

Journal of the
GRACE
Evangelical Society

"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"

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EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

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Is Ignorance Eternal Bliss? EDITOR	3-15
The Cross in John's Gospel JOHN H. NIEMELÄ	17-28
A Critique of <i>The Potter's Freedom</i> by James White LAURENCE M. VANCE	29-34
TULIP: A Free Grace Perspective Part 1: Total Depravity ANTHONY B. BADGER	35-61
How Were People Saved Before Jesus Came? BOB BRYANT	63-70
Book Reviews	71-84
Periodical Reviews	85-95

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IS IGNORANCE ETERNAL BLISS?

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

What is the fate of those who have never heard the gospel?

As a new Christian, I was taught that God gave everyone natural revelation, and if they responded to it, God would bring them more light, and ultimately the good news of Jesus Christ. That is the whole point behind missions.

However, in the last decade or so, more and more Christian leaders are saying that ignorance is indeed an excuse. Many are saying that if a person has never heard of Jesus, they will get into the kingdom if they fall on God's mercy even if they never come to faith in Christ in this life.

II. MANY EVANGELICAL LEADERS ARE SAYING IGNORANCE IS INDEED AN EXCUSE

A. H. Strong says, "a humble and penitent reliance upon God, as a Savior from sin and a guide of conduct, is *an implicit faith* in Christ."¹ This is a recurring theme among some Evangelicals. One who humbly relies on God *implicitly believes* in Jesus Christ, even though he never heard of Him or His good news.

John Sanders is associate professor of philosophy and religion at Huntington College in Huntington, Indiana. He wrote a book entitled, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*. In it he suggests,

God is presently at work in the lives of all people through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, attempting to bring them to repentant faith. Those who are believers now will awaken in the

¹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 843, emphasis added.

next life to discover who it is that saved them and begin to experience the fullness of life in the Lord Jesus Christ.²

When he speaks of repentant faith, he clearly in context does not mean *faith explicitly in Jesus Christ*, but rather *faith in God*. That explains why after death many will only then discover who it is that saved them.

In the mid-eighties James Hunter conducted a survey of teachers and students at nine evangelical liberal arts colleges and seven evangelical seminaries. *One-third* of those interviewed indicated that "the only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus Christ, *except for those who have not had an opportunity to hear of Jesus Christ*."³ In other words, fifteen years ago as many as one-third of Evangelicals training for the ministry believed ignorance is an excuse.

Possibly his survey was not conducted at truly conservative schools. However, whatever the correct percentage was then, it has surely risen since then. In the past 10 years there have been many books on this subject advocating that those who've never heard can be saved apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ.

Many more examples could be given. But the point is clear. Many evangelical leaders today believe that the unevangelized can be eternally saved apart from explicit faith in Jesus.

III. THE IMPLICIT FAITH VIEW

We might think that people would say the unevangelized can be eternally saved by their works. However, Evangelicals who argue for justification apart from explicit faith in Jesus are careful to say that faith is always required, but faith *in Jesus* is not always required. Pinnock states,

According to the Bible, people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology. Since God has not left anyone with-

² John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 283, emphasis added.

³ James Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 35, cited by Daniel Strange in *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2001), 21, emphasis added.

out witness, people are judged on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded to that light. *Faith in God is what saves, not possessing certain minimum information.*⁴

It is rather popular today to denounce theology and doctrine. So when one says a person is "not [saved] by the content of their theology," many will accept that. Notice the fruit that comes of this. This means that there is no "certain minimum information" which one must believe. Of course, the popular view of faith today has little bearing on information. Rather, faith seems to be an experience or encounter with God.

Those who believe in implicit faith suggest faith might occur as a result of a dream, a vision, or even an internal feeling. As long as the person experiences God in some way, he has faith and is saved.

Pinnock continues:

Scripture and reason both imply that no one can be held responsible for truth of which they were inculpably ignorant; they are judged on the basis of the truth they know. *A person is saved by faith, even if the content of belief is deficient (and whose is not?).*⁵

And again:

It is not so much a question whether the unevangelized know Jesus as whether Jesus knows them (Mt 7:23). One does not have to be conscious of the work of Christ done on one's behalf in order to benefit from that work. *The issue God cares about is the direction of the heart, not the content of theology.*⁶

As was previously mentioned, A.H. Strong held this view. Here is a fuller articulation of his position:

...whoever among the heathen are saved, must in like manner be saved by casting themselves as helpless sinners upon God's plan of mercy, dimly shadowed forth in nature and providence. But such faith, even among the patriarchs and heathen, is *implicitly a faith in Christ*, and would become explicit and

⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 157-58, emphasis added.

⁵ Ibid., emphasis added.

⁶ Ibid., emphasis added.

conscious trust and submission, whenever Christ were made known to them.⁷

According to this view, the person who falls on God's mercy, knowing nothing of Jesus, "implicitly [has] faith in Christ" and this faith "would become explicit and conscious trust and submission, whenever Christ were made known to them." Implicit faith in Jesus, according to Strong, is evidently a general trust in and submission to God which would blossom into explicit trust in and submission to Jesus if the person with implicit faith ever heard the good news.⁸

David Clark comments:

Some evangelicals have solved this dilemma [that universalism is clearly unbiblical] by denying point 3, which asserts that the only way to know Jesus Christ is to come into contact with special revelation. They believe that information sufficient for salvation can be found outside special revelation. This position could be called the implicit-faith view.

Several evangelicals have taken this kind of view. Augustus H. Strong...advocated this position, as have Millard Erickson and Clark Pinnock. James I. Packer thinks it possible. C. S. Lewis maintains that, "the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do not know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him."⁹

The Roman Catholic Church officially adopts the view that the unevangelized can gain eternal salvation. They say it is by sincerely seeking God and striving to obey God's will as He makes it known to them in their consciences. Note this statement from Vatican II:

⁷ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 842, emphasis added.

⁸ It is interesting that when missionaries arrive with the message of Jesus, this is not what we find. A very small percentage of Muslims or Buddhists or Hindus, or the other religions trust in and submit to Jesus when the good news is proclaimed to them. Either this means very few of them are actually falling on the mercy of God or that the view is incorrect. I'm inclined to believe both are the case.

⁹ *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, eds. Crockett and Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 41, 42-43.

They also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, yet sincerely seek God, and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.¹⁰

Liberals (non-Evangelicals) also suggest something akin to implicit faith. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Professor Emeritus of History of Religions at Harvard, says, "Faith can never be expressed in words."¹¹ Heim says, "In Smith's case...faith is an existential, generic human attitude locked deep in human subjectivity which, again, is beyond and separate from any forms used to express it. To give it any content would be to make it particular, when he claims its nature is universally human...Faith is contentless..."¹²

IV. THE BIBLE SPECIFICALLY SAYS IGNORANCE IS NOT ETERNAL BLISS

As with most issues, there are some texts which speak clearly to this issue. The Bible specifically says that ignorance is no excuse. While many have never heard the name of Jesus, let alone His gospel, that doesn't mean they can be saved by some inner encounter with God.

A. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Jesus Christ and His promise of eternal life to all who simply believe in Him is explicitly stated in the Gospel of John as the object of saving faith (e.g., John 1:12-13; 2:23; 3:14-18, 36; 4:39, 42; 5:24; 6:35-40, 47; 11:25-27). John's Gospel states that all who believe in Jesus Christ have everlasting life, and that only such people have it. John's purpose for his Gospel was to tell unbelievers what they must do to have eternal life (John 20:31). Surely, then, John would tell us if there was a way to be born again apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ. Yet he actually slams that door shut.

¹⁰ *Vatican II*, "The Church," Chap. 16. This view goes back to some of the church fathers. See, for example, Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165), *First Apology*, Chapters 10, 14. See also the writings of Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenaeus.

¹¹ Cited without documentation by S. Mark Heim in *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 54.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70.

John's Gospel says that those who do not believe in Jesus are condemned. For example, "He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). There is no wiggle room in John's Gospel for people to be born again by anything other than explicit faith in Jesus Christ.

B. ROMANS 10:1-15

The Jewish people had "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (10:2). Knowledge of Jesus Christ and eternal life through faith in Him, Paul says, is indeed essential. No one is born again without knowing that Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him (10:4, 9-15¹³).

In v. 14 Paul makes it clear that people cannot believe without a preacher. And in Romans 1-4 and Galatians 2-3 Paul makes it clear that there is no justification apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ. Preachers of the good news of Jesus Christ must be sent for people to hear and believe the good news and thereby be justified.

C. GOD-FEARERS IN ACTS

Cornelius told Peter that an angel had told him to call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who would tell him the words by which he and all his household would be saved. *Cornelius and his household were not saved until they heard and believed the good news of Jesus Christ* (Acts 10:43-44). The idea that Cornelius was already saved prior to being evangelized is directly contradicted by his own testimony.

Cornelius is but one example of a God-fearing Gentile in Acts. Darrell Bock points out that in its various uses in the Book of Acts (10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26) all God-fearers nonetheless needed to hear and believe the message of Jesus in order to gain eternal life and escape eternal condemnation. After commenting on Cornelius in Acts 10, he writes:

The use of God-fearers in Acts 13 is crucial. Here Paul addresses the Gentiles in his audience as God-fearers. Does this mean that they are in God's blessings? The answer is, No, at least, not yet. In the speech Paul presents Jesus and warns his

¹³ For a discussion of Rom 10:9-10, see John Hart, "Why Confess Christ? The Use and Abuse of Romans 10:9-10," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1999): 3-35. I agree with him that Rom 10:9-10 concerns both justification (righteous by faith alone) and deliverance from God's wrath here and now (saved by confession plus faith).

God-fearing audience not to reject the message. To scoff at the message is to perish (Acts 13:40-41). The God-fearer for Luke is interested in the divine, but the God-fearer is not in the kingdom until he or she responds to the message.¹⁴

D. OVER 150 PASSAGES PROVE EXPLICIT FAITH IS REQUIRED

As Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was so fond of pointing out, there are over 150 places in the NT where faith in Jesus Christ is stated as the sole condition of eternal life.

E. THE IMPLICIT FAITH VIEW PRODUCES PHARISAISM

Paul Knitter, a proponent of the implicit faith view, nonetheless does a good job of explaining two major objections to the implicit faith view:

First, there is in all followers of other religions an ineluctable tendency to *effect their own salvation*—that is, to try to force God's hand, to establish their own worthiness. It amounts to this: other religions do not really accept salvation "by faith alone."

A second tendency...is closely related to the first corrupting tendency: in trying to achieve their own salvation, all religions, in one way or another, end up attempting to *capture* God. They try to contain divinity in their doctrines or manipulate it with their "good works." Some form of idolatry rears its head in all religions.¹⁵

V. MISSIONS: THE UNINTENDED VICTIM

If those who've never heard can be saved apart from faith in Christ, then when we tell them about Jesus, we eliminate that possibility.

Darrell Bock put it this way:

Someone could object that those who have never heard are in a different category. They are not responsible because they have had no opportunity to hear the gospel. Only when Jesus is preached is one responsible to believe. But if this is true, then at Mars Hill [Acts 17] Paul puts nonhearers at risk. In their ignorance they had a chance, but now that he has told

¹⁴ *Through No Fault of Their Own?*, 123.

¹⁵ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 102-103, emphasis added.

them about Jesus they must respond or be destroyed. We are driven to the absurd conclusion that Paul should never have mentioned Jesus, because as "nonhearers" they had a chance! But clearly, the apostle believed it was essential to mention Jesus to those who had never heard. The idea that some would enter the kingdom through ignorance is unacceptable to Paul.¹⁶

Would you be less likely to choose the separation, losses, and hardships of the mission field if you believed that people could be born again without hearing the gospel? Might you be tempted to stay home if you thought that by your actions many people would be eternally condemned who otherwise might be saved? I would think so.

Pinnock seems to be unaware of the force of this argument when he writes:

The Bible teaches that many varieties of unevangelized persons will attain salvation. This will happen according to the faith principle. In the case of morally responsible persons confronted with the gospel of Christ in this life, they would surely turn to Him in explicit faith. If they did not do so, it would prove that they had not been favorably disposed to God prior to that time, since Jesus is the culmination of divine revelation. Pre-Christian faith is valid up until that moment when Christ is preached, but not afterwards. When Christ is known, the obligation comes into force to believe on him. The unevangelized are expected to receive the Good News when it reaches them. God's offer becomes an objective obligation at that time, *and refusal to accept that offer would be fatal. No hope can be offered to those declining God's offer to them in Christ.*¹⁷

Evangelistic—as opposed to purely humanitarian—missions have been and are motivated by *spiritual* as well as *physical* need. If you remove the spiritual need, you remove a major motivation to go and evangelize.

Sanders has an answer to the objection that the implicit faith view undercuts missions. He says that while people can escape eternal condemnation apart from explicit faith in Jesus, they cannot find full and meaningful lives here and now without it:

¹⁶ *Through No Fault of Their Own?*, 122.

¹⁷ Pinnock, 168, emphasis added.

The Bible indicates that God wants to bring the fullness of eternal life into the lives of all people *now*. Even if some of the unevangelized are already believers or all will encounter Christ at the moment of death or after [other views he rejects but discusses], it is God's desire that people experience the joy, love, and hope that come from knowing Jesus and that they not put this experience off to some future time. To have a relationship with the risen Lord is much more satisfying spiritually than simply experiencing God's universal grace. God desires mature sons and daughters, the sort of maturity that comes only from a relationship with Christ.¹⁸

Frankly, that is a good point. That is another reason to do missions. However, one wonders if the underlying assumption that people who believe in God in some saving sense will necessarily believe in Jesus when they hear of Him. If not, then are we not endangering the eternal destiny of people?

In addition, even though it is true that one must become a Christian and an active disciple to have fullness of life, is that motivation enough to compel as many people to go to the mission field as would otherwise? Personally, I don't think so.

Of course, Sanders' major premise is wrong. People cannot be eternally saved apart from faith in Christ. Hence Sanders misses the greatest reason to evangelize.

VI. GOD'S GOODNESS IN QUESTION

Nearly all who hold the implicit faith view think that the goodness of God is at stake. If God condemns people to eternal torment in hell who never even had a chance to believe, then His goodness is in question. Here is how Pinnock puts it:

If God really loves the whole world and desires everyone to be saved, it follows logically that everyone must have access to salvation. There would have to be an opportunity for all people to participate in the salvation of God. If Christ died for all, while yet sinners, the opportunity must be given for all to register a decision about what was done for them (Ro 5:8). They cannot lack the opportunity merely because someone failed to bring the Gospel of Christ to them. God's universal salvific

¹⁸ Sanders, 284.

will implies the equally universal accessibility of salvation for all people.¹⁹

Yet people who die never having heard the gospel did have a chance. Jesus said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all unto Me." The incarnation (John 1:9), and the Cross (John 12:42), and natural revelation (Romans 1) are three ways in which God is drawing men unto Him. The Holy Spirit is convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:9-11).

In my opinion Scripture teaches that all who respond to the light they have will receive more light. The account of Cornelius coming to faith in Jesus Christ shows that (Acts 10-11). So do Paul's remarks on Mars Hill in Acts 17:27. God brings the explicit good news of Jesus Christ to all who respond to the light they have by seeking God. Romans 3:11b, "there is none who seeks after God," looks at people when left to their own initiative. Clearly since God takes the initiative, we are free to seek Him in response (Acts 17:27).

The goodness of God is not in question in the issue of the fate of the unevangelized. He is good even though some never hear the good news of Jesus Christ and are eternally condemned. He brings the good news of Jesus Christ to all who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6).

VII. OT PEOPLE WERE NOT JUSTIFIED BY IMPLICIT FAITH

I've thought for years that Dispensationalism, which I believe in as a system, has dropped the ball on the issue of what OT people had to do to have eternal life.

Notice how Pinnock picks up on this point:

Dispensationalists have rightly opposed the notion that believers in other epochs needed to believe in the coming Savior in order to be saved. These people trusted in God, even though the content of their theology differed from our own.²⁰

I disagree with Pinnock and with Dispensationalists who say that something less than faith in the coming Messiah was required.

¹⁹ Pinnock, 157.

²⁰ Ibid., 162.

This same suggestion is made by Karl Rahner, as Ruokanen says,

Rahner refers to the analogy of the Old Testament: although the Old Covenant had not yet attained the perfection of God's revelation and grace, it served as the legitimate religion of that time, willed by God. The same principle can be analogously transferred to the non-Christian religions of today...In the case of non-Christians, it is essential that they are open to God, seekers of the truth; this openness already demonstrates existence in a state of grace.²¹

I agree with what Bob Bryant and Sid Dyer have written.²² Old Testament people were born again in the same way we are: by faith alone in Christ alone.

Many people wonder what practical difference it makes how OT people were justified. After all, we live now, not then. That the implicit faith view cites this aspect of Dispensationalism in its favor shows why this is so important.

Logically what we must do to have eternal life cannot change. If the saving message changes, then so does the gospel.

Dispensationalism has long said that men in every age are justified by faith in God, but as revelation progressed what they needed to believe about God changed as well.

Well, if people before the time of Christ could be born again by some general faith in God, then logically so can anyone today who has not yet heard the name of Jesus.

No one was ever born again by some general faith in God. The condition has always been faith that the Messiah gives eternal life to all who simply believe in Him.

The only dispensational change is that after Jesus' baptism people had to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah who gives eternal life to all who simply believe in Him. But the message is the same.²³

²¹ Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), 30.

²² Bob Bryant, "How Were People Saved Before Jesus Came?" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 2003): 63-70. Sidney D. Dyer, "The Salvation of Believing Israelites Prior to the Incarnation of Christ," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 2001): 43-55.

²³ Space doesn't permit detailed proof. See Bryant's article on pp. 63-70 of this issue and Dyer's article for careful argumentation. However, Paul's use of

VIII. WHAT ABOUT ACTS 10:35?

This verse is often cited by those believing in implicit faith. According to Matthew Henry:

God never did, nor ever will, reject or refuse an honest gentile, who, though he has not the privileges or advantages that the Jews have, yet, like Cornelius, fears God, and worships him, and works righteousness; that is, is just and charitable towards all men, who lives up to the light he has, both in a sincere devotion and in regular conversation.²⁴

Pinnock understands the passage as Henry does, even favorably quoting the above passage.²⁵ But he admits that the explicit faith view has a "plausible way" to understand the passage. He says:

Another more plausible way to limit the text is the view that any soul like Cornelius who is genuinely seeking God will be evangelized through a special messenger before he dies. In other words, God will take steps to ensure that any person truly seeking him will hear the gospel before death and have an opportunity to be saved. This theory holds that persons who respond to the light they have will receive further light from God. There is something to be said for this theory. For one thing, the Cornelius account does illustrate that point. Cornelius was seeking God, and Peter was led to his side. Besides, things like this do happen in our own experience. Further, the theory can be commended for seeing the problem of accessibility and for answering it. It is a move in the right direction and (depending on the means used by God) it might even approach our own theory. If, for example, the divine messenger could be a vision or an inner voice, not necessarily a human messenger, then it could be part of my own theory.²⁶

Gen 15:6 in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 shows that Abraham believed in the coming Messiah for eternal life. If not, Paul's whole argument about Abraham being the father of all who believe in Jesus for eternal life collapses like a house of cards.

²⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), 6:133.

