Law’s jurisdiction and yet abandons some of its requirements.

v 11a Hence it is clear that no one can belong to the people of God on the basis of the Sinai Law/Covenant while blatantly abandoning some of its requirements.

v 11b Therefore, those who become members of the people of God by faith must continue to direct their lives by faith.

v 12 and not by the Mosaic Covenant, which requires a person to live by *all* its stipulations (hence the hypocrisy of the Judaizers,

who claim Sinai's authority in support of their case for circumcision but do not themselves keep all the Law's requirements; see 6:13).

v 13 Christ's death on the cross has released us—those of faith—from the Sinai covenant's ability or right to curse us for abandoning such requirements as circumcision and holy days,

v 14 with the result that Gentiles, without incurring the Law's curse, are now able to receive the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit, even though they are uncircumcised (p. 91).

It is amazing how scholarship can take the clear meaning of a passage and turn it on its head!

The article is well worth reading simply to see the confusion that exists on relatively straightforward passages. However, in addition, there are many accurate comments in this article as well. For example, commenting on the use of *hosoi*, "as many as," in v 10, Young shows that elsewhere in Galatians and in his writings Paul uses this inclusively of all people, Jews and Gentiles (p. 81). Similarly, commenting on *erga nomou*, "works of the law," in v 10, he says that this is an objective genitive: "works done in conformity with the law" (p. 80 fn. 7).

Additionally, Young's footnotes contain a wealth of excellent bibliographic material, including some that contradicts his position.

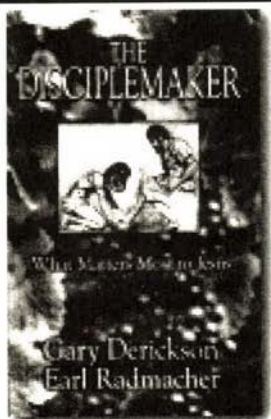
I highly recommend this article for the well grounded believer.

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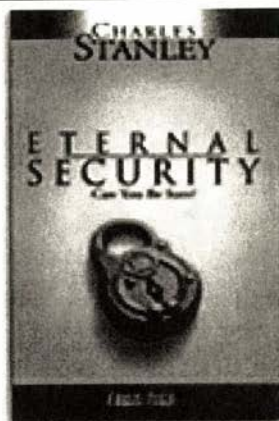


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