²⁵ Pinnock, 165-66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 166. Also, see my article, "Can Unbelievers Seek God and Work Righteousness? Acts 10:35," *Grace in Focus* (Nov-Dec 2002): 1, 3, 4.

Unfortunately, Pinnock then adds, "But usually the theory calls for a human messenger, and that is the problem."²⁷ He then goes on for pages to show why he considers this view incorrect.

Pinnock does not see the need for a human messenger, or even Jesus Himself as in the case of Saul. For him a vision or inner voice is enough. What this vision or inner voice says is not clear, for Pinnock ends this discussion by saying, "Pre-Christian faith is valid up until that moment when Christ is preached, but not afterwards. When Christ is known, the obligation comes into force to believe on Him."²⁸ Evidently the inner voice tells the person to fall on God's mercy or something to that effect.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Lord Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him. And He guarantees that those who do not believe in Him will be eternally condemned.

If we adopt an implicit faith view, there will be other ramifications either in our beliefs, or in the beliefs of those we influence.

I realize that there are solid Free Grace people who hold the implicit faith view. My hope, however, is that they would search the Scriptures to see if explicit faith in Jesus Christ is required, not just for those who are evangelized, but for all.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 168.

THE CROSS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

The signs section of John's Gospel (John 1–12, 19–20) encompasses about two thirds of the book. The prominence of this section shows that John's overriding purpose is to explain, through the signs, how the readers can obtain eternal life (John 20:31). Therefore, it is not surprising that he has many nutshell statements on how to pass *from death to life*. What may surprise us is the strange absence of Christ's cross and resurrection from John's message-in-a-nutshell verses for unbelievers.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life (John 6:47).

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 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 (John 20:30-31).

¹ The author presented a paper under this same title at the Grace Evangelical Society Conference in Irving, TX, on March 12, 2003. It is a revision of his article, "The Message of Life in the Gospel of John," *CTS Journal* 7 (July–September 2001): 2-20 (available online at www.chafer.edu). The impetus for relating the cross to John's message arose in teaching the book in 2000 and early 2001 at Chafer Theological Seminary and at Grace Chapel of Orange, CA.

II. THREE PROPOSALS IN RESPONSE TO THE ABSENCE OF THE CROSS IN EVANGELISTIC PASSAGES IN JOHN

The author has heard three proposals from Christians who reflect upon the absence of the cross and resurrection in these verses. Each proposal creates its own difficulties. (This article will present a fourth option that avoids these pitfalls.²)

A. THE ARGUMENT THAT THE PRE-CROSS MESSAGE IS IRRELEVANT TODAY

Some who hold that believing in Jesus' death and resurrection is a prerequisite to gaining eternal life say that the pre-cross message as found in John doesn't apply today since we live after the cross. New revelation has made additional content an essential part of the saving message for us.

They point out that each example in John where the cross is absent precedes the cross. Thus, they conclude that verses like John 3:16; 5:24; and 6:47 could not possibly say anything about the apostles' post-cross message for unbelievers.

This statement contains its own refutation. John 20:30-31 does not adjust the message of John 3:16, 36; 5:24; and 6:47. Thus, John's statements of what the unbeliever must believe was the same during Christ's ministry as it was after the cross and resurrection. John wrote his entire book after the cross. If the message changed, but John did not tell his readers, he would be misleading (at best) or deceptive (at worst). Thus, we should reject this proposal and look for another solution.

B. THE DEBATER'S PLOY

Some use the technique commonly found in debates. They ask a withering rhetorical question: "You don't mean that John de-emphasizes the cross, do you?" They then follow with: "This doesn't mean that we should de-emphasize the cross, does it?"

This proposal is a reversal of the first. It assumes that the non-mention of the cross in John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; and 20:30-31 would mean that the cross has little or no relevance in John's message for the unbeliever. The present author categorically rejects the idea that John minimizes the cross. A paraphrase of John's salvific message indicates

² Cf. especially pp. 25-26 in this article. Pages 18-26 make a case for the approach accepted by this author.

this: *I am to believe that—through His cross and resurrection—Jesus Christ, God's Son, gives me eternal life and resurrection, removing the death sentence that I deserve as a sinner.* The cross and resurrection have a vital role in John's Gospel and in our message to the unbeliever. We need to discover how John relates the cross to his message for the unbeliever.

C. THE "LET'S IMPROVISE" APPROACH

A popular response is to plead ignorance as to why the Lord Jesus didn't mention the cross in some evangelistic encounters. Since Paul in his epistles makes it clear that today's gospel centers on the cross, we should just add the cross. Why limit ourselves to passages in John?

This proposal has good intentions, but rushes forward before discovering how John relates the cross to his message. Unfortunately, as we all know, many people compromise grace in John's message for unbelievers by inserting repentance, even though John's Gospel avoids the word.³ Well-intentioned people have erred by adding what they assume that John neglected. Let us not rush into a solution, but examine how John relates the cross to his message for the unbeliever (a fourth proposal).

III. FINDING THE ANSWER THROUGH THE PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose statement in John 20:30-31 defines John's message of life:

And truly Jesus did *many other signs* in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 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 (John 20:30-31).

Immediately, a question arises: Why does John say *other signs*? His most recent use of the word *sign* is in chapter 12, but this is now the end of chapter 20.⁴ Why is it that John speaks of *other signs*, despite the long gap since last using the word?

³ Since John uses the term *repentance* often in the Book of Revelation, it is appropriate to say that he *avoids* the word in his Gospel and his Epistles.

⁴ *Semeion* ("sign") is in John 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30.

A. THE SEVEN RECOGNIZED SIGNS

Let us begin by noting that most expositors recognize seven signs:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Turning water into wine | 2:1-12 |
| 2. Healing a nobleman's son from afar | 4:46-54 |
| 3. Healing at Bethsaida | 5:1-15 |
| 4. Feeding the 5000 | 6:1-14 |
| 5. Walking on the water | 6:15-21 |
| 6. Healing a man born blind | 9:1-7 |
| 7. Raising Lazarus | 11:1-44 |

Although these seven are the recognized signs, John points to an eighth.

B. DISCOVERING AND DEFINING THE EIGHTH SIGN

When the Temple authorities demand a sign validating Christ's right to cleanse the Temple, He identifies that sign (John 2:18-22). The present author has long recognized an eighth sign. However, prior to 2000, he restricted it to Jesus' resurrection. But Jesus did not define the sign that narrowly. Verse 21 defines Temple [*naos*] as Jesus' body, so the eighth sign clearly includes His resurrection:

So the Jews [Judeans] answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple [*naos*], and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews [Judeans] said, "It has taken forty-six years⁵ to build this temple [*naos*], and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple [*naos*] of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said (John 2:18-22).

The eighth sign includes the resurrection, but does Jesus say more? To limit the eighth sign to the resurrection reads vv. 18-19 as follows:

So the Jews [Judeans] answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus an-

⁵ Many translations see these words referring to ongoing construction of the Temple. However, *naos* speaks of the holy place and the holy of holies, not the entire Temple precinct. The *naos* was built forty-six years before John 2 (Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, xv. 11. 6).

swered and said to them, "...in three days I will raise it [this temple] up."

However, Jesus did not merely mention His resurrection. Verse 19 also refers directly to the crucifixion:

Jesus answered and said to them [*concerning the sign*], "Destroy this temple [*naos*], and in three days I will raise it up."

Someone may object, "The crucifixion cannot be part of the eighth sign, because His audience did not regard the destruction of the Temple as miraculous. They only viewed raising up the Temple in three days as a miracle."

The problem with limiting the eighth sign to what the Judeans perceived should be self-evident. They did not understand the reference to the crucifixion, so why should their limitation of the miracle to raising the Temple in three days be definitive?

The Judeans were quite aware of the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem. In that light, they would not regard a destruction of Herod's Temple as impossible (however unlikely it might seem). They only regarded a three-day reconstruction as impossible. Therefore, they construed Jesus' words about destruction of the Temple as idle speculation about the future. However, when Titus actually destroyed the whole Temple in A.D. 70, the hand of God's judgment upon the nation became undeniable. In other words, Jesus and His listeners would regard the destruction of the Temple as a sign from God, but His hearers did not yet realize what Christ says of Himself in Matt 12:6:

Yet I say to you that in this place there is One [Christ] greater than the temple.

Yes, it is true that the A.D. 70 destruction signaled God's judgment upon the nation for rejecting their Messiah. It is also true that the crucifixion of the Messiah was part of the sign authorizing the cleansing of the Temple in John 2. However, the idea that killing Jesus could possibly relate to a sign from God never occurred to them. Thus Paul writes:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:7-8).

What is fascinating in John 2:19 is the imperative, *Destroy this temple*. Ultimately, it was not a foreign power that would *destroy this temple*

(kill Jesus): The Judean leaders themselves delivered Jesus up to the Romans and insisted on crucifixion. The very fact that the crucifixion occurred was indeed a great miracle. Neither the religious leaders nor Satan sought to validate Jesus as the Christ through a sign, but unwittingly played their roles leading to the fulfillment of the cross/resurrection sign. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was a sign that verified Jesus' right to cleanse the Temple. However, recognition of it as a sign came only after the resurrection.

After Christ's resurrection, John and the other disciples recognized that the cross and resurrection constitute a single sign. Therefore he writes:

Jesus answered and said to them [regarding the sign that He would show them that authorized Him to cleanse the temple], "Destroy this temple [*naos*], and in three days I will raise it up."...Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said *this* to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said (John 2:19, 22).

C. JOHN 19–20 SHOWS THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION ARE A SIGN

Verses in John 19–20 speak of the cross and resurrection fulfilling various Scriptures (John 19:24, 28, 36–37; 20:9). (This hints at the cross and resurrection being a sign.) John 20:6–8 describe Peter and John arriving at the tomb. When John saw the things described in v. 7, he believed that the crucified Christ had risen from the dead.⁶ The context of John 19–20 may well explain why John 20:30 uses the phrase *many other signs*, despite not using the word *sign* since chapter 12.

What John is saying is that any one of the signs is sufficient to cause someone to believe the message through which Christ gives life. However, let us ask, "Which sign did John place right before the purpose statement?" That sign was the cross and resurrection. It was the greatest

⁶ John was already a believer, so he already possessed eternal life. John 13:10–11 shows that Judas was the only unbeliever among the twelve. John 15:3 confirms that the eleven had already believed the message of life. It is quite conceivable that John was an unnamed disciple of John mentioned in John 1:35. If so, he was already a believer in John 1. Also, John 13:10–11 and 15:3 show that Thomas was *already clean* before he believed the Christ's crucifixion culminated in His resurrection in John 20:28–29 (the eighth sign).

of all the signs in a number of ways. The other signs show that He is the Christ, the Son of God, who gives eternal life to everyone who believes Him for it. However, the cross and resurrection demonstrate how He *fulfills* the promise to give eternal life to believers. Despite His crucifixion, He lives eternally. Despite His crucifixion, He is resurrected. Those who believe in Him share that eternal life and the certainty of future resurrection. Does John deemphasize the cross? The answer is a definite "No." Consider how he connects the cross to his message.

D. EACH OF THE EIGHT SIGNS IS SUFFICIENT

Each of the eight signs is sufficient to persuade a person that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*. John 20:31 shows that whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, has eternal life. Thus, it is imperative that we know what the expression, *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, means in John's Gospel.

IV. DEFINING WHAT "JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD" MEANS

Clearly the passage does not mean that everyone who believes that "Jesus is His first name and Christ is His last name" possesses eternal life. John defines these terms in John 11:25-27, the only other place in John's Gospel where the expression "the Christ, the Son of God" occurs.

A. THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Jesus asserts that He is *the resurrection and the life*. Then He defines what He means. The following chart shows how these verses relate to both truths.

Christ is the Resurrector		Christ is the Guarantor of Life
I am the resurrection (25a)	and	[I am] the life (25b)
He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live (25c)	and	whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (26a)
Do you believe [all of] this (26b)?		

The neuter form of the word *this* in 26b shows that Jesus did not just ask if she believed that He is *the resurrection* or just whether she believed that He is *the life*. Rather, He asked if she believed that He is both the resurrector and the life-giver.

Verse 25c explains what Jesus means by saying that He is *the resurrection*: He will resurrect all who believe in Him, even though they may die physically. Verse 26a explains what He means by saying that He is *the life*: He grants eternal life to everyone who believes in Him. Martha affirms that she has already believed these truths [Greek perfect tense].

B. JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD

It is fascinating to see how v. 27 moves from a simple "Yes/No" answer to an essay answer: Yes, *Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come [or comes] into the world*. Another way of expressing this is, "Of course I believe that You will resurrect all believers and that You grant eternal life to all believers, because I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who comes into the world."

Her logic matches that of Paul in Acts 26:6-8. How could the patriarchs (including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) enjoy the land God gave to them and to their seed forever (Gen 13:15; 17:8; 26:3; and 35:12) in Christ's millennial kingdom? Living forever in resurrection bodies is a prerequisite to enjoying the land forever. Martha knows that now deceased saints will be in the Messiah's kingdom, so obviously the Messiah will resurrect them and give them eternal life. Apart from resurrection and eternal life, no one could be in His millennial kingdom (cf. John 3:3).

Summary: Believing what John means by *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, entails believing that He gives me eternal life. If I have *never* known that faith alone in Jesus Christ alone gave me eternal life, then I *have not yet believed* in Him. If I have *ever* known that faith alone in Jesus Christ alone gave me eternal life, then I *have believed* in Him.

C. THE PURPOSE STATEMENT

It is not accidental that John includes Martha's statement about believing that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*. His purpose statement indicates that this is sufficient content to give a believer eternal life:

these [the eight signs] are written that you may believe that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, and that [by] believing [this] you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

V. HOW DOES THE CROSS RELATE TO THE MESSAGE OF LIFE?

A. THE GOD OF THE LIVING

Before answering this question directly, it is useful to consider whether the cross and resurrection are the means for Christ granting eternal life. Consider part of Jesus' response to the Sadducees' attempt to ridicule the resurrection. They raised the case of the childless levirate marriages of seven brothers to one woman. He says:

But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt 22:31-32).

Note that vv. 31-32 focus on eternal life, not on resurrection. The point seems to be that the Sadducees not only denied resurrection, but they also denied eternal life. These two verses demonstrate that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all possessed eternal life long before the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. We should conclude: The cross did not need to occur prior to God granting eternal life to believers. However, the cross and resurrection did need to occur before God could give a resurrection body to a believer. Briefly, Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20). A judgment of sin (personal, imputed, the sin nature, etc.) would also seem to be prerequisite to receiving a resurrection body.

B. HOW JOHN RELATES THE CROSS TO THE MESSAGE

John focuses on the reception of eternal life. Everyone who believes that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God* (in the Johannine sense as the resurrector and guarantor of eternal life) receives eternal life from Him. John 11:25-27 indicates that Christ also promises to resurrect all who believe in Him. The fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob possessed eternal life since the days of Genesis proves that the cross and resurrection did not need to occur prior to the granting of eternal life. In light of this, John sees Christ's cross and resurrection as the greatest of all signs. Since the cross is what enables the granting of a resurrection body, it is vitally important in John.

...these [the cross-resurrection sign and the other seven signs] are written that you may believe that *Jesus is the Christ, the*

Son of God, and that [by] believing [this] you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

VI. WHAT ABOUT FIRST CORINTHIANS 15?

Evangelicals often make believing the cross and resurrection their bottom-line for unbelievers to gain eternal life. We often define the gospel in terms of Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection,⁷ seeking to echo 1 Cor 15:3-8:

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, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Is the mere fact that God's Son died a horrible death on the cross good news for us? Is the fact that He was raised good news for us? These facts become good news for us for only one reason: They affect the destiny of believers. God uses the crucifixion and resurrection to enable believers to escape the Lake of Fire and to be with Him forever. We cannot limit our definition of the gospel to vv. 3-8, because what precedes these verses is what makes His death and resurrection good news for Christians.

Therefore, let us not miss an important feature of vv. 1-2 where Paul demonstrates that what happened to Christ is indeed good news to us. He declares:

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 fast⁸ that word

⁷ Paul focuses on two items: Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. He does not set forth burial as another item for belief, but as a proof of Christ's death. He gives two lines of evidence for the crucifixion: the OT Scriptures and the fact that He was buried. He also has two proofs of the resurrection: the OT Scriptures and the many witnesses who saw Him.

⁸ The word translated *hold fast* is *katechō* ("to grasp"). Here, it is equivalent to *believe*. Grasping the truth that Jesus Christ gives me eternal life and removes my death sentence is to believe it. In effect, Paul says that his Gospel saves

which I preached to you—unless you believed in [something] vain.⁹

We must always remember that vv. 1-2 show why this is good news for believers: *the gospel...by which also you are saved*. Specifically, Paul says that the gospel gives salvation to the believer. In other words, God gives life to everyone who believes in Jesus for that free gift. The gospel is not merely that Christ was crucified and resurrected. First Corinthians 15:1-8 is good news for us precisely because Christ saves believers through His death and resurrection.

When Paul spoke with the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, he told him simply: *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*. No one would ever accuse Paul of minimizing the cross and resurrection, but the bottom line of his gospel was that Jesus saves from eternal condemnation all who simply believe in Him. John would express the same point in terms of receiving eternal life (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; and 20:30-31).

VII. HOW DOES THE CROSS RELATE TO THE MESSAGE FOR THE UNBELIEVER?

The bottom line is to believe that Jesus grants eternal life to everyone who simply believes Him for that gift. When I am persuaded that simply by faith in Him the Lord Jesus has taken away my death sentence and granted me eternal life, I receive eternal life as a gift. Faith alone in Jesus Christ alone through grace alone gives me eternal life and the promise that He will resurrect me.

The way that the cross fits into this is that John sees it as the greatest of all of Christ's signs and as the one which enables Him to resurrect

people, if they believe (grasp) it. Paul calls these Corinthians *brethren* in v. 1 and his first class condition raises no doubts about them being believers.

⁹ The word translated *in vain* is a dative. The dative is the normal case for the direct object of *pisteuō* (e.g., *to believe in something vain*). Others take this as an adverbial dative (e.g., *to believe in a vain way*). In response, the direct object view fits normal grammatical usage. In addition, 1 Cor 15:14 shows that Paul's focus is on the truthfulness of Christ's resurrection: *And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty*. In this light, vv. 1-2 teach that believing the gospel message saved the Corinthians, unless what they believed were a false message from Paul. Paul preached a true message to them which they believed. Paul does not want them to abandon that true message.

believers. Let us not forget that John 20:30 assumes that the reader understands the cross and resurrection of Christ as a sign. That is sufficient to account for why John says *many other signs*, not just “many signs.”

My paraphrase of John’s message to the unbeliever follows: I am to believe that—through His cross and resurrection—Jesus Christ, God’s Son, gives me eternal life and resurrection, removing the death sentence that I deserve as a sinner. John sees the cross and resurrection as a reason that people should believe that Jesus Christ gives believers eternal life.

A friend of mine has asked many unchurched unbelievers, “Who was crucified and resurrected on the third day?” Hardly anyone responds, “I have no idea.” They almost always say, “Jesus Christ.” However, most are clueless when asked, “Does God give eternal life as a free gift?” Why not present the cross and resurrection as the reason for believing that Christ will give them eternal life as a gift the moment they believe this? Let us share the good news that Jesus Christ gives eternal life.

A CRITIQUE OF *THE POTTER'S FREEDOM* BY JAMES WHITE

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I. INTRODUCTION

One thing Calvinists can never be accused of is failing to present their views. Of all the books written by Calvinists during the past ten years, James White's book *The Potter's Freedom*¹ is perhaps the most polemical. And because it is so illustrative of the Calvinists' continual rehash of their errors, it merits further attention because of its prominent place in the current round of what I call the TULIP Wars.

James White is the director of Alpha and Omega Ministries,² an apologetics ministry he co-founded in 1983. In addition to his crusades against the King James Bible,³ he has debated assorted atheists, Catholics, and cultists. He has also authored a number of good books, such as his recent work on justification.⁴ White's theological position should have been apparent even before he wrote his book on Calvinism since he is a member of the Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church. A Reformed Baptist Church, although it is inherently Calvinistic, is not just a polite term for a Calvinistic Baptist Church. Many Calvinistic Baptists would never describe themselves as *Reformed* because they would shun, and rightly so, the immediate identification with Reformed Theology—a system of theology that rejects dispensationalism and premillennialism. A Reformed Baptist is therefore not much more than a Reformed Christian who baptizes adults only and by immersion only.

¹ James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000).

² <http://www.aomin.org>.

³ James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995).

⁴ James R. White, *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2001).

Article III of the constitution of the Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church⁵ states: "We do hereby adopt as a reasonable expression of our faith the 1689 London Confession of Faith as republished in 1974 under the title *A Faith to Confess*." As any student of church history knows, the 1689 London Confession of Faith is nothing more than a "baptized" Westminster Confession of Faith, put out by the Presbyterians in 1646. This 1689 Baptist confession made its way to America in 1742, and with the addition of two new articles, became the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. Neither the Westminster Confession of Faith nor either of the Baptist confessions are the slightest bit dispensational or premillennial. The statement of faith on the Alpha and Omega Ministries website simply says: "We believe that Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead. This promise is found throughout the inspired Scriptures."

II. DON'T JUDGE THE BOOK BY ITS COVER

White's book *The Potter's Freedom* is said on its cover to be "A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's *Chosen But Free*." But the cover alone is a typical Calvinistic misrepresentation, and for two reasons.

The first problem is that the title is based on a twisted view of the passage in Romans 9 regarding the potter and the clay. Romans 9 is the "haven of reprobation" for all Calvinists. In Romans 9, Calvinists throughout history have seized upon three verses and made them the pillars to support their teaching of the reprobation of the non-elect. The three verses in question are: "Esau have I hated" (Rom 9:13), "whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom 9:18), and "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:22).

The third verse is part of the account of the potter and the clay in Rom 9:22-24. "*What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

According to one Calvinist, because the potter has power over the clay, this proves "God's absolute sovereignty to determine the final des-

⁵ Available at <http://www.prbc.org>.

tiny of men, either to honor or dishonor, to salvation and glory or to damnation and desolation.”⁶ When White called his book by the seemingly innocuous title *The Potter's Freedom*, he was actually saying that God, as the potter, has the freedom to foreordain the “elect” to heaven and the “reprobate” to hell by a sovereign, eternal decree.

Does Paul's illustration of the potter and the clay have anything to do with the salvation of NT Christians? The potter and the clay was a common illustration in the OT (Isa 29:16, 45:9, 64:8; Jer 18:1-6). Never is it a reference to anyone's salvation. Israel is said to be the clay (Isa 64:8; Jer 18:6). The clay is formed, not created. There was no clay before the foundation of the world, and neither is anyone said to be fitted or prepared before the foundation of the world. And although the “vessels of mercy” are said to be “afore prepared unto glory” by God, no agent is given in the case of those “fitted to destruction.”

The second problem with the cover of *The Potter's Freedom* is that the unsuspecting reader would never think that the book is actually a defense of Calvinism, not the Reformation. White uses the old Calvinist “guilt by association” argument. As everyone knows, the Reformation pitted the Reformers against the Roman Catholics. Therefore, if you are against White's book, you must be against the Reformation—and for the Roman Catholics, or at least that is the implication. Calvinists like to refer to Calvinism as the gospel, biblical Christianity, the faith of the Reformation, New Testament Christianity, the Doctrines of Grace—anything but Calvinism. But if Calvinism is all these things, then anything that is opposed to Calvinism must be opposed to the gospel, biblical Christianity, the Reformation, and salvation by grace.

Regarding the Reformation itself, there are several things that bear mentioning. First, it is not enough just to defend the Reformation. The Reformation was a reform and not a wholesale return to biblical Christianity. The Reformers had numerous Roman Catholic hangovers: infant baptism, baptism by sprinkling, the uniting of Church and State, amillennialism, and a false conception of the nature of the local church.

Additionally, because they are hung up on the Reformation, Calvinists have substituted Reformed Theology for the Bible. The final authority for a Calvinist is not the Bible at all, it is Reformed Theology. One of the endorsements in the back of White's book says that “James White's

⁶ Herman Hoeksema, *God's Eternal Good Pleasure*, ed. and rev. Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1979), 60.

book, *The Potter's Freedom*, is as clear a presentation of the Reformed doctrine of salvation as I've ever read." That statement is classic, and is reminiscent of Loraine Boettner calling his book on Calvinism *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. Calvinism is a Reformed doctrine. It has its own plan of salvation—the Reformed doctrine of salvation—that is different from the plan of salvation found in the Bible, as will presently be seen.

The descendants of the Reformers—Christian Reformed, Dutch Reformed, Presbyterians, etc.—don't think that Baptists like James White are real Calvinists. Herman Hanko, a Dutch Reformed Calvinist with impeccable credentials, says that "a Baptist is only inconsistently a Calvinist."⁷ So, in spite of the attempt of some Baptists to call themselves Calvinists or Reformed, and in spite of the fact that it is the Calvinistic Baptists who are the most zealous Calvinists, the fact remains that Baptists are only second-class Calvinists.

Therefore, it is no surprise that White's book contains endorsements by Presbyterian and Reformed authors such as Jay Adams, Kenneth Gentry, Joel Beeke, Robert Reymond, and George Grant. What is disturbing about the endorsements section is that it also contains endorsements by three members of the Southern Baptist Founders Ministries and the Southern Baptist author and teacher Tom Nettles. Dr. Erwin Lutzer, the Senior Pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, and Dr. Daniel Wallace, the Greek scholar from Dallas Theological Seminary, also have endorsements in the book.

III. TEN ARGUMENTS THAT CRUMBLE UNDER SCRUTINY

As anyone who has studied the writings of Calvinists knows, there are a number of standard arguments and innuendos that all Calvinists use to discredit their opponents and promote their theology—and White is no exception. And as we have seen already, this is even apparent on the cover of the book.

First, White tries to make all Christians either Calvinists or Arminians (pp. 20, 295). Once this grouping is made, Arminians are made to look so bad that Calvinism is chosen by default. To a Calvinist,

⁷ Herman Hanko, *We and Our Children* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1988), 12.

Arminianism is anything that is opposed to Calvinism. Thus, we continually read of Arminians (p. 147), Arminianism (p. 175), Arminian positions (p. 235), Arminian preachers (p. 231), Arminian exegetes (p. 153), and Arminian views (p. 136). Other forms of this argument use Augustine and Pelagius (p. 40) or Luther and Erasmus (p. 34).

Second, White uses the guilt by association argument (pp. 33, 85, 92, 233). After consigning all Christians to one of two groups (Calvinists or Arminians), Calvinists typically associate Arminians with every conceivable heretic or heresy so as to discredit them. The most common enemy is Roman Catholicism. Thus, in White's book, to reject Calvinism is to be associated with Roman Catholicism, Ignatius Loyola, Jesuits, Thomas Aquinas, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Third, White claims that non-Calvinists misrepresent Calvinism (p. 21). This argument is typical of Calvinists. They have written so much espousing their system that it is almost impossible to misrepresent them. No one has to create a caricature of Calvinism; an abundance of quotes from Calvinistic authorities on any subject relating to Calvinism can always be found. But when this is done, and their true beliefs are exposed, Calvinists say that they are being misrepresented.

Fourth, White exalts God's sovereignty above His holiness (pp. 41-44). The fact that God is sovereign is obvious. If God was not sovereign he would not be God. The rulers of many countries have absolute sovereignty, but that does not mean they are holy or even good. The important thing about God is that he is sovereign yet holy. White relates God's decrees to Calvinism (p. 45). The decrees of God in the Bible do not relate in any way to salvation, and none of them are said to be eternal, like all Calvinists teach. He maintains that God has decreed not only salvation, but everything that has taken place, is taking place, and will take place (p. 45). White also claims that God only has foreknowledge of what He has already decreed to take place (pp. 53, 57). This is an attack on God's omniscience. What kind of power does it take to know something that you already decreed to take place?

Fifth, White appeals to men (pp. 125-31, 255). Calvinists are always appealing to men: Augustine, Calvin, Pink, Edwards, Hodge, Dabney, Boyce, Gill, Berkhof, et al. Calvinists claim that all the great preachers, teachers, and commentators throughout history have been Calvinistic, and, because they are in the majority, they must be correct. One man in particular that White appeals to is Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), the great Baptist preacher (pp. 36, 277). Since Spurgeon was one

of the few Calvinistic Baptists in history to have a large church and a fruitful ministry, all Calvinists, whether Baptist or Reformed, appeal to Spurgeon as if his ministry was the result of his Calvinism instead of in spite of it.

Sixth, White appeals to extra-biblical sources like creeds and confessions (pp. 78, 125). Whether it is the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession, the Second London Confession, or the Westminster Catechisms—Calvinists often put the words of men above the Scripture.

Seventh, White uses the standard proof texts: John 6:37, 44; Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 2:14; Acts 13:48; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9; and Romans 9 (pp. 96, 109, 154, 159, 186, 195, 208, 211, 213). Calvinists never seem to tire of running around the same circuit of verses.

Eighth, White claims that Jesus Christ taught Calvinism (pp. 153-69). Chapter 7 in White's book is called "Jesus Teaches 'Extreme Calvinism.'" What a better authority to which to refer? Why not just say that to deny Calvinism is to deny Christ?

Ninth, White overwhelms the reader with theological terms (pp. 91-92). Calvinists are the masters at this tactic. One barrier to understanding Calvinism is that one must learn its vocabulary: synergism, monergism, effectual calling, preterition, Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, and jaw-breakers like supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism, and sublapsarianism.

Tenth, White makes all sorts of false implications that are standard operating procedures for a Calvinist. He implies that if you are not a Calvinist then you deny salvation by grace (p. 91). He implies that a rejection of Calvinism means that justification by faith must be rejected as well (p. 36). He implies that a denial of Limited Atonement means that the substitutionary nature of the Atonement of Christ is being rejected (p. 233).

IV. CONCLUSION

Having read all the works of past and present Calvinists, I can say that James White's book, *The Potter's Freedom*, although ostensibly written to refute Norman Geisler's *Chosen But Free*, is merely a regurgitation of all the discredited Calvinist arguments that have ever been presented. This does not mean that everything in Geisler's book should be defended, but it does mean that White's book is a weak attempt yet once again to advance the Calvinist agenda in what has become a TULIP war.

TULIP: A FREE GRACE PERSECTIVE

PART 1: TOTAL DEPRAVITY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of doctrine due to continued hybridization has produced a myriad of theological persuasions. The only way to purify ourselves from the possible defects of such “theological genetics” is, first, to recognize that we have them and then, as much as possible, to set them aside and disassociate ourselves from the systems which have come to dominate our thinking. In other words, we should simply strive for truth and an objective understanding of biblical teaching.

This series of articles is intended to do just that. We will carefully consider the truth claims of both Calvinists and Arminians and arrive at some conclusions that may not suit either.¹ Our purpose here is not to defend a system, but to understand the truth. The conflicting “isms” in this study (Calvinism and Arminianism) are often considered “sacred cows” and, as a result, seem to be solidified and in need of defense. They have become impediments in the search for truth and “barriers to learning.” Perhaps the emphatic dogmatism and defense of the paradoxical views of Calvinism and Arminianism have impeded the theological search for truth much more than we realize. Bauman reflects,

I doubt that theology, as God sees it, entails unresolvable paradox. That is another way of saying that any theology that sees it [paradox] or includes it is mistaken. If God does not see theological endeavor as innately or irremediably paradoxical,

¹ For this reason the author declines to be called a Calvinist, a moderate Calvinist, an Arminian, an Augustinian, a Thomist, a Pelagian, or a Semi-Pelagian. Accepting such a categorization would leave in its wake a doctrine or position to be defended rather than a willingness to change if the search for truth should demand it. It seems better to seek the truth than to attempt to be the authority.

that is because it is not. Paradox is not a phenomenon natural to theology. Theological paradox is a mirage.²

As an example of theological "paradox," some see God's sovereignty over all things and man's ability to make free choices to be a paradox which cannot be explained, only accepted and lived-with. They conclude that either God is sovereign or man is free, but not both. "It's a mystery, my son" is not an acceptable explanation in the mentality of man. In no other realm are we satisfied to be put off by such "take-it-by-faith" extenuations. Only three conclusions are logically possible: 1) either one or the other is correct, 2) neither one nor the other view is correct, or 3) both are correct (true) but have not, heretofore, been understood adequately, expressed properly, or defined in such a way as to avoid contradiction. It seems that the latter alternative represents the real situation in the consideration of TULIP. This and following articles will propose solutions to the enigmas that exist and reconcile the supposed paradoxes that have arisen from the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism as represented in TULIP.

II. WHAT IS "TULIP"?

TULIP is both an acrostic and an acronym. As an acrostic, each letter stands as the first letter of a particular doctrine or theological truth claim which helps one recall that teaching. As an acronym, the term signifies the essence of Calvinism (or what some might call Extreme or Hyper-Calvinism).³ The mere mention of TULIP often raises strong emotions, either positively or negatively. Some react with a favorable feeling, such as would normally be expected at the mention of one's mother, America, or apple pie. Others respond quite negatively to the term, rejecting its implications of predestination, divine election, and eternal security. Those not at all familiar with the term may simply picture a flower from Holland and start tiptoeing away.

² Michael Bauman, *Pilgrim Theology: Taking the Path of Theological Discovery* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 19.

³ Edwin H. Palmer in dealing with these points in his defense of Calvinism says, "Calvinism is not restricted to five points: It has thousands of points" and asserts that "it is as broad as the Bible" (*The Five Points of Calvinism* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972], 5).

The intention of this and following articles is to appropriately state and analyze each of the doctrines represented by TULIP by: 1) establishing, as necessary, a brief history of the doctrines involved, 2) presenting clearly the Calvinistic and Arminian views of each doctrine, 3) explaining the related doctrines upon which the discussion or view may hinge, and then 4) proposing a carefully worded, logically correct, and biblically accurate solution to each of the five points of Calvinism and Arminianism.

In the study of Systematic Theology one should be constantly aware that its subjects, while necessarily considered one at a time and/or in sequence, must never simply be “pigeon holed” or relegated to mere categorization without respect to truths of other related doctrines. On the contrary, one can readily see that, for instance, the study of the doctrine of salvation could never rightly be severed from an understanding of God Himself (His nature and attributes), sin (the fall of Adam), Israel, the Church, or last things (the future accomplishment of God’s plan for the saved and the lost). Indeed, one doctrine tends to relate to and hinge upon the others. Similarly, as will be shown, the teachings of TULIP so interrelate that each depends upon the other.⁴ In the acrostic:

“T” stands for *Total Depravity* and involves the implications and ramifications of Adam’s original sin upon himself and his physical descendants.

“U” is for *Unconditional Election* and teaches God’s eternal selection of certain human beings for eternal salvation, which selection was not caused by anything meritorious done by fallen man.

“L” represents the teaching of *Limited Atonement*, the assertion that the death of Christ was intended to eternally save only those who were unconditionally chosen by God from the realm of depraved humanity, but not every single human person.

“I” designates *Irresistible Grace* which asserts that the depraved, yet chosen person for whom Christ’s death was in-

⁴ For instance, Palmer includes in his chapter on Irresistible Grace a discussion of Limited Atonement, Unconditional Election, and Total Depravity (ibid., 60-66). Robert L. Dabney confirms the interrelationship of the five points by defending them saying, “Discarding the order of the five points [of Calvinism] I will exhibit the theory in its logical connection” (*Lectures in Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972], 580).

tended cannot (or is not able to) resist the Holy Spirit's application of the provisions of Christ's death.

Finally, the "P" points to the *Perseverance of the Saints* (i.e., those totally depraved humans who were unconditionally chosen, redeemed specifically by Christ, and recipients of Spirit-applied grace) in holiness and faith until the end of their earthly lives.

Arminians and Calvinists, as well as those who do not associate themselves with either of these major doctrinal positions, usually have positive or negative opinions of these doctrines, but do not know how or when they developed. The following is a brief history of the development of these doctrines into their present form.

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF TULIP

The Reformation period of the Church began in the early 16th Century with three rising theologians: Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) in Switzerland, Martin Luther (1483–1546) in Germany, and John Calvin (1509–1564) in France, all of whom were within the Roman Catholic Church hybridization. Each one developed a scriptural understanding that the salvation of mankind is a result of God's grace, not the obligatory response of God to human effort. With the spread of their teaching the Reformation doctrines swept throughout Europe and a political dispute developed in the Netherlands and elsewhere leading to a revolt against Philip II, the King of Spain.⁵ Jellema explains,

The "seventeen provinces" revolted against Philip under the leadership of William of Orange (1568), with the Calvinists playing the role of militant and influential minority. Calvinism was the religion favored by the state. The first national synod was held in 1578. As the revolt went on, the N Lowlands drove out the Spanish, while the revolt was slowly crushed in

⁵ Philip II (1527–1598) was King of Spain from 1556 and was the son of Charles V of Spain and Isabella of Portugal. J.G.G. Norman states, "He became Europe's most powerful monarch, ruling Spain, Naples and Sicily, Milan, the Netherlands, Franche Comte, Mexico, and Peru...He reactivated the Inquisition in Spain, using it to establish his absolute power. Revolt, however, continued in the Netherlands, resulting in the independence of the Dutch republic (1579)" ("Philip II," in *New International Dictionary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978], 773).

the south, which thus remained Catholic. By 1609, when a Twelve Year Truce recognized for all practical purposes the independence of the north, the Calvinists were free to turn to difficulties within their own ranks.⁶

Preceding the time of this revolt and political upheaval the Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), who had studied under Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor in Geneva), came to minister in the Reformed congregation in Holland in A.D. 1588. While there he came to reject the Calvinistic teachings and, after leaving his pastorate, taught his views at the University of Leyden. This produced a number of followers. After his death in 1609 his disciples wrote a document known as the *Remonstrance* which, Clouse explains:

outlines the system known as Arminianism. The major points of departure from strict Calvinism are that (1) the decree of salvation applies to all who believe on Christ and who persevere in obedience and faith; (2) Christ died for all men; (3) the Holy Spirit must help men to do things that are truly good (such as having faith in Christ for salvation); (4) God's saving grace is not irresistible; (5) it is possible for those who are Christians to fall from grace.⁷

His followers became known as Arminians (after Arminius himself) or Remonstrants (after the document which set forth their views) and carried on his teaching.

In response to the clearly expressed teachings of Arminius and his followers set forth in the *Remonstrance*, a synod was held in the Dutch town of Dort (Dordrecht) in 1618-1619, which led to a doctrinal standard in the Dutch Reformed Church called the "Canons of the Synod of Dort." Toon says,

Judging the Remonstrants by their writings, then, the synod not surprisingly concluded that they were not orthodox. The Canons were written to summarize the orthodox position against the Remonstrants, and affirmed total depravity (i.e., man, after the fall, cannot choose to serve God), unconditional election (God's choice of the elect is not conditioned on any action by them), limited atonement (Christ died for the elect

⁶ Dirk Jellema, "Dutch Reformed Church," in *New International Dictionary*, 317.

⁷ Robert G. Clouse, "Arminianism," in *New International Dictionary*, 70.

only, since those He died for are saved), irresistible grace (divine grace cannot be rejected by the elect), and perseverance of the saints (once elect, always elect).⁸

There have been some major variations of these two views. In the Arminian camp, probably the major diversion is that of John Wesley (1703–1791).⁹ Departing from the Dortian Calvinism are the teachings of Moses Amyraut (or Moise Amyraut, 1596–1664), a French Protestant theologian who took issue with the conclusions of the Synod of Dort and

⁸ Peter Toon, "Dort, Synod of," in *New International Dictionary*, 309–310.

⁹ For instance, John Wesley held to the unity of the race and the imputation of Adam's guilt (*Sermons* I, XI. 534; *Works*, VIII. 227) and says that the human will has the ability and liberty to act and choose freely (*Works*, VII. 285; *Sermons*, VII. 228–229). He reconciles the contradictory aspects of death in Adam and man's freedom to act and choose by postulating that there are two works of grace in salvation: one to restore the ability of man and the other to actually save man. The former, he calls preventing (or prevenient) grace which is understood to be a "preparing grace" from God which is given to all men so as to enable them to adequately respond to the truth of the gospel. It may be defined as "that grace which 'goes before' or prepares the soul for entrance into the initial state of salvation" and is the "preparatory grace of the Holy Spirit exercised toward man helpless in sin. As it respects the impotent, it is enabling power. It may be defined, therefore, as that manifestation of the divine influence which precedes the full regenerate life" (Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1989, 496 quoting Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:346). Following the enabling quality of prevenient grace comes repentance. Wesley says, "Salvation is carried on by convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed repentance; which brings a larger measure of self knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone" (Wesley, *Sermons*, LXXXV. 509). The latter "grace" he calls "convincing grace." It might also be called saving (or prevailing) grace whereby God finally effects salvation upon the one who rightly responds. Wesley says, "These works [of repentance] are not the effective cause of his acceptance with God. Yet God expects them, and looks upon them with favour, because they are the necessary token that the profession of penitence is indeed sincere. Thus good works meet for repentance, e.g., a sincere attempt to make amends for wrongs done to one's neighbour, are in a sense a previous condition of justification." He goes on to say, "if we willingly neglect [repentance] we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all" (Wesley, *Sermons*, II. 451–52). For further consideration, see Paul A. Mickey, *Essentials of Wesleyan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980) and Steve Harper, *John Wesley's Message for Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

posited a synthesis between Calvinism and Arminianism by suggesting a hypothetical universalism, i.e., he disagreed with the doctrine of limited atonement (the "L" in TULIP).¹⁰ The discussion has progressed to the present day.

IV. A COMPARISON OF THE CALVINISTIC AND ARMINIAN VIEWS REGARDING THE DOCTRINE OF TOTAL DEPRAVITY

With the preceding history of the controversy briefly established, it is time to consider the details of the doctrine of Total Depravity and related doctrines which support or refute the doctrine.

A. THE CALVINISTIC VIEW

Steele and Thomas contrast Calvinism and Arminianism giving a concise, yet precise, statement of each view. Explaining the Calvinist position regarding total depravity they write:

Total Inability or Total Depravity

Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not—indeed he cannot—choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ—it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salva-

¹⁰ "A master of the literature of Calvin, Amyraut held to the main tenets of Calvinistic theology. Nevertheless he sought to revise what he judged to be the unacceptable teachings of seventeenth century scholastic Calvinism on grace and predestination and to forge a return to Calvin himself. In addition, he sought to create at the theological level a bridge with Lutherans who were offended by the pronouncements of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) regarding the intent of the atonement. In pursuit of these ends, Amyraut propounded a view of hypothetical universal predestination, whereby God was said to will the salvation of all people on the condition that they believe. Thus ideally Christ's atonement was sufficient for all, but because of universal human depravity, in practice it was efficient only for the elect." (B. A. Demarest, "Amyraut, Moise," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 42.) See also Amyraut's works: *A Treatise Concerning Religions* (1631), *A Short Treatise on Predestination* (1634), and *Christian Ethics* (1652-60).

tion, but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation—it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God.¹¹

Loraine Boettner, a defender of Reformed Doctrine, equates total depravity as "Total Inability"¹² and quotes *The Westminster Confession of Faith* which says,

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.¹³

Boettner follows, "What [this means] is that since the fall man rests under the curse of sin, that he is actuated by wrong principles, and that he is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation."¹⁴ He continues:

The inability under which he labors is not an inability to exercise volitions, but an inability to be willing to exercise holy volitions. And it is this phase of it which led Luther to declare that "Free-will is an empty term, whose reality it lost. And a lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all."¹⁵

Thus, Calvinists¹⁶ assert the following: First, fallen man has no ability to believe. Man is not unable to exercise volition, but he is unable to be willing to exercise his volition (which amounts to the same thing, or at

¹¹ David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *Romans: An Interpretive Outline* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963), 144.

¹² Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977), 61.

¹³ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), IX, 3.

¹⁴ Boettner, 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 62, quoting Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 125. It is interesting that Luther also said, addressing Erasmus, "Free-will is a downright lie; and that like the woman in the gospel, the more it is taken in hand by physicians, the worse it is made." Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 17.

¹⁶ The term *Calvinist* in this article is used to denote the Five-point Calvinist, someone who sees all five points as being mutually inclusive and logical. Of course, many feel the need to refer to themselves as Calvinists, but choose to differ with one point or another, and usually like to call themselves Moderate Calvinists.

least gives the same result). Second, he cannot receive communication from God because he is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God. Third, his will is in bondage and can do only evil in the spiritual realm. Since belief is a good thing, man can't believe unto salvation. Fourth, the Holy Spirit must, if the man is to be saved, effectively regenerate him before he can believe, so that he can believe. That is, regeneration must precede faith. Therefore, fifth, God must give faith to such a previously fallen, but regenerated, man. In the standard Calvinist position faith in Christ is not the means through which one is regenerated (given new life, made alive again), but rather an ensuing result of the imposition of new life on the unwilling sinner. Faith becomes a manifestation of regeneration, not the channel through which one receives eternal life. This seems inconsistent biblically since faith in Christ alone is set forth as the only condition for receiving eternal life.

Now, compare the above implications of total depravity with that of Ryrie: "Positively, total depravity means (1) that corruption extends to every part of man's nature, including all the faculties of his being; and (2) that there is nothing in man that can commend him to a righteous God."¹⁷ We might ask if it is necessary to understand total depravity as the lack of ability to believe or just the lack of ability to do something so worthy that it merits favor with God and obligates Him to accept us on the basis of that work, whatever it may be. It is suggested that the extreme Calvinist position is logically invalid internally and contradictory externally as it relates to the requirement to believe as the only means through which one might receive eternal life as a gift. Faith is biblically, the *means* through which regeneration is effected by the Spirit, not the ensuing *result*. It would seem that we are not called on to be regenerated in order to believe, but we are obliged to believe as a condition of receiving eternal life.

B. THE ARMINIAN VIEW

Steele and Thomas record the Arminian view in contrast:

Free Will or Human Ability

Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but

¹⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, "Depravity, Total," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 164.

does so in such a manner as not to interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.¹⁸

It would seem that even the Remonstrants assert that man is unable to believe or to freely choose God "of and by himself" and carry the need for some form of assisting grace both backward (preceding belief unto salvation) as a preparatory circumstance to belief and forward (subsequent to belief unto salvation) as a means of doing good after one becomes a Christian.

Note first, man's will is not enslaved or bound by the sinful nature. Second, God enables repentance and belief. Third, both repentance and faith are conditions for regeneration, rather than faith alone. Fourth, man has free will (freedom, liberty, and ability to believe). Fifth, in the current Arminian view,¹⁹ man is not spiritually helpless, but able and under

¹⁸ Steele and Thomas, 144.

¹⁹ Contrast the third and fourth of the *Five Arminian Articles* which seems not to go as far as the current expression of Arminianism: "Article III. That, man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ, John xv.5: 'Without me ye can do nothing.' Article IV. That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man, himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following and co-operative grace can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements, that can be conceived, must be ascribed to God in Christ..." From Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), 545-47. This seems to assert that man has no free will to believe and needs assisting grace in order to begin,

the obligation to respond to God. Sixth, the sinner must “cooperate” or take an active role in the regeneration experience, and thus is responsible to do so or suffer eternal consequences. Seventh, faith is man’s “act,” his gift or contribution to God or a contribution toward his salvation, which precedes the new birth. Note the internal contradiction in this summary: Man is not helpless, yet needs God’s enabling grace; he is enslaved to a sinful nature, yet has freedom of will. It seems that the Arminian view is an attempt to have it both ways.

By comparing these two major theological views in their extreme it is clear that there are contradictions both within the systems and between the systems. Is man free or isn’t he? Can he hear God or is he so dead in his sins that he cannot even understand the gospel? Why take the time to explain the gospel to someone if they are unable to receive it, believe it, or even understand it in a spiritual way? Is faith the part of salvation that man contributes, or is it given to him by God, like a commodity? Is man regenerated so that he can believe or does he believe and receive subsequent regeneration? Is it really fair or good of God to provide salvation for someone who has no ability to attain it because he can’t appropriate the remedy? In order to supply an answer to these and other questions, one must understand the biblical basis for the doctrine of total depravity. What does the Bible teach about man’s sinfulness or his ability versus non-ability?

V. THE IMPUTATION OF SIN

At this stage one might ask, “What, then, is the basis for the doctrine of total depravity, where does it come from, and what does it mean? The question of total depravity arises from the biblical teaching regarding the

continue, and finally accomplish salvation in its fullest sense. This is similar to Boettner’s statement, cited above, indicating that man’s inability is that of his willingness, not his ability *per se*. Robert L. Dabney comments, “The five points handed in by the Arminians to the States General of Holland, in their celebrated Remonstrance, were so covertly worded as scarcely to disclose their true sentiments. The Assertions concerning original Sin and Free will, were seemingly such as Calvinists could accept. The doctrine of common grace was but obscurely hinted; and the perseverance of Saints was only doubted. But their system soon developed itself into semi-Pelagianism” (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 580).

consequences of Adam's sin upon him and, consequently, upon his descendants.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 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 die" (Gen 2:15-16).

With Adam's disobedience came the fulfillment of God's promise of death. But how did this affect his posterity? The answer to this comes by considering the imputation of sin.

The Bible asserts that beginning with the fall of Adam, our original forefather, his descendants are not only guilty of the sins which they personally and individually commit, but also that they are constituted sinners by their very nature and carry the guilt and, therefore, the consequences of Adam's sin. The primary passage which supports this is Rom 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man [*dia henos anthrōpou*] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Also, 1 Cor 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." Compare Eph 2:1-3:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the *sons of disobedience*. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were *by nature children of wrath, even as the rest* (emphasis added).

So, how are we to understand these verses and what conclusions are we to draw from them? Are individuals rendered guilty because Adam failed in his obedience to God? If not, one might ask why the cosmos is under the curse of death and why we are "by nature" children of wrath. If death resulted as a consequence of Adam's sin, and we "naturally" participate in that death, are we not also guilty of that sin? If we are not guilty of Adam's sin, is it then not unjust for God to impose physical death upon us? And would it not be correspondingly unjust for Him to punish us with spiritual or eternal death? These and other questions have brought about several primary views which explain our sinful, guilty condition. Major views dealing with these issues are Pelagius' view, the

Arminian view, the Federal headship view, and the Realism or Seminalism view. They are described briefly below.

A. PELAGIUS' VIEW

Briefly, Pelagius (ca. 340–ca. 410), a Brit:

taught that God created every soul directly (he despised the traducian theory), and that every soul therefore was innocent and unstained. No created soul had any direct relation to the sin of Adam; the only significance of Adam's sin upon humanity was the bad example. Pelagius, therefore, did not view Romans 5:12 as affecting all humanity; it did not. No sin of Adam was imputed to the human race; only those acts of sin that people themselves committed were imputed to them. Moreover, man did not die because he sinned but because of the law of nature. Adam would have died even if he had not sinned. Pelagius and his doctrines were condemned at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 418.²⁰

Pelagius' view can be dismissed since he fails to convincingly provide an adequate understanding of Scripture relative to the sin problem.²¹

B. THE ARMINIAN VIEW

Again, this arises out of the teachings of Jacobus Arminius who taught that:

man was not considered guilty because of Adam's sin. When people would voluntarily and purposefully choose to sin even though they had power to live righteously—then, and only then, would God impute sin to them and count them guilty. Although man does not possess original righteousness because of Adam's sin, "God bestows upon each individual from the first dawn of consciousness a special influence of the Holy Spirit which is sufficient to counteract the effect of the inherited depravity and to make obedience possible, provided the human will cooperates, which it has the power to do." Thus Arminius recognized an effect from Adam's sin but not in the sense of total depravity; through divine enablement man could still make righteous choices. Romans 5:12 is not understood as all humanity suffering the effect of Adam's sin and death; but

²⁰ Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 311.

²¹ For a contemporary argument against Pelagius see Augustine, *Against Pelagius*. Generally Pelagius' teaching is followed by Unitarians and Socinians.

rather because of the individual agreement with Adam's act is sin imputed to the individual.²²

So, in the Arminian view, there is no imputation of *Adam's* sin. Guilt is assigned when a person commits his own sin. Again, like Pelagianism, this seems to ignore the teaching of the biblical text.

C. THE FEDERAL HEADSHIP VIEW

It asserts that the role of Adam, who was indeed the natural head of the human race, was also the legal representative head of the total (federated) human race and, as such, brought condemnation on his race by virtue of his covenant (of works) relationship with God.²³ Enns explains this "covenant of works" concept:

Covenant Theology involves two primary features, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works, although not mentioned specifically in the Old Testament is implied. According to covenant theologians, God entered into a covenant with Adam prior to the Fall. In this covenant He promised eternal life for obedience during a probationary period and death if Adam disobeyed. In the test Adam stood as the federal head of all humanity; had he obeyed, he would have been confirmed in righteousness with the benefits passing to all humanity. Conversely, because he failed and fell, Adam's act of disobedience was transmitted to all humanity—all are born in sin and under sin's authority.²⁴

Collins says that Federal Theology:

²² Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 312.

²³ This view was popularized by Johannes Cocceius (Johann Koch, 1603-1669), *Doctrine of the Covenant and Testaments of God* (1648) and *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1655); Charles Hodge (1797-1878), *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 2:197 ff.; J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1962), I: 307-12; James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Pompano Beach, FL: N. Pompano Baptist Church, 1887), 253; and Louis Berkhoff, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 219-58, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1933), 143-50; John Murray, *Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959).

²⁴ Enns, 461-62.

finds clear expression in I Cor. 15 and Rom. 5. "As in Adam all die," writes Paul, "even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22). Adam, as the first man, was the natural head of the race, and represented all mankind as the human party to the covenant of works into which God entered with him. As the natural head, he stood in a federal (*foedus*, Latin "covenant") relationship to all posterity. His obedience, had it been maintained, would have transmitted an entail of blessedness to them; his disobedience involved them with him in the curse which God pronounced upon the transgressors of his law.²⁵

From these descriptions it is clear that unlike the Pelagian and Arminian view, the transmission of sin and guilt from Adam to the human race is certain. The federal headship view, therefore, asserts an *immediate imputation* of Adam's sin and guilt *directly* from Adam to each of his descendants without consideration of the physical inheritance of other corruption, or hereditary depravity. Hodge says, "in view of the union, federal and natural, between Adam and his posterity, his sin, although not their act, is so imputed to them that it is the judicial ground of the penalty threatened against him coming also upon them. This is the doctrine of immediate imputation."²⁶ "What Adam did is charged to his posterity."²⁷

D. THE REALISM OR SEMINALISM VIEW (ALSO CALLED THE AUGUSTINIAN VIEW)²⁸

This view encompasses some concepts of the Federal headship view and, therefore, is somewhat similar to it, but goes beyond the supposed "covenant of works" in which Adam was to act as humanity's represen-

²⁵ G. N. M. Collins, "Federal Theology," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 413.

²⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1940), II:192-93. By "immediate" Hodge means that there are no "mediators" or go-betweens from Adam to each individual. Guilt is imputed directly to each soul.

²⁷ H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Chart 50 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 86.

²⁸ This view was held by Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, and Martin Luther. William G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888-94), 2:29-32, 41-44, 181-92; Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 465-76; and Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1998), 639.

tative, which covenant is not expressed in the Bible. It provides a biblical and a biological rationale for the imputation.

The theory of realism teaches that all human nature existed in Adam prior to his transgression. When he sinned, therefore, the common human nature that was in him fell too. Thus, Adam's act of disobedience was quite literally the disobedience of all humanity. Consequently, every human being who enters this world—being an individualization of the common nature fallen in Adam—is guilty of, and punishable for, Adam's sin. That sin someone has said, "is ours, not because it is imputed to us; but it is imputed to us, because it is truly and properly ours."²⁹

Thus, "Tertullian's dictum became famous: *Tradux animae, tradux pessati*, 'the propagation of the soul implies the propagation of sin.'"³⁰

E. SUMMARY

Traducianism, the view of the biological transmission of the material and immaterial part of man from Adam to each person conceived, coincides with the doctrine of Realism or Seminalism which view holds that the human race was really in Adam when he sinned, participated in the sin, and incurred the *just* penalty of judicial condemnation upon the human race. It would seem that "like begets like" and that 1) God's image, 2) human nature (the immaterial human soul/spirit), and 3) the human body (the physical or genetic makeup of each person) is passed on from father to child (cf. Gen 5:1, 3; 9:6). Adam has had a self-propagating offspring, and there seems to be no need to chaff at the idea that we inherit either corruption or guilt seminally. We come with it. Federalism stresses the representative nature of Adam's headship and transgression, and understands a parallel between what Adam did and the representative role of Christ (Rom 5:12-21). A seminal relationship in Adam answers *how* and *why* "all die in Adam" (1 Cor 15:22) and how death would *naturally* spread to all men, since the entire essence of human nature (i.e., the potential human race) *must* have been in Adam at the time he sinned (Where else could the entirety of humanity have been?) and at which time he and we (by virtue of our essential presence in him) be-

²⁹ David C. Smith, *With Willful Intent: A Theology of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books/SP Publications, 1994), 360, quoting Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:216.

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

came actually guilty of the transgression. The biblical teaching that we are “by nature the children of wrath” is easily understood if we inherit both body and human nature (essence, spirit, soul, the immaterial part of our being) from Adam. We are as guilty as Adam. All of humanity is simply “Adam-in-extension.” Since we have a direct relationship with Adam, (having been spiritually and physically in him while in the garden, transgressing against God, receiving the guilty verdict, and receiving the death penalty), his sin is ours and his guilt is directly (or immediately) placed to our account at the time of our historical individualization at conception. And since we have this biological tie to Adam who was the entirety of humanity when he/we sinned, we receive, at the time of our historical individualization at conception, not only the transmission of the likeness of both God and Adam, but also, the corruption of the fallen nature.³¹ It would, therefore seem that a correct view could be a combination of the Federal and Seminal view as long as one understands that Adam was not *just* our representative, but was also the *location* of our existence and the one from whom our life and essential nature has derived.³²

VI. FAITH AND REGENERATION

Confusion of the highest order arises in theological discussions and writings when discussing how faith or belief relates to the regeneration of the sinner. If faith in Christ is unconsciously categorized as an act of the human will, then it conflicts with the scriptural teaching that “we were born, not from blood *nor from the will of flesh nor from the will of man*, but from God” (John 1:12, emphasis added). The Arminian would argue that the exertion of the will in believing is something a sinner *can do* only with God’s assisting grace. But if that were the correct manner of expressing things, it would follow that man’s *will* to believe *does* have at least some part to play in the scheme of things, and this seems contradictory to Scripture as a requisite for regeneration. On the other hand, the

³¹ It would seem better to refer to this as the “corrupt human nature” rather than the “sin nature” so often referred to in theological books and discussions.

³² This writer prefers the Realism or Seminalism view to the Federal headship view simply because the biblical references to being in Adam and the spread of sin to all men, combined with a normal understanding of physical reproduction, seems to be a more solid basis than an inferred “covenant of works” between Adam and God which is not recorded in Scripture.

Calvinist would argue that faith is a *gift* from God, not a contributing act of the human will at all. God's "gift of faith" goes only to the elect. He gives faith only to those He regenerates (regeneration precedes faith), and a sinner contributes nothing to his regeneration in any way, not even the use of his will. If he were to *do* anything of merit (and exercising the will to believe would be an action of the human will) this would imply at least some obligation on God's part since He could not turn a blind eye to the merits of the action. So, according to the Calvinistic view, believing is also an *act* of the will, but cannot precede regeneration so as to make it meritorious. Either Arminian or Calvinist views may seem valid except that belief or faith is what man *does* as a condition for receiving eternal life. Herein lies the confusion. It is a problem coming from within our language structure because we speak of what we *do* as though each time we do something it is an action, a decision, or a deed. If I am told that I must believe in Jesus, I understand that this is something I ought to *do*. But how do I *do* it? What *action* is it that I take? Do I "do it" by confessing, professing, being baptized, repenting of known sins, performing acts of penance, or promising God to be good from now on?

Two considerations might be made here. The first question is: Is the unregenerate sinner able to believe? The second is: If the unregenerate sinner is indeed able to believe, how is it that his belief is not considered to be a meritorious act, and therefore automatically canceled? We will consider these in order.

A. IS THE UNREGENERATE SINNER ABLE TO BELIEVE?

The Arminian says, "Yes, but only with God's help." The Calvinist says, "No, since regeneration precedes faith which is a gift."³³ Norman L. Geisler frames the matter this way:

The famous French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre argued: If God exists then the future is determined and I am not free; I am free; therefore, God does not exist. In contrast, the great Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards argued: If every event has a cause, then so do free human choices; God is the First Cause of everything; therefore, God must be the cause of our free choices. Sartre used freedom to eliminate God, and Edwards seemed to use God to eliminate freedom. Since the bib-

³³ For an excellent debate on the various views on the subject, see *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, eds. David Basinger & Randall Basinger (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

lical Christian grants both God's sovereignty and human responsibility for free choice, there remains the problem as to how to reconcile them.³⁴

The question here is: Is the doctrine of total depravity correctly understood to exclude human freedom in regard to the ability to believe the gospel in order to obtain eternal life? The answer is no. If we have the ability to believe some things, why is it that we are thought to be unable to believe the propositions of the gospel and be accepted by God on that basis? Most admit that God holds the sinner accountable for the guilt of sin, as discussed above, but why would God offer salvation to all through the gospel when He knows that the hearer is unable to believe? Would that not be the grandest hoax of all, a deception that would prove God to be an unjust, sadistic monster on a cosmic scale?

The question of whether man is free to act or believe is excellently argued by Geisler in his article "Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism" in which he says,

There are three basic positions concerning man's choices: determinism, indeterminism, and self-determinism...Determinism is the belief that all of man's actions are the result of antecedent factors or causes...Theistic determinists, such as Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards, trace man's actions back to God's controlling hand. The opposite position to determinism is indeterminism. On this view there are no causes for man's actions, antecedent or otherwise. The final position is self-determinism, or free will. This is the belief that man determines his own behavior freely, and that no causal antecedents can sufficiently account for his actions.³⁵

As an analogy, *determinism* could be compared to a parent force-feeding an infant, so God also forces His will on man in accord with His designs. *Indeterminism* would be like denying that people eat because they are hungry. Eating would be a random event at best. True, we often

³⁴ Norman Geisler, "God Knows All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 63, referring to Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), pt. 4, Chap. 1, and to Jonathan Edwards, "Freedom of the Will," in *Jonathan Edwards*, eds. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), 305.

³⁵ Norman L. Geisler, "Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 428.

eat when not hungry, but there is still a reason to do so (to socialize with others, to enjoy the taste, etc.). *Self-determinism* might be likened to a person acting on what he perceives to be good or desirable, to obtain pleasure, or to avoid pain. We can actually decide whether to eat junk food or a balanced meal apart from any externally compelled duress!

In his explanation Geisler deals with both determinism and indeterminism, showing objections to each and concludes that "some form of self-determinism is the most compatible with the biblical view of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility." He points out that self-determinists "accept the fact that such factors as heredity and environment often influence one's behavior," but also suggests that such factors are not the *cause* of one's behavior. He answers the question of what causes the will to act.

[I]t is not the will of a person that makes a decision but the *person* acting by means of his will. And since the *person* is the first cause of his acts, it is meaningless to ask what the cause of the first cause is. Just as no outside force caused God to create the world, so no outside force causes *people* to choose certain actions. For man is created in God's image, which includes the possession of free will.³⁶

The *person* acts, not the will. Self-determinism therefore seems correct and, to the extent that belief is an act, decision, or self-determination, it would seem to apply to the present topic. It would certainly apply to a believer's decision to live for Christ and His cause, to obey Him on a daily basis, to find His will in the study of the Scriptures, to be baptized, to participate in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, and to witness of His grace to others. But it would also apply to unbelievers when they decide or act in any manner, consistent or not, with God's justice. Unbelievers can do good, kind things as well as bad things. So can Christians. Does God *make* us do the good? Does He *make* us do the bad? Why one and not the other? Obviously God does not make us do anything. We are responsible. If self-determination is relinquished, we are then only puppets of God or some other force or we are clouds floating in the chaotic atmosphere of fate.

We may conclude that man, who has been made in God's image, can act freely in accord with his nature, even in his fallen state. Our fallen human nature has residuals of the image of God and is also inclined

³⁶ Ibid., 430 (emphasis added).

away from Him. This doesn't mean that we cannot do right things, nor does it mean that we cannot believe His message. To argue 1) that unregenerate man lacks the ability to meaningfully hear the propositions of the gospel message and 2) to insist that he cannot understand the implications and consequences of unbelief, is to render useless any and every gospel message to the sinner. To say that the sinner, even though he hears the message of eternal life is innately unable or unwilling to believe in Christ is to deny that unregenerate man has a sense of self-preservation. But self-preservation seems to be a given among mankind as well as lower forms of animal life. The point is that if a person is able to understand propositional gospel assertions and to respond in such a way that preserves his life by believing, there would be no practical reason to evangelize the lost. Geisler says,

...the only difference between [the extreme and moderate Calvinist] is that moderates insist that being "dead" in sin does not mean that unsaved people cannot understand and receive the truth of the gospel as the Spirit of God works on their hearts. That is, it does not *erase* the image of God (but only *effaces* it).³⁷

Total depravity, therefore, speaks of the legal guilt and the inherited corruption of the persons who descended from Adam and became individualized at their conception. The doctrine should not rule out the possibility of a person acting rightly or responding in belief. Believing may be categorized as an act by some, but there may be a better way to view belief than understanding faith to be an act of the will.

B. IS BELIEF/FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE A DISQUALIFYING ACT?

The question that arises at this point is: If I am indeed able to believe, how is it that faith is not considered a meritorious act, and therefore automatically canceled? In order to answer this it is necessary to

³⁷ Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 120. He categorizes Extreme Calvinism as holding to "Intensive" total depravity which essentially destroys the image of God in the unsaved person and Moderate Calvinism (a category in which he places himself) as holding to "Extensive" total depravity, meaning that man is naturally corrupted. He says, "Some extreme Calvinists deny that they believe the image of God is 'destroyed' in fallen humans—at least formally. But *logically* this is what their view demands and practically this is what they hold," (note 1, emphasis in original).

define faith and to ask if faith is an act at all! Evangelicalism has asserted without challenge that the sinner must make a decision for Christ. This might be called "decisionism" and decisionism blurs the message of the gospel. It calls on a person to *do* something. What? Believe, of course! But how do you do that, and how is anyone else going to know if you did it? Must one walk the aisle, confess with the mouth, be baptized, regularly attend church, or do other appropriate things? Doing something rather than believing something confuses the whole issue.

It is reported that Lewis Sperry Chafer would tell the men in his classes during the early days of Dallas Theological Seminary, "Men, don't give them something to do, give them something to believe!" He knew that the *message of the gospel*, not the decision (will) of men, was the key. Here is our failure. Evangelicals have confused doing something with believing the historical event of Christ's crucifixion and the promises of God as they relate to the one who trusts Christ alone for eternal life. We have made belief a deed to be done, a decision to be made, and a follow-through to be accomplished. Since when does belief include action?³⁸ How is it perceived that faith includes works? Dillow asks rhetorically, "If faith is the opposite of works of obedience (law) and is the opposite of work, by what mental alchemy can men seriously argue that, while faith is apart from works of obedience, faith itself includes works of obedience?"³⁹ Surely, action may result from belief, but that action would be necessarily subsequent. The problem within Evangelicalism is that while we have asserted that man is 1) unable to believe (or is, at

³⁸ This writer realizes that there are biblical passages where one might imply that belief is a deed. For instance, the Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" and this is often taken, from a present day evangelistic perspective as referring to obtaining eternal life rather than the physical destruction that might have come upon the jailer and his family for allowing prisoners to escape. Or, it may have been a question about obtaining eternal life which was stated the only way he knew to ask the question. But believing was not doing something, it was simply an acceptance of the truth of Paul's prior words and testimony about Christ. Jesus answered a question of disciples, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29). Jesus may have been saying, either that their continued work was to believe in Him or that their belief was a product of God's work in them.

³⁹ Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 273.

least, impaired) and 2) unable to do anything to meritoriously earn eternal life, we seem to need an alternative. The only alternative to simple faith in Christ alone is to insist that the sinner do something (decide, confess, repent, etc.), and this is the very thing that the gospel message categorically excludes (cf. Rom 4:2-5; 11:6). In other words, for lack of a viable alternative we have mingled faith and works together even though the Bible excludes one from the other in the realm of the gospel offer because, it seems, we are not astute enough to see the glaring contradiction.

When defining faith, the dictionary gives us little help because dictionaries traditionally define a word as to its common use. For instance, one definition given for faith is "to urge, be convinced" and then it defines it as both, "1. Unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence...5. Complete trust, confidence, or reliance."⁴⁰ What if one believes something that does require evidence to believe? How is one to believe, for instance, that today is Sunday without an awareness that it is so according to the calendar (the evidence). Since the dictionary has several disparate definitions of faith, perhaps we should define what faith really is and then refine it to show what "saving faith" really is. Robert N. Wilkin says simply that, "Faith is the conviction that something is true."⁴¹ There is nothing in this definition that is opposed to belief being based upon evidence. On the contrary, he explains that faith *does* depend upon evidence, whether it be verbal testimony (like a teacher's claim that Washington was the first president of the United States or Sarah's belief in God's promise that she would bear a child) or other more concrete forms (like verbal or physical evidence provided to a jury). In either case, one's belief is due to the evidence offered. When one is convinced that the evidence is true, authentic, and reliable, he believes the ramifications of the evidence immediately. The crux is the perceived truth of the evidence.

But what is "saving faith"? As Wilkin suggests, faith in Christ may be defined as "the conviction that He is the Guarantor of eternal life for every believer."⁴² While discussing "saving faith" at this location, Wilkin cites John 11:25-27. Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" (John

⁴⁰ *Websters New World Dictionary*, s.v. "Faith," 503.

⁴¹ Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7.

11:26) as the only condition for eternal life. We note that Jesus did not ask, "Will you *decide* to believe this?" or even "*Will* you believe this?" He simply asked her if she did believe (i.e., was convinced) that the words and promise which He had just spoken were true.

So the question as to whether faith itself is a meritorious deed expresses a misunderstanding about the nature and definition of faith. Faith is not a deed at all. So, it cannot be a meritorious deed. It is not a decision, but a realization that the message or promise of eternal life is true. It is what happens when we are convinced of the truth. It takes no decision and no action of the will at all. It is not a deed.

"Faith is the act of assent by which the gospel is appropriated."⁴³ An appropriation can be illustrated by the following. Let's suppose you have fallen down into an old, deep well casing. When you regain consciousness you find yourself upside down, in pain with broken bones, and desperately frightened. You begin to call out for help. You yell with all your might and finally someone comes along and hears your cry. They throw down a grapevine and try to pull you out. You happily put the grapevine under your arms. They pull, but the vine breaks. They give up and go away. More people come along, see your plight, and throw down some food saying that they can do nothing else but try to alleviate your misery. They depart as well. Finally you hear a voice that says he's from the local fire department search and rescue team. He says he'll pull you out and sends down a narrow, strong metal cable telling you to put the straps under your arms. Gladly you comply and wait.⁴⁴

At this point we must stop and ask what you have do to get out of the hole. Did putting the grapevine around your body do you any good? At this point, has the cable lifted you one inch? Is putting the straps on going to do you any good at all? The only thing that will carry you to safety is the power of the fireman above and the strength of the cable. You cannot do it yourself. If the fireman isn't trustworthy or if the cable breaks, you'll still never get out. But on the basis of his promise to save you, your compliance in putting the straps under your arms was simply an appropriation of the means of the deliverance offered. You have not

⁴³ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 11.

⁴⁴ I realize that putting on straps, in the illustration, is an action, but remember that it's only a physical illustration. Appropriation is what is being illustrated here.

saved yourself in any way, you've only made salvation possible. You saw your need, called on a higher, stronger power, and complied with the one condition required. You were weak, helpless, and injured, but not dead. The fireman didn't put the straps on you or coerce you to do it, but you gladly did it of your own free will because you were convinced of the truth and the veracity of the fireman. You believed him. Now, the fireman didn't cause you to fall. When you became conscious of your need you called out for help. You were able to hear the directions of the fireman and you understood them. You complied with the one and only condition for deliverance and were lifted up. You were saved by grace (i.e., you did not earn your way out by doing something and you did not vow to give a yearly contribution to the fire department. That wasn't the issue at the moment). You were not saved *because* of what you did (put on the straps) nor what you would do in the future (be very thankful and probably contribute to the fire department), but by means of appropriating the straps. You could never legitimately claim credit for your own escape by saying, "If it weren't for my heroic action in putting the straps under my arms the fireman would never have gotten me out!" The fireman got you out because that's what he does. He didn't make you attach the straps though. You did so of your own accord, knowing that it was the best deal in town.

VII. THE PROPOSED BIBLICAL VIEW OF TOTAL DEPRAVITY

We have presented a brief history of the Calvinist and Arminian controversy, reviewed the basic differences between them regarding the doctrine of total depravity identified by the T in the TULIP acrostic, and considered the related doctrines: 1) the imputation of sin (Pelagius theory, the Arminian theory, the Federal headship theory held by Covenant Theology, and the view of a real, seminal presence of every individual in Adam when he sinned and 2) the question of man's ability to believe in light of the doctrine of Total Depravity and whether or not faith is a meritorious act.

While the discussion of the guilt of original sin and inherited corruption will continue to be evaluated, it seems natural, logical, and biblical to assert that man is totally depraved. This means that each and every human with a seminal relationship to Adam, is 1) guilty as an immediate consequence of being in Adam when he sinned and 2) corrupt by an inherited fallen nature with an inclination to fall short of the standards of God's righteous character. *Because* the human race was in Adam, Man-

kind is not only guilty of sin and worthy of the penalty of death, but is also, *because* of innate corruption, unable to do anything that would merit God's favor, forgiveness, or acquittal from the death penalty. Therefore, God is neither the author of sin by the creation of each soul at conception nor can it be said that God arbitrarily (i.e., without valid reason) imposes the judicial guilt of Adam upon each one of his descendants by virtue of an inferred covenant of works (as supposed by the Federal Headship View). The Traducian view of the transmission of the corrupt human nature through one's father combined with the Realist or Seminal View of our presence in Adam conforms with Scripture as well as with biology. Traducianism and Seminal Realism do not create the problems that the Federal Headship view does. Schaff speaks of the need of salvation:

It arises from the fall of Adam and the whole human race, which was included in him as the tree is included in the seed, so that his one act of disobedience brought sin and death upon the whole posterity. Paul proves the depravity of Gentiles and Jews without exception to the extent that they are absolutely unable to attain to righteousness and to save themselves. "There is none righteous, no, not one." They are all under the dominion of sin and under the sentence of condemnation.⁴⁵

Total depravity, therefore, speaks both of inherited corruption of our nature seminally through our individual fathers, leading to personal sins, and also of the imputed guilt of sin because the entirety of the human race was in Adam sinning. The result is total depravity which may be seen as a separation from the joys of God's presence, a non-appreciation of His virtues, and an inclination to fall short of His character in our actions. The lostness of the human race, however, does not mean that man acts as badly as he is capable of, that he cannot think logically, that he cannot hear and understand the propositions of the gospel, or that he is unable to believe the truth. Man is rightly considered to be dead in sin, and by nature the child of wrath, but he still retains the image of God in his being. That image seems to carry with it an ability to believe the gospel (appropriate God's grace channeled through the message of the cross) and, by faith alone, obtain eternal life. While man is unwilling to come to God and/or earn His favor (Jer 17:9-10), he can approach Him by faith

⁴⁵ Phillip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: A.P. & A., n.d.), 244.

(which is not meritorious, but the existence of which admits that there is indeed nothing that man can do to earn His favor). Since man can do that which is according to his nature, and since his nature carries with it an innate ability for self preservation and a desire for same, it follows that man may consider the claims of the gospel and believe the message. Such would be consistent with the desire for self preservation. One may not reasonably argue that since man is inclined to do nothing to glorify God in his fallen state, but act only in a selfish way, his motive to believe is insufficient to attain God's approval. Man is not saved by his good motives, desire to glorify God, or any other meritorious deed. He is saved when he comprehends the consequences of his desperate fallen condition and, perhaps even selfishly and fearfully, believes in Christ alone as his only hope of eternal life. Believing in this way could by no stretch of imagination be considered meritorious. If anything, it is seen as just the opposite. It is in this context that God's grace shines for His glory.

HOW WERE PEOPLE SAVED BEFORE JESUS CAME?

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I. INTRODUCTION

How were people saved before Jesus came? Some suggest that people were saved by sincerely responding to what God had revealed to them at that time. They assert that this revelation did not include the need to believe in Christ. This idea has led some to suggest that if God saved people back then who did not believe in Christ, then He does the same today. This suggestion should make us uncomfortable and force us to find biblical answers to the following two questions: “*How* were people saved before Jesus came?” and “How did people *know* how to be saved before Jesus came?”

II. HOW WERE PEOPLE SAVED BEFORE JESUS CAME?

To answer the first question, let’s allow the Bible to eliminate some suggested answers and then let’s look for the Bible’s answer, one step at a time.

A. *NOT* SAVED BY SACRIFICES, LAW KEEPING, OR GOOD WORKS

Some suggest that before Jesus came people were saved by offering animal sacrifices. However, the Bible states, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb 10:4). Others argue that before Jesus came people were saved by keeping the OT law. But the Bible says, “By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight...” (Rom 3:20). Some say that before Jesus came, people were saved by doing good works. However, the Bible makes clear that “...all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags...” (Isa 64:6). Therefore, before Jesus came, people were not saved by offering animal sacrifices, by keeping the law, or by doing good works.

B. SAVED ON THE BASIS OF CHRIST'S DEATH

Having eliminated these answers, let's now consider the Bible's claim that people have always been saved on the basis of Christ's death for their sins. This includes those people who lived before He died. The Bible speaks of Jesus as "...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8). In the mind of God, Christ's death was as good as done, even before the world was created. Some 800 years before Jesus died, Isaiah wrote of His death in the past tense, "...the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). Paul says, "Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were *previously* committed" (Rom 3:25, emphasis added). God could pass over the sins of men committed before Jesus came because, in His mind, Jesus had already paid for those sins. Therefore, before Jesus came, people were saved on the basis of His death for their sins.

C. SAVED BY FAITH ALONE

Now let's consider what people had to do to be saved before Jesus came. Paul says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness...But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom 4:3, 5). Using Abraham as an example, Paul demonstrates that, before Jesus came, people were saved by faith alone, not by their works.

D. SAVED BY FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE

But that leads to an obvious question: "Faith alone in what?" "Abraham believed God," but what did God tell him to believe? Some suggest that God didn't tell Abraham to believe in Christ. But Jesus said, "...Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Two thousand years before Jesus came, Abraham looked ahead in time and believed in the coming Christ for eternal life. Therefore, he was saved by faith alone in Christ alone.

Job made a similar statement, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26). Two thousand years before Jesus came, Job knew that his Redeemer was coming to this earth to pay the price for his sins. Job had a certain assurance that because of his Redeemer, he would live with God after his death.

We also know that Moses: "...esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Heb 11:26). Living 1,500 years before Jesus came, he not only believed in Christ, he also understood God's truth concerning discipleship and rewards. Moses even wrote about Christ. As Jesus said to the Jews, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46).

Abraham, Job, and Moses illustrate that before Jesus came, people were saved by believing in the Christ who was yet to come. Today, we are saved by believing in the same Christ who has come. They looked forward. We look back. But people have always been saved in the same way, by faith alone in Christ alone.

III. HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO BE SAVED BEFORE JESUS CAME?

To adequately answer this question, we need to ask it in relation to three distinct time periods. First, "How did people know how to be saved before the OT was written?" Second, "How did people know how to be saved while the OT was being written?" And third, "How did people know how to be saved after the OT was completed?" Let's consider these questions one at a time.

A. HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO BE SAVED BEFORE THE OT WAS WRITTEN?

Consider the dates of our three examples: Abraham and Job lived about 2000 B.C. and Moses lived about 1500 B.C. Now consider the dates in which the OT was written. Job was probably written about 2000 B.C. The rest of the OT began with the writings of Moses in about 1450 B.C. and ended with Malachi in about 450 B.C. Abraham, Job, and Moses did not have the OT when they believed in the coming Christ. And before them, for thousands of years, all the way back to Adam, people did not have the OT. So how did they know how to be saved? There can be only one answer. Before the OT was written, God gave verbal revelation that eternal salvation is received through faith alone in Christ alone.

In the beginning, God gave this verbal revelation Himself. He said to the serpent in Gen 3:15, "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." While this verse alludes to Christ's future

death for sins, it certainly is not enough information for Adam and Eve to be saved, even if they heard God say it. It says nothing about believing in Christ and nothing about their eternal destiny with God. Therefore, we can safely assume that God gave Adam and Eve more verbal information than what we read in the Scriptures, specifically that they must believe in the coming Messiah for eternal salvation.

God verbally presented the way of salvation Himself, and later, He presented it verbally through His prophets, long before the OT was written. Enoch is a specific example of this truth. As Jude says, "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all...'" (Jude 14). If Enoch revealed these advanced truths about the second coming of Christ, we should expect that he also revealed basic truths about the first coming of Christ and the good news of eternal life given to those who believe in Him.

In summary, for over 2,500 years before the OT was written, God verbally revealed the way of salvation Himself, and later verbally revealed the way of salvation through prophets such as Enoch. In turn, the gospel would then have been verbally proclaimed by believers who learned the way of salvation from the prophets.

B. HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO BE SAVED WHILE THE OT WAS BEING WRITTEN?

It would have been exceedingly difficult for someone to find the way of salvation in an unfinished OT since it is exceedingly difficult to find the way of salvation in the completed OT. Let's consider how difficult it is to find the way of salvation in each major section.

First, would people know how to be saved from the historical books? Genesis 3:15 alludes to Christ's death for sins, but says nothing about faith in Him for eternal life. Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham "believed in the Lord and He accounted it to him for righteousness," but it doesn't clearly tell us *what* he believed. It seems that nowhere in the historical books do we find a passage that explains the way of salvation.

What about the wisdom literature? Job seems to detail the way of salvation when he says, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26). Job says, "I know" which may be a synonym for "believe." He believes in a living Redeemer, which is an allusion to Christ and His payment for sins. He says he will see God after his death, which is assurance of eternal life

with God. This passage in Job seems to be the only passage in the wisdom literature where we find the way of salvation.

What about the prophets? Isaiah writes, "My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11), but he does not tell the reader what he must do to be justified. Habakkuk says, "The just shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4), but he does not explain in whom that faith is to be placed. While Jeremiah speaks of "knowing the Lord" and "forgiveness of sins" (Jer 31:34), he doesn't mention how to experience these things. Ezekiel speaks of spiritual birth as he says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you..." (Ezek 36:25), but he doesn't say how to experience this new birth. There seems to be no passage in the prophetic section that by itself explains the way of salvation.

While we can find various pieces of information about the way of salvation from Moses to Malachi, these pieces are hard to find because it was not the purpose of the OT writers to focus on this truth. Their focus was on discipleship. The writers assume that the readers already know the way of salvation through verbal revelation given by the prophets.

Consider what Peter says about the prophets' testimony concerning Christ, "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). Peter refers to the prophets who wrote about Christ. But he must also have in mind that these and other prophets said much about Him verbally that is not recorded in the OT. For example, while Enoch is mentioned in Genesis, we would not know that he prophesied about Christ unless Jude told us. And we would not know that Moses "considered the reproach of Christ" unless the writer of Hebrews told us. We would also not know that Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day unless John told us.

Another example of this is seen in the story of Saul in 1 Samuel 10. Consider these words spoken by Samuel to Saul: "...You will meet a group of prophets...and they will be prophesying. Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man...God gave him another heart..." (1 Sam 10:5-6, 9). Saul did respond to the words of the prophets. As a result, he "was turned into another man," and "God gave him another heart." Clearly these terms could only refer to a new birth. Saul was saved that day! What did the prophets tell him? Samuel doesn't say. He assumes that the reader would know that the prophets told Saul to believe in Christ for eternal life.

In summary, while the OT was being written, prophets verbally proclaimed the gospel, and believers, in turn, verbally proclaimed what they heard from the prophets. The OT writers recorded pieces of information about the way of salvation, but this was not their focus.

C. HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO BE SAVED AFTER THE OT WAS COMPLETED?

Now, let's consider the third period of time. How did people know how to be saved after the OT was completed? Let's consider three possible sources.

First, people could have known how to be saved from the OT. While there may be only one passage in the OT that by itself explains the way of salvation (Job 19:25-26), the necessary pieces of information can also be found in various scattered passages. In fact, God expected the rabbis to find these pieces, put them together, and verbally explain what they found to others. For example, as Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about the gospel, He said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things?" (John 3:10).

Second, prophets could have continued to proclaim the way of salvation as the prophets before them had done. It should be noted, however, that the Bible says nothing about prophets being on the scene during the four hundred years from Malachi until prophecies were made concerning the conceptions and births of John the Baptist and Jesus (see especially Luke 1:67 and 2:36). The Bible's silence does not preclude the presence of prophets during this time period, but it does keep us from being certain that they were present.

Third, believers who were not prophets would have verbally transmitted the message of salvation. However, if prophets were not on the scene during that time period, believers would have been that much more dependent on the OT to anchor the truth of their message to keep it from becoming distorted.

In summary, during the time period after the OT was completed and before Jesus came, people could have known the way of salvation from three possible sources: the OT explained by teachers, prophets who may or may not have been on the scene, and believers who were not prophets.

IV. HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO BE SAVED AFTER JESUS CAME?

We will better understand how people knew how to be saved before Jesus came if we compare that to how people knew how to be saved after He came. Again, we need to consider distinct periods of time. First, let's consider the period of time after Jesus came and before the NT was completed. Then, let's consider the period of time after the NT was completed.

A. HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO BE SAVED AFTER JESUS CAME AND BEFORE THE NT WAS COMPLETED?

Before the NT was completed, Jesus and His followers verbally told people the way of salvation, sometimes using passages from the OT to explain it. For example, Jesus used the story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness to help explain the gospel to Nicodemus (John 3:14-16). As Philip presented the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, he explained that Isaiah wrote about Jesus when he said, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter" (Acts 8:26-35).

In summary, after Jesus came and before the NT was completed, people learned how to be saved by the same method as people who lived before Jesus came, that is, through a verbal presentation of the gospel, sometimes using the OT to explain it.

B. HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO BE SAVED AFTER THE NT WAS COMPLETED?

After the NT was completed, people knew the way of salvation from the Gospel of John. John is the only book in the NT written for the purpose of explaining how to have eternal life (John 20:30-31). The rest of the NT emphasizes discipleship. While the way of salvation can be found in other NT books, it is rarely found explicitly, and where it is alluded to, the writer assumes that the readers already know it and believe it.

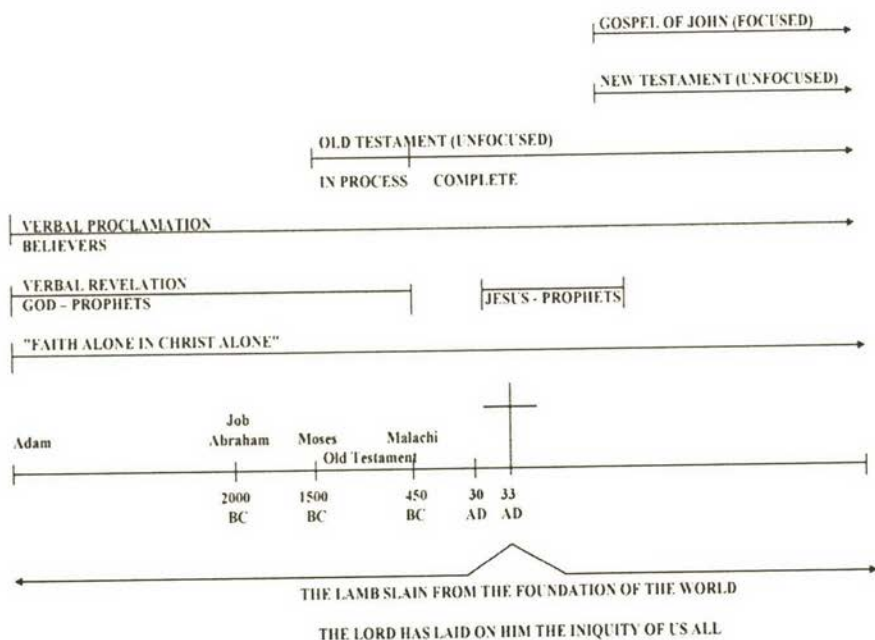
Since the NT has been completed, the message of the Gospel of John has been spread verbally by evangelists and other believers. Verbal proclamation is still God's primary method of spreading the gospel, just as it was before Jesus came. As Paul says in Rom 10:14-15, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As

it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'"

V. CONCLUSION

How were people saved before Jesus came? Just like you and I are saved—by faith alone in Christ alone. For them, it was by faith in the Christ who had not yet come. For us, it is by faith in the same Christ who has come.

No one has ever been or ever will be saved apart from believing in Christ for eternal life. We must reach people with the one and only message that provides eternal salvation today, just as it did before Jesus came.¹



¹ The diagram above summarizes, in timeline form, what I have presented in this article.

BOOK REVIEWS

Four Views on Eternal Security. Edited by J. Matthew Pinson. Contributors: Michael S. Horton; Norman L. Geisler; Stephen M. Ashby; J. Steven Harper. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002. 302 pp. Paper. \$14.99.

Eternal security is one of the dearest doctrines to me. Thus I was thrilled when I heard about this new book on the subject.

The contributor closest to the Free Grace view is Geisler. He makes many excellent points about assurance and eternal security. He shows that we are not regenerated after a life of continuous faith (pp. 85-87). We are regenerated the very moment we believe. He shows that classic Calvinism does not believe in assurance prior to death (pp. 67-70). He suggests that the Bible (moderate Calvinism) teaches we can be sure we are saved the very moment we believe and as long as we continue to believe (pp. 68-69).

He unfortunately suggests that all true believers persevere in faith (pp. 110-11). He also says that "true faith is not mere mental assent. It involves the mind, emotions, and will" (p. 106). "True repentance is involved in saving faith...and true repentance will lead to good works" (pp. 105-106). He advocates a typical faith-that-works view of Jas 2:14-26 (p. 89). And he sees tests of life in 1 John that are "other evidences of salvation" (p. 80).

While I wish that Geisler had not said some of these things, I still am very appreciative for his contribution.

The classic Calvinist position is defended by Horton. There is nothing new here. However, it is helpful to see how he responds to Geisler and the two Arminians.

Ashby advocates something called Reformed Arminianism. That was a new term to me. While I knew that Arminius was a Calvinist, still it is fascinating to see the title Reformed Arminian. He argues eternal life can be lost only by apostasy (p. 187). Of course, that is one reason too many!

The Wesleyan Arminian position is defended by Harper. Two types of sin result in loss of salvation according to Harper. First, deliberate sins

become "mortal" and cause us to lose our salvation if we fail to repent of them (p. 240). Second, involuntary sins will cause us to lose our salvation only if when we discover them we do nothing about them (p. 240). There is much room for ambiguity here. What is "doing nothing about them"? And what if a believer commits a deliberate sin immediately before death, with no chance to repent? Or what if one commits a deliberate sin and yet subsequently forgets about it?

I recommend this book as a helpful comparison of four views on eternal security. I simply wish they had made this five views and included a chapter on the Free Grace view of eternal security.

Robert N. Wilkin

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Outbreak! Creating a Contagious Youth Ministry Through Vital Evangelism. By Greg Stier. Chicago: Moody Press, 2002. 265 pp. Cloth. \$19.99.

Written by Greg Stier, the co-founder and president of Dare 2 Share Ministries, *Outbreak!* provides a fresh and insightful look at evangelism in the context of youth ministry. In eleven chapters Stier elucidates the process of youth group evangelism with an eye-opening illustration of the infectious habits of a virus.

The first chapter, entitled "Bad Monkey!" describes the infection of the gospel. Stier notes that there are three elements of vital evangelism: a carrier that is courageous (p. 30); a sneeze that is infectious (p. 32); and a virus that is contagious (p. 35). His first chapter uncovers his purpose: "to unleash the virus in your youth group" (p. 37).

In chapters two, three, and four, Stier talks about the gospel going forth, the problems that it entails, and how to create a contagious youth ministry. Stier writes, "In the same way, when we present the gospel story to the postmodern culture, we must realize that it is when we get to the 'proof' that some will accept it and many will reject it" (p. 42). He attributes much of this resistance to the "have it your way" (p. 41) theology prevalent in many of our churches today. Instead of the church

impacting its surroundings, Stier notes that: "our culture is impacting the church" (p. 41).

Although Stier paints a grim picture for the salvation of the lost in our postmodern culture, he illustrates the historical pattern for revival in chapter three. He writes, "Whatever the reason, in the history of revival God inevitably raises up an army of teenaged carriers to spread the message" (p. 57). Regardless of your perspective on historical revival, you may question the examples provided by Stier, and for good reason. Chapters five, "Increasing the Velocity of the Virus," and six, "Don't Take Your Antibiotics!" are meant to aid youth workers in causing an outbreak. Chapter five gives seven "Outbreak Indicators," which provide examples, from the Book of Acts, of conditions that are conducive for the outbreak of the gospel. Chapter six dispels numerous excuses for not evangelizing. They range from "we don't want those kind of kids in our youth group" (p. 146) to "evangelism is not my gift" (p. 154). Stier creatively encourages and motivates youth leaders to infect their youth groups with a desire to evangelize the lost.

Chapter seven deals with the doctrine of salvation. Stier correctly remarks, "When the pure message of God's grace is doctored in any way, the results are less than optimal. Many gospel presentations are delivered with vagueness and confusion instead of with clarity and power" (p. 161).

He then deals with the ill effects of legalism and Arminianism. Concerning Arminianism, Stier quips, "It is the 'Daddy may leave you someday' strain. It is the message of grace that leaves the back door unlocked just in case you or the Father wants to get out. It is the message that says that salvation is only eternal if you stay faithful and keep serving" (p. 167). Stier correctly notes that in a world saturated with broken relationships, dysfunctional fathers, and suicide, the Arminian gospel does not provide peace, but more heartache. He notes, "When we share a message infected with the 'Daddy may leave you someday' strain, we are taking away the unshakeable assurance that flows from an unconditional love" (p. 170). It is refreshing to read a book with such insight on youth ministry and a clear proclamation of the gospel.

Chapters eight through eleven provide tools for infecting postmodern teenagers with the age-old virus of the gospel. The topics covered are postmodern students (chapter 8), infectious invitations (chapter 9), dealing with dead Christians (chapter 10), and putting it all together (chapter

11). These final chapters make it abundantly clear to the reader that Stier understands the workings of the postmodern teenage mind.

There are some inconsistencies that the astute youth minister should note. In chapter seven, Stier clearly explains, "Simple faith in Jesus Christ is the only prerequisite to salvation given in the whole book of John. Nothing more, nothing less. Some people think that way of salvation is too easy...It is so easy that a child can do it, and it is so difficult a religious person can choke on it" (p. 175). However, in a section concerning Phil 1:6, he writes, "The process of 'infection' begins at salvation and doesn't stop until the 'victim' is completely under Christ's control...The gospel message is efficient. It transforms everyone and everything it touches" (p. 29). Although he correctly notes in chapter seven that Rev 3:20 is commonly misused in evangelism (pp. 175-76) he unfortunately seems to let the context of Phil 1:6 elude his discussion.

Also, concerning the decision of a handicapped boy named Doug, Stier writes, "They preached about the person of Jesus Christ and the purpose that He offers to those who follow Him...That week he dedicated his life to follow Jesus Christ and keep others out of hell" (p. 46). Though Stier did not make it clear if Doug was making a decision of discipleship or salvation, Doug evidently later understood the gospel. While evangelizing, Doug told a group of kids, "I hope you trust in Christ as your Savior!" (p. 48). Thus while there are several hiccups in his presentation, the gospel presented is otherwise always clear and easy to follow.

In *Outbreak!* Stier has provided the church with a sound tool for turning an ingrown youth ministry into one that is infectious, prompting Josh McDowell to write, "This book is infectious!" Nonetheless, beware! After reading this book, your youth group may never be the same.

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Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs. By Ergun Mehmet Caner & Emir Fethi Caner. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002. 251 pp. Paper. \$12.99.

As the title suggests, the authors (who are brothers) were raised in a Muslim home, which gives this book an authentic flavor. In fact, the strength of this book is the assurance the reader has that the writers, both of whom have earned doctorates, present authoritative revelations about Muslim theology and way of life from both detailed research and eyewitness testimonials.

The authors are very thorough in their coverage of Islam's key theological areas, in terms of both the topics addressed as well as in the detailed research presented. These topics include politics and jihad, the violent history of Islam, the Qur'an, Sunnah and Hadith, Allah, the five pillars of Islam, the Islamic view of women, salvation, Islamic holy days, sects of Islam, Jesus, and how Muslims view Christianity. The Caners also present a valuable chapter on how to evangelize Muslims, along with helpful reference appendices which include a topical index to the Qur'an and a comparison of the beliefs of Christianity and Islam.

Unfortunately, the gospel is anything but clear in this presentation. In sharing about their other brother receiving eternal life, it is stated that he "accepted Christ" (p. 19); and regarding others in the family, we are told that they "made a profession of faith" (p. 20), but their father never "accepted Christ as Lord" (p. 20). Then, later, an even more obscure presentation is given via the testimony of another former Muslim whose declaration of entering into "an intimate, personal relationship with God" consisted of Christ, in a dream, announcing to him that He loved him (p. 37). Other than quoting Rom 3:24-26 and Eph 2:8-9 in Appendix C, that is as clear as the gospel is presented in this book. However, the writers give a humorous lesson regarding the importance of clarity and accuracy of presentation when they cite a preacher who "repeatedly spoke of 'accepting Jesus in your heart.' When he asked why so few people had accepted the invitation, he learned that many of his listeners assumed the invitation was to agree to surgery—to place Jesus in the ventricle chamber" (p. 228).

But with that aside, this volume accomplishes its quest of enabling Christians "to understand Islam more clearly" (p. 20). For example, the background of Muhammad as "the militant messenger" (pp. 39-65) gives the reader great insight into the actions of fundamentalist Muslims today,

while chapters 3, "The Story of Islam: A Trail of Blood," and 13, "The Bloodshed of Jihad," cause one to strongly question the propagation in the media today that Islam is a religion of peace.

However, it is chapter 6, "Allah: Names of Terror, Names of Glory," that may be the most valuable discussion of all for the average Christian. For in it, the authors clearly and convincingly demonstrate that Allah is not simply another name for God; it is a false god that has absolutely no relationship with the God of the Bible.

The book closes with a practical and insightful look at how to reach a Muslim with the gospel. Instead of giving the reader a specific gospel presentation to use, the Caners give us a better understanding of how typical Muslims think and how we can be more effective in evangelism with them.

Though the GES reader will be disappointed with the authors' obtuse slant on the gospel, there is much to be recommended in this book. In fact, this reviewer heartily endorses *Unveiling Islam* for accomplishing what its title suggests.

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A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard & the Christian Life.
Don Veinot, Joy Veinot, & Ron Henzel. Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2002. 383 pp. Paper. \$15.99.

I came to faith in the Lord Jesus for eternal life in the fall of 1972. Around a year later I attended Bill Gothard's Institute of Basic Youth Conflicts (now called *The Institute in Basic Life Principles, IBLP*) conference. A year after that I attended the advanced conference he offered. While I didn't agree with all he said, especially on the gospel (he appeared to me to be mildly in the Lordship Salvation camp), I did think his great respect for parents was helpful. Indeed, I waited a year to go into Christian work because my parents were against it.

The back jacket of the book features impressive endorsements by Drs. Earl Radmacher (Western), Ron Allen (DTS), Jay Adams (Westminster), and Samuel Schultz (Wheaton).

Rarely have I read a Christian book that is such a page turner. If you have any knowledge of Bill Gothard and his organization, this book is fascinating. Even if you don't, you will find much powerful information. This book is more than a critique of a particular man and his ministry. It is a warning to all of us. For, whether we are in the leadership of a church, parachurch organization, or even a secular business, we must all beware of the dangers that come with success.

Gothard received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Wheaton College in 1957 and 1961 respectively.

In 1966, Gothard presented his first seminar in Chicago. In 1968 he had his first out of town seminar (in Seattle). The ministry really took off in 1972, with total seminar attendance around the country numbering 128,000, up from 12,000 just one year earlier. And those numbers just kept on climbing.

In Chapter 1 the authors recount the scandal that rocked the ministry, resulting in Gothard's resignation in July 1980 (p. 60). During the next week, 31 of the 76 staff were fired, dismissed, or resigned (p. 61). By the end of the 1980, only 26 of the 76 staff remained. Gothard's brother was shown to have been involved in affairs with seven of the Institute's secretaries (p. 49). Fifteen people in the ministry were involved in sexual immorality. According to the authors, for at least four years Gothard actually knew of the immorality going on and instead of rooting it out, he covered it up and violated his own principles (pp. 50, 52-62).

Gothard's departure was quite brief. Within about a week, he returned and began running things once again. This was facilitated by the resignation of the board chairman (p. 61).

The book goes on to document the following: 1) Gothard's pattern of not submitting to authority (particularly to his board); 2) His use of Scripture to make it support a point he believes to be true; 3) Gothard's proofs of his principles are anecdotal, not biblical. He loves to tell of people who applied his principles and got excellent results. Unfortunately people are all too quick to accept such stories as proofs that the principles are from God; and 4) Gothard's approach to marriage, family, and the Christian life is legalistic and while many people report excellent success following his principles, many more have been hurt deeply as a result of trying to follow his teaching. See especially Chapter 4, "Institute in Basic Legalistic Practices."

The authors contrast Gothard's view of what one must do to have eternal life with that of D. Martyn Lloyd Jones and Steve Brown, two

Reformed pastors known for advocating simple faith as the sole condition of eternal life (pp. 180-82).

In the epilogue the authors give a brief appeal to unbelieving readers to come to faith in Christ. There they indicate the sole condition is faith in Christ. They say, "It's a *free gift*, with no strings attached, and we receive it by faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9)" (pp. 336-37; see also 325-26). While some may not like the way in which they then explain faith as "trusting in" Jesus like one who gets on board a plane even if he is fearful (p. 337), they will appreciate the fact that the authors advocate justification by faith in Jesus Christ with no strings attached.

Clearly the authors feel that Gothard believes in justification by faith plus works. Unfortunately, while they are very careful to give much evidence on other points, they don't give many clear statements of Gothard's teaching on what one must do to have eternal life. For the clearest statements of Gothard's position, see pp. 143-44, 147-49, 151-55, and 285.

Two final points bear mentioning. First, Gothard is highly suspicious of doctors, to the point of establishing The Medical Training Institute of America to educate Christians about medical matters. The authors' presentation and critique of what Gothard suggests is truly amazing. See Chapter 10, "Bill Gothard—Medicine Man," pp. 279-311.

Second, having been in a cult myself (from 1958 through 1972), I found the author's discussion of how hard it is for "Gothardites" to leave the movement to be excellent. Here are some of the hurdles one must overcome to leave and stay away from a cult: fear of ridicule from those still in the cult, fear of making a mistake that could cost you your life or even your eternal life, feeling the cult must be right since some very intelligent and highly educated people remain active, and wondering how the cult could possibly be wrong since it contains so many nice and godly people (pp. 319-25).

I highly recommend this book. It not only informs about Bill Gothard and his ministry, but it also warns all of us to be accountable, humble, teachable, discerning, and submissive to the authority of the Word of God.

Robert N. Wilkin
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Boyd's Handbook of Practical Apologetics: Scientific Facts, Fulfilled Prophecies, and Archaeological Discoveries That Confirm the Bible. By Robert T. Boyd. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997. 251 pp. Paper. \$13.99.

None of us comes to believe the Bible by learning everything there is to know and then seeing if the Bible fits the data. Inability, lack of time, and our fallen sinful natures make that impossible.

Nevertheless, information gathered about the natural world that appears to be true and which coincides with the revelation in Scripture can encourage believers and can influence unbelievers to consider the claims of the Bible.

In *Handbook* Robert Boyd offers empirical evidence from three disciplines—science, fulfilled prophecies, and archaeology—to support the believability of the Bible.

A pure presuppositionalist might think this is a waste of time. But many can testify to coming to faith in Scripture as God's Word with the help of such an approach. Care must be taken, of course, not to subject the Bible to the latest scientific theories as though such theories are the final arbiters of truth.

Although Dr. Boyd might be somewhat guilty of elevating science in this way, it's obviously done with a respect for Scripture and a desire to see others believe the Bible, too. In fact, on p. 51 he appears to guard against this with the statements, "Science has proved that the Bible is correct. Or better yet, the Bible has proved science correct." Furthermore he doesn't hesitate to differ with popular "scientific" theories when they don't square with Scripture.

The section on science takes up nearly one-third of the book and is perhaps the part to be most criticized, mainly for lack of documentation, unsupported casual statements, and typos.

For example, oceanographer Matthew F. Maury is called "M. F. Murray" (p. 61).

And the statement, "A kind is a species and may be described as those which crossbreed with fertility," is found on p. 84. I think it would be difficult to find an informed, modern day creation scientist who would equate the biblical kind with the modern concept of species. In fact, *baramin* (from the Hebrew for create and kind) is a term gaining acceptance among creationists to refer to the created kinds of Genesis; a term that distinguishes those that reproduce "after their kind" from other mod-

ern labels. (The interested reader might like to visit the Creation Research Society's website at www.creationresearch.org for more on this and other creation topics.)

Awkward statements detract from the readability of this section. Also, the lack of documentation and footnotes often leaves the reader on his own for source information.

In spite of these shortcomings the author does present much useful information from the sciences upholding the reliability of Scripture. This reviewer appreciates that Dr. Boyd takes a YEC (Young Earth Creationist) position (pp. 69-72). This, of course, rules out both theistic and atheistic evolution (p. 32).

The section on fulfilled prophecy, at only 33 pages, is the shortest of the book's three divisions, but is loaded with references to biblical prophecies and explanations of their fulfillment. There are a couple of useful lists. One, "Landmarks of 4,000 Years of Jewish History" (pp. 113-14), is a snapshot of pertinent dates in Israel's history from 2100 B.C. through A.D. 1993. The other list (pp. 125-27) references 48 prophecies that have their fulfillment in Christ. I liked this section and found it to be much easier reading than the one on science.

The farther along one goes in this book the better the writing style becomes. The section "Archaeology and the Bible" is laid out well, being divided into chapters which include "Tidbits" from the Old and New Testaments, "Basic Archaeological Information" and a short section on "The Intertestamental Period." It also has 90 of the book's 97 illustrations. These black and white pictures include tablets of ancient writings, carvings, ruins, and various artifacts.

Did you know: That the plagues brought on Egypt under Moses were a slap in the face to Egyptian deities (p. 151)? That the woman in Luke 7:38 who washed Jesus' feet may have done so with her tears she had saved in a bottle (p. 164)? That there were two Bethlehems (p. 186)?

Whether the author is detailing Christian life in the catacombs (p. 211), revealing gruesome facts about the heinous Roman emperor Nero (p. 209), or passionately telling of Paul's trial and execution (p. 214), he seems to have a special feel for this area of apologetics. The reader is informed academically and sometimes "brought to the scene."

Other helpful tools at the end of the book include an appendix with definitions, a chart of recent archaeological discoveries, a bibliography, and an index.

We need to be aware that there have been in the past, and there are presently, many creationists and defenders of the Bible as God's Word who don't hold to the Free Grace Gospel for eternal salvation. Seventh Day Adventists, Churches of Christ, various other Arminians, and Lordship Salvation advocates come to mind.

The author doesn't deal directly with the Free Grace Gospel issue. And the statements he makes regarding salvation aren't conclusive on where he stands. For example, on p. 129 in a section concerning a current state of affairs, he says, "Truths are flatly denied, error has been substituted in its place, and works are now predominant over faith in Jesus Christ for salvation." On p. 193 under The Crucifixion of Christ we read, "In the darkness of sorrow and sin and death, the Christ of the cross will illuminate a repentant heart and give eternal life."

Dr. Boyd's academic credentials include degrees or "further study" from Washington Bible College (B.A.), Antietam Biblical Seminary (M.Div and D.Min), Wheaton College, Baptist Bible Seminary, and the former Philadelphia College of Bible.

Handbook is a useful and engaging reference work and can serve as a springboard for further study. However, the reader needs to be aware that the section on science, at least, needs to be cleaned up. Parts of it are written without the tightness and accuracy necessary to defend against a determined skeptic.

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The Christian Message for Contemporary Life. By Stephen F. Olford, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997. 112 pp. Paper. \$7.99.

Stephen F. Olford is a noted communicator, author, and pastor. Born in 1918 to missionaries, he spent the first seventeen years of his life in West Africa where he witnessed the power of the gospel to change lives and developed a passion for evangelism. His book, *The Christian Message for Contemporary Life*, is born out of this passion that has not waned for more than sixty years of ministry. In his preface Olford writes, "I [am] burdened...for young Christians who find it so difficult to appreciate and communicate the Christian message to their contemporaries."

The Christian Message for Contemporary Life is a homiletical exposition of the first three chapters of First Corinthians. Indeed, the book is essentially a transcript of a series of messages Olford first preached at a crusade. It contains six chapters each covering a different aspect of the Christian message. A brief summary and review of each chapter follows.

In the first chapter, Dr. Olford addresses what he calls the *Contradiction of the Christian Message*. Based on 1 Cor 1:9-17, the author points out that division within the church severely hinders the church's ability to spread the gospel. It is true that hypocritical Christianity certainly plays into the devil's hand as he attempts to obstruct the effectiveness of the gospel message. According to Olford, the solution to this problem is a return to the centrality of Jesus Christ. This is also true, provided that by "the centrality of Jesus Christ" he means more than a mere ambiguous focus on Him. For many evangelists and preachers, Christ is central to their message but the specific content of the message is confusing. Olford addresses the communication of the message in a later chapter.

The second chapter addresses what the author calls the *Character of the Christian Message*. This section is based on an exposition of 1 Cor 1:18-25. The author affirms the importance of the unchanging nature of the gospel especially in this questioning age of Postmodernism. Olford is correct that "the gospel of Jesus Christ is unchanged."

The third chapter deals with the *Community of the Christian Message* based on 1 Cor 1:26-31. Here Olford addresses the positive effects of the Christian community—in contrast to the negative effects of division addressed earlier—on the spread of the gospel. The author is to be commended for the high priority he places on the importance of a consistent walk with Christ for those who wish to be effective evangelists.

In the fourth chapter Olford looks at 1 Cor 2:1-5 and discusses what he calls the *Communication of the Christian Message*. He is correct that "the priority program of the church until Jesus returns is the communication of the Christian gospel" (p. 69). One key to communicating the gospel effectively, according to Olford, is the power of the Spirit. This is certainly true. Quoting Leon Morris, the author points out that "it is possible for arguments to be logically irrefutable, yet totally unconvincing" (p. 75). Unfortunately, what the author fails to point out is that it is equally possible for arguments to be logically flawed yet very convincing to an undiscerning and indiscriminate audience. Olford states, "No communicator [of the gospel] fulfills his mission until he brings boys and girls, men and women, to rest their faith in the power of God. The power

of God is nothing less than the word of the gospel, even our Lord Jesus Christ crucified and risen" (p. 77). While this is true, Olford goes on to say that genuine faith must be "sound, saving and steadfast" (p. 78). He states that a saving faith is one that effects a "mighty transformation" (p. 78). Olford's characteristic alliteration is unfortunate here for in his effort to sermonize the text he seems to imply that it is not possible to have saving faith without steadfast faith. This is certainly not the case. The faith of believers often wanes. That is precisely the reason Scripture commands believers to be "steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet 5:9; cf. Col 1:23). Nevertheless, when "we are faithless, He remains faithful" (2 Tim 2:13).

The Comprehension of the Christian Message is what Olford titles his exposition of 1 Cor 2:6-16. In this fifth section the author makes an unfortunate distinction between what he calls "believing faith" and "receiving faith." He claims that the reason many are lost is that they have "believed" but never "received the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 86). He does not adequately explain how believing differs from receiving. The fact is the two terms are synonymous when it comes to eternal salvation. To "receive the Lord Jesus Christ" is to believe that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that only Jesus Christ can save you and give you the free gift of eternal life (cf. John 1:12; 3:16; 6:47). In this chapter, Olford also states, "There is no truth that is vital to Christian life and practice that has not the support *both* of divine revelation *and* Christian tradition" (p. 90, emphasis mine). This statement is made during his discussion of the Spirit's ministry of illumination. Olford implies that the accuracy of a particular interpretation of Scripture is validated or even proven by the testimony of historical interpretation. In other words, a certain interpretation must be correct because that's the way the church has always interpreted it. It's a good thing Luther did not subscribe to this viewpoint!

In his final chapter titled *The Challenge of the Christian Message*, the author focuses on 1 Cor 3:1-4. He seems to allow for the reality of carnal Christians. However, his outline of this passage is confusing because it includes "natural, carnal, and spiritual" as three subheadings under "categories of carnal Christians." Still, the author is to be commended for challenging Christians to avoid carnality and grow up into maturity.

In the introduction to his book, Olford writes, "Despite the unparalleled advances in the fields of technology and other scientific endeavors, our day is plagued by a great deal of fuzzy thinking...The question,

‘What is the Christian message?’ would evoke a confusing cluster of replies...” This is certainly true. Unfortunately, *The Christian Message for Contemporary Life* does little to clear up the confusion and may even add to it.

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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

"Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel," Ben L. Merkle, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:4 (December 2000): 709-721.

Voltaire, the French skeptic, whined that the world of his day "revolved around the insignificant pimple of Jewry." Imagine how much louder he would complain two centuries later, when terrorism and Mideast battles make Israel the subject of morning headlines and evening talk shows. There is no more relevant theological question today than the question of whether the nation of Israel has a future in God's plan.

The prevalent Christian answer to that question since A.D. 150 has been, no. Because Israel rejected His son, God has rejected and replaced her with a new Israel, the Church. This view, which goes by the name of supersessionism, found circumstantial support in the destructions of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and 135, the subsequent scattering and disappearance of the Jews, Rome's replacement of Jerusalem as the "holy city," and the complete Gentilization of Christianity after Constantine.

But today this "replacement theology" is fading fast. Premillennialism has risen along with a literal interpretation of OT prophecy; the Jews have not only survived but returned to the land; and the Holocaust has made biblical scholars reassess the possibility that the Bible has been read through an anti-Jewish lens.

As a result, two years ago Craig Blaising could confidently tell an audience of 1,000 theologians—in his presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society—that there is "a consensus regarding Paul's teaching in Romans 9–11 that there is indeed a future in the plan of God for Israel—not a redefined Israel, but ethnic-national Israel." Blaising could have named scholars as disparate as Barth, Cranfield, Stuhlmacher, Dunn, and Moo. Many covenant theologians have yielded as well, including perhaps the best Reformed exegete of the last century, John Murray.

For this reason, I imagine, the editor of *JETS* thought it would be interesting to include a riposte from one of the Reformed rear guard. Ben Merkle is a NT instructor at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville,

and his argument against a future for ethnic Israel is clear, simple, and fair. But in the end, it is futile.

The crucial clause is found in Rom 11:26a, "and so all Israel will be saved." "All Israel" includes every individual Jew, or possibly the general mass of Jews, living on the earth at the end of the Tribulation period. Those who differ with this ethnic view generally take "all Israel" as referring to the Church, all the elect both Gentile and Jew. But this "Church" view must shut its eyes to the fact that Paul has used the term "Israel" ten times previously in Romans 9–11, and each refers to national, ethnic Israel. Perhaps for this reason, Merkle adopts the less common view of Lenski, Ridderbos, Hendriksen, and Palmer Robertson that "all Israel" refers to Jewish believers only, the Jewish elect throughout history.

To make his case, Merkle forces all of Romans 9–11 down to its knees before 9:6, "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel." Because Paul here sifts true ("spiritual") Israel from ethnic Israel, and declares that God will save the former, Merkle cannot imagine that the Apostle might later predict that the latter might join the former (11:26).

In the end, several solid rocks in the text will not budge despite Merkle's exertions. First, Paul's enthusiastic asseveration that "God has not cast off his people" (11:1-2, 10) must refer to God's ethnic people the Jews. By restricting "his people" to the Jewish elect, Merkle reduces this to a banal promise that God will not damn every Jew henceforth born, because of the nation's past obduracy. But this is entirely too mundane, and so he leaps to the diverting but entirely undefended dogma that "there will always be a remnant of believing Jews until the end of time" (pp. 709, 722). It is revealing that this unsupported statement is repeated twice in the short closing paragraph.

It is amusing to observe Reformed theologians squirm on the spit of 11:2, "God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew." Either covenant soteriology or covenant eschatology must give way, for if the Apostle is not declaring for ethnic Israel, he is wrestling with the possibility that God might reject his spiritual elect. It is covenant eschatology that takes the fall here, for a number of reasons: the context of 9:30–10:21 is about the status of the nation as a whole; the nation is seen corporately in the rest of chapter 11; 11:28 speaks of the nation Israel as the enemy of the gospel and yet God's choice; and 11:26 promises that all Israel will be saved in the future.

Secondly, the Israel that is to be *saved* (v. 26a) surely cannot be any other than the Israel that is blinded earlier in the sentence (v. 25b). Merkle does all he can to distinguish these two uses of "Israel" that are separated by only eleven words in the Greek text, noting repeatedly (and curiously for an exegete) that these are two different *verses*. But then he stretches all the way back to 9:6 (73 *verses*!) as his proof text.

In the end, the reader is even more convinced of C.E.B. Cranfield's conclusion about Romans 9–11 over two decades ago: "These three chapters emphatically forbid us to speak of the Church as having once and for all taken the place of the Jewish people."

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"Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," Wayne A. Brindle, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (April-June 2001): 138-51.

Wayne A. Brindle has been Professor of Biblical Studies at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia since 1981 and editor of the Evangelical Theological Society's Newsletter since 1994.

Brindle surveys the NT evidence for imminence of the Rapture. Naturally, the definition of imminence is of paramount importance. After noting two different definitions which Brindle considers sound (John A. Sproule and Robert Gundry), he mentions another definition offered by Douglas Moo that is a little broader. Summarizing his "more strict" view of imminence, Brindle notes, "that Christ's return for the church can occur at any time without any predicted intervening sign or events" (p. 138).

Four criteria are established to help pave the way for his article. These are essential, for the texts Brindle cites have "no temporal designation." The criteria are as follows: The passages speak of: 1) Christ's return at any moment, 2) Christ's return as "near," 3) Christ's return providing hope and encouragement, and 4) Christ's return providing hope without reference to the judgment of unbelievers.

The biblical evidence begins with John 14:1-3. Noting the similarity of departure and return spoken by Jesus, and drawing attention to the Greek verb tenses, as well as showing the irrelevance of the place pre-

pared for the disciples if He really did not intend to take them there, Brindle claims this is a snatching away of the church rather than the advent to earth. Brindle shows that this teaches an imminent return as it is offered as a hope for believers.

Next Brindle addresses 1 Thess 1:9-10. Here Brindle ties the concept of the rapture to its *pre*-tribulational chronology as indicated by the deliverance from the coming wrath. Also discussing a textual variant, Brindle suggests that the Greek preposition *apo* rather than *ek* means Christ will "keep believers 'away from' the coming wrath" (p. 142). Incidentally, Brindle correctly interprets the verse, which speaks about the Thessalonians turning to God from idols as "they responded to Christ by faith and were born again." Another passage in this book serves as the next part of the evidence. First Thessalonians 5:4-9 discusses the destruction to come and Brindle equates this with the tribulation. The assured salvation/deliverance of the Thessalonian believers is described as "living together" with Christ. Brindle connects this with the idea of rescue in 1:10 (p. 145). When one compares the suffering to be expected by believers during the Great Tribulation as discussed in Revelation 6 and 13 and Matthew 24 one notices some will even be martyred. Brindle challenges that *this* is the way that Christians will be delivered or rescued. Since it is the whole Church that is promised this rescue, it must occur before the events described as the Tribulation, where evidently some believers will not be delivered. Imminency is tied to Paul's exhortation to the Church to "watch and be sober" (p. 146). Without the possibility of an anytime rapture, the Pauline injunction loses its force.

In 1 Cor 1:7 Paul speaks of an eager anticipation, which Brindle notes, *may* suggest an imminent coming. Stronger support is found in Titus 2:13, where again Paul joins the coming of Christ as a blessed hope without mention of any intervening signs. In 1 John 3:2-3 the coming of Christ is a purifying hope. The illustration of "guests to arrive momentarily" and how they cause one to prepare the house and to be ready makes sense, and so does this passage unless we divest it of imminency. As we await the any-moment arrival of Jesus to take us to be with Him, we are to be preparing ourselves by purity in thought, word, and deed. Finally, Brindle shows from Rev 22:7, 12, 20 that imminency best explains these passages. The concept of Christ coming quickly is explained as a sudden return. Coupled with Rev 16:15 about the way Christ returns as a thief in the night, Brindle, citing G. K. Beale, suggests this means, "a 'swift, unexpected appearance' is included, especially with respect to the 'pos-

sibility that Jesus could come at any time” (p. 151). Furthermore, the promise of rewards (Rev 22:12) reminds one of Paul’s words about the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10-11), Brindle claims.

This article is praiseworthy. For anyone wishing to teach or preach on the rapture as the imminent hope of the church, this is the place to start. When one adds Thomas Edgar’s “An Exegesis of Rapture Passages,” Paul D. Feinberg’s “Dispensational Theology and the Rapture,” and Earl D. Radmacher’s “The Imminent Return of the Lord,” all in *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Moody, 1994), one is well prepared to provide much food for thought, and much reason for hope and joy.

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“Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored?,” Jim Showers, *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Fall 2001): 99-122.

This article immediately catches the eye of anyone who is deeply troubled by the prevalence of moral failure among those holding vocational ministry positions. The recent child abuse scandals within the Roman Catholic Church have also heightened the general sensitivity in our culture to the issue of moral failure within the ministry. In this article Rev. Jim Showers provides an excellent summary of key issues related to the question, “Can fallen pastors be restored to the ministry?”

Showers begins by providing several statistics to demonstrate the reality of the crisis. Most of the statistics he cites are between six and thirteen years old. Nevertheless, the numbers are staggering and one can only assume that the problem has worsened, not improved, in the years since the data was first collected.

The section titled *The Seriousness of Adultery* is outstanding. The author establishes quite effectively from the Old and New Testament that adultery is a particularly vile offense. Showers writes, “Adultery is a sin that is different from any other sin...It attacks and desecrates the inner sanctuary of the body, the temple of God...” (p. 107). His discussion of 1 Cor 6:15-20 is instructive.

The section titled *Pastoral Qualifications* addresses three relevant qualifications for the office of overseer (or bishop) from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These are: (1) above reproach; (2) husband of one wife; and (3) a good testimony among those who are outside. The scope of his article does not permit him to deal extensively with any one of the three, but in general the author makes the case that pastors are called to a high standard of moral purity. Showers concludes that the qualifications for office are "designed to be more than a one-time assessment of an overseer; they are a high standard of conduct that must be maintained throughout a pastor's ministry" (p. 117).

In a section titled *Pastoral Disqualification*, the author connects disqualification from formal ministry to Paul's use of the term "disqualified" in 1 Cor 9:24-27. This probably stretches the original intent of the passage a bit. In the context, Paul seems to be referring to the general disqualification that applies to any believer who fails to maintain control over the sinful flesh and results in the failure to receive rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:9-11). The author draws the same conclusion regarding disqualification from ministry based on his understanding of 2 Tim 2:4-5. Yet, the subject of disqualification from ministry is absent from this context as well. Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 come in the context of a challenge to endure hardship with no explicit mention of the consequences vis-à-vis Timothy's official position in ministry should he fail to do so.

Despite the absence of any direct biblical statement regarding the disqualification of fallen pastors, the author nevertheless makes a convincing argument for his belief that "fallen pastors are permanently disqualified from the office of overseer" (p. 118). His review of the three most common views on the issue: *Immediate Restoration*, *Future Restoration*, and *Personal* [but not formal] *Restoration* is excellent. Showers borrows these terms from John Armstrong's book, *Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored?* His critique of the most common arguments in favor of restoration is a very effective rebuttal. Also helpful (and much needed) is his practical advice to pastors on how to avoid moral failure.

In the mind of this reviewer it seems that there might be some middle ground between what Armstrong calls the "future restoration" view and the "personal [or 'no'] restoration" view. While one appreciates Showers' commitment to the purity of the minister; and while it is certainly true that immorality is an egregious offense; and while it is also true that most "restoration processes" for fallen pastors are far too short and

simplistic; is it not possible that a minister who falls might eventually be able to truly and genuinely meet the standards outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? Though perhaps rare, it seems possible that a fallen minister who truly repents might be able to re-establish himself as worthy of the ministry over a period of years so that eventually (perhaps 10-15 years?) he might accurately be described as "above reproach." In the absence of clear, unequivocal biblical teaching on precisely what "disqualifies" a pastor from ministry, it seems unwise to say that *every* pastor who falls is disqualified from the ministry *forever*.

Showers allows for the possibility that fallen pastors may be restored to "service," which he suggests might be as a "janitor or an usher" (p. 120). But he does not address such compelling questions as: Can a fallen but personally restored former pastor ever preach again? Or, Can a fallen but personally restored former pastor teach Sunday school? It is unclear whether Showers' suggestion of "janitor" or "usher" as potential places of future service for fallen pastors betrays his belief that these are the *only* types of service fit for such an individual. Perhaps his use of these terms was merely inadvertent and not meant to imply a particular limitation for future service. But even if one accepts the view that fallen pastors can never be restored to the office of pastor, the issue of what particular duties they can one day perform as lay servants must be addressed. It would seem that one might be able to honor the conviction that fallen pastors can never be restored to pastoral ministry without relegating them merely to such tasks as ushering and sweeping floors.

Though one may disagree with Showers' conclusion that fallen ministers can never be restored to the office of pastor, surely all share his conviction that "what the church desperately needs today is not anemic, sickly pastors whose personal life is an abomination to God, but virile, strong, disciplined warriors who will bring their bodies into submission for the sake of Christ and the Church!" (p. 122).

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"Should We Pray for Straying Brethren? John's Confidence in 1 John 5:16-17," Randall K. J. Tan, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (December 2002): 599-609.

Randall Tan, instructor of NT interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY raises an interesting question: Should we pray for straying brethren?

Tan understands this passage concerning sin that leads to death as referring to sin which leads to eternal death. Thus he understands John to be asking his readers to pray for straying members of the church body that they may come back to the Lord and hence not die eternally. Tan is not clear whether those who fail to come back have lost eternal life, or never had it in the first place.

Tan begins his discussion of vv. 16-17 by discussing whether the references to *death* (*thanatos*) carry physical or eternal senses. Tan acknowledges the fact that "death" can be interpreted in a physical sense given Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Cor 11:30-32. However, he notes that "the other two occurrences of *thanatos* in 1 John (besides the four in 5:16-17) refer to the state of death from which believers have already been delivered, but in which unbelievers remain (3:14)" (p. 601).

The word "death" occurs twice in First John: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death" (3:14). Either this passage illustrates tests of life or tests of fellowship. The problem with the former interpretation is that it assumes that the readers (brethren) are not all believers. Nonetheless, the audience in v. 13 "believes in the name of the Son of God" and thus has eternal life. John then includes himself, when he writes, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (5:14, emphasis added). There is no indication that his readership has changed in vv. 16-17. Therefore, his readership "believes in the name of the Son of God."

Interestingly, in a footnote, Tan argues "In the Gospel of John, *thanatos* likewise signifies eternal death in 5:24; 8:51, 52; and 11:4(?)" (p. 601). He then gives five clear examples where "death" carries a physical sense. John 11:4 clearly refers to the physical death. Lazarus's sisters told Jesus that he was sick, and responding Jesus said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it" (11:4b). This verse clearly foretells Jesus' imminent miracle of healing. Thus, "death" should be taken in a physical

sense. Therefore, since out of the Gospel of John's nine occurrences of "death" only three have clear eternal reference, the footnote seems to argue against his point.

Tan's second argument against viewing "death" in vv. 16-17 as physical is that he believes the readership to be "professing members of the Christian community, whether ultimately revealed to be true or false believers" (p. 602). Tan notes, "We are faced with a dilemma, however, if we equate professing members of the Christian community with true believers: we must either (a) say that true believers can sin leading to eternal death; or (b) fall back on a physical death interpretation to avoid that connotation" (p. 602). Tan believes John's readers to be only professing believers for three reasons: (1) he calls into question whether the brother in 2:9 (the one who says that he is in the light and hates his brother) is a believer; (2) he believes the secessionists in 2:19 were thought to be believers until they left; and (3) the fact that the Gospel of John records "disciples" who were said to have believed, but later proved otherwise (2:23-25).

Unfortunately, Tan makes several theologically-driven assumptions. First, he assumes that *brothers* does not refer entirely to believers. This assumes that within 30 years of Jesus' death the term *brother* had evolved from its narrow definition of "believer" to a wider sense of "professing member of the Christian community." Second, Tan assumes that certain sins lead to eternal death, while others do not. Zane Hodges in his commentary on the Epistles of John argues, "all sins can be said to lead to death (Proverbs 11:19; Romans 6:23; James 5:19-20..." (p. 233). The opposite is true as well. Proverbs 10:2 and 11:4 state that righteousness delivers from death. Accordingly, it would be more accurate to say that while there are sins that lead to death, in general, those who walk in sin abide in the realm of death while those who walk in obedience abide in the realm of life.

Though Tan raises some interesting points, his views unfortunately have little exegetical and theological credibility. Raising further doubt, Tan concludes, "We should not allow uncertainty over whether a member of the visible Christian community has sinned or strayed in a way that casts doubt on the genuineness of his or her faith keep us from making fervent and persevering intercession for that person. Just as we should humbly seek to instruct and correct, we should intercede with God on behalf of straying brethren, 'If perhaps God might grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth' (2 Tim 2:25)" (p. 609).

As with his exegesis of First John, Tan once again misapplies this passage to unbelievers. Second Timothy 2:25, like 1 John 5:16-17, is dealing with straying believers, not unbelievers. The knowledge of the truth is not knowing what they need to do to have eternal life. It is knowing the truth concerning that which has ensnared them (v. 26).

Oftentimes merely understanding the gospel clearly and the author's intended audience accurately does more for exegesis than any commentary from church history could ever do.

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"The Center of Pauline Theology," Don N. Howell, Jr., *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March, 1994): 50-70.

In this discussion of the debate over the center of Pauline thought, Don N. Howell, Jr., effectively demonstrates that both the Juridical Righteousness view and the Participatory view (the view of E. P. Sanders) fall short of an accurate depiction of Pauline theology.

The Juridical (judicial) view states that all Pauline thought must be judged based on its relation to justification. The opposite view, the Participatory view, also known as The New Perspective on Paul states that all of Paul's writings are subservient to the idea of being "in Christ."

The Juridical view is refuted because it narrows Paul's theology down to his soteriology. Howell rightly states that: "There is a deeper element, a higher point of coincidence, resident in the Person and purposes of God the Father, that a soteriological center can never provide" (p. 58).

The real focus for this article, however, is the Participatory view. Howell depicts its historical development, beginning with Albert Schweitzer and continuing with E. P. Sanders, one of the view's chief spokesmen. He then gives and thoroughly refutes each of the four major arguments for this view.

Stated briefly, the Participationists simply count references to "in Christ" in Paul's letters. That does indeed prove this theme's pervasiveness, but not its centrality.

They also argue that because this expression is uniquely Pauline, participation "in Christ" must be the central theme. This is based on the idea that Paul's encounter on the road to Damascus only taught him the Lordship of Christ and nothing about justification by faith, assuming that this is where Paul's entire theology finds its basis. Clearly this also assumes that Paul knew nothing of the message of the Christians he was so adamantly persecuting. This is an obviously shaky foundation for an argument.

The Participationists also state "that Pauline ethics are derived solely from the [*en Christō*] position of the believer, but never from juridical righteousness, which can only lead to an ethical cul-de-sac" (p. 64). This is based on Sanders' "involved 'solution to plight' reading of Paul's inner logic" (p. 65). It is creative but subjective and hazardous (not to mention logically fallacious) to start with a speculation of a writer's thought process in order to arrive at an interpretation of a text rather than letting the text guide your interpretation of the writer's logic. This criticism is key to understanding and refuting this system.

The last major argument for the Participationist view is that juridical statements are always subservient to participatory ones. This is simply not true. Howell refutes this in many ways, including demonstrating that in 2 Cor 5:14-21 both themes serve the greater purpose of the program of God the Father.

Throughout the article, Howell constantly criticizes Sanders and other proponents of this view for failing to even attempt to exegete Paul's epistles. Instead a thought process is created for Paul and all of his texts are then made to fit this fabricated thought process.

This article correctly shows that it is impossible to declare a center for Pauline thought unless your declared center is incredibly broad. Paul wrote many letters to many churches and individuals in different situations for different purposes. Any attempt to make all of these letters say the same thing is futile. I recommend this article for anyone who is interested in Pauline scholarship.

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The Other Side of Calvinism

by Laurence M. Vance

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LAURENCE M. VANCE, Ph.D., holds degrees in history, theology, accounting, and economics. He has written and pub-

